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LINKING THEORY & PRACTICE

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Notwithstanding the strong influence and value of rational, scientific management thinking, there is increasing recognition of the important role that emotional dynamics play in understanding organization behavior and leadership. In "Mapping the Association of Emotional Contagion to Leaders, Colleagues, and Clients: Implications for Leadership," Laura Petitta and Shahnaz Naughton share the foundations and results of an exploratory study offering potentially valuable theoretical and practical insights about emotional exchange in the workplace.

The authors define "emotional contagion (EC)" as "the automatic and unintentional tendency of people to catch/absorb another individual's emotional experience and simultaneously infect others with their own emotions, thereby achieving emotional convergence during social interactions." They consider EC as ubiquitous and a basic building block of human interaction. They note that "most influential and emerging theories of transformational, charismatic, and servant leadership posit emotional links between leaders and followers, and speculate that affect and emotions are deeply intertwined with the process of leading, with leading outcomes and follower outcomes."

Going beyond typical studies of dyadic emotional exchange, Pettita and Naughton try to advance our understanding of emotion circulation dynamics in the workplace by applying and validating an instrument for "holistically mapping" the simultaneous contagion of four types of emotions—joy, sadness, fear, anger—among three stakeholder groups—leaders, colleagues, and clients—in six very different types of organizations. Their basic research question was: Would the emotions (i.e., joy, sadness, fear, anger) absorbed from and infected into others be differentially associated to the respondent's leaders, colleagues, and clients?

The authors found that colleagues, clients, and leaders played differential roles in how emotional contagion circulates in workplaces. Specifically, they found that most of the emotions considered for contagion (both absorbed and infected) were more frequently experienced with colleagues and clients. Contrary to expectations, leaders were the least associated with emotional contagion. In addition, the contagion of joy and pleasant emotions was the most highly reported in all six organizations. The authors offer interesting interpretations of these findings.

Despite some acknowledged limitations, this article has much to offer to researchers, managers, and change consultants who are interested in leadership and organization effectiveness. Theoretically, it suggests the importance of enlarging ongoing dyadic research by more holistically mapping emotional exchanges among multiple stakeholders. It offers an instrument for investigating the role of different social paths (e.g., leaders, colleagues, clients) in variously contributing to the spread of emotions at the workplace, and demonstrates how a "multifocus relation-based framework" may enhance our understanding of the actual emotional dynamics between leaders and their followers. In addition, the strong role that positive emotions were found to play reinforces theories of positive psychology that emphasize the "relevance of positive experiences and relationships as key factors in order to build thriving individuals and contexts."

From a practical perspective, as leaders increasingly face the challenges of effectively managing emotional processes to improve performance and well-being, the authors assert that greater awareness of emotion-spreading mechanisms can help inform and sustain both voluntary change processes and planned interventions at multiple organizational levels. Providing individuals with feedback on the results of contagion mapping may "help them to more fully see how they are agents of workplace emotional dynamics, and actively use the emotions experienced to effectively

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manage relationships at work." Providing leaders with such feedback may foster their awareness of their emotional position in comparison to followers and clients, "to broaden their own, as well as their followers', thought-action repertoire, and build social resources over time." Providing top management with feedback on multilevel (i.e., groups, departments, the whole organization) holistic mappings of emotional contagion could spur and support organizational-wide interventions, such as integrated system designs "that aim at empowering individuals and enhancing positive emotional environments . . . [to drive] achievement and collective synergy." The authors suggest appreciative inquiry as a useful starting point for allowing people to report their positive emotional experiences.