Improving Employee Emotions and Emotion Regulation

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Learning Objectives

- Explain the relationship between employee emotional experiences and several organizationally-valued outcomes
- List several organization- and person-focused strategies for improving employee emotional experiences
- Review research on the effectiveness of self-guided emotion regulation strategies
- Discuss opportunities for future research on employee affect and emotion regulation
# Employee Affect

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Formal Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discrete Emotions</strong></td>
<td>Emotions focused on a specific target or cause; relatively intense and short-lived.</td>
<td>Anger, fear, pride, sadness, joy, grief, gratitude, frustration</td>
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<td><strong>Mood</strong></td>
<td>Global pleasant or unpleasant feeling. Tends to be diffuse and not focused on a specific cause. Medium duration.</td>
<td>Feeling generally pleasant, negative, cheerful, irritable, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Dispositional (trait) Affect</strong></td>
<td>Overall tendency to respond to situations in stable, predictable ways. A person’s “affective lens” on the world.</td>
<td>“She is always so upbeat.” “He’s such a downer.”</td>
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Adapted from Barsade & Gibson (2007)
Emotion Regulation

- “What people do to alter the experience, expression, and future course of affective experiences” (Beal et al., 2005, p. 1061)

Why does affect matter in organizations?

- Affect as a component in theoretical models of employee health and well-being

Proposed Worker Well-Being Framework

- Satisfaction
- Meaning/purpose
- Affect

Why does affect matter in organizations?

- Affect as a component in theoretical models of employee health and well-being
- Empirical connections between affect and valued individual- and organizational-level outcomes
Affect and Organizational Outcomes

- Work performance metrics (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005)
- Decision-making (Isen & Labroo, 2003)
- Creativity (Isen, 1999)
- Group dynamics (Barsade, 2002)
- Leadership (Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005)
- Turnover/absence (−) (Thoresen, Kaplan, & Barsky, 2003)

Determinants of Employee Affect

- Intentional Activity 40%
- Set Point 50%
- Circumstances 10%

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade (2005)
### Organization-Focused Interventions

- "Planned, behavioral, theory-based actions to remove or modify the causes of job stress (stressors) at work and aim to improve the health and well-being of participants" (Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 152)
- Focus on changing:
  - Task characteristics
  - Working conditions
  - Social relationships


### Person-Focused Interventions

- "Treatment methods or intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, behaviors, or cognitions" (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p.468)
- Self-administered/initiated
- Relatively brief
- Non-stigmatizing
- Goal = enhance positive outcomes in addition to reducing negative ones
Person-Focused Interventions

- Gratitude
- Acts of Kindness
- Job Crafting
- Personal Strengths

Gratitude Activities

- **Gratitude**: "recognizing and responding with grateful emotion to the roles of other people’s benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains" (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002, p. 112)

- Types of interventions
  - Gratitude lists
  - Grateful contemplation
  - Direct expressions of gratitude
Gratitude Activities – Efficacy

- Initial support from primary studies (e.g., Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Kaplan et al., 2012)

- Recent meta-analytic findings (Davis et al., 2015):
  - Gratitude interventions:
    - Outperform measurement-only control conditions
    - Perform marginally better than the matched-activity comparison conditions
    - Perform no better than psychologically active conditions

Kind Acts

- Acts that benefit others, typically at some cost to oneself (e.g., Tkach, 2006)
  - Includes altruism, prosocial behavior, “paying it forward”

Types of interventions

- Isolated/brief vs. repeat/long-term acts
- Autonomously vs. non-autonomously motivated
  - Reciprocal vs. other-focused
Six random acts of kindness 2x weekly for 4 weeks → increases in positive affect compared to neutral control (cognitive change) and psychologically active (behavioral experiments) conditions (Alden & Trew, 2013)

- Effects not attributable to differential compliance or frequency of social contact

A variety of acts of kindness for 10 weeks → decreases in negative affect and stress compared to neutral control condition (reporting recent life events) (Tkach, 2006)

- Gratitude as a key mediator (the "kindness effect")

Participants who were randomly assigned to spend $5 or $20 on others were happier at the end of the day than those who spent the same amount of money on themselves (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008)

- A one-time ‘forced altruism’ “Pay it Forward” activity increases emotional well-being in the giver (Pressman, Kraft, & Cross, 2015)

- Female-identified individuals benefit more

- Autonomous motivation of the volunteer is necessary for both the giver and receiver of the good deed to experience well-being benefits (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010)
Job Crafting

“Changes individuals make in the task and relational boundaries of their work” (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179)

- **Task boundaries**: altering the form or number of activities engaged in while doing a job/how one sees the job
- **Relational boundaries**: exercising discretion over with whom one interacts while doing the job

### Job Crafting – Examples

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<th>Example</th>
<th>Effect on Meaning of Work</th>
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<tr>
<td>Changing number, scope, and type of job tasks</td>
<td>Design engineers engaging in relational tasks that move a project to completion</td>
<td>Work is completed in a more timely fashion; engineers change the meaning of their jobs to be guardians or movers of projects</td>
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<td>Changing cognitive task boundaries</td>
<td>Nurses taking responsibility for all information and “insignificant” tasks that may help them to care more appropriately for a patient</td>
<td>Nurses change the way they see the work to be more about patient advocacy, as well as high-quality technical care</td>
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<td>Changing quality and/or amount of interaction with others encountered in the job</td>
<td>Hospital cleaners actively caring for patients and families, integrating themselves into the workflow of their floor units</td>
<td>Cleaners change the meaning of their jobs to be helpers of the sick; see the work of the floor unit as an integrated whole of which they are a vital part</td>
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Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001)
Job Crafting – Efficacy

- The extent to which employees engage in job crafting predicted psychological need satisfaction, which in turn predicted positive affect and psychological functioning (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2014)

- Those engaging in a job crafting intervention reported less negative affect and increased self-efficacy pre-post intervention (van den Heuvel, Demerouti, & Peeters, 2015)

- Crafting structural and social job resources is associated with higher levels of work engagement (Tims et al., 2013)

Personal Strengths

- Identifying and building one’s inherent or natural strengths (Ko & Donaldson, 2011)

- Three main programs:
  - Clifton StrengthsFinder (strengthsfinder.com)
  - Reflected Best Self Exercise (Roberts, Dutton, & Spreitzer, 2005)
  - Values-in-Action (VIA) Classification (viacharacter.org)
Those participating in a strengths intervention reported an increase in overall subjective well-being – but not positive or negative affect – as compared to a placebo control group (Mitchell, Stanimirovic, Klein, & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

Completing a Best Possible Self exercise for 4 weeks has a larger initial effect on positive affect than a gratitude intervention, relative to a control condition (“life details”); all 3 exercises have beneficial effects in terms of reducing negative affect (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006).
Personal Strengths – Efficacy

Senf & Laiu (2013)

Harzer & Ruch (2013)
Other Person–Focused Interventions

- Mindfulness (see Giluk, 2009, for a review)
- Goal–setting (e.g., Macleod, Coates, and Hetherton, 2008)
- Psychological Capital (e.g., Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008)

Research Agenda

- Understand causal mechanisms through which interventions are effective
- Propose and evaluate moderators (e.g., for whom, under which conditions, and when) interventions are effective
- Evaluate how the effects of decay over time may be countered by follow-up sessions
- Identify linkages between interventions, discrete emotions (e.g., gratitude), and organizational outcomes
- Continue to implement rigorous research designs for properly evaluate the efficacy of a given intervention – and in the workplace!
THANK YOU!

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References

References

References
