

MANAGING EMOTIONS IN YOUR ORGANISATION

- Recognise that emotions influence many aspects of interpersonal, team and leadership interactions in your organisation. The influence of these emotions is not necessarily a bad thing - distinguishing between when emotions are helpful, and when they are disruptive, is the first step towards creating an emotionally-healthy climate.
- Both positive and negative moods influence thought. Positive mood works better for the generation of ideas and creative problem-solving; negative mood works better when you need to extensively critique and carefully weigh the pros and cons of a complex situation.
- Know when your emotions are overwhelming you. Stressed, unhappy workers are unproductive workers. Consider stress management strategies that help you regulate emotions.
- The customer is not always right. Know when to draw the line with abusive customers so that you are not the subject of customer aggression, and are able to place limits on unacceptable customer behaviour.
- Understand the emotional dynamics of your teams and the relationships contained within those teams. We may not necessarily like everyone we work with, but understanding these relationships helps us plan collaborative efforts while minimising friction between team members who are antagonistic towards one another.
- Seek leaders who emotionally empower you. If you are the leader, think of how you can enhance, empower and build your followers' belief in their own capabilities. Seeking feedback from, and expressing openness and gratitude for followers' feedback and suggestions are just two ways to do this.
- Inspiring visions should be idealistic but also realistic, and be an outcome that resonates emotionally with its organisational members - all members must buy in to the overarching goal.



THE SOCIAL GLUE THAT MAKES OR BREAKS TEAMS



SHOULD WE REALLY LEAVE OUR EMOTIONS AT THE DOOR?

By DR EUGENE Y J TEE
 editor@leaderonomics.com

ON the surface, the modern-day organisation appears to be a well-oiled industrial machine, efficient in the production of goods and delivery of services. The word *organisation* implies order, conjures images of tidily-organised workspaces and uniform cubicles housing human skill and talent.

We imagine the many people within such environments hurriedly pacing across office space, files in hand, attending to a ceaseless line of clients over the course of the workday.

Employees perform their jobs and duties diligently; managers supervise and strategise in careful, calculative fashion.

Organisations and the individuals within them behave in a manner that is directed towards enhancing profitability and the bottom line. Rationality, cool-headedness and logic fuel organisational functioning.

But we somehow know that's not what *real* organisations are like. Real organisations are complex and messy. Real organisations have people, who, unlike the cogs in an industrial machine, express their individualities in ways that either help or hinder organisational success.

Leaders and managers may drive the collective efforts of employees, but they too are subject to biases and misjudgements that

may derail organisations. Leaders are scapegoated for poor team performance, and in other instances, seen as redeemers of floundering organisations. The organisation is essentially an organic entity created by, and managed by people.

LET'S GET REAL

People ultimately determine the organisation's fortunes and failures. We've subscribed to the idealistic, yet unrealistic notion that organisations are machines that can be managed with clinical precision.

We eliminate anything that disrupts this prevailing view - rationality prevails as the path to ruthless efficiency. We forget that we are human - imperfect, emotional beings.

We, and the organisations we create, are not paragons of rationality. Rather, organisations are all too human - and emotional, in nature.

Emotions permeate many aspects of organisational life, but have long been viewed as antithetical to organisational rationality. Rationality and emotionality are seen as two opposing forces in organisations.

The former is considered the basis for professionalism and appropriate conduct; the latter, relegated as noise that disrupts the flow of effective organisational functioning.

Emotions can indeed be disruptive - the roots of the word itself, mean 'to move'. But we have emotions for good reason. Having emotions is, psychologically speaking, a very rational thing for our brains.

There is arguably no greater propelling force for human action and endeavour than emotion. Emotions move thoughts, intention and action. Emotions move people.

Realising this is the first step towards understanding how this powerful and primitive psychological drive can be managed for the good of the organisation.

As the face of the organisation, service staff interact directly with customers, conveying the personal, human aspect of the organisation. Providing high-quality service means that at times, service staff need to suppress their true feelings towards customers.

Service staff are performing emotional labour - portraying emotions in accordance to a script befitting their role and work culture, while simultaneously suppressing what they actually feel.

Their professionalism is tested with the particularly demanding or downright impolite. These emotionally-demanding jobs can eventually take a toll on employee psychological well-being and health.

Bank tellers, flight attendants and counsellors are just some forms of such emotionally-laborious work. It's no surprise that turnover rates are especially high in the retail, hospital and business services sectors.

Organisations have, in effect,

We excitedly relay our congratulatory sentiment to team members' successes, and are riled by envy upon hearing of a rival's accomplishments. We await our performance appraisals with perhaps a tinge of anxiety. It's always personal. Don't take it personally? How could we not? Frustration, elation, apprehension - our emotions prompt us to take action.

When the thrill and enthusiasm of starting a new project outweighs our uncertainties, we are spurred into action and accomplishment. We would feel terribly bored were it not for some emotion to kickstart our motivational drives.

Emotions can propel us, but they can also overwhelm us. Feeling stressed is essentially an emotional experience, when our emotions tax us beyond our physical and psychological limits.

We burn out when we exhaust our supply of psychological resources needed to sustain our emotional fuel. Consequently, we can become emotionally exhausted, detaching ourselves from our work.

Managing stress is thus, management of these unpleasant emotions, ensuring that we don't burn out from being stuck in an emotional high gear for too long.

We need that sweet spot of emotion to get us going, along with knowing when to tap the brakes when we find ourselves accelerating past our limits.

EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD
 Spare a thought for service staff, who are often required to convey politeness, attentiveness and responsiveness towards customers for hours on end. Customers exact a certain amount of emotional credit from customer service staff as part of every social transaction.

As the face of the organisation, service staff interact directly with customers, conveying the personal, human aspect of the organisation. Providing high-quality service means that at times, service staff need to suppress their true feelings towards customers.

Service staff are performing emotional labour - portraying emotions in accordance to a script befitting their role and work culture, while simultaneously suppressing what they actually feel.

Their professionalism is tested with the particularly demanding or downright impolite. These emotionally-demanding jobs can eventually take a toll on employee psychological well-being and health.

Bank tellers, flight attendants and counsellors are just some forms of such emotionally-laborious work. It's no surprise that turnover rates are especially high in the retail, hospital and business services sectors.

Organisations have, in effect,

commercialised human emotion, determining what is appropriate and necessary for their employees to feel as part of their work role. Staff are trained in the expression, less so on the healthy regulation of their emotions, and minimally in knowing when to draw the line with abusive customers.

The customer is not always right. Organisations have an ethical obligation towards protecting staff's emotional well-being, equipping them with the skills to manage difficult customers and drawing boundaries on unacceptable customer behaviours.

Emotions are contagious, likened to a social virus that infects the moods and sentiments of its members. Interactions between team members result in the sharing and transfer of emotion.

Teams celebrate successes together, and collectively feel a sense of dread when projects derail. The collective sharing of emotions is essential for building solidarity and teamwork between members.

Team-building efforts revolve around creating the social glue of emotion, bonding members in the spirit of trust, cooperation and unity. The more emotionally connected team members are to one another, the better they function as a cohesive, directed entity.

Teams don't always function perfectly, of course. Conflict and rivalry between team members may escalate into politicking behaviours; displeasure from disagreements among team members may ultimately undermine the entire team's effectiveness.

Organisational politics are inherently emotional - a result of many individuals vying for scarce organisational resources. Conflict between team members may manifest itself in problematic behaviours such as backstabbing, rumour-mongering, petty tyranny and even outright sabotage. Organisational politics is a game played with a volatile concoction of power and emotions.

Leadership, like any other human relationship, is also subject to the influence of emotion. Inspirational leaders have, over the course of human history moved followers to action, through their charisma, vision and acts of self-sacrifice.

We romanticise such leaders, attributing divine-like qualities to them. When asked to recall leaders we wish to emulate, we often recall those with whom we share an emotionally resonant relationship with. Leaders who lead with compassion, who patiently mentored us, or those who commanded our respect

through sheer force of skill - these are the leaders that strike an emotional chord within us.

The resonance we feel towards these leaders is an indication that they empathise with us, and that they know what it feels like to be in our positions.

They magnify our hopes and aspirations, directing our emotions towards a common good. We even use terms such as the leader being 'out of touch' to describe authority figures who fail to establish this emotional resonance with us.

Toxic, abusive, unjust, ineffectual and selfish leaders stir a different set of emotions. These emotionally dissonant leaders are remembered for the wrong reasons. They sap our motivation, rob our sense of self-worth and ultimately deny us of a satisfying career.

Great leaders don't just manage the operational aspects of teams and their followers. They also manage the emotional side of this relationship. Great leaders empathise - they connect emotionally with their followers and inspire followers to be great leaders themselves.

Effective leadership development rests on cultivating one critical emotion in followers: the feeling of being empowered. Great leaders imbue followers with the belief and courage that they too, can be great. Great leaders develop greater leaders.

CULTURE AND CLIMATE
 Organisation-wide emotion shapes the culture and aspirations of the company. In its humble beginnings, Sony Corporation aspired to be the



KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Emotions have long been viewed in opposition to rationality. In fact, both emotion and rationality are essential for effective organisational functioning.
- Emotions in organisations move thought into intention and action. Emotions move people to act.
- Work can be emotionally laborious. Organisations commercialise human feeling, requiring employees to express emotions that may be at odds with their actual feelings.
- Emotions form the social glue that makes or breaks teams.
- Great leaders emotionally empower followers. Positive emotions resonate in high quality leader-follower relationships.
- The organisation's culture and aspirations embody the collective emotion of the people within.

ings, mirror the psychological health of the organisation.

Both are facets of organisation-wide emotion that move groups of people, teams, industries and nations.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

From daily interpersonal interactions to top-down organisational-level culture, it is clear that organisations are not the purely logical entities that we see, or wish them to be.

Many, if not all, aspects of organisational functioning are influenced by emotion. Perhaps it is time we start viewing organisations as comprising not just a sum of unfeeling elements, but as an embodiment of human aspirations and ideals.

Acknowledging the emotional aspect of organisations would allow managers and employees to collaborate towards building emotionally-healthy workplaces.

Positive, empowering atmospheres of work are both conducive to the organisation's bottom line and employee psychological well-being. The purely rational organisation does not exist. It probably never has, and it's a good thing that it never will.

that would "change the world's perceptions of the poor quality of Japanese products."

Embedded within this mission statement is a reflection of the hopes and goals of founders Masaru Ibuka and Akio Morita. The entrepreneurial passion of Sir Richard Branson is ingrained in the Virgin Group's culture, reflected in the group's creative and innovative ventures across multiple industries.

Organisational culture captures the aspirations of the organisation's founders, along with the collective feelings of its staff across varying economic climates.

Consider the challenges of navigating and managing organisation-wide emotion in the event of crises. Organisational members may be gripped with uncertainty, fear and apprehension in crisis situations or any large-scale change.

What must have it been like to be part of Malaysian Airlines, as the national carrier had to lay off 20,000 staff as part of its massive restructuring?

The company's culture is an expression of what its people aspire to accomplish. The company's climate, the psychological barometer of its members' sentiments and feel-

■ Dr. Eugene Y J Tee is presently senior lecturer at the Department of Psychology, HELP University, Kuala Lumpur. Eugene thinks that the better we understand our emotions, the better off we would be as a society. When not researching emotions or writing articles for Leaderonomics, he likes the occasional video game. His high score on Fruit Ninja is 3,333. Get in touch with him on Twitter @eugene_tee