Emotions in Interpersonal and Organizational Interactions

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Chairperson

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Presenters

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Integrative Abstract

This symposium discusses recent research findings from three studies on the role of emotions in both interpersonal and organizational interactions. Leong's study on gender differences in empathy regulation suggests that individuals do also regulate the extent to choose to empathize with others. In her study, Leong found significant differences in the extent to which males and females empathize with others when engaging when the interaction partner was expressing feelings of anger and sadness. The second paper by Choong and Lim examines the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in predicting leadership emergence in teams and if EI contributes to team performance. Sampling undergraduate students working in self-managing teams, results from this survey study showed that both team EI and leadership emergence are correlated with team performance, suggesting the importance of both these factors in influencing team performance. The third paper by Wong adopts a qualitative research paradigm in examining how organizational leaders are affected by followers' emotions through emotional contagion

processes. Through a series of interviews with middle-level managers, Wong found that followers' expressed emotions can affect their leader's emotions, and that the emotional contagion effect can also occur in an electronic communication context.Collectively, the three papers here research different aspects of emotions and their implications for interpersonal and organizational interactions. However, they unify research on emotions in suggesting that emotions-processes are relevant in social interactions, from how people choose to empathize with others, how much they are able to understand and manage their emotions for effective group-level functioning and the effects of emotional expression on cognitive performance. Theoretical and practical implications from these three studies are discussed at the end of the symposium session.

Individual Abstracts

Gender Differences in Empathy Regulation
by
Leong Kam Heng

This study aimed to examine the extent to which males and females 'regulate' their empathy when interacting with others. Consistent with social role theory, it was hypothesized that males are better in regulating empathy for sadness than regulating empathy for anger, whereas females are better in regulating empathy for anger than regulating empathy for sadness. It was also hypothesized that males are better in regulating empathy for sadness than females and that females are better in regulating empathy for anger than males. 199 undergraduate psychology students were recruited as participants and were asked to read a hypothetical scenario depicting a situation where another individual is expressing overt anger and sadness towards them. They were then asked to complete a modified version of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire assessing the likelihood of their regulation towards the individual portrayed in the scenario. T-

tests were conducted to analyze the result, and showed that support for two of the four hypotheses. Males and females were found to be better in regulating their empathy towards anger than in regulating their empathy towards sadness. No significant difference found between genders in regulating for anger. Consistent with social role theory, males were also found to be better in regulating their empathy towards sad individuals than were females.

Beyond the Big Five: Does Individual-Level Emotional Intelligence Predict Group-Level Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Emergence and Team Effectiveness?
by
Choong Yin Choong and Lim Kai Szheng

Associations between individual emotional intelligence (EI), leadership emergence, team EI, and team performance were examined in the present study. A total of 123 of undergraduate psychology students working in 27 self-managing teams completed self- and other-reports of emotional intelligence and team performance. All variables were averaged across teams and correlations were examined between EI, leadership emergence, team EI and team performance. The findings indicated that the performance of self-managing teams is related to the level of informal leadership emergence and team EI. Contradicting our hypotheses, correlations also showed that average individual EI correlated negatively with leadership emergence. The findings of the present study extend on EI research by examining how individual and team emotional intelligence are related to leadership emergence in self-managing team's and subsequent team performance.

A Qualitative Study of Upward Emotional Contagion
by

Wong Chee Yan

This study aimed to examine the phenomenon of upward emotional contagion in organizational leadership interactions. A qualitative research paradigm was adopted for the present study, with the main research question revolving around how followers' expressed emotions affect their leaders' emotions and performance in actual organizational contexts. A total of six managers from different organizations were interviewed about incidents where followers expressed their emotions to them, and on how they as leaders dealt with their follower's expressed emotions. Leaders were also asked on how followers' expressed emotions may have impacted their leadership effectiveness. Thematic analysis showed that upward emotional contagion does occur in leadership in actual organization and it takes place in several ways. Firstly, followers express their emotions both directly and indirectly toward their leaders, and that leaders can "catch" those expressed emotions. Secondly, emotions can be conveyed via face-to-face or electronic communication, i.e. emails. Thirdly, followers' expressed emotions play a role in leaders' decision making process and its resulting leadership effectiveness. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.