

The Affective Component of Workplace in Organizational Behavior Studies

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Abstract

The growing interest in the affective component of workplace has led to a shift in organizational behavior studies, recognizing that people's emotions influence performance. Researchers have been steadily showing how employee decisions and actions are linked to emotions at personal, interpersonal and organizational levels. In the context of an organizational setting, a positive climate contributes to promote human flourishing and organizational growth. The paper examines how benefits of positive emotions in workplace serve as mechanism to achieve transformative cooperation, contributing to an organization's process of dynamic change. Employees' effort to work together, using positive experiences as lever for organizational development and change, stimulates creativity necessary for innovation.

Keywords: Positive emotions, Organizational climate, Workplace

1. Introduction

Organizational behavior scholars use and apply psychological, sociological, economic and organizational perspectives in order to understand and predict the determinants of human behaviour (Knights, Willmott 2007; Tosi, Pilati 2008). These studies attempt to illustrate how individual behavior in organization is related to some other important key elements: work environment, personal traits, behaviour and consequences of behavior. One of the purposes of organizational behavior management is to create a link between performance and satisfaction, by understanding the behaviors of individuals, groups and organizations (Tosi, Pilati 2008).

In recent years, organizational scholars have been intrigued by the potential benefits that positive emotions have to offer to employees. Researchers have recognized that people's emotions influence performance and employee decisions and actions are linked to emotions at the personal, interpersonal and organizational levels (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011).

People's attitudes towards work and organizational commitment are two important elements in terms of competitive advantage of organization, performance and job satisfaction. It is not always easy to change attitudes to increase job satisfaction. That's why many organizations enable periodic climate analysis to understand employees' attitudes towards job attributes, policies, reward systems, progression of career, training, leadership style, organizational structure (Knights, Willmott, 2007; Tosi, Pilati, 2008). Climate analysis can contribute to a change process, based on a reformulation of interpersonal relations. The direct employees' involvement can increase the likelihood that a change in the workplace produces the expected results.

Recent studies on the relationship between organizational performance and climate have showed that a positive work environment can help to improve outcomes, by creating a positive perception of how things are made, reducing work stress and favouring innovations, as a response to environmental and organizational change (Schneider, Ehrhart, Macey, 2011). The ideology and the organizational culture play an important role in climate development and affect the decision-making and organizational action, through specific mechanisms of creation and reinforcement of organizational values and behaviors (Ashfort, Mael, 1989).

Culture can be distinguished by climate: culture is more macro in focus, targeting the values, beliefs of the organization; climate refers to what can be directly observed and experienced (James, Choi, Ko, McNeil, Minton, Wright, et al. 2008). The culture is the *why* of organizational behavior and the climate is the *what* of culture (Ostroff, Kinicki, Tamkins, 2003). Both constructs share the emotional side of the organization.

The increasing attention to the affective component of workplace has led to a shift in organizational behavior studies, intrigued by the potential benefits of positive emotions on performance (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011). The paper focuses on how the benefits of positive emotions in workplace serve as mechanism to achieve transformative cooperation, contributing to an organization's process of dynamic change.

2. Organizational Climate and Culture

Scholars of organizational behavior, fascinated by the distinctions and connections between the concepts of culture and climate, have tried to understand how certain aspects of the work environment can affect the achievement of a number of results (Baltes, Zhdanova, Parker, 2009). Both these constructs can influence some outcomes, at individual and organizational levels, such as customer satisfaction, turnover and absenteeism, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance and well-being (Gibbs, Cooper, 2011). Values and beliefs of workers (part of culture) influence their interpretations of policies, practices and organizational procedures (climate) (Schneider, Brief, Guzzo, 1996). The culture refers to the beliefs and values of an organization (Schein, 1990) and it includes the expectations and the organizational norms ruling the behavior of the community of workers within an organization (Glisson, James, 2002). The climate represents the perceptions of employees of organizational policies, practices and procedures. There is no doubt that culture and climate are similar concepts since they both describe employees' experiences of their organizations (De Simone, 2011). Organizational climate represents the descriptions of the things that happen to employees in an organization. Climate is behaviourally oriented. Climates for safety or service, for example, represent the patterns of behavior that support safety or service. Organizational culture is defined as a set of shared values, common assumptions, patterns of beliefs and norms held by employees that guide their interactions with peers, management, and clients (Schneider, Brief, Guzzo, 1996; Schein, 1990).

Exploring organizational cultural values and assumptions in relation to, for example, individualism/collectivism can help explain employees' perceptions of the climate for teamwork in their organizations. The quest to differentiate the concepts has influenced approaches to measurement, with most climate research utilizing quantitatively based questionnaire measures applied comparatively across several organizations, while most culture researchers have advocated the use of qualitative measures and a focus on single organizations (Patterson, West, Shackleton, Dawson, Lawthom, Maitlis, et al. 2005). Organizational culture and climate are both important constructs that influence employees' attitudes and behaviors (James, Choi, Ko, McNeil, Minton, Wright, et al. 2008; Baltes, Zhdanova, Parker, 2009).

3. Cognitive and Affective States at Work

A prominent feature in research on organizational climate and culture is that employees' perceptions of their working environment are mediated by cognitive and affective states (Gibbs, Cooper, 2011). Climate influences a number of important organizational outcomes and behaviors (citizenship and performance) through the mediating effect of employees' cognitive and affective states (job satisfaction and commitment). Different cognitive and affective states related to different climate dimensions (Ostroff, 1993):

- *Affective dimension*: social and interpersonal relationships at work;
- *Cognitive dimension*: self-knowledge and psychological involvement with work activities;
- *Instrumental dimension*: task involvement.

Cognitive and affective states mediate organizational climate's impact on a number of important outcomes, such as job performance and well-being. The way in which employees derive meaning from their work environment is a salient component for mediating cognitions (James, Choi, Ko, McNeil, Minton, Wright, et al. 2008). However, discovering the essence and effects of positive perceptions of employees at work can be more important than focusing on negative ones.

The collective conscious perceptions employees have of their work environment are influenced by individual characteristics, structural characteristics of the organization, exchange among individuals of the interpretations of organizational events, and culture. Organizational culture and climate are highly interrelated concepts that share a strong emotional undertone.

Constructive organizational climate is characterized by values such as openness towards diversity, collaboration, friendship, encouragement, personal freedom and trust, which tend to lead to high levels of employee cognitive and affective involvement with the organization (Glisson, Landsverk, Schoenwald, Kelleher, Hoagwood, Mayberg, et al. 2008). In a study of employees in mental health services, positive organizational climate correlated with positive work outcomes, positive employee work attitudes, intentions to stay with the organization, and overall organizational performance (Aarons, Sawitzky, 2006). The affective face of climate was more strongly correlated with organizational members' psychological well-being and performance than the cognitive or instrumental elements of climate. The affective face of climate had the strongest impact on employees' job satisfaction, commitment and involvement with their organization (De Simone, Esposito, Siani, 2014).

4. Emotions in Workplace

The goal sharing by organizational members engenders a positive climate, which serve in turn to increase organizational identification and to develop stronger relationships in the organization that then foster higher levels of organizational growth and performance. A climate of insecurity can impact on employees' affective reactions, quality of leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Sora, Caballer, Peiró, de Witte, 2009).

An emotional climate promotes human flourishing. According to Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions, such as joy, interest, appreciation, function in the short term to broaden one's thought-action repertoire and thereby build in the long term one's cognitive, social, psychological, and physical resources (Fredrickson, 2001).

Positive emotions engender social interactions. Negative emotions will always be a part of organizational life, just as they are a feature of life outside work. Negative emotions don't automatically equate to subsequent negative outcomes, just as positive emotions don't automatically equate to positive outcomes following the emotional experience. Negative emotions often provide useful signals to people in regards to areas where learning is required (Härtel, Ashkanasy, 2011). The ability to respond constructively to negative emotions depends on how frequently people are exposed to negative emotional experiences. Positive emotions play an important role to buffer the impact of negative emotions on people, to build psychological resiliency towards negative events and to promote functional coping strategies. An emotional climate that promotes human flourishing is one where positive emotional experiences outweigh negative emotional experiences (De Simone, 2013a).

Another feature of a climate that provides the emotional experiences for human flourishing is the absence of emotional game playing (Härtel, Ashkanasy, 2011). Individuals could use emotions management skills in inauthentic and destructive ways. For example, an employee may ingratiate him to a superior with the aim of getting a better performance appraisal. Emotional game playing diminishes trust, inequities, and results in social exclusion and distress. Other-directed emotion management skills with destructive consequences include backstabbing, refusal to cooperate and lack of minimum of civility. Other-directed emotion management skills with constructive consequences include giving recognition, courtesy, helpfulness, conflict management and optimism. Examples of self-directed emotion management skills with destructive coping consequences include worrying, negative affectivity, wishful thinking and avoidance. Examples of self-directed emotion management skills with constructive coping consequences include problem-focused coping and not easily giving way to anger. Emotional climate has important consequences for individual employees and the organization as a whole. Organizational norms and the constructive use of emotion management are essential to develop and keep an emotional climate enabling individuals' well-being (De Simone, 2013b).

5. Transformative Cooperation Process

Scholars of organizational behavior have been intrigued by the potential benefits that positive emotions have to offer to workers. They have shown how experiences that foster emotions, such as interest, joy, pride and appreciation, promote adaptive qualities that help people work together. The benefits of positive emotions, contributing to a dynamic process of individual and organizational change, serve as a mechanism to achieve *transformative cooperation* (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011). Transformative cooperation derives from a combination of transformation and cooperation.

In an organizational setting, transformation is a shift in how people think, observe, and interpret their organization and their role within it; cooperation is viewed as an association of people who work together to achieve mutual benefits as a result of their shared actions.

In order to initiate and sustain transformative cooperation, it's important to understand how the benefits of positive emotions can contribute to this fundamental change in an organizational setting, starting at the individual level and then through small groups (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011). Positive emotions are associated with helping individuals to establish positive meaning in their job and organizational role and to stimulate competence, achievement, involvement and social interaction (Fredrickson, 2001). When individuals encourage others to seek a positive meaning in their work, bringing forward what they value most, gratitude and enthusiasm tend to emerge. Generally, positive emotions in contrast to negative emotions can stimulate cooperation in route to change (Härtel, Ashkanasy, 2011). Psychological capital (optimism, hope and resilience) favourably influences employees' attitudes and behaviors and organizational change, especially through positive emotions.

The figure 1 illustrates transformative cooperation process and effects of positive emotions on organizational development and change. Positive emotions are promoted by transformative cooperation (fostered through strength-based analysis) that contributes a positive emotional climate, enabling the benefits of broaden-build effects of positive emotions. One's emotions and cognitions are strictly linked and people that feel good about what they are doing are more inclined to cooperate and engage in action. A strength-based inquire referring to positive strong points of the organization and its members is a first step towards transformative cooperation. Focusing on what people value most emboldens collectively experienced positive emotions that support personal and organizational growth. A process of development and organizational change, through strength-based enquire, encourages people to share positive memories through stories, testimonials, and discussions about what they appreciate of their work life (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011).

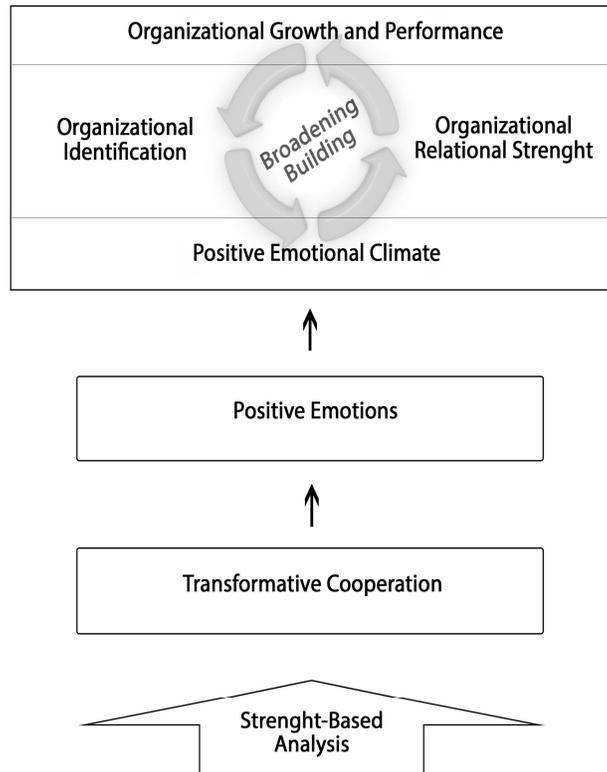
Rather than looking at problems and symptoms of dysfunction, this process starts with organization's positive core and contributes to socially constructing reality. Through transformative cooperation, organizational members align themselves in new and unique ways by forming groups, taking on new roles and functions, generating positive energy with interest and enthusiasm. New organizational relationships emerge. Employees' effort to work together, using positive experiences as lever for organizational development and change, stimulates creativity necessary for innovation (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011). When people work in a strength-based inquire, the process of transformative cooperation generates a positive emotional climate. Organizational routines can change by identifying new strategic actions.

Once transformative cooperation has started, it will probably continue to generate positive experiences within the organization and build capacity through inclusion and empowerment. Cognitions fostered by positive emotions such as gratitude, appreciation contribute to increase organizational identification. Employees working together can encourage new ideas, share goals and generate learning. Gratitude motivates and reinforces social actions in both the giver and receiver of help, by inspiring positive actions. When organization continues to cultivate a positive emotional climate, it will derive benefit from an increase in the strength of interpersonal relationships. Positive emotions foster constructive engagement and trust, which is the basis of negotiations and contribute to organizational effectiveness (Fredrickson, 2001). A leadership style stimulating a positive emotional climate also contributes to increase productivity and organizational growth (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011). Given that positive emotions contribute to organizational identification and relational strength, this adds value to the organization which in turn increases social capital. The presence of these resources can contribute to growth and performance, as antecedent for organizational effectiveness (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011).

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Figure 1: The Process of Transformative Cooperation



Source: Adapted from Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, Fredrickson, 2011