

The role of emotions in organizational behaviour

Zoltán Bogáthy, Coralia Sulea, Catalina Zaborila

West University Timișoara, Psychology Department
Romania
zbogathy@socio.uvt.ro

Professor Zoltán Bogáthy, PhD teaches organizational psychology, work psychology, organizational behaviour and organizational diagnosis at the Psychology Department of West University Timișoara. He is also the head of the Psychology Department and runs his own consultancy firm.

Coralia Sulea is an Assistant Professor in social psychology and invests her research interests in the field of counterproductive and citizenship work behaviour.

Catalina Zaborila is an Assistant Professor at the Psychology Department and studies the dynamics of emotional experience in organizations.

Abstract

The paper explores the main implications of the current approach to the study of emotions in organizations (the bi-dimensional approach) and the relation between the emotional experience and the behaviour displayed at the workplace (organizational citizenship behaviour and counterproductive behaviour). The authors claim that a focus on the change of individual models of adaptation to the demands of the environment would bring more efficiency to consultant's activities of diagnosis and intervention in organizations.

Introduction

A recent review of job performance literature indicates that there are three distinct components of work behaviour in the job performance sphere. They have been identified as: a) task performance; b) organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB); and c) workplace deviance behaviour (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002 after Dunlop & Lee, 2004). The importance of the two categories of non-task behaviour in relation with overall job performance is also well documented in literature. Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994 after Dunlop & Lee, 2004) found that OCB plays a comparably important role as task performance when it comes to determine employees' overall job performance. Similar findings were reported with respect to counterproductive citizenship behaviour (CWB) by Rotundo & Sackett (2002 after Dunlop & Lee, 2004).

According to the fact that employees' performance at the workplace is likely to be influenced by task performance and by non-task performance, there is increasing attention to factors that determine counterproductive work behaviour and citizenship behaviour in research literature. In the following paragraphs we will explore the role of emotions as one of the important predictors of behaviour.

Counterproductive and citizenship behaviour

Workplace deviance is defined as "voluntary behaviour of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms, and, in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organizational norms and/or its members" (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Workplace deviance is conceptualised also as counterproductive work behaviour.

On the contrary, *organizational citizenship behaviour* (OCB) refers to extra-role behaviour that promotes organizational efficiency but it is not explicitly recognised by an organizational reward system (Organ, 1988, 1990 after Bennett & Robinson, 2000). OCB has been defined as "individual contributions in the workplace that go beyond role requirements and contractually rewarded job achievements" (Organ & Ryan, 1995 after Lee, 2002). Examples of such

behaviour include helping newly hired employees or employees with heavy workloads, making constructive suggestions, volunteering for tasks that are not required and so on.

Organizational deviance is a voluntary behaviour that has the potential to harm the organisation, while organizational citizenship behaviour reflects pro-social voluntary behaviour beneficial for the organisation.

Organ and colleagues (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983) reported two dimensions of OCB, namely an *interpersonal dimension* (OCB-I) (example: volunteering to help a co-worker) and an *organizational dimension* (OCB-O) (example: praising the organisation to outsiders) (after Dalal, 2005). This taxonomy was formulated aiming at the target of behaviour: individual employees or the organisation as a whole, respectively. On the *counterproductive* (CWB) side, Robinson and Bennett (1995) made a similar distinction between interpersonally directed and organizationally directed aspects of what they called workplace deviance. Examples include gossiping about co-workers (CWB-I) and taking overly long breaks (CWB-O). Therefore both, OCB and CWB, can be separated into behaviour that is directed toward other employees and behaviour directed toward the organisation as a whole (after Dalal, 2005).

CWB - OCB and emotions

Counterproductive work behaviour and organizational citizenship behaviour have been studied extensively across international research in relation with various predictors (such as job stressors, organizational constraints, personality, and affectivity). Emotions the employee feels at work have been found to have an important role in the dynamics of organizational behaviour. An increased amount of *negative affectivity* (NA) has been found to be related to setting minimal goals, to an increased potential to involve in withdrawal behaviour, as well as to an increased level of hostility and demands (Necowitz & Roznowski, 1994 after Aquino et al., 1999). *Hostility and sadness* play an important role in explaining deviant behaviour at the workplace; *attention* plays an important role in prediction of citizenship behaviour, *self-confidence* (that can be associated with boldness and even aggressiveness) predicts counterproductive behaviour. Fox and Spector (1999) found that hostility correlates more strongly with self-ratings of counterproductive behaviour than fear does. Bruk-Lee and Spector (2006) found that employees who reported to experience more negative emotion at work also reported to have engaged in more counterproductive behaviour.

Miles, Borman, Spector and Fox (2002) suggested that perceptions of the work environment relate to positive emotion, which is positively correlated with the occurrence of OCB. Also, negative perceptions of the work environment relate to negative emotions, which are positively correlated with the occurrence of CWB.

Spector and Fox (2002) argued that affect is associated with general physiological arousal and induces "action tendencies" that engender behaviour via the formulation of behavioural intentions and/or the initiation of readiness to act (Dalal, 2005). The same authors asserted that behaviour may take the form of either constructive action (meaning OCB) or destructive action (CWB). Although the relationship between affect and behaviour is rather complex, there is some evidence that CWB is designed to ameliorate NA whereas OCB is designed to maintain positive affect. In general, these authors predicted strong PA-OCB and NA-CWB relations. Moving forward, it could be argued that people scoring high on PA would typically engage in OCB and those scoring low on PA may or may not engage in CWB. Similarly, it could be argued that those scoring high in NA would typically engage in CWB, but those scoring low on NA may or may not engage in OCB.

In 2005, Dalal put into effect a meta-analysis concerning the relation between OCB and CWB. These constructs were found to be relatively distinct factors in their own right. Also negative affectivity in relation with CWB seems to be much stronger than its relation with OCB. This findings support Spector and Fox's (2002) result that NA is more strongly related to CWB than to OCB. Regarding PA the situation is less clear. A fairly substantial discrepancy in the obtained PA-OCB results was observed between Organ and Ryan's (1995) results and the results Dalal presented (2005). The results appear to not support Spector and Fox's (2002) claim that PA is more strongly related to OCB than to CWB (Dalal, 2005).

Bogáthy, Sulea, Zaborila (2007) have investigated the impact of the interaction between personality and emotions and supportive vs. abusive leadership on employees' citizenship and counterproductive behaviours. Regarding the relevance of emotions, the results were as follows:

- Feeling "repulsed" is positively related to organizational counterproductive behaviour.
- Feeling "happy" is positively related to organizational counterproductive behaviour. This finding draws attention to the fact that even a positive affect can drive an employee to involve in undesirable behaviour. Consistently, happy emotion is negatively related to organizational citizenship behaviour
- If the employee feels "relaxed", there is a good chance that he will not involve in organizational counterproductive behaviour.
- The employee who feels "warmth" will be inclined to involve in organizational citizenship behaviour.

The above analysis highlights the importance of emotions in non-task behaviours, meaning CWB and OCB. The importance of these behaviours is undisputable, due to their connection with overall job performance. The emotions felt by the employees at work also influence their well-being. The way they are expressed or suppressed can impact on the employees' state of health.

The healthy function of emotions in organizational life

Discrete emotions diversely colour peoples' existence, both at work and at home, and their experience cannot be analysed only from a bi-dimensional perspective on affective states (positive versus negative) (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Gabriel, 1995; Lawler & Thye, 1999; Lawler, 2001; Poon, 2001; Weiss & Brief, 2001).

Recent studies on discrete emotions (Kiewitz, 2002; Oatley & Jenkins, 1992) point to the fact that *decisions* regarding behaviour displayed in dangerous situations are made on the basis of:

- *the evaluation of the significance of danger* coming up to a person (a spontaneous, often subconscious process aimed at identifying the source and the magnitude of the danger – e.g., the evaluation of a threat in case of fear);
- *the person's experience* (the adaptation models acquired during childhood);
- *characteristics of the situation* (characteristics of the environment where the emotion is experienced that encourages/inhibits the emotional response through norms and rules for the emotional display).

Clinical psychology literature shows that many of the adaptation problems of an adult to events and relationships are linked to *early adaptation models*. These models have once proved to be efficient for survival in a hostile environment and can become very dysfunctional in the here and now reality, by making difficult or blocking communication, by inhibiting performance and other behaviours (Deffenbacher, 1999; Joines & Stewart, 2002; Greenberg, 2002; Schiraldi & Hallmark Kerr, 2002).

Taking into consideration that defence mechanisms are activated regardless of the nature of danger (real, perceived or imagined), and that each of us has a unique style of adaptation to environmental demands and constraints, we can expect for any interaction context to become a field where defence reactions trigger the vicious circle of interpersonal conflict.

The investigation of the dynamics of emotional response to the experience of anger and fear in organizations could have an impact on the efficiency of organizational development programmes, HR practices and procedures, leadership and followership.

Application of this work to organizational life

Organizational consultants and scholars should first identify the organizational sources of emotions with negative valence. Then they should help managers to recognise the negative impact of keeping the organizational practices that generate such emotions, and raise

awareness on employees' responsibility in maintaining or changing the unproductive models of communication and problem solving.

The organizational consultants who use this diagnosis/intervention framework report remarkable results in the work experience with their clients, and offer support for the relevance of the study of discrete emotions in organizations (Frost, 2003; Raz, 2002; Ryan & Oestreich, 1998). Such an approach to organizational diagnosis and intervention is powerful enough to contribute to work quality and productivity by *setting free the organizational climate from the toxicity of negative emotional responses*.

It is well known that repeated experience of anger or fear has long-term effects on the physical health of an individual (in terms of such conditions as heart diseases, diabetes and ulcers) (Pope, Smith & Rhodewalt, 1990). These effects are not only connected to the emotional experience, but also to the emotional response. For example, it is proved that anger expression has positive effects on physical health, while anger suppression contributes to heart disease (Pope et al., 1990).

The role of managers in promoting healthy organizational behaviour

Managers and supervisors play an important role in discouraging workplace deviance and also in promoting organizational citizenship behaviour. Managers who model an ethical behaviour and other types of related behaviours can greatly influence employees' behaviour in this direction. Litzky, Eddelston and Kidder (2006) also suggest that managers at all levels in organisation need to model ethical behaviour and must take a firm stance against deviant behaviour if they expect the same from their employees. Managers should explain to employees what would be considered as workplace deviance and describe the boundaries of behaviour considered to be appropriate and inappropriate within the organisation.

Role clarity was also found to be an important predictor for organizational behaviour. If managers succeed to establish clear tasks and procedures for employees, this would decrease a lot the chances for those to involve in counterproductive behaviour. A trustworthy and honest relationship between managers and subordinates will also encourage healthy organizational behaviours. Also managers should look for groups that encourage workplace deviance and rotate members in order to avoid a strong "nest" that promotes deviance within organisation. Different types of organizational training, for instance in social skills, stress management, interpersonal communication, and coaching can also be very helpful in reducing interpersonal deviant or aggressive behaviour. Managers should also communicate clear expectations toward employees, not only about the work they have to do, but also what conduct is accepted and encouraged within the organisation.

Related to organizational citizenship behaviour in organizations, researchers found that organizational commitment, job satisfaction and procedural and distributive justice have positive effects to this type of organizational behaviour (Erturk, Yilmaz & Ceylan, 2004). One important finding is also that employees put more emphasis on the fairness of managerial practices, particular on the perceived equity of managerial practices in reward distribution. In this context, we emphasize the importance of the managers' attitude and behaviour to encourage organizational citizenship behaviour. Also, it is important that when managers provide guidance regarding appropriate workplace behaviour there is sufficient explanation of these behaviours and feedback to the employees to appreciate how their behaviours are received. It is critical that managers become more aware of their role and how much their behaviour and attitudes influence employees' behaviour.

Romanian perspective

From the perspective of Romanian organizations, research has shown that if the supervisor's behaviour is perceived as supportive then the probability for the employee to engage in interpersonal citizenship behaviour increases. A way to decrease interpersonal counterproductive behaviour could be influenced by change in the supervisor's behaviour, preferably by introducing a new supportive behaviour toward the employee. Personality factors

are relevant for organizational citizenship behaviour: An extroverted employee, who has an increased activity level, will be more prone to involve in this type of behaviour.

Romania is in a continuing developmental process and this also affects organizations. If at the beginning of the developmental process the emphasis was on creating working procedures and organizational rules and procedures, now the emphasis is more on the process of transmitting those procedures, to model them. These steps, from formal code of conduct and ethical codes for the employees, for example, to actual enactment, emphasising feedback and other communication systems has started to show the signs of more efficient working climates. Also, the development of trainings, team-building and other forms of learning and connecting that are developing in the last few years, help to foster a better working environment that goes beyond written rules and procedures and is more oriented to real organizational behaviour.

References

- Abe, J.A., & Izard, C.E. (1999). The Developmental Functions of Emotions: An Analysis in terms of Differential Emotions Theory. *Cognition and Emotion*, 13, (5), 523-549.
- Aquino, K., Lewis, M. & Bradfield, M. (1999). Justice constructs, negative affectivity and employee deviance: a proposed model and empirical test. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 20, (7), 1073-1091
- Bennett, R.J., & Robinson, S.L. (2000). Development of a measure of workplace deviance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85, (3), 349-360
- Bogathy, Z., Sulea, C., & Zaborila, C. (2007, May). The role of emotions in the organizational counterproductive behaviour & the citizenship behaviour of the employee. Paper presented at *The XIIIth European Congress of Work and Organizational Psychology, Stockholm, May 9-12*
- Brief, A.P., & Weiss, H.M. (2002). Organizational Behavior: Affect in the Workplace. *The Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 279-307.
- Bruk-Lee, V., & Spector, P.E. (2006). The social stressors-counterproductive work behaviors link: are conflicts with supervisors and coworkers the same? *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 11, (2), 145-156.
- Dalal, R. S. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and counterproductive work behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90, (6), 1241-1255.
- Dalal, R. S., Sims, C.S., & Spencer, S. (2003, April). The structure of discretionary behavior at work. In D.E. Rupp (Chair), *New Frontiers in Job satisfaction, Job performance and their linkages*. Symposium conducted at the 18th Annual Meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Orlando, Florida.
- Deffenbacher, J.L. (1999). Cognitive-Behavioral Conceptualization and Treatment of Anger. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 55, (3), 295-309.
- Dunlop, P.D., & Lee, K. (2004). Workplace deviance, organizational citizenship behavior, and business unit performance: the bad apples do spoil the whole barrel. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25, 67-80.
- Erturk, A., Yilmaz, C., & Ceylan, A. (2004). Promoting organizational citizenship behaviors: relative affects on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and perceived managerial fairness. *METU Studies in Development*, 31, 189-210
- Evison, R. (2001). Helping individuals manage emotional responses. In R.L Payne and C.L. Cooper (Eds.). *Emotion at Work: Theory, Research, and Applications for Management*. West Sussex: Wiley & Sons.
- Frost, P.J. (2003). *Toxic Emotions at Work*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Gabriel, Y. (1995). The unmanaged organization: stories, fantasies and subjectivity, *Organization Studies*, 13, (3), 477-501.
- Gray, E.K., & Watson, D. (2001). Emotion, mood, and temperament. Similarities, differences, and a synthesis. In R.L Payne and C.L. Cooper (Eds.). *Emotion at Work: Theory, Research, and Applications for Management*. West Sussex: Wiley & Sons.
- Greenberg, L.S. (2002). *Emotion-Focused Therapy: Coaching Clients to Work Through Their Feelings*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Joines, V., & Stewart, I. (2002). *Personality Adaptations: A New Guide to Human Understanding in Psychotherapy and Counselling*. Nottingham: Russell Press.
- Kelloway, E., Loughlin, C., Barling, J. & Nault, A. (2002). Self-reported counterproductive behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors: separate but related constructs. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 10, (1/2).
- Kiewitz, C. (2002). *The Work Anger Model (WAM!): An Inquiry Into the Role of Anger at Work (Dissertation)*. Ann Arbor: ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
- Lawler, E.J. (2001). An Affect Theory of Social Exchange. *The American Journal of Sociology*, (2), 321-352.

- Lawler, E.J., & Thye, S.R. (1999). Bringing Emotions into Social Exchange Theory. *The Annual Review of Sociology*, (25), 217-244.
- Lee, K. (2000). *Job Affect as a predictor of organizational citizenship behavior and workplace deviance*. National Library of Canada
- Litzky, B. E., Eddeleston, K.A., & Kidder, D.L. (2006). The good, the bad, and the misguided: how managers inadvertently encourage deviant behaviors. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 91-103.
- Miles, D.E., Borman, W.E., Spector, P. E., & Fox, S. (2002). Building an integrative model of extra role work behaviors: a comparison of counterproductive work behavior with organizational citizenship behavior. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 10, (2), 51-57.
- Oatley, K., & Jenkins, J.M. (1992). Human Emotions: Function and Dysfunction. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 43, 55-85.
- Parkinson, B. (1996). Emotions are social. *British Journal of Psychology*, 87, 663-683.
- Poon, J.M.L. (2001). Mood: A review of its antecedents and consequences, *International Journal of Organizational Theory and Behavior*, 4 (3), 357-388.
- Pope, M. K., Smith, T., & Rhodewalt, F. (1990). Cognitive, Behavioral, and Affective Correlates of the Cook and Medley Hostility Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 54, (4), 501-514.
- Power, M., & Dalgleish, T. (1998). *Cognition and Emotion. From Order to Disorder*. Hove: Psychology Press.
- Raz, A.E. (2002). *Emotions at Work: Normative Control, Organizations, and Culture in Japan and America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Robinson, S., & Bennett, R. (1995). A typology of deviant workplace behaviors: a multidimensional scaling study. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, (2), 555-572
- Ryan, K.D., Oestreich, D.K. (1998). *Driving Fear Out of the Workplace: Creating the High-Trust, High-Performance Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schiraldi, G.R., & Hallmark Kerr, M. (2002). *The Anger Management Sourcebook*. New-York: McGraw-Hill.
- Weiss, H.M., & Brief, A.P. (2001). Affect at work: A historical perspective. In R.L Payne and C.L. Cooper (Eds.). *Emotion at Work: Theory, Research, and Applications for Management*. West Sussex: Wiley & Sons.