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Rater mood and employee emotional expression in a customer service scenario: interactions and implications for performance review outcomes

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Abstract

This laboratory study examined mood and affect intensity of *raters*, *employee* gender and emotional expression, and their impact on a performance review outcome in a customer service scenario. Rater mood, rater affect intensity, and employee emotional expression all interacted to predict the amount of raise assigned, and the effect was intensified when the rater was affectively intense. Employee emotional expression and the interaction between gender and strength of expressed affect also significantly predicted outcomes. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

In the past decade, research within several areas of emotions in the workplace has begun to accumulate and form a critical mass with several strong implications for the effects of emotions on work attitudes and outcomes. From performance appraisal research, we know that a manager/rater's affective state toward the employee is related to his or her rating of performance (Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Longenecker, Jaccoud, Sims, & Gioia, 1992; Varma, Denisi, & Peters, 1996). Yet, the bulk of research in this area conceptualizes and examines manager/rater affect as *liking* of an employee (e.g., Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Conway, 1998;

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Robbins & DeNisi, 1994; 1998; Tsui & Barry, 1986; Varma et al., 1996) rather than as a mood state with its concomitant effects (Sinclair, 1988 being a notable exception). Further, empirical assessments of how *employees'* expressed affect impacts performance review outcomes are scant. A customer service setting provides a logical arena to examine these potential effects due to the inherent dictates of emotional expression for most customer service positions. Thus, the primary purposes of the present research were to provide insight into how both affect expressed by the employee and mood of the rater (and their interaction) would impact outcomes of a performance review within a customer service scenario. It is argued if such effects are found with “manager raters,” that these very same effects may operate with “customer raters,” greatly impacting customer satisfaction.

2. The nature of affect

Often, the terms affect, emotion, and mood are used interchangeably, which contributes to confusion over their distinction. For most, *affect* is a more general term encompassing emotions, moods, and feelings (Arnold, 1960; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Longenecker et al., 1992; Park, Sims, & Motowidlo, 1986; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Undifferentiated affect, synonymous with mood, “refers to a generalized affective state that is pervasive but has no inherent target that necessarily represents the cause or the object of the mood” (Longenecker et al., 1992, p. 23). Differentiated affect, in contrast, has a specific target (Arnold, 1960; Clark & Isen, 1982; Longenecker et al., 1992) and usually results in a specific emotion or constellation of emotions. For example, within a performance review situation, the target could be the employee to be evaluated or the performance appraisal process itself. The present research examines undifferentiated affect or mood yet acknowledges that an examination of discrete emotion within the same research paradigm would also be a valuable endeavor.

For the purposes of the present research, the terms “employee expressed affect” and “employee emotional expression” are used to convey that it was not employee mood that was manipulated and examined but employee affective expression or display. “Rater mood” is used because general mood of rater rather than specific affect directed toward a target was predicted to influence outcomes of a performance review.

3. Affect in judgment and evaluation processes

Generally, Isen’s research consistently demonstrates that positive affect (PA) predicts better creativity and greater cognitive flexibility (Isen & Daubman, 1984; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987; Isen, Johnson, Mertz, & Robinson, 1985) as well as the use of heuristic types of cognitive processing strategies (Isen & Means, 1983; Mackie & Worth, 1991; Schwarz & Bless, 1991). In contrast, Alloy and Abramson’s research consistently demonstrates that negative affect (NA) predicts accuracy and realism in judgments and decision-making (Alloy & Abramson, 1979, 1982; Alloy, Abramson, & Viscusi, 1981; Martin, Abramson, & Alloy,

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