3

Managing Emotion

❖   ❖   ❖

I was working in customer service at a loan company. My job was to handle customer complaints, calm down the angry ones, make them feel more satisfied with our services. I'm not trying to brag, but I was good at my job and even had awards to show for it. All of us service reps got along pretty well and usually had some laughs on our breaks. Then this new manager was hired and he wanted to crack down on things. Nobody liked him. He would intimidate by spying on us and shouting stuff like, "You were late from break!" We weren't. He made me go to some basic training as a way to humiliate me. As angry as I felt, I couldn't say anything because that would be an excuse for him to fire me. Throughout the training I was written up for not being enthusiastic enough. Long story short, unfortunately the new manager drove my decision to quit.

Sanji, age 23

Cultural norms encourage us to keep our emotions out of the workplace. In fact, derogative terms are sometimes used to label an overly emotional coworker—labels like "unprofessional," "high maintenance," or even "out of control." At least in our imaginations,

work is the place for analysis, planning, and cool heads—terms we often set in opposition to emotion. But Sanji reminds us of the many ways that the communication of emotion is an intrinsic and important part of so many jobs. As a customer service representative, he was required to calm down angry customers and make them feel satisfied. This kind of communication, the kind that manages our emotions and those of others, is so important in service jobs that researchers long ago gave it a name—*emotional labor* (Hochschild, 1983).

Emotion surfaces in many other ways for Sanji. He liked his job because of the "laughs" he and his coworkers sometimes shared, a suggestion that positive emotions make work more appealing. By "not trying to brag," Sanji was regulating the emotion of pride. Organizational norms teach us to distinguish between felt emotions and expressed emotions. Even when workers feel pride, they may hesitate to express it for fear of being boastful. Coworkers might greet such displays with disdain or envy. Sanji also struggles to suppress his anger at a supervisor, who seems bent on cultivating the emotions of fear and humiliation. Sanji is eventually written up for his unwillingness to demonstrate the correct emotions in training—for "not being enthusiastic enough."

This chapter addresses emotion management—the communication processes associated with feeling, eliciting, regulating, expressing, and fabricating our emotions and interpreting those expressed by others. The communication of emotion is an underappreciated but common (and necessary) form of organizational communication. And it can indeed be risky. Sanji left a job that had given him pleasure and financial reward, in part due to the emotional upset associated with his new supervisory relationship. His organization lost a productive employee. Other workers find that the emotional demands of their jobs put them at risk of stress, burnout, strained relationships, and even emotional numbness. Frequent demands to throttle back emotion, the pressure to fabricate emotions we don't feel—these demands could eventually change the way we see ourselves at work and at home. In other words, our identity is placed at risk. Of course, emotion management is a necessary skill and often a positive one. We use it to maintain harmonious relationships, improve our performance on stressful tasks, and make work a satisfying (and fun) social experience for ourselves and our peers.

❖ WHY IS MANAGING EMOTION IMPORTANT?

Researchers report that the management of emotion is an integral and sometimes taken-for-granted part of most jobs (see Miller, Considine, & Garner, 2007). Consider its functions.

Improving Task Performance

As Marie Hochschild (1983) made clear years ago in her study of airline flight attendants, service workers don't just get emotional *about* their work. Instead, emotion *is* work. The very tasks they perform are emotional, and their success, even their compensation, hinges on the ability to manage their feelings and those of others. The attendants in Hochschild's study were asked to appear cheerful at all times, even when agitated passengers made obnoxious demands at 30,000 feet. Ignoring their own fear, attendants were required to calm passengers frightened by the bucking and shuddering of an airliner negotiating turbulent skies.

Closer to home, college students frequently take part-time jobs as restaurant servers, paying their bills from meager wages and tips. But as any server knows, income from tips is linked to emotional control. Those who are resolutely cheerful, calm under fire, and able to "take it" when customers vent their frustrations generally make more money. Of course, emotion management has life-threatening consequences in some jobs. It is especially important for 911 operators who sometimes deal with hysterical callers (see Tracy & Tracy, 1998) but also for police officers, emergency room nurses, and many others. Most manage emotion skillfully, but Textbox 3.1 presents the one author's recollections of an instance when emotion was managed ineffectively.

Textbox 3.1 | **The Cost of Mismanaged Emotion**

In Arizona, a 911 operator reportedly received a call from an agitated citizen reporting that his son was experiencing distress. When asked to calm down, the caller simply became more upset, demanding in profanity-laced language that an ambulance be dispatched immediately. The operator reacted indignantly to the profanity and refused to provide assistance until the caller stopped his tirade. While the emotions boiled, precious seconds ticked away. Help eventually arrived, but sadly, it was much too late.

As we saw in Sanji's account, skillful detection, regulation, and production of emotion is a routine but critical part of less dramatic forms of work. The job success of salespersons, teachers, managers, and countless service professionals depends on this communication skill.

Enhancing Climate

Another positive function of emotional management is its capacity to make the workplace more hospitable. By agreeing to edit out feelings

such as hostility, envy, and fear, employees create a relatively tranquil climate, one that allows fellow employees to focus on the less emotional aspects of their work. The climate might also be enhanced when workers share feelings of excitement, amusement, and cheerfulness. When employees recognize sadness and express sympathy for a coworker's disappointment, they are creating a climate that "feels" more personal and humane. Of course, efforts to create an emotionally harmonious workplace can be exhausting, particularly if they are inauthentic. Moreover, manipulative uses of emotion may create false perceptions of calm, which may eventually crumble under the weight of unexpressed negative emotion.

Forging Relationships

Due to shared circumstances and interdependent tasks, coworkers often become friends—and sometimes enemies. These "blended relationships" have caught the attention of communication researchers (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). Some work relationships, but certainly not all, become important sources of emotional support. Competent communication involves learning how and when to disclose personal feelings, recognizing the signs of emotional distress, and providing appropriate kinds of emotional support for distressed peers and subordinates. It involves adept management of relational boundaries, knowing when it is OK to "lay it on the table" and when to be circumspect.

Signaling Moral Failure

Some emotions serve a cautionary function by marking violations of the moral codes that govern interactions at work. This has been called the signal function of organizational emotion (Waldron, 1994). For example, guilt, when detected in ourselves or revealed through conversations with others, signals that personal or organizational values have been flouted. The communication of other emotions, such as fear, indignation, or regret, also serves moral purposes (see Table 3.1 for a list of the moral emotions). Employees monitor the moral health of the workplace by learning to recognize these emotions, and by communicating them appropriately, they may resist ethical abuses and prompt organizational reflection about moral concerns. Of course, norms and reward systems need to encourage employees to communicate these feelings or they will be ignored or forced underground. The result? Wayward employees are allowed free reign until the situation is too serious to be ignored. By then, the organization may face legal and financial trouble.

The widely publicized and rapid meltdown at Enron, a high-flying energy trading company, is a classic case from earlier this decade, while the implosions of financial companies such as Bear Sterns, AIG, and Lehman Brothers stand as contemporary cases from recent years.

Table 3.1   Moral Emotions and Their Social Referents

Emotion	Social Referents
Admiration	Success of deserving others
Anger	Hurtful or immoral behavior committed by others
Embarrassment	Acts that reveal moral failures or create an appearance of moral failure
Envy	Desire for the qualities, possessions, or accolades possessed by others
Guilt	Responsibility for wrongdoing
Humiliation	Threats to dignity; dehumanizing behaviors
Humility	Exposure to transcendent moral forces
Indignation	Ire at the unfairness of a social situation or system
Jealousy	One's rightful role in a relationships is threatened by rivals
Outrage	Fury aroused by the offensive acts of others
Pride	Personal or group accomplishments; recognition by valued others
Regret	Having hurt others or made a serious mistake
Resentment	Sustained or acute ill-treatment of others
Scorn	Someone or something held in contempt
Schadenfreude	Shame experienced by another brings joy to the self
Shame	Disgraceful, unworthy, or dishonorable behavior
Shock/surprise	Unexpected moral violations by others
Sympathy	Pain or distress of another brings feelings of pity or sorrow

Source: Waldron (2009). Used by permission.

When emotional communication fails, organizations risk the loss of its positive contributions. Customer service suffers when employees on the front lines lose their enthusiasm. The signal function of emotions is dulled when organizations and employees ignore them. But emotion is risky in other ways because it can lead to the restriction of identity, the practice of emotional tyranny, burnout, and what we call emotional spillover.

Identity Restriction

When employees spend long days faking emotion, they may lose touch with the emotional traits that previously defined their identity. These new emotional responses may be effective at work but may lead to identity confusion and a sense of artificiality in nonwork contexts. For example, professors are trained to develop an emotionally detached and highly analytic persona; it helps them keep intellectual arguments from becoming personal. This forced coolness may be restrictive in family conflicts, where emotional detachment could be interpreted as a lack of compassion.

Yet emotional training is common in some kinds of work. Extreme approaches to sales training compel new hires to repress certain negative emotions while substituting other more acceptable ones. Because emotions are important components of identity, this training may change self-perceptions and the perceptions of others who know us. Certainly, these changes could be for the better. Learning to replace extreme anger with other emotions would be a productive move for a person prone to violence. But emotional tinkering can restrict the range of feelings people allow themselves to experience and express. This kind of identity restriction could be harmful. This seems perhaps to have been the case with the bible salesman profiled in Textbox 3.2.

Textbox 3.2	The Emotional Education of a Book Salesman

Dan was fairly typical of students at his rural state university. While browsing for summer jobs at the Career Center, Dan's eye settled on an eye-popping advertisement for a lucrative summer job selling bibles and encyclopedias. Dan applied for and got the job.

After classes ended in May, Dan found himself driving to a remote location where he and thousands of other students would attend sales boot camp—intensive training in the emotional art of door-to-door book selling. For days, Dan and his colleagues were subjected to highly emotional speeches by legendary salespeople, all of whom exhorted the students to embrace a positive attitude. Trainees showed

they were "fired up" by participating in chants, cheers, and positive self-affirmations. Students were taught that sales success turned on the power of an unending smile and the charm of a cheerful demeanor. After a week of nearly around-the-clock exposure to this barrage of positivity, Dan's easygoing personality, natural caution, and nagging doubts about his promise as a salesperson were transformed into a sunny sense of self-confidence and an unswerving commitment to eliminate doubt and negativity from not just his work but his relationships with other people.

Dan spent a trying summer slogging with two other young men across the humid Midwest, making barely enough money to cover their expenses. Despite facing rejection at nearly every front door, Dan's cheerful outlook never failed. He simply hadn't learned to be positive enough—that was the explanation for the poor sales results.

Dan's family and his girlfriend noticed a change in him that fall. He was resolutely positive at even the most trying times. He offered a hearty handshake to anyone he encountered. Dan refused to socialize with "negative people" and preferred not to share feelings like frustration and anger. Amazed at his new confidence and outgoing personality, family members couldn't help but wonder if it all was "real." Had they gained a salesman at the cost of the son and sibling they knew so well? Years later, Dan is a highly successful sales agent. His many acquaintances enjoy Dan's sunny demeanor and unfailingly positive outlook. He never loses his cool or brings them down.

Burnout

Workers who must constantly draw on their capacity for emotional communication may be subject to burnout and emotional exhaustion, particularly if they receive limited emotional support from their organizations and peers. Research on social workers, nurses, and other human service professionals indicates that emotional fatigue is one reason people leave their profession (Miller, Birkholt, Scott, & Stage, 1995). Similarly, elementary school teachers who tend to the emotional needs of children may find their resources exhausted when confronted by the needs of their own family members. When faced with danger, humans experience a surge of energy and a heightened state of awareness. This *fight or flight* response is essential in crisis situations. But when workers experience it constantly due to work demands or dysfunctional interactions, the result is physical and mental stress and, eventually, burnout.

❖ KEY RESEARCH STUDIES

The communication of emotion at work has received growing attention from researchers. Here we briefly consider two key studies: the

seminal ethnographic work of Marie Hochschild, whose influential book *The Managed Heart* (1983) reported her observations of the emotional labor performed by airline attendants. We also present a summary of Waldron's work on the role of emotions in work relationships (Waldron, 2000, 2009; Waldron & Krone, 1991).

Emotion as the Work

Hochschild's (1983) ethnographic study involved an intensive field investigation of the hiring practices, training regimes, and workplace behaviors of service work, with a particular focus on airline attendants. She found that airline attendants were selected in part based on their emotional communication. Those who were relentlessly cheerful in their manner were favored. Training involved a kind of emotional brainwashing in which trainees were taught to suppress emotions such as fear and annoyance at passengers. In-flight emergencies, drunken male passengers with groping hands, personal problems at home— none of these should crack the calm and cheerful façade. Hochschild introduced a variety of important terms into the research literature, including the contrast between surface and deep acting. *Surface acting* is evident when employees, including airline attendants, perform emotions but don't really feel them. It is a kind of emotional faking. *Deep acting* involves the internalization of required emotions. Employees actually learn to feel the emotions they are asked to perform on the job. Dan, the salesperson profiled previously, developed a deep enthusiasm for his products. He doesn't need to fake it. In other examples, teachers may learn to feel genuine pride in the accomplishments of their students, church workers may develop a feeling of genuine humility before God, and athletes develop a love of competition. Hochschild also described a kind of emotional transmutation—the conversion of one felt emotion into another, more acceptable one. The airline attendant confronted by an agitated passenger may learn to convert feelings of annoyance into a sense of compassion by imagining that the agitation is due to a fear of flying or a separation from family. Hochschild worried that these emotional sleights of hand, when practiced habitually, could leave employees divorced from emotional reality.

Emotion in Work Relationships

In a series of studies, one of the authors observed the emotional communication tactics used in work relationships (see Waldron, 2000, 2009). Table 3.2 describes some of these and provides examples. This

work is based on surveys, interviews, and observations with workers from numerous occupations—parole officers, factory workers, school cafeteria workers, government staffers, lawyers, and judges. In an early survey study of the emotional lives of parole officers, many of whom spent their days supervising felons, it became obvious that the most intensely emotional experiences involved not the rather daunting tasks they performed but relational incidents with coworkers (Waldron & Krone, 1991). On anonymous surveys, officers shared narratives of betrayal, public humiliation, and injustice as well as moments of intense joy and pride. The tactics used to communicate emotion were important as these workers managed problematic work relationships.

Table 3.2 Emotional Communication Tactics

Tactic	Description and Example
Venting	Unedited expression of feelings After work at a local bar, service employees hold an unrestrained "bitch session" about their demanding customers.
Editing	The emotion is expressed but some elements removed or altered to make the message more effective or organizationally appropriate A boss verbally conveys disappointment in an employee's poor performance but edits anger from his or her tone of voice.
Suppression	Preventing the expression of an undesired emotion You refuse to express anger at a coworker who is attempting to get under your skin through rude and annoying behavior.
Fabrication	Expressing an emotion when you feel none A salesperson learns to be cheerful at all times.
Substitution	Felt emotions that are transformed into approved emotions You are irritated by a new work policy, but you profess to be excited by the challenge.
Elicitation	Using communication to create emotions in others A team member is "guilted" into accepting extra work.

Source: Waldron and Krone (1991); Waldron (1994).

Waldron (1994) later articulated these tactics in some detail. Parole officers *vented* emotion, as a way to "let off steam"—to unload or express internal feelings in an unrestrained way. Quite often workers *edited* emotional displays, sometimes by softening or removing the elements that they considered too intense or unprofessional. Some emotional experiences were completely *suppressed.* That is, the employee refused to display any aspect of the emotion, often because coworkers' reactions were expected to be negative or unpredictable. As noted in Table 3.2, to preserve a professional demeanor, employees also *fabricated* or *substituted* emotions. Finally, Waldron observed that emotion was often *elicited* by workers or their peers, as when threats were used to induce fear or compliments were offered to instill a sense of pride.

Later, Waldron (2000, 2009) identified several ways in which emotional communication defines and redefines work relationships. First, emotional communication *regulates interactions* among coworkers, enforcing a system of rights, obligations, and values. For example, a story told by factory workers related their efforts to humiliate a rookie floor boss who had abused his newfound power by embarrassing less productive workers, taunting them, and issuing hollow threats (Waldron, Foreman, & Miller, 1993). This former peer had gotten "too big for his breeches," so he was subjected to a series of anonymous and embarrassing practical jokes. The supervisor was further embarrassed when work crews intentionally slowed production, subjecting their boss to the displeasure of higher-level factory management. In short, the humiliation suffered by the faculty workers was interpreted as a grave form of relational injustice. They sought to restore justice by manipulating the emotional experiences of their abusive boss.

Emotional communication sustains work relationships in a second way. In observing the interactions of workers at a beleaguered and underfunded state agency, Waldron (2000) saw that emotion was used as a *relational resource.* When management announced that layoffs were likely, workers cheered each other up with black humor and funny stories. In this way, the elicitation of emotion promoted resilience and cohesion. The language of emotion was also a useful resource at this agency, particularly when defining relationships with disliked coworkers and managers. They were described as "pouty," "needy," "bitchy," "out of control," "edgy," and "mercurial." In this sense, emotion words are used to define workplace interactions and personalities.

Finally, on the basis of his observation of lawyers, judges, and defendants in a common pleas court, Waldron (2000) argued that emotion is a *collective performance.* He reported that defending and prosecuting attorneys appeared to coordinate their "on-stage" performances to ensure that the accused (and their observing family members)

experienced certain emotions (see Textbox 3.3). For example, with the presiding judge, the attorneys collaborated to create an aura of grim formality to ensure that the young (and often poor) defendants were sufficiently afraid of the potential consequences of their alleged crimes. The attorneys conveyed a false hostility to the other side's case, perhaps to create the impression of a truly adversarial proceeding (when, prior to the trial, the attorneys were observed joking about the poor quality of the defendant's case). Finally, after the sentencing, the attorneys worked to convince defendants to feel relief at the relatively mild punishment rather than disappointment at the failure to obtain an acquittal.

Textbox 3.3   **Collective Emotional Performances in Court**

Grim formality: Communicated through somber dress, formal discourse, and ritualistic communication.

Elaborate concern: Communicated by concerned facial expressions, patting the defendant, and voicing concern for the future of family and defendant.

Adversarial posturing: Conveyed through presentation of arguments, hostile questioning, and nonverbal indicators of disagreement.

Cooling the mark: Attorneys create fear by emphasizing serious consequences and relief by cooperating to reduce the charges.

Source: Waldron (2000).

Emotional Tyranny

In a recent reanalysis of narratives reported by workers from a variety of organizations, Waldron (2009) argued that emotional communication can be used to promote unethical conduct. Powerful people enjoy more freedom to express their emotions. Some even express unedited negative emotion in a manner that harms others, a practice Waldron called *emotional tyranny.* Sharon, a secretary at a large university, for example, had this to say:

> My boss would rant and rave, like a nutcase, really. Then he would be nice as can be for a few days. Then out of the blue he would be embarrassing me or saying hurtful things. I never knew what to expect so I would come to work on pins and needles. Everyone else was that way too. Never quite sure of what to say or do.

Sharon's work life was made miserable by an emotionally mercurial boss. But as noted in Table 3.3, the emotional weaponry of workplace

Table 3.3	Manipulative Emotional Practices With Discourse Examples

Tactic	Exemplar
Betrayal	"I put my heart into the job because my boss liked me and believed in me. But after he got promoted, I got nothing but coldness. He stabbed me in the heart."
Blackmail	"I (stupidly) told my boss about a crush I had on a coworker. He threatened to tell if I didn't show a good attitude. Maybe joking . . . but he enjoyed the threat."
Deflecting	"He basically told us it was not his fault [that people haven't been paid on time]. We all should be mad at the contractor. He dodged responsibility."
Discounting	The dean asked, "Why did you care so much about the staff evaluations? All I care about is the faculty. We really don't need to be so emotional."
Embarrassing	"She criticized me right on the floor, in front of my customers (two were my friends)! My face went red and I ran for the bathroom."
Exhorting	"[My boss] was like a preacher at church, getting us all whooped up and excited about the company and our sales. But we found out it was all BS. The company didn't care about us and the bosses made all of the money. We were used."
Faking	"The HR person could really pretend like she was sincere when we brought up a grievance. Like she cared and was all worried. But it was an act, a joke really."
Grinding	"After a while I got tired of the everyday anger control issues. She snipped and yelled and wore me down over time. I finally left (which is what she wanted)."
Guilting	"Because I was super-dedicated back then, they could guilt me into anything. I'd stay late because they would make feel disloyal or selfish for going home."
Intimidating	"I was told I would pay a huge price if I went public with the problem. Basically, they scared me into conformity."
Orchestrating	"This guy (team leader) was threatened by me. So he went around spreading rumors that I wasn't working hard and thought I was too good to work. Before I knew it people resented me."
Reframing	"You think poor sales are no big deal? This is an embarrassment to me."

Tactic	Exemplar
Ridiculing	"When I see my servers cry, I know they aren't ready for prime time. Crying doesn't make customers happy and babies don't get tips. I say, buck-up!"
Shaming	"After I complained, they made me feel like I was being selfish, like I was more important than everybody. Just because I wanted them to follow the [curriculum development] process rather than just rush it through."
Silencing	A college professor told me, "Sure I am disgusted . . . and I think the policy is stupid. But keep my name out of it. I have already had my head chewed off in too many meetings (by university administrators)."
Vanquishing	"Wipe that smile off your face and don't let me see it again!"

Source: Waldron (2009).

tyrants takes many forms. Employees should recognize the emotional communication practices that are commonly used by bosses and peers for manipulative purposes. This awareness helps us better understand the feelings we experience in the presence of certain coworkers, and it may help us avoid work relationships that are emotionally unhealthy.

The research reviewed thus far documents that emotional communication is a rich and important aspect of work life. Competent employees recognize their communicative options and use this knowledge to manage risks to themselves and to others. As with the other chapters, we summarize these communication options in a textbox (see Textbox 3.4).

Textbox 3.4   Communication Options

Emotional Acting (Hochschild, 1983)

Surface acting
Deep acting

Emotional Communication Tactics (Waldron, 1994; Waldron & Krone, 1991)
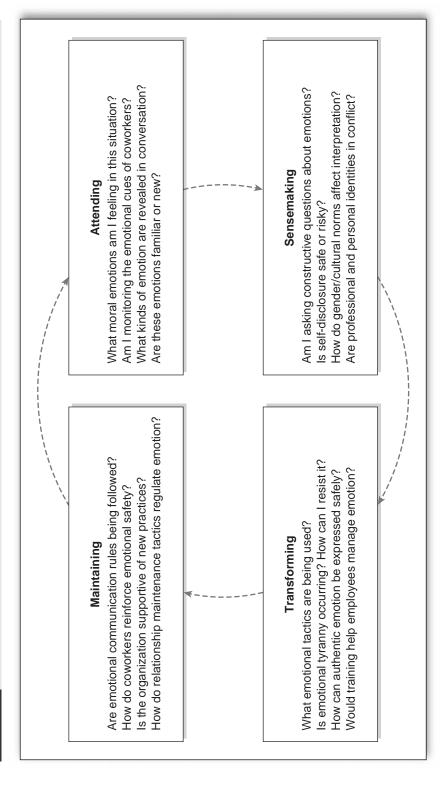
Venting
Editing

(Continued)

Textbox 3.4   *(Continued)*

Suppression
Fabrication
Substitution
Elicitation

Using Emotion to Define Work Relationships (Waldron, 2000)

Regulating relationships
Relational resources
Collective performances

Practices of Emotional Tyrants (Waldron, 2009)

Betraying	Blackmailing
Deflecting	Discounting
Embarrassing	Faking
Grinding	Guilting
Intimidating	Exhorting
Orchestrating	Reframing
Ridiculing	Shaming
Silencing	Vanquishing

❖ COPING WITH EMOTION AND THE RISK NEGOTIATION CYCLE

We have established that the communication of emotion is pervasive, important, and sometimes risky. But how can the risk be managed? Recall that the Risk Negotiation Framework from Chapter 1 proposes that risky situations are shaped through a cycle of communication behaviors. As potentially risky situations unfold, risk is managed through the joint behavior of the participants, ultimately leading to an enhanced sense of safety or a more acute sense of endangerment. In the case of emotion, we see the process working this way (see Figure 3.1).

Attending

The first element of the communicative task is attending to emotional cues. This process includes self-monitoring, as employees examine their feelings about work, including the moral emotions identified

Figure 3.1 Managing Emotion and the Risk Negotiation Cycle

Attending

What moral emotions am I feeling in this situation?
Am I monitoring the emotional cues of coworkers?
What kinds of emotion are revealed in conversation?
Are these emotions familiar or new?

Sensemaking

Am I asking constructive questions about emotions?
Is self-disclosure safe or risky?
How do gender/cultural norms affect interpretation?
Are professional and personal identities in conflict?

Maintaining

Are emotional communication rules being followed?
How do coworkers reinforce emotional safety?
Is the organization supportive of new practices?
How do relationship maintenance tactics regulate emotion?

Transforming

What emotional tactics are being used?
Is emotional tyranny occurring? How can I resist it?
How can authentic emotion be expressed safely?
Would training help employees manage emotion?

previously. Are they feeling agitated, guilty, fearful, frustrated, or burned out? Other-monitoring is the process of perceiving emotions through the nonverbal cues displayed by peers, supervisors, and others. For example, a leader might note hesitancy in a member's tone of voice; perhaps this is an indication that he or she feels some trepidation at the prospect of delivering bad news (see Chapter 2). Through facial expressions and tense posture, team members may signal impatience or frustration. Interaction-monitoring involves observing and listening to the emotional tone of conversation. Emotions may be communicated implicitly in messages that are notably brief, abrupt, defensive, loud, despairing, accusatory, or sullen. In addition to these nonverbal indicators, interaction often includes verbal characterizations of emotional behavior. These often mark perceived violations (or misperceptions) of the organizational norms that regulate emotion, as when a coworker is described as unprofessional or the weekly staff meeting is described as a "bitch-fest."

Attending also means awareness of historical factors that shape current experiences. Examples include the fears that have been building in distressed coworkers, the communication patterns that sustain a chilly or warm supervisory relationship, and memories of the organizational past that stir employee emotions of pride or resentment. The enduring dispositions of participants can shape perceptions of workplace encounters. For example, some employees are inclined to be more attuned to the different kinds of emotional states experienced by themselves and others. When emotionally observant supervisors recognize that employees are fearful (or frustrated or indignant), they can better adapt the emotional tone of their communications. One adaptive approach is to acknowledge the emotion before proceeding to the task at hand ("You seem a bit nervous. Is everything OK?"). Another common tactic is to provide a rationale before issuing a directive or to make a request when you anticipate a defensive emotional reaction ("Customer service is especially busy this month, which is why I'd like you to spend 2 hours a day working in that office."). Being emotionally observant is particularly relevant when dealing with people who experience unusually high levels of anxiety in public speaking or group settings (McCroskey, 1982). Perceptive supervisors can make these tasks feel less risky for apprehensive communicators (Richmond & McCroskey, 1992). For example, apprehensive workers may perform better when asked to speak informally at team meetings rather than formally in front of large groups. For other suggestions, see Textbox 3.5.

> **Textbox 3.5   Attending to Communication Apprehension at Work**
>
> - Recognize that differences in apprehension exist among workers and assign tasks accordingly.
>
> - Look for nonverbal cues that signal apprehension.
>
> - Practice presentations and conversations in nonthreatening settings.
>
> - Use communication technologies in place of face-to-face interaction.
>
> - Use remediation methods, such as desensitization or cognitive restructuring.

Sensemaking

Emotional cues are inherently ambiguous, and they often are merely a signal that something larger is happening in the organization or work relationship. Sensemaking behavior helps decipher the possible meanings of emotion. Constructive questioning is one such behavior. Some emotions are reactions to breaches of the expectations that define role identities and work relationships. Constructive questioning is the process of inquiring about the underlying sources of emotion. What could explain the feelings of anger workers feel toward their organization? What did they expect and how have those expectations been violated? What are the (sometimes unexpressed) communication rules that govern a work team's interactions? Does the collective frustration experienced by team members suggest that the rules need to be renegotiated? Why do employees feel shame or guilt at the actions they have taken on behalf of themselves or their employer?

Self-disclosure is another behavior associated with sensemaking. Because the meanings of emotion are ambivalent, employees often test their interpretations against those of other employees. This kind of reality checking can be a good thing if a peer can be trusted to keep disclosures confidential. For example, if an employee feels annoyed at the continual complaints of a team member, he might reveal these feelings cautiously ("Has Rodney been a little cranky lately? I have been feeling annoyed by his argumentative style in our meetings."). He may find that others share this emotional reaction—an indication that team norms are in fact being flouted by Rodney's behavior. He may also learn that Rodney's emotional displays should be reinterpreted in light of new information (perhaps Rodney is under considerable personal stress). Or, yet another possibility, maybe the employee is being too

emotionally vigilant in team meetings in reaction to past conflicts. The reasons for this employee's hypervigilance may be worth exploring as part of the sensemaking process.

Sensemaking is particularly susceptible to cultural context. What appears to be "normal" emotional behavior at work is in part shaped by cultural expectations communicated through family socialization, popular media, and religious training. One example involves gender differences in emotional displays (see Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 2000). In the United States at least, men are expected to be largely unemotional in the workplace and cool under fire. Powerful males are allowed to be angry, particularly when incompetent subordinates are involved, but signs of fear or tears of sadness are generally taboo. (see Textbox 3.6). Boys (and girls) learn these expectations from parents and coaches at youth sporting events (see Meân & Kassing, 2008), from the leading men in action-adventure films, and from television shows that feature emotionally demanding work in such places as police stations or emergency rooms. On the other hand, American females are expected to be compassionate and emotionally engaged. Somehow powerful women are expected to be both composed and decisive (like males), but they shouldn't appear icy, bitchy, or distant. Of course, cultural norms are always evolving, but, needless to say, emotional communication can be particularly risky for women as they negotiate these conflicting cultural expectations.

The perplexing emotional restrictions on the behavior of powerful women surfaced in the Democratic primary race of 2008, as news media across the nation covered the candidacy of Hillary Clinton, the first female to mount a major run for the presidency of the United States. Persistently criticized for seeming emotionally distant in speeches, Clinton shed several tears in a confessional talk with a group of New Hampshire voters. This emotional display prompted a flurry of editorializing from nearly every U.S. newspaper.

Textbox 3.6 **Crying in Public: The Politics of Emotion**

An article in the *Washington Times* (Bellantoni, 2008) dubbed it the "Comeback Cry." Few displays of emotion have so incited so much speculation from voters and the press. It was reported that the New York senator and presidential candidate teared up when a voter in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, inquired about the rigors of the campaign trail. The next day, Clinton pulled off a surprise win in the state's Democratic primary.

The *Times* quoted Senator Dianne Feinstein, a California Democrat and a Clinton backer, who offered that Clinton's tears displayed "humanity and real warmth . . . an emotional connection" with female voters. In the news story, Clinton campaign chairman Terry McAuliffe lauded Clinton for showing the compassion that voters needed to see for themselves. But other commentators questioned the authenticity of Clinton's emotional moment, noting that she had rarely been emotional in public during her many years in the public eye.

In television interviews, Mrs. Clinton acknowledged the impact of her emotional connection with New Hampshire voters. She suggested that emotional displays help voters appreciate the humanity of candidates. The complicating role of gender expectations was evident in Clinton's comments during a FOX News interview, which also were included in the *Times*'s story. "Maybe it's a little more challenging for a woman in this position because, obviously, we know what people will say, but maybe I have liberated us to actually let women be human beings in public life" (Bellantoni, 2008, p. A01).

American culture encourages workers to build emotional barriers between professional and private life, to accept that "business is business" and domestic and spiritual lives are something else entirely. This can be a good thing. After all, home should offer some relief from the emotional demands of labor as few employees enjoy workplaces that share completely our personal preferences and values. But this demarcation is probably unrealistic, and it can be problematic, particularly when it comes to the moral functions of emotion. Consider the case of Felipe, who managed a branch location of a large restaurant chain. Felipe was informed by his superiors that the location would be closed in several weeks, although he was assured of a job at another branch. Felipe was asked not to inform his local staff of the imminent closure. Management wanted the store to close in an orderly way and feared the employees would quit en masse if they discovered the truth. A religious person who valued forthrightness in his personal affairs, Felipe felt guilt at the prospect of this deception. The emotion of guilt prompts employees to apply moral standards when making sense of their behavior. Should Felipe separate his personal ethical standards from those he practiced at work? What should be more important, serving the interest of the organization that supports his livelihood or preserving his personal identity as an honest person? Felipe's case illustrates the danger, and even the folly, of assuming that private and workplace emotions can be cleanly divided. He sided with his employer, but nagging feelings of guilt persist to this day.

Transforming

Earlier we described the emotional communication practices, such as venting or editing, that transform work relationships. We also introduced the destructive communication practices of emotional tyrants. The use of fear tactics to gain the compliance of workers is just one example. Fear is an unpleasant emotion in nearly all circumstances, and its use can harm not just the targeted employees but also the larger interests of an organization. Fear has a tendency to paralyze thinking, so fearful employees may do just what they are told to do—and nothing else. Fear tactics can discourage independent thinking while encouraging defensive behavior and resentment. This is true of those who are victimized, as well as those who observe these tactics in use.

More positively, transformative communication reduces risk and increases safety. Individuals or work teams may decide to place new restrictions on harmful emotional practices. These might include gloating, expressions of envy, public embarrassment, and unedited displays of anger. For instance, the venting of frustration felt toward the larger organization may serve a useful cathartic purpose, and it can forge emotional connections between team members. However, it may be wise to restrict "group bitching" to certain times (e.g., after work) and venues (off-site) and subject it to certain communication rules (e.g., no personal attacks on other team members). In this way, employees vent their authentic emotions in a safe manner that minimizes risk to team relationships and preserves productivity on the job. Similarly, other emotional practices promote safety in teams. These might include displays of camaraderie or public expressions of encouragement.

At the organizational level, safety is enhanced when emotion is recognized as a common, legitimate, and potentially valuable part of working life. Safe organizations monitor abusive emotional practices such as public humiliation and unchecked displays of anger. They train employees in more constructive forms of interaction. In contrast, organizations that simply repress employee frustration, anger, or indignation may be missing important warning signs. When unaddressed, these emotions may lead to turnover, burnout, and, in extreme cases, sabotage of the organization or workplace violence. Yet organizations can only do so much to help employees manage intense emotional experiences. Employees may need help from therapists, religious leaders, and other consultants outside the organization.

Maintaining

With the tasks of attending, sensemaking, and transforming completed, the final element of the risk negotiation cycle remains—maintaining safe levels of risk. In the case of emotional communication, this task often involves continued compliance with new communication rules. Maintenance requires practice, self-reminding, the support of coworkers, and positive recognition. A worker who pledges to overcome a fear of speaking in meetings will need encouragement when resolve falters. A supervisor seeking to curb angry outbursts may need to avoid situations that trigger anger. A team member who demotivates the group with continual complaints will need to be reminded of the team's positive accomplishments. Safe emotional communication practices must be reinforced by the organization. For example, a member who has decided to no longer be intimidated by an abusive boss will need the continued support of the human resources office and, quite possibly, powerful allies in management.

Relationship maintenance behavior shapes the emotional tenor of workplace interactions. For example, some members use regulative behavior to maintain supervisory relationships. They hide bad news and severely limit their emotional displays. Employees often cite compelling reasons for using this defensive approach, but ironically, regulative behavior can heighten the intensity of the negative emotions an employee feels during encounters with a supervisor. Why? These employees limit their communication to high-stakes formal contacts, such as monthly status reports or required performance reviews. Consequently, the parties operate from limited personal understanding. Power differences may be more salient. The consequences associated with any one encounter are high. For all of these reasons, when compared to other relationship maintenance approaches (informal, contractual, direct), regulative communication leads to emotional vulnerability and heightened perceptions of risk. Thus, it may be that ordinary relational communication practices are most important in maintaining a sense of emotional safety.

❖ CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we introduce Maria, a highly motivated new employee, one who was genuinely excited about her future with the medium-sized advertising firm that had hired her right out of college. Use the

four phases of the risk negotiation cycle to examine how Maria managed her emotions in this work situation.

As a relatively new member of the staff, Maria was pleased to be working with a small team of creative people—all laboring feverishly to design a new advertising look for a local health food chain that hoped to go national in the next 12 months. The work was demanding and the deadline was tight, but the client seemed pleased with designs the group had produced thus far. But Maria had a problem, and his name was Phil. A longtime employee and friend of the agency's owner, Phil seemed threatened by Maria. In creative meetings, he tended to call her by denigrating names, like "gee whiz kid" and "Miss Eager Beaver." He often criticized Maria's ideas in brainstorming sessions and generally seemed uncomfortable with her presence on the team. The senior team members sometimes laughed at Phil's teasing comments, but often they just looked uncomfortable and fell silent. Nevertheless, these coworkers found merit in Maria's work, and they told her so privately. Maria possessed a sense of humor and she could take the teasing. But after several months of Phil's unrelenting negative attention, she felt both humiliated and angry. Maria needed to do something about Phil or she would soon lose her cool.

Maria considered reporting Phil's behavior to the agency's owner. Fueled by indignation, she reviewed her argument. Upon reflection, she determined that Phil's behavior was a form of harassment. Before reporting him, Maria confided in Nolani, a coworker with 4 years of experience at the agency. Nolani confided that Phil treated all new employees this way. The owner actually was well aware of these antics and excused Phil's behavior as a playful form of new employee initiation. Nolani thought Phil was an insecure bully, and she suggested that Maria "call him on it." In fact, as the two women discussed the matter, they decided to place "process issues" on the agenda for the next team meeting. As it turned out, Nolani and the other members supported Maria's concerns and added their own. Phil backed down without a fight.

How successful was Maria in attending to the emotional dimensions of this situation? Did she engage in self-monitoring? Which emotions did Maria feel? Were they moral emotions? What did these emotions tell her about herself and the situation she faced at work? Did the emotional cues provided by coworkers reveal useful information in this situation? What were they? We mentioned that past events can make situations more or less emotional for organizational members. Were past events important in this case? What other aspects of the

organizational context shaped the emotions felt by Maria? Was it risky for Maria to take action on her feelings?

Consider Maria's sensemaking activities. In response to her emotions, did Maria engage in constructive questioning? Were coworkers helpful as Maria tried to interpret Phil's behavior? Was it safe for Maria to disclose her feelings to coworkers? Why or why not? Consider the culture of this particular organization. How was Maria advantaged or disadvantaged by informal rules and norms? Are these unique to the organization, or are they drawn from the larger society? Did Maria engage in sufficient sensemaking before deciding on a course of action? Did she take advantage of multiple and varied sources of information to develop an informed understanding of the situation?

Transforming behavior can increase safety or exacerbate risk. Was Maria subjected to emotional tyranny? Did she resist it? Was she successful? Which kinds of emotional communication tactics did Maria use in this case? Consider that emotional communication can define the relationships of coworkers. Did you see evidence that the emotional behaviors of Maria or her coworkers defined or redefined their relationships? We argued earlier that some kinds of emotional experiences are collective performances. By coordinating their communication behaviors, Maria's coworkers created emotions in their work team. Which emotions were created, and which kinds of interaction created them?

Emotional communication practices can be used to maintain a safe environment for employees. How are the ongoing communication practices of this organization increasing or decreasing risk? Were Maria and her colleagues able to establish communication procedures that managed risk in their work team? What might they do in the future? Which relationship maintenance practices would help Maria sustain relatively safe relationships with her peers? With Phil? With the company's owner?

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