

The Behaviour of People at Work


Lecture Title: Emotions at Work





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Course Outline

 **Module 1.** About people and about the workplace: the fundamentals

 **Module 2.** A trip to the biology department: basics of evolutionary theory

 **Module 3.** Focus on the individual: the Central Six and the Big Five personality traits

 **Module 4.** A focus on the individual: sex differences

 **Module 5.** Emotions at work: the function of coordinating mechanisms



Module 5: Emotions as evolved solutions

- What are emotions?
- Emotions as coordinating mechanisms
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Shame
- Depression
- Stress
- Envy
- Negative emotions
- Moral emotions





Emotions

Emotions as coordinating mechanisms to solve problems



What emotions are, and why they evolved

- Many emotions are cross-culturally universal.
- They are biological adaptations that evolved to serve a function.
- Emotions are response patterns shaped by natural selection to offer selective advantages in certain situations. They increase our ability to cope with threats or seize opportunities.
- Each emotion can be thought of as a computer programme designed to accomplish some specific fitness task particularly well.
- What we think of as 'aversive' emotions are just as functional and beneficial as pleasant emotions despite how they make us feel.



Emotions help us in fitness and advantage

- Emotions must fit the challenges, with each emotion fitting a particular kind of situation.
 - If the task is courtship, romantic love is helpful.
 - If one is being betrayed, anger is useful.
 - If a tiger is attacking, then fearful flight and avoidance are best.
 - If people are disapproving, then social anxiety may be appropriate.
- They must also be orchestrated. This is the view of emotions as 'super-ordinate' mechanisms, or the 'coordinating mechanisms' view. To produce an effective solution, an emotion must:
 - Activate the right programmes;
 - Deactivate conflicting programmes;
 - Adjust programme thresholds to meet task demands, and
 - Manage the sequence and duration of programme activation as well as the point of programme termination.



If you think that emotions are ‘just feelings’, think again.

- Here’s a list of programmes that are regulated by the emotions:
 - perceptual mechanisms,
 - attention,
 - memory,
 - categorisation,
 - motivational priorities,
 - current goals,
 - information-gathering adaptations,
 - specialised inference mechanisms,
 - communication and expression,
 - learning processes,
 - reflexes,
 - energy level, mood, and effort allocation,
 - physiology, and
 - behavior.



Here's a list of emotions

- Fear and anxiety
- Guilt, shame, embarrassment
- Anger, rage, contempt, revenge
- Pride
- Romantic love, parental love
- Sexual jealousy
- Envy
- Hunger
- Disgust
- Sadness, depression
- Joy, elation, triumph
- Surprise
- Gratitude, elevation, moral awe, and being moved.
- Sympathy, compassion, and empathy
- Stress
- Others?



A closer look. We start with fear.

- Fear is a human universal and an adaptive response that causes us to deal with the source of danger.
- The different responses – freezing, fleeing, fighting, submission or appeasement, fright, and fainting – are all meant to protect us from danger.
- In humans, specific fears seem to emerge precisely when they are needed, and that there are marked differences in the way males and females experience some types of fears.
- Evolutionary reasoning offers us these insights so that rather than struggle to eliminate our fears, we can appreciate the power of fear, and perceive it as a positively normal and valuable emotion.

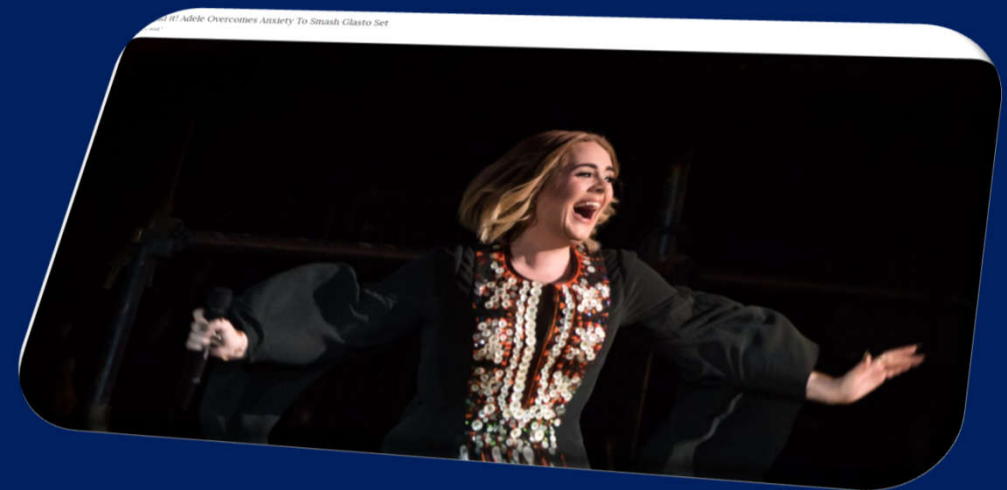


“Fear is a vital evolutionary legacy that leads an organism to avoid threat, and has obvious survival value.” (Isaac Marks).



Anxiety. This is a famous one.

- Anxiety is also a normal defense mechanism that sits on the spectrum of fear, evolved to deal with danger and its subtypes.
- Although nearly everyone recognises that anxiety is a useful trait, even good things cease to be good when they become excessive. Too much anxiety can be disabling. However, if a drug were found that abolished all anxiety for all time, it would as harmful as a drug that induced anxiety of crippling degree.
- Anxiety is aroused in dangerous situations where there is a risk of loss – not only life and health, but also relationships, property, status, reputation, skill, and anything else that could effect our fitness.



Anxiety and panic

- Mild threat causes a general increase in anxiety.
- Extreme or sudden danger is more likely to produce panic.
- General anxiety probably evolved to deal with threats whose nature could not be defined very clearly.
- General anxiety commonly precedes panic.
- Occasionally there can be sudden panic without preceding anxiety.



Social anxiety

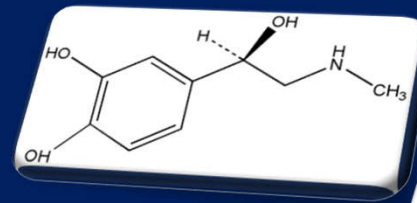
- Social anxiety serves the same function as generalised anxiety, making us vigilant to potential threats in our environment, but in a specialised context; when threat is social in nature.
- In these settings, like in a job interview or a class presentation, feeling anxiety can be a reminder to proceed with caution.
- In situations in which making a good impression seems to be an unlikely outcome, social threat may still be avoided by not interacting at all.
- Thus, feeling social anxiety can be a valuable defense mechanism that helps individuals avoid damaging their relationships and reputations.



The biological response

Components of anxiety and panic which are recognised as useful:

- Epinephrine acts on platelet beta receptors to enhance blood circulation.
- Circulation patterns change so that less blood goes to the skin and gut, and more to the muscles.
- Hyperventilation raises oxygen import and carbon dioxide export.
- Sweating cools the body and makes it slippery.
- A sense of imminent doom galvanises preventive action and forestalls dawdling.
- All these components act together to increase fitness in the face of danger.



Anger. A whole lot of anger.

- Anger is triggered when a person suspects that another is not putting enough value on his welfare/not keeping his best interest in mind. The evolved function of anger, is to “convince” the target to correct this.
- The anger face increases the perceived fighting ability of the angry individual.
- Stronger anger is triggered when the cost to the victim is large, the benefit to the perpetrator is small, and the perpetrator knows exactly who he is harming.
- Attractive women and attractive and muscular men are more prone to anger because they have more bargaining power (can inflict costs on others).



Shame. The type that sticks to you like tar.

- Shame becomes activated when a person is the object of scorn or disdain, and there is a powerful signal that he will be devalued by others in the social group.
- Shame evolved as a defense against being devalued by others; it coordinates changes to reduce the likelihood and costs of social devaluation. This involves:
 1. refraining from behaviors that may lead to devaluation,
 2. concealing information that may lead to devaluation, and
 3. minimising the negative impact of devaluation when it does occur.



Depression. When you lose something precious

- Depression is the emotional reaction to the loss of status, although it can arise from many other things, such as the loss of attachment bonds.
- Depression from the loss of rank can occur when a person loses his or her looks, gets fired from a job, perceives self to be a burden on others, or fails in some socially visible manner.
- It sometimes motivates submissive behaviour designed to appease others and prevent the continuation of aggression from them.
- People bounce back from depression when they find employment again or otherwise discover a way to increase their value in the social group.



Envy. One of the least studied emotions.

- Envy is linked with rank in that people experience envy when someone else has resources, houses, mates, or prestige that they want but fail to possess.
- Envy may function to motivate us to imitate those who have what we want.
- Hero worship and the idealisation of others may reflect the emotion of envy.
- On the negative side, envy might prompt actions designed to tear down those who have more than we do.



This is how, the ‘negative’ emotions help us:

- “Negative” emotions such as anger, distress, and upset are psychological solutions.
 - Although they are generally painful to experience, they help us solve adaptive problems.
1. First, they focus our attention on problematic events and momentarily screen out less relevant events, guiding attention to the sources of the distress.
 2. Second, the emotions mark those events for storage in memory and easy retrieval from memory.
 3. Third, emotions lead to action, causing people to strive to eliminate the source of the problem, e.g. interference, conflict, etc.



The moral emotions

American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt compiled a natural history of the emotions making up what we may call the 'moral sense':

1. Other-condemning emotions – contempt, anger, and disgust – prompt one to punish cheaters;
2. Other-praising emotions – gratitude, elevation, moral awe, and being moved – prompt one to reward altruists;
3. Other-suffering emotions – sympathy, compassion, and empathy – prompt one to help a needy beneficiary;
4. Self-conscious emotions – guilt, shame, and embarrassment – prompt one to avoid cheating and to repair its damage.



The moral emotions as commitment devices

The moral emotions might serve as commitment devices that promote prosocial deeds, reparation of harm, and punishment of cheaters, while signaling to others that one is a good coalitional ally. Each moral emotion seems tailored to a specific kind of conduct. The adaptive problems they solve can be grouped into three major classes:

1. Respect for authority – restraining one's selfish urges by deferring to those in a dominant position and obeying laws, rules, and commandments from higher authority.
2. A thirst for justice – the adaptive value of cooperation and reciprocity, including the punishment of cheaters to avoid the collapse of beneficial mutualism.
3. The evolution of care – the adaptive value of devotion, sympathy, giving towards allies, mates, and kin.





Thank You!





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