

The Behaviour of People at Work

Lecture title: Esteem dynamics



Lecturer: Sonya Sammut B.SC., M.SC., M.ENT.

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Course Outline



Module 6. Life outside work: parental care and relationship with kin



Module 7. The individual in the team: esteem dynamics



Module 8. Solutions for the team: status, rank and dominance



Module 9. Solutions for the team: cooperation, alliances, and friendships



Module 10. The modern organic workplace: built around your people

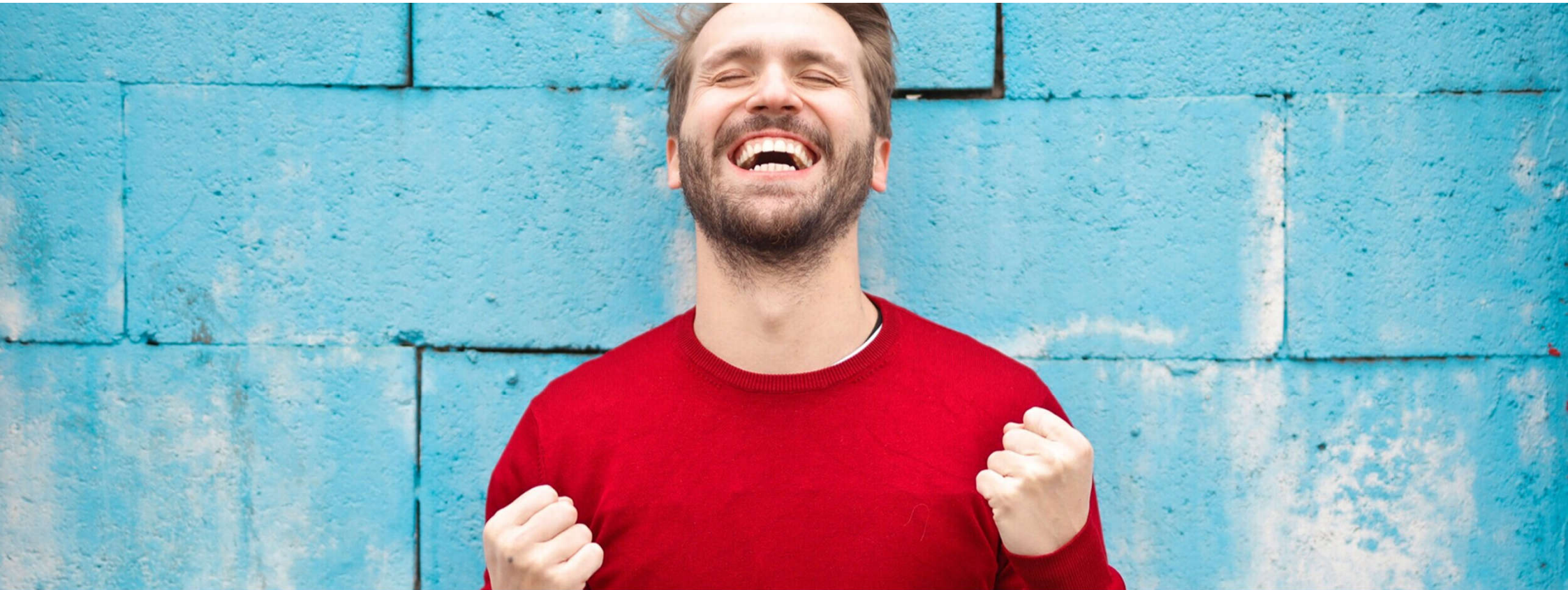


Module 7: The individual in the team: esteem dynamics

Self-esteem

- Self-esteem and self-confidence
- Sex differences in confidence
- Esteem dynamics
- The sociometer theory
- Self-esteem and status
- Emotions in self-esteem
- Prestige, status, and reputation
- Social attention holding potential





Self-esteem

Understanding the role of self-esteem as
a solution for the individual in the team



The concept of self-esteem

- A search on Google Scholar for 'self-esteem' will produce 2.76 m results.
- Despite that, there is no agreement on a explanatory theoretical framework beyond that self-esteem refers to how positively or negatively we evaluate ourselves (our self-concept).
- Self-esteem is not restricted to psychology; it is treated as a tangible that needs saving and protecting. "I need to protect my children's self-esteem by not letting them fail".



"Perhaps more ink has been devoted to the issue of self-esteem...than to any other single topic in psychology." Kirkpatrick and Ellis (2001, p. 411)

Self-confidence and self-esteem

- People usually find it easier to build their self-confidence than their self-esteem.
- So what, then, is the precise difference between self-confidence and self-esteem?
- "Confidence" comes from the Latin *fidere*, "to trust." To be self-confident is to trust in oneself, and, in particular, in one's ability or aptitude to engage successfully or at least adequately with the world. A self-confident person is ready to rise to new challenges, seize opportunities, deal with difficult situations, and take responsibility if and when things go awry.



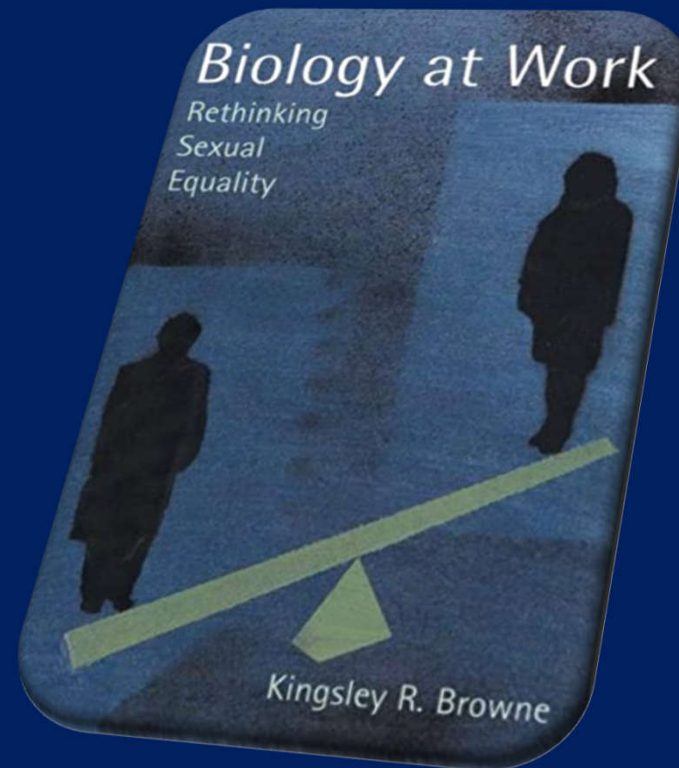
Self-confidence and self-esteem

- “Esteem” is derived from the Latin *aestimare*, meaning “to appraise, value, rate, weigh, estimate,” and self-esteem is our cognitive and, above all, emotional appraisal of our own worth. More than that, it is the matrix through which we think, feel, and act, and reflects and determines our relation to ourselves, to others, and to the world.
- People with a healthy self-esteem treat themselves with respect and take care of their health, community, and environment. They are able to invest themselves completely in projects and people because they do not fear failure or rejection.



Sex differences in confidence

- Kingsley Browne, author of *Biology at Work*, says that when given a choice of tasks to perform, males are more likely to select the more difficult task and females the easier one. Females tend to be more adversely affected by failure and more likely to give up than males, and they are somewhat more likely to attribute failure to lack of ability rather than lack of effort.



Sex differences in performance appraisal

- Another factor is that anticipation of competition results in lower confidence levels in females than males.
- Females seem to have a greater need than males for feedback about performance in order to achieve or maintain high levels of self-confidence in their performance capabilities.



Biology has the answer

“Self-esteem is great – as long as it is rooted in reality”.

- So what is the problem?
- Can we “get” more self-esteem?
- Can we “protect” it?

Evolutionary psychology provides a framework for conceptualising and understanding the role and function of self-esteem.



Basics first

- Most people's goals in life – making more money, improving one's looks, having more free time, travelling, finding love, and feeling valued – are astonishingly similar.
- 'Esteem' means to value. There is tension in this. It is a process of evaluation. And comparisons. And judgments.



Esteem dynamics

- When someone shakes his fist at you on the freeway, this is an esteem dynamic – a very unpleasant one. When an attractive person signals that they find you very attractive, this is the most exciting esteem dynamic of all.
- Esteem dynamics looks at more effective ways of competing for the legitimate esteem of others, and points the way to a rather obvious and powerful truth: the more effective you become, the more you will feel good.



A more technical analysis

- The sociometer theory (from evolutionary psychology) was born out of an attempt to answer two fundamental questions: (1) what is self-esteem?, and (2) what is its function?
- The basic premise of this theory is that self-esteem functions as an indicator or gauge of other people's evaluations.
- An increase in self-esteem indicates an increase in the degree to which one is socially included and accepted by others.
- A loss of self-esteem follows from a downward shift in inclusion and acceptance by others.



The question is: which problem is self-esteem trying to solve?

1. Exclusion from a group would result in reduced survival due to loss of resources and benefits associated with group living (this is the problem).
2. Self-esteem is an interpersonal monitor that has evolved to gauge an individual's level of social acceptance (this is the adaptive solution).

When one suffers a blow to self-esteem, this motivates them to solicit favour with the group, to improve relationships, and to seek new ones (repair the damage).



Prestige, status, and reputation

- If we were to expand on the sociometer theory, we could think of self-esteem as something that also tracks prestige, status, and reputation.
- This is the idea that self-esteem functions to monitor exactly where you are positioned in society; e.g. if you're a number one, the highest level of status, you're an overwhelming success.



The Social Attention-Holding Potential

- It is also related to the social attention-holding potential – this refers to the quality and quantity of attention others pay to a particular person.
- According to this view, we compete with each other to be attended to and valued by others in our group.



What going up and down in status does to us:

- People who experience a rise in status (rank) are more likely to behave in a friendly and helpful manner.
- A positive mood (elation) increases the likelihood of seeking out future competitions and increased expectation of winning.
- People will avoid seeking help from others because it will reduce their perceived status.
- Plummeting in status, on the other hand, has a different set of consequences – social anxiety, shame, rage, envy, and depression (think of people who have been implicated in wrongdoing).



There's more: our emotions are designed to help us deal with issues of status.

- Social anxiety motivates us to make the effort to avoid loss of status.
- Shame motivates an individual to avoid being the object of scorn, in the present or the future.
- Rage may function to motivate one to seek revenge on the person who caused the loss of status.
- Envy may function to motivate us to imitate those who have what we want.
- Depression from the loss of status sometimes motivates submissive behaviour designed to appease others and prevent the continuation of aggression from them.



Self-esteem has important functions

For our well-being, we need to understand what it is and how to use this mechanism to our advantage.

A motivational mechanism

Not merely to improve relations with others when their respect wanes, but also to repeat or increase the frequency of actions that lead to a rise of respect from others.

A guiding mechanism

About whom to challenge and whom to submit to.

A tracking mechanism

Of one's value in a given group, whether the workplace, or in other settings. This also relates to one's desirability in the mating market, but the link between mate value and self-esteem seems to apply more to men than women.





Thank You!



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