

What is?

EMOTIONAL INFLUENCE?

Emotional influence refers to the ways in which individuals attempt to influence other people's feelings. Within the workplace, employers and employees use a range of tactics in order to influence other people's positive and negative emotions, including happiness, enthusiasm, calmness, pride, anger, guilt, anxiety, and jealousy.

Research suggests that people's emotional experiences at work affect their well-being, energy, creativity, motivation and performance. The significant role that emotional influence can play in increasing creativity and cohesion amongst employees and satisfaction amongst customers is implicit in much of the advocacy of modern management methods such as teamworking, continuous improvement and customer care programmes. Such methods are seen as especially important in the service sector, where employees are routinely required to undertake emotional influence in their interactions with customers or clients.

What are the benefits of considering emotional influence in the workplace?

Research evidence indicates that the consideration of emotional influence by employers and employees alike can help attain positive organisational and personal work outcomes, in areas such as dealing with difficult situations, teamwork and negotiations.

Dealing with difficult people Emotional influence tactics intended to calm others can be used to avert negative work-related outcomes such as staff dissatisfaction and customer complaints. For example, an employee could use appropriate emotional influence tactics to reassure a jealous colleague, or to placate an angry customer.

Teamwork Emotional influence tactics can also be used to energise others, to promote positive outcomes such as improving team members' well-being and working relationships. For example, a manager or team leader could use emotional influence to enthuse de-motivated teams, and to inspire team members to work more cohesively and harmoniously.

Negotiations Individuals can use a range of tactics that improve and worsen others' moods, in order to achieve the most constructive outcome of a situation. For example, a salesman may use emotional influence tactics to achieve a sale, or a purchasing manager may attempt to influence the price of a component.

What tactics can individuals use to influence other's feelings?

There is a wide range of tactics and strategies that individuals can use to influence the feelings of those around them. Research at the Institute of Work Psychology (IWP), concerning how employees from various occupational groups perceive that they consciously influence others' moods, suggests that the most popular methods include:

Ingratiation Tactics such as flattery, opinion conformity and doing favours can be used to make people feel happier, calmer and reassured. In contrast, tactics such as personal criticisms and challenging benefits may be used to upset and anger.

Comparisons Individuals can draw comparisons between the person they are trying to influence and others (e.g., self, the person's past behaviour, a standard or ideal), to induce an emotional reaction such as pride, enthusiasm or jealousy.

Force Forceful verbal and behavioural displays, including shouting, arguing, slamming doors, and violence, may be used to influence others' feelings, typically in a negative manner. On the contrary, the absence of force, or passivity, may be used to calm others.

Logic Using a rational approach to discuss a problem situation, give practical advice, apportion blame, or justify someone's actions, can produce a variety of emotional responses, including happiness, relief or grief.

Humour Tactics such as telling jokes and making fun of oneself are often used to distract a person from their problems, or to elicit happiness and joy. Equally, tactics such as mocking, patronising and performing practical jokes may also be used to frustrate and annoy.

Social support Support can be offered in a number of ways to improve other people's moods, including listening, spending time with someone, and being affectionate or sympathetic. Conversely, withdrawal of support by ignoring, ostracising, walking away and being judgemental can be used to worsen others' moods.

Emotional display Displaying one's own emotions can be a particularly effective way of influencing the way others feel, using facial expressions, vocal tones and body language to promote happiness, calmness and fear, amongst other emotions.

What makes a good influencer, and who is most susceptible to influence?

Effective and successful influencers are likely to display high levels of emotional intelligence. Research informs us that someone who exhibits the qualities of high emotional intelligence will be skilled at reading others' moods, empathic, and emotionally expressive. As such, they will be able to pick the influence tactics that are more contextually appropriate, and able to implement these tactics in a persuasive manner.

People may be more susceptible to emotional influence if they are in a subordinate position to the influencer, as power dynamics affect how much attention we pay to the words and actions of others.



In addition, people are more susceptible when they are uncertain as to how they should feel. Consequently, individuals entering novel situations (e.g., a new work project) or threatening situations (e.g., job appraisal) may be influenced more readily.

How can employers manage the use of emotional influence tactics within the workplace?

The main way in which employers can affect how employees attempt to influence others' emotions is through staff training. For example, training could be offered to develop employees' skills in executing emotional influence tactics, as well as choosing the most effective and appropriate tactics to influence emotions in particular situations. More subtly, it might also help employees to resist attempts made by others to influence them that could be detrimental to their mood and job performance.

A further consideration for employers is that there will be individual differences in the ways in which people influence others. In particular, research shows that some individuals display energising traits, tending to inspire high energy and motivation in others, whilst others are viewed as de-energisers, typically leaving those they interact with drained of energy and de-motivated. Employers could therefore reward behaviours associated with energising, such as displays of enthusiasm, humour and eye contact, to promote energising emotional influence within the workplace.

For further details contact:

Karen Niven
k.niven@sheffield.ac.uk

Institute of Work Psychology and
ESRC Centre for Organisation and Innovation
University of Sheffield
Sheffield, S10 2TN
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 114 222 3258

