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CBE RESEARCH GRANT

EFFECTS OF EMOTIONAL CONTAGION IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION Progress Report

Summary of Findings from the Research Supported by this Grant:

The present study investigated the dynamics of individual emotional displays and one's positional power on the process of emotional contagion and individual performance in online environment in a mixed-motive context. The results of the experiment using the self-reported data, along with content analysis of individual e-mails, indicate that negative emotional expressions are more noticeable to online opponents and are more contagious in the online environment than positive emotional expressions. In addition, the findings demonstrate that one's positional power influences the process of emotional contagion and has a significant impact on individual performance. Specifically, it appears in our study that expressing positive affect online may be interpreted by virtual partners as a way of signaling low power; and coupled with little or no actual positional power in the online environment, it can make a person appear desperate for an agreement, hurting his/her individual performance.

These findings were presented to the research community at the Academy of Management meeting in August of 2009. Based on the comments of the 3 anonymous reviewers at the Academy of Management conference along with some comments from my colleagues, the following changes/additions to the current paper draft are believed to be necessary in order to strengthen the research:

It is important to collect additional data in order to increase cell size, as well as to measure for some of the factors not accounted in previous data collection. The details are listed below.

Original Methodology

Participants: Undergraduate students were recruited for the experiment.

Procedure: Students from across the college taking Business Minor class were assigned to negotiate a case as a part of a class assignment. The 2 x 3 experiment was conducted using the New Recruit negotiation case (Bazerman & Brett, 1997). Students were randomly assigned to three different conditions of emotion manipulation. Specifically, each student will be given confidential instructions to take on either a very positive or a very negative mood prior to starting negotiations. These three types of negotiations pairs were composed as: (1) a pair where one participant is given positive mood instructions (2) a pair where one participant is given negative mood instructions and (3) a pair where both participants do not have any mood instructions (control condition).

Analysis: Immediately after completing negotiations, each participant was required to fill in the post-negotiation questionnaire, which will include items on own mood, impressions of partner mood, and trust. After filling in the questionnaire, students submitted it, along with negotiations results and the full transcript of the electronic negotiation process, to the instructor (me in this case). The students were fully debriefed on the purpose of the exercise and the research study later in class.

Both, quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in the data analysis. Specifically, quantitative analyses were conducted in order to assess how the mood instruction influenced the emotional dynamics and negotiation outcomes. In addition, in order to capture the intensity of emotions qualitative analysis of electronic negotiation transcripts were conducted by four paid research assistants.

Original Methodology used in Fall 2008 (described above) will be used again in Fall 2009 for an additional data collection. However, the experiment will run in real time, instead of a 5-day frame used last Fall. In addition, in order to rule out

alternative explanations, participants' pre-negotiation mood will be measured as well. Finally, another study that will employ a different methodology (3-person ongoing communication in real time) will be conducted in late Fall 2009 in order to further explore the process of emotion transfer in an online environment. These changes/additions to the study will be implemented to increase the reliability of the results and to rule out the alternative explanations for the phenomenon observed.

Updated Timeline:

Summer 2009	The original paper presented at the annual Academy of Management conference
Fall 2009	Additional data collection and analysis
Winter 2010	Finalizing the new results along with the updated paper draft
Spring 2010	Final paper write up and submission to top-tier management journal

Significance

I expect these new results to strengthen the existing preliminary findings and to be of use to both researchers and practitioners. From a theoretical perspective, the proposed research will be able to expand on the psychological model of emotional contagion, as well as add to the emerging body of research on organizational communication. As was mentioned above, by bridging two distinct areas of research, emotions and electronic communication, I expect this paper to deliver some important theoretical contributions to the management field. From a practical perspective, if the propositions will be confirmed, this research can have important implications in the area of organizational communication, by providing evidence on how emotions not only influence the psychological well-being of individual employees, but also influence group work in terms of efficiency, resulting outcomes and have long-term ramifications for group dynamics.

Facilitation

This grant is crucial to my progress on this project, because from the money left on my grant account I should be able to pay again for three independent coders during months of November-December 2009 for the qualitative coding of new e-mail transcripts and quantitative analysis required of the additional data.