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The role of leaders' emotions

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Abstract: Western cultures support the notion that the ideal 'professional' behaviour for a leader is primarily rational and carefully controlled emotionally. The relationship of reason and emotion is often played out as one of mutual exclusion, and moreover as one representing hierarchy of leaders and followers. Power positions in most organizations are ritually emphasized through strict emotional control/suppression. Thus this display of unemotional rationality is held to be synonymous with control, may actually belie emotional and psychological insanities, and indicate organizational incongruities. Since, emotions play crucial role in the regulation of workplace relations. Negative emotions are the basis of awareness and positive ones are that of trust, and hence they both are needed in everyday situations. Leaders' emotions can be used as tools to motivate and to express individualist attention and caring. However, this use of emotions as tools may come at a price for those leaders who are less apt at emotion regulation. In sum, workplace is an emotional place and it is of best interest of the organizational members, – both the leaders and those led, – to understand the leaders' genuine and displayed emotions, their antecedents and their consequences.

Key words: emotion, emotional labour, leadership

Introduction

The investigation of emotions at workplaces is a relatively new research area of organisational behaviour. In Western societies, emotions have so far been regarded as irrational and dysfunctional factors, and incorporated in models as disturbing factors at the very best (Arvey et al, 1998; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Muchinsky, 2000). Concurrently with a growing literature on workplace climate, work morale, and emotional intelligence (EI), researchers have started to focus more and more on the investigation of the emotional component of working. Despite this tendency, genuine emotions of leaders (more often than not different from those displayed) are explored to a very little extent.

An interest taken in the role of emotions in the leadership process is mostly the invention of the twenty-first century. In literature on leadership, the desirability of 'emotional arousal states' leaders should create in others is highlighted. In most approaches, numerous behaviours with emotional implications, such as lending support, developing trusting relations, exhibiting moral integrity, providing safety, fostering collaboration, offering intellectual stimulation, encouraging organizational learning, and practicing consultative and shared decision making, are endorsed (Leithwood et al, 1999). Such leadership skills have been variously referred to as "socio-emotional" orientation (Bales, 1950), "leader consideration" (Fleishman, 1957), or "human relations skills" (Likert, 1967). Goleman et al. (2003) even argue that emotions and emotional intelligence lie at the core of effective leadership. In line with this view, George (2000) and Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) claim that leadership is an emotional process in which leaders express emotions and try to arouse emotions in their subordinates. Control of the emotions of their staff is thus one of

the most important means by which leaders can improve staff performance and productivity (Humphrey, 2002).

The power of a leader's emotions as a leadership tool is appreciated by all leadership styles that flatter the "charismatic" aspect of a leader. Thus, charismatic leaders, resonant leaders, and transformational leaders all use emotions to motivate employees, communicate a vision, and excite followers to work towards long-term ideals and strategic objectives. These competencies are to establish warm, empathic, non-directive, trusting relations with subordinates, so empathy, active listening and other interpersonal skills are supposed to be inevitable for leaders. The focus is mostly on the emotions the leader stimulates in others in the process of generating productive behaviour. But throughout all the theories the emotions of a leader were hardly ever considered.

What is more, leaders are supposed to be unemotional. Power positions in most organizations are ritually emphasized through strict emotional control/suppression. A rational attitude is a must for leaders. Accordingly, emotions in organizations are political. In literature, such skills as problem solving, strategic planning, and even reflective practice are considered from an exclusively rational perspective. The display of unemotional rationality is held to be synonymous with control. However, this concept is essentially mistaken because even the most rational leader is subject to his/her own transrational values that are sustained by his/her own emotions (Hodgkinson, 1990). Reason itself is not free from an emotional foundation and, even in the purest of intellectual moments; emotions are present because of the mind itself being a seamless blend of thinking and feeling (Damasio, 1994).

Organizations have a variety of mechanisms at their disposal to regulate emotions at the workplace. These mechanisms mostly aim to either prevent emotions from arising in the first

place or “safely” control those as may arise, regardless of the fact that emotions can have positive effects. Emotional display rules exist in each and every workplace. These include expectations that organizational members be pleasant and helpful, and express a minimum of hostility and negative emotions (Cropanzano et al., 2000). Mann (1999), for example, found similar rates of performance of emotional management occurring among colleagues to those occurring between staff and customers. Respondents reported that in 53% of interactions, they had smiled because this was expected of them, rather than because a smile expressed their true feelings. These findings suggest that emotional management within organizational boundaries should be paid more attention by researchers. Strazdins (2002) supports this point of view, claiming that emotional labour is not restricted to particular professional roles, but managers as well as workmates perform emotional management. Briner and Totterdell (2002) claim that managerial jobs include an additional element of emotional labour, because tasks will probably be performed better if leaders fake enthusiasm in order to motivate their staff. Mann (1999) also found that emotional labour is influenced by roles and status. Emotional management by leaders has contents and meanings different from those associated with emotional management by subordinates.

Material and methods

I have researched 36 physicians at the University of Debrecen Medical and Health Sciences Center. The participation in the research was voluntary. 9 leaders (heads of institutes, departments, wards) and 27 non-leaders (from now on subordinates) filled out the questionnaire. I have used the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule – Expanded Form (PANAS-X) questionnaire (Watson and Clark, 1994) to investigate the true and displayed emotions of the leaders and their subordinates.

The PANAS-X contains 60 emotions that can be compressed into two general (Positive Affect, Negative Affect), or 11 basic (Fear, Hostility, Guilt, Sadness, Joviality, Self-Assurance, Attentiveness, Shyness, Fatigue, Serenity, Surprise) emotion scales.

My questionnaire contained the PANAS-X twice. First the respondents were asked to rate the listed emotions on the basis how they feel each one of them in the course of their daily work. Secondly they had to rate them on the basis of their emotional displays. They had to score on a five point scale how often and how intensely they were displaying a given emotion.

Results and discussion

Emotions are feelings experienced, interpreted, controlled, and expressed (Thoits, 1989; Mills and Kleinman, 1988). They arise from social interactions, and are influenced by social, cultural, interpersonal, and situational factors (Martin, 1999). Emotions are aroused by the individual interpretation of events.

According to Fisher and Ashkanasy (2000), emotions can be defined as the complex of cognitive and physiological processes, willingness to act, and subjective feelings. Emotions are displayed through many channels, including kinesics (such as bodily posture and hand gestures), prosodic (such as vocal intonation and pitch) and facial expressions.

Emotions are individual, although socially constructed to a degree (Hare, 1986). According to Fineman (1993), there exists a social consciousness of what are the correct emotions in specific situations. Individuals create meaning and content about one's own and others' emotions on the basis of emotional codes and 'schema' that contain guidelines for socially acceptable emotions within a given culture. According to Lazarus (1991), the variety, quality and intensity of emotions reflect how the person in question interprets and reacts to ongoing organizational events.

Human emotions can be divided into two broad categories. These two categories are called negative and positive, and should be regarded as polarities. (These descriptions do not imply any value judgment, but are designed to signify senses of action induced.) Negative emotions are fuelled by an underlying fear of the unknown or other people's actions, and a need to control or stop them to avoid being harmed (Watson and Clark, 1984). On the other hand, positive emotions are fuelled by an underlying desire for unity and enjoyment.

Positive emotions enhance creativity, encourage helping behaviour and cooperation, and reduce aggression against either the organization or people. A negative affect leads to a more thorough treatment of information and hence better judgments in situations where difficult and complex problems need to be solved. Sad people seek and consider more information and process persuasive messages more thoroughly. In contrast, individuals in a positive mood tend to prefer the use of simple heuristics and decisional shortcuts, or base their judgments on stereotypes.

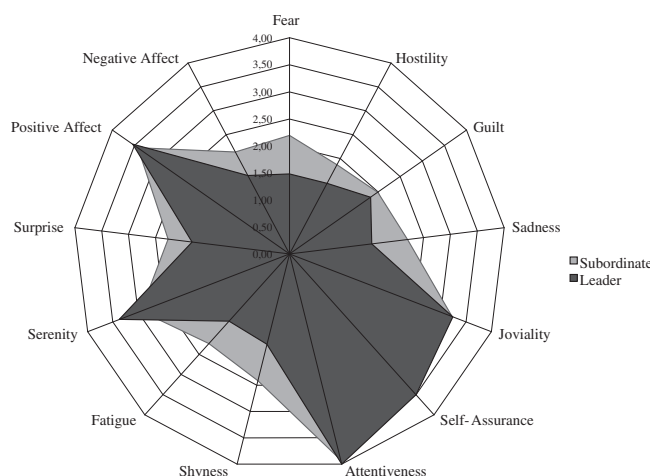
While emotions alter rapidly, they are intense and represent responses to a particular event. They play a number of functional roles, such as preparing for actions, steering attention, sharpening memory, adapting behaviour to tasks and goals, ensuring adaptation to changing social requirements, affecting the behaviour of other people and supporting decision-making processes (Reilly and Seibert, 2003). Very often it is emotions felt that give leaders a hand in replying to problems too complex to analyse.

Table 1 shows the scores given to 60 different emotions by leaders and by subordinates. I have indicated the emotions that had the greatest differences between that of a leader and that of a subordinate. Letter 'A' spotlights emotions, which are felt more often or more intense by leaders. Letter 'B' highlights emotions that are felt by leaders less often or less intense than by subordinates.

The genuine emotions of leaders and subordinates are different in the field of most basic emotive factors as well. This difference may be the consequence of the different work demands and expectations, but also could serve as a basis for the internal selection process for an organization (Figure 1).

Table 1: Differences in genuine emotions of leaders and subordinates

Descriptive Statistics	Subordinate (N=27)		Leader (N=9)		Difference in Means	Highest Differences
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Active	3,93	0,92	4,44	0,53	-0,52	A
Afraid	2,30	1,03	1,56	0,53	0,74	
Alert	4,07	0,78	3,89	0,78	0,19	
Alone	2,15	1,17	1,67	0,71	0,48	
Amazed	1,81	0,68	1,78	0,67	0,04	
Angry	2,81	0,96	2,78	0,97	0,04	
Angry at self	2,52	0,98	2,00	1,00	0,52	
Ashamed	1,85	0,86	1,44	0,73	0,41	
Astonished	2,63	1,04	1,78	0,83	0,85	
At ease	2,48	1,25	3,11	1,05	-0,63	A
Attentive	4,07	0,78	4,00	1,00	0,07	
Bashful	2,22	0,93	1,67	1,00	0,56	
Blameworthy	1,81	0,88	1,67	0,87	0,15	
Blue	1,81	0,96	1,11	0,33	0,70	
Bold	3,48	0,98	4,11	0,93	-0,63	A
Calm	3,44	1,37	4,11	0,60	-0,67	A
Cheerful	3,70	0,72	4,00	0,50	-0,30	
Concentrating	3,85	0,86	4,00	0,71	-0,15	
Confident	3,74	0,71	4,00	0,50	-0,26	
Daring	2,63	0,97	3,00	1,32	-0,37	
Delighted	2,48	0,98	2,22	1,09	0,26	
Determined	3,74	0,71	4,11	1,05	-0,37	
Disgusted	1,67	0,88	1,00	0,00	0,67	
Disgusted with self	1,30	0,72	1,11	0,33	0,19	
Dissatisfied with self	3,11	1,09	3,00	1,12	0,11	
Distressed	2,07	1,14	1,67	0,71	0,41	
Downhearted	2,33	0,83	1,56	0,73	0,78	
Drowsy	1,89	0,85	1,22	0,67	0,67	
Energetic	3,74	0,81	4,00	0,87	-0,26	
Enthusiastic	2,48	1,12	2,33	0,71	0,15	
Excited	2,89	1,09	2,33	1,22	0,56	
Fearless	1,93	1,07	2,67	1,22	-0,74	A
Frightened	1,96	1,16	1,22	0,44	0,74	
Guilty	1,89	0,85	1,78	1,09	0,11	
Happy	3,41	1,01	3,78	0,97	-0,37	
Hostile	1,89	1,01	1,33	0,71	0,56	
Inspired	2,44	0,89	2,89	1,27	-0,44	
Interested	4,11	0,58	4,22	0,97	-0,11	
Irritable	2,56	1,12	2,22	0,97	0,33	
Jittery	1,89	0,85	1,44	0,73	0,44	
Joyful	3,15	0,99	3,33	0,71	-0,19	
Lively	3,78	0,64	3,89	1,05	-0,11	
Loathing	1,74	1,02	1,11	0,33	0,63	
Lonely	1,96	1,32	1,67	1,12	0,30	
Nervous	2,89	1,22	1,78	0,83	1,11	B
Proud	3,11	1,05	3,11	0,60	0,00	
Relaxed	2,74	1,06	2,89	1,36	-0,15	
Sad	2,78	1,09	1,67	0,50	1,11	B
Scared	1,89	0,97	1,44	0,73	0,44	
Scornful	1,67	0,92	1,56	1,13	0,11	
Shaky	2,59	0,89	1,44	0,53	1,15	B
Sheepish	2,67	1,11	1,67	0,50	1,00	B
Shy	3,04	0,98	2,00	1,00	1,04	B
Sleepy	1,89	0,80	1,22	0,44	0,67	
Sluggish	2,07	0,83	1,67	0,71	0,41	
Strong	3,63	0,63	4,11	1,05	-0,48	
Surprised	2,37	0,93	1,89	0,78	0,48	
Timid	2,15	1,20	1,56	0,53	0,59	
Tired	3,15	1,17	2,56	1,33	0,59	
Upset	2,70	1,10	1,78	0,83	0,93	

**Figure 1:** Genuine emotions of leaders and subordinates on the basis of general and basic emotion scales

Emotions affect organisational behaviour in multiple ways. The impact may be direct, such as behaviours provoked by different emotions, and indirect, such as those which affect performance via mediating mechanisms, e.g. motivation and perception. However, not only organizational behaviour is affected by emotions, but organizational processes also modify emotions. Panic reactions of others can intensify, while calm, reassuring behaviours of reference people weaken, the intensity of emotional reactions. Consequently, the emotions of leaders are of utmost influence and importance. *Totterdell and Holman* (2003) have found team members' moods to be systematically linked, especially tightly in the leader-to-follower relation.

Emotions are definitely present in both leaders and those led, but, until recently, leaders' emotions have gone unacknowledged in research, theory and, perhaps, even practice. However, leaders constantly have to manage their emotions to behave in a way leaders are expected to, because they directly influence not only the performance of their subordinates, but that of the whole organization.

There is significant difference between true and displayed emotions both in leaders and in led (*Table 2*). The differences stand for altered emotions, emotional labour. Letter 'A' highlights emotions, where true emotions are less strong or less frequent, than the displayed ones. Letter 'B' highlights emotions, where true emotions are more frequent, more intense, than displayed ones.

Newcombe and Ashkanasy (2002) have demonstrated how emotions influence the way in which subordinates perceive their leaders. They found that the emotional expressions of leaders were given more weight than the actual content of their messages. Emotional expressions of leaders are essential when subordinates are interpreting their sincerity (*Humphrey, 2002; Dasborough and Ashkanasy, 2002*). In fact, a leader's emotions have strong effects on others'. Leaders who feel excited, enthusiastic, and energetic themselves are likely to similarly energize their followers, so are leaders who feel distressed and hostile likely to negatively activate their followers. For example, a leader's

Table 2: Difference between genuine and displayed emotions of leaders and of subordinates

Difference between true and displayed emotions	Subordinate (N=27)	Emotional Labour	Leader (N=9)	Emotional Labour
Active	0,11		0,11	
Afraid	0,22		0,26	
Alert	-0,22		0,44	
Alone	0,11		0,37	
Amazed	0,44	B	-0,11	
Angry	0,11		0,37	
Angry at self	0,33		0,37	
Ashamed	0,00		0,07	
Astonished	0,00		0,44	
At ease	0,11		0,04	
Attentive	-0,22		0,22	
Bashful	0,56	B	0,30	
Blameworthy	0,11		-0,15	
Blue	-0,11		0,33	
Bold	0,00		0,19	
Calm	-0,22		-0,11	
Cheerful	0,11		0,30	
Concentrating	-0,33	A	-0,30	A
Confident	-0,33		0,30	
Daring	-0,22		-0,11	
Delighted	-0,44	A	0,15	
Determined	0,00		0,07	
Disgusted	-0,44	A	0,19	
Disgusted with self	-0,11		-0,11	
Dissatisfied with self	0,56	B	0,63	B
Distressed	0,22		-0,07	
Downhearted	-0,11		-0,04	
Drowsy	0,00		0,30	
Energetic	-0,22		0,22	
Enthusiastic	0,00		0,07	
Excited	0,33		0,37	
Fearless	-0,22		-0,56	A
Frightened	0,00		0,19	
Guilty	0,56	B	-0,37	A
Happy	-0,11		0,33	
Hostile	-0,11		0,30	
Inspired	-0,44	A	-0,11	
Interested	0,00		0,19	
Irritable	-0,11		0,41	
Jittery	0,33		0,19	
Joyful	0,33		0,04	
Lively	-0,33	A	0,26	
Loathing	0,00		-0,04	
Lonely	0,44	B	-0,07	
Nervous	0,11		0,59	B
Proud	0,33		0,07	
Relaxed	0,22		-0,30	A
Sad	-0,67	B	0,44	B
Scared	0,22		-0,04	
Scornful	0,22		0,30	
Shaky	0,00		0,30	
Sheepish	-0,11		0,59	B
Shy	-0,22		0,44	
Sleepy	0,22		0,33	
Sluggish	-0,33		0,22	
Strong	-0,22		0,00	
Surprised	-0,11		-0,15	A
Timid	0,33		0,04	
Tired	0,22		0,26	
Upset	-0,22		0,52	B

Table 3: Difference between emotions displayed by leaders and subordinates

Descriptive Statistics	Subordinate (N=27)		Leader (N=9)		Difference in Means	Highest Differences
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Active	3,81	0,96	4,33	0,71	-0,52	
Afraid	2,04	1,34	1,33	0,71	0,70	
Alert	3,63	1,24	4,11	0,60	-0,48	
Alone	1,78	0,97	1,56	1,13	0,22	
Amazed	1,93	1,00	1,33	0,87	0,59	
Angry	2,44	1,12	2,67	1,32	-0,22	
Angry at self	2,15	1,17	1,67	0,71	0,48	
Ashamed	1,78	0,89	1,44	0,73	0,33	
Astonished	2,19	1,00	1,78	0,97	0,41	
At ease	2,44	1,19	3,00	1,32	-0,56	
Attentive	3,85	0,95	4,22	0,67	-0,37	
Bashful	1,93	1,14	1,11	0,33	0,81	A
Blameworthy	1,96	1,09	1,56	0,53	0,41	
Blue	1,48	0,80	1,22	0,44	0,26	
Bold	3,30	1,23	4,11	1,05	-0,81	B
Calm	3,56	1,09	4,33	0,71	-0,78	B
Cheerful	3,41	0,97	3,89	0,78	-0,48	
Concentrating	4,15	0,66	4,33	0,50	-0,19	
Confident	3,44	1,19	4,33	0,50	-0,89	B
Daring	2,74	1,02	3,22	1,20	-0,48	
Delighted	2,33	1,11	2,67	1,22	-0,33	
Determined	3,67	0,73	4,11	0,78	-0,44	
Disgusted	1,48	0,85	1,44	1,33	0,04	
Disgusted with self	1,41	0,93	1,22	0,67	0,19	
Dissatisfied with self	2,48	1,28	2,44	1,24	0,04	
Distressed	2,15	0,99	1,44	0,73	0,70	
Downhearted	2,37	1,11	1,67	1,00	0,70	
Drowsy	1,59	0,75	1,22	0,44	0,37	
Energetic	3,52	0,98	4,22	0,67	-0,70	
Enthusiastic	2,41	1,01	2,33	1,00	0,07	
Excited	2,52	1,09	2,00	1,12	0,52	
Fearless	2,48	1,34	2,89	1,45	-0,41	
Frightened	1,78	1,31	1,22	0,44	0,56	
Guilty	2,26	1,13	1,22	0,44	1,04	A
Happy	3,07	1,11	3,89	0,78	-0,81	B
Hostile	1,59	0,89	1,44	1,33	0,15	
Inspired	2,56	1,09	3,33	1,22	-0,78	B
Interested	3,93	0,73	4,22	0,67	-0,30	
Irritable	2,15	1,06	2,33	1,50	-0,19	
Jittery	1,70	0,91	1,11	0,33	0,59	
Joyful	3,11	1,01	3,00	1,12	0,11	
Lively	3,52	1,05	4,22	0,67	-0,70	
Loathing	1,78	1,15	1,11	0,33	0,67	
Lonely	2,04	1,13	1,22	0,44	0,81	A
Nervous	2,30	0,87	1,67	0,87	0,63	
Proud	3,04	1,13	2,78	0,97	0,26	
Relaxed	3,04	1,09	2,67	1,22	0,37	
Sad	2,33	1,11	2,33	0,87	0,00	
Scared	1,93	1,04	1,22	0,44	0,70	
Scornful	1,37	0,74	1,33	0,71	0,04	
Shaky	2,30	1,10	1,44	0,73	0,85	A
Sheepish	2,07	1,00	1,78	0,83	0,30	
Shy	2,59	1,01	2,22	1,20	0,37	
Sleepy	1,56	0,93	1,00	0,00	0,56	
Sluggish	1,85	0,86	2,00	1,00	-0,15	
Strong	3,63	1,15	4,33	0,50	-0,70	
Surprised	2,52	1,01	2,00	0,87	0,52	
Timid	2,11	1,05	1,22	0,44	0,89	A
Tired	2,89	1,31	2,33	1,22	0,56	
Upset	2,19	1,11	2,00	1,41	0,19	

sad emotional expressions make him appear less efficient and followers who observe a sad leader feel less enthusiasm and more fatigue (Glaso et al. 2006).

There is usually a double standard for compulsory emotions inside organizations. Leaders must express emotions reflecting a state of inner psychic balance and rationality (Putnam and Mumby, 1993; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Subordinates on the other hand are expected to behave towards their superiors with submission, respect and politeness, which might require suppression of strong positive or negative feelings (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Fineman, 1993; Briner and Totterdell, 2002).

Anger, for example, is a prerequisite for leaders while being a luxury for subordinates (Tiedens, 2000). Although anger can lead to counterproductive work behaviours and often has a disruptive effect, anger is also a sign of power. Male leaders are perceived as more efficient when they show anger than when they show sadness or react with a neutral expression. Similarly, people attribute more power to a leader who shows anger than one who shows sadness.

Table 3 and Figure 2 indicate how much the emotions displayed by leaders differ from those displayed by subordinates. Letter 'A' spotlights emotions, which are displayed more often or more intense by leaders. Letter 'B' highlights emotions that are displayed by leaders less often or less intense than by subordinates.

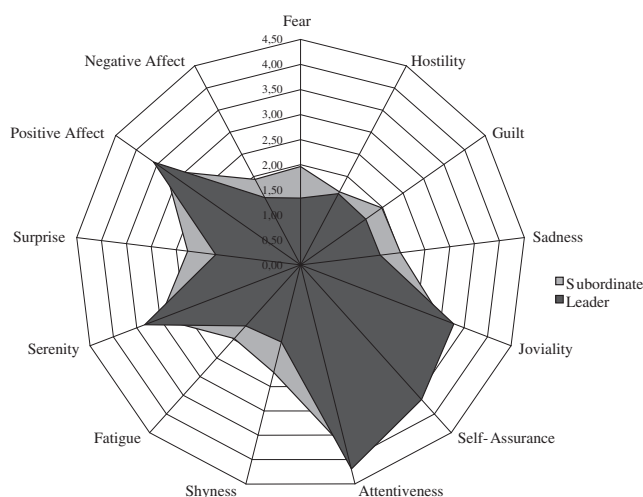


Figure 2: Difference in emotions displayed by leaders and subordinate

The difference between the leaders' and subordinates' displayed emotions is consistent with literature data cited above (Figure 2).

Conclusions

Emotions at the workplace are not ubiquitous but may be employed to foster organizational goals; this, however, needs to be done wisely because, as qualitative research shows, leaders do not always find their true feelings conform to their roles (Ashforth & Toumiuk, 2000). As adequate feelings do not erupt spontaneously or automatically, leaders modify

their display of emotions either by deep acting or by surface acting (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1979, 2003). Emotions can be faked but this faking bears a price. A good emotional leader seeks ways to make employees' natural feelings be like those which are good for the job. Helping employees to be more empathic in their interactions with clients and creating an environment which is perceived as just, are two important means leading to this goal. But who gives a hand to leaders? Do they have to strive for proper emotions all by themselves for both their own and others' sake? Is emotional management a burden or a prospect for leaders?

The requirement to show organizationally demanded emotions was originally thought to be a source of stress leading to burnout. Firstly, a leader who uses his or her emotions strategically risks a necessity to "create" the right emotions for the right purpose on a regular basis. But those who on a daily basis feel obliged to 'fake' emotions and play an emotional role will experience emotional dissonance and hence be at risk for burnout in the long run.

The second problem is that the success of charismatic leadership is intrinsically based on the perception of the genuineness of a leader's emotions. Consequently, emotional behaviours that are simply used as tools may not work, but even have perverse side effects. Followers react negatively to a leader whose verbal message does not match their emotional expressions in emotional tone. Leaders who unsuccessfully try to mask their negative emotions are also likely to be perceived as manipulative and having self-serving intentions. This is why leaders should especially be adept in regulating their emotions perfectly all the time.

However, it turned out that frequency, duration and intensity of emotional labour are not systematically related to burnout. In fact, in a frequently cited article on emotional labour, Morris and Feldman (1997) argue that emotional labour need not to be uniformly or equally damaging to all individuals. They point out that not only are there cases where leaders simply go on automatic pilot, but that there are situations where emotional labour reduces uncertainty or helps avoid embarrassing interpersonal situations and hence may actually lead to increased job satisfaction. Due to personal or job characteristics, individuals in jobs with high levels of emotional labour may actually report higher levels of satisfaction and personal accomplishment, and suffer less from burnout. Showing leader-like emotions may result in increased self-esteem and improved leader-to-subordinate relationship, which further amplifies the leader's sense of worth.

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