Chapter 1
Emotions in Organisational Behaviour: An Historical Perspective

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors cover the basic concepts around emotion. In particular, they present an historical introduction of emotion theories, while offering several definitions of emotion, as well as research findings in the past decades. You will be introduced to the major exponents of emotion theory, such as Darwin, James, Freud, Arnold, Lange, Averill, Hochschild, and many more. At the end of the chapter, the reader should have a better understanding of the theoretical background needed to appreciate the importance of emotion in the workplace. After the conclusions, there is a comprehensive section of further readings, for those who would like to learn more about these topics.

INTRODUCTION

“Most simply, emotions matter because if we did not have them nothing else would matter. Creatures without emotion would have no reason for living nor, for that matter, for committing suicide… Emotions are the stuff of life. Emotions are the most important bond or glue that links us together.”, says John Elster (1999).

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To discuss the role of emotion in the organisational environment, we first need to understand what an emotion is, and how it can shape our behaviour in managing employees.

For Aristotle, emotions are the product of different judgements, a concept later represented by Shakespeare in Hamlet, who affirms “there is nothing either good or bad but thinking make it so” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, 2, 1, pp. 249-250). According to William James, “bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact… and feeling of the same changes as they occur, is the emotion” (W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1890, p. 449). Descartes affirms that emotions originate in our soul, or the thinking of ourselves, and there are only six - wonder, desire, joy, love, hatred, and sadness. Because of their origins in the soul, emotions are not only controlled by thinking, they are also shaped by thoughts, especially those which are believed true. To explain, Descartes affirms that “in order to excite courage to oneself and remove fear, it is not sufficient to have the will to do so, but we must also apply ourselves to consider the reasons, the objects or examples which persuade us that the peril is not great; that there is always more security in defence than flight; that […] we could expect nothing but regret and shame for having fled, and so on.” (Descartes, *The Passions of Souls*, 1649, p. 352). In such sense, “the utility of all the passions consists alone in their fortifying and perpetuating in the soul thoughts which it is good it should preserve, and which without that might easily be effaced from it. And again, all the harm which they can cause consists in the fact that they fortify and conserve those thoughts more than necessary, or that they fortify and conserve others on which it is not good to dwell” (*ibid*, p. 364).

Arnold and Gasson (1954) state that “an emotion or an affect can be considered as the felt tendency towards an object judged suitable, or away from an object judged unsuitable, reinforced by specific bodily changes”. While for Lutz and White, “emotions are a primary idiom for defining and negotiating social relations of the self in a moral order” (note 1). Moving on, Lazarus (1991) states that emotions are organised psychophysiological reactions to news about ongoing relationships with the environment. In the same period, Frijda and Mesquita (1994) argue that “emotions are, first and foremost, modes of relating with to the environment: states of readiness for engaging, or not engaging, in interaction with that environment”. In such sense, we can easily affirm that our emotions are social.

While we have established there is no clear consensus on the definitions of emotion, what we can say at this point is that:

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