Chapter 2
Emotions in the Workplace

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors build on the classic theories from the previous chapter to better understand the role of emotion in the workplace. They introduce the field of organisational behaviour, which deals with what people, as individuals or groups, do in an organisation, and how what they do affects the organisation itself. Although it would be impossible to present all matters related to organisational behaviour as a discipline, the authors discuss issues concerning diversity in the workplace, as well as considering personal attributes that can influence behaviour and decision making in the organisation. While offering a clear definition of moods versus emotion, they also tackle the impact of personality, personality traits, and values in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

In the previous Chapter, we have discussed in great detail what an emotion is, and how researchers have tackled this topic from the beginning, including classical theory from Charles Darwin and others. Through different perspectives on emotion such as for example, biological and social, we have tried to lay down the basics of emotion theory. Now, we will explore the link between such perspectives and the organisation, through an organisational behaviour lens, to see if there is room for implementation in dealing with employees from a strategic perspective.

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So, why should we be interested in emotions in the workplace? As Boudens and Saudelands suggested (1999, note 1), people spend most of their waking life at work, where complex and intense forms of group life tend to arise. In their studies, researchers have highlighted that when asked about their jobs, people do not talk much about what they actually do at work. Emotions are described in negative terms, for example, to suggest fatigue and stress in their daily routines. This attitude could be explained through the automation and repetition in jobs, which in turn highlight the need to project future goals or ends, rather than concentrating in physical tasks. Other studies (see for example, Argyris, 1957; Maslow, 1954; or Terkel, 1972 - note 2) seem to suggest that people, when asked about what makes their job meaningful, tend not to consider self-actualisation or the desire for personal growth. It appears that, what they are trying to achieve is a connection to others. In particular, Terkel (1972), Garson (1975) and Hamper (1986, note 3) found that individuals mostly talk about other people when referring to their job. This might be in terms of friendship, love, conflict, gossip or in a more general social context. However, it appears that, in such studies, negative feelings and experiences are usually recounted, with the group found guilty of having rejected an individual, who in response feels sad, hurt and angry about it. Although we will have a chance to discuss job satisfaction and feelings in the workplace in the following chapter, it might be important to remind ourselves at this stage that “work feeling” is different from the concept of job satisfaction: the latter concerns the personal judgement an individual has about their specific job, while the first one is more related to the group and how the group perceives emotions at work.

That said, we will now analyse the workplace from an organisational behaviour perspective, and look at what can influence such emotions in the organisation.

WHAT IS ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR?

To better understand what is organisational behaviour (also abbreviated as OB) and how important it has grown nowadays, we should remember that until the late 1980s, business schools preferred to concentrate on the technical aspects of management (i.e., accounting, finance), while the study of human behaviour and soft skills in an organisation were still not considered...
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