Chapter 3
Some Hot Topics in Personnel Management and Emotions

ABSTRACT

Building upon the findings from the previous chapters, the authors introduce the hot topic of perception, and the theories and models that researchers have proposed to somehow rationalise the decision-making process. In particular, they observe how individuals perceive specific situations and what factors influence such perception. This chapter is useful to reflect on past experiences, and the way you think of the people you come across in your life or within the organisation you work for. In this perspective, the authors show that perception can be manipulated through motivation techniques, using, for example, Maslow’s theory of needs or Latham’s SMART goals approach.

INTRODUCTION

In the previous Chapters, we had the chance to discuss emotion in general terms, and we have somehow highlighted that every emotion contains a unique value judgement that support the emotion itself. This statement is a powerful one, especially considering that it also implies individuals having decisional power about whether or not letting the emotion express itself in a particular action, or not expressing at all (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994).

While thinking about emotion at work in this and the next Chapters, we are going to discuss how our perception of events can influence our emotions and moods, which in turn influence job satisfaction and performance (Fisher,
2002; Weiss & Beal, 2005; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In particular, we will look at theories and practices underpinning emotion management in organisations, such as the Affective Events Theory (also known as AET) which supports our previous statement about individuals’ capability, through their own personalities, to choose how to respond to a specific work event that has triggered positive or negative emotions.

**PERCEPTION AND INDIVIDUAL DECISION MAKING**

While looking at Personnel Management as a general discipline, several topics come to mind, depending on the perspective we are looking at. For example, in relation to appraisal and reward management, we should take into account the organisational environment as a means to try and understand an employee’s behaviour. Within such parameters, it might seem superfluous to point out that people behave according to their perception of reality, rather than reality itself. This happens because of some factors, such as the perceiver (i.e., their personality traits, or past experiences), the target and the context. Here then, perception can be defined as a process through which we give meaning to the environment, following organisation and interpretation of sensory impressions.

Within this realm, we need to take into account all the facets related to perceiving things, which also consist in the so called non-verbal behaviour, that researchers Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen (1969) put into five categories. According to them, we will need, first of all, to recognise emblems, here identifiable as non-verbal gestures that translate directly into words. As an example, illustrators are non-verbal gestures which accompany speech to make it visual or more felt, like when we use our hands during a speech to convey more meaning. Other non-verbal behaviours can be used to coordinate conversation, in the form of head nods for example. These differ profoundly from the so called self-adaptors, which are ways to cope and release negative energy, such as biting your lips, or touching your hair. When we have finally been able to separate similar previous behaviours, we are left with pure displays of emotion, which can be seen as signals in the voice, face, body and touch to convey a specific emotion.

Some famous television series such as “Lie to Me” or “Bull”, are built upon the idea that facial expressions of emotion are easily readable, when spotted. Because such expressions of emotion tend to last for just a few seconds (see Bachorowski & Owren, 2001) and cannot be faked or suppressed deliberately
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