COGNITIVE ASYMMETRY IN EMPLOYEE AFFECTIVE REACTIONS TO LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS

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Abstract

This paper is predicated on the idea that leaders shape affective events, such as positive "uplifts" or negative "hassles," that determine employees' attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. In this paper, this notion is addressed in a model based on two related theories. First, based on *Affective Events Theory* (AET), it is argued that effective leaders ameliorate employees' hassles by providing frequent emotional uplifts. The resulting positive affective states lead to more positive employee attitudes and behaviors. The second theoretical underpinning of the model is the *Asymmetry Effect* of emotion. Consistent with this theory, I suggest that employees are more likely to recall negative hassles than positive uplifts. Within this framework, it is argued that leaders need to exercise their 'emotional intelligence' to generate uplifts to overcome the hassles that employees often tend to remember vividly. In a qualitative study evidence that these processes exist in the workplace was found. Leader behaviors were sources of positive or negative emotional responses in employees; employees recalled more negative incidents than positive incidents, and they recalled them more intensely and in more detail than positive incidents.

Key words: leadership, affective events, asymmetry effect

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This paper presents the results of a qualitative study of subordinate perceptions of leaders in the workplace, and how they respond emotionally to particular leadership behaviors. The study represents an exploration of a model based on *Affective Events Theory* (AET), which posits that effective leaders are seen to shape the affective events that determine employees' attitudes and behaviors in the workplace (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The research questions also take into account the *Asymmetry Effect* (Peeters, 2002) of emotion, which purports that a negativity bias (prominence) exists when employees report emotional incidents they have encountered.

To investigate this model a qualitative approach was chosen. Conger (1998) asserts that qualitative research must play a pivotal role in leadership studies because leadership is a rich and complex phenomenon (Conger, 1998). Alvesson (1996) has also argued for a qualitative approach that takes the socially constructed nature of leadership seriously. Sandberg (2001) and Conger (1998) argue in particular that leadership is not a "simple reflection of objective reality", but is a socially constructed process where leadership can be produced and reproduced over time (see Chen & Meindl, 1991). Further, interpretation plays a large role in how leadership is defined and experienced; for example, employee perceptions and emotional reactions to leader behavior (Conger, 1998).

The findings provide detailed accounts of employee emotional responses to interactions with their leaders. In particular, leaders who were seen by employees to provide continuous small emotional uplifts were consistently held to be the most effective, consistent with the predictions of AET. Study participants were also especially affected by negative

events (or hassles), as expected from the asymmetry effect of emotion. In addition, leaders who failed to deal with employee hassles or, worse still, were the source of hassles, were consistently seen to be less effective. The paper concludes with an outline of the theoretical and managerial implications arising from these findings.

Theoretical Background

Leadership is "the ability to decide what is to be done, and then to get others to want to do it" (Larson, 1968, p.21, emphasis added). Historically research on leadership has focused on such leadership behaviors from cognitive and behavioral perspectives. Recent advances, however, have shifted the focus from purely behavioral and cognitive processes to emotions, a perspective that has been neglected to date by most scholars of leadership (see Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000; George, 2000; Humphrey, 2002). This shift has been long overdue since, as Humphrey (2002) has noted, leadership is intrinsically an emotional process, whereby leaders recognize employees' emotional states, attempt to evoke emotions in employees, and then seek to manage employees' emotional states accordingly.

Ashkanasy and Tse (2000) were amongst the first to highlight the role that emotions play in facilitating leadership effectiveness. Other scholars, including Caruso, Mayer, and Salovey (2001) and George (2000), have also pointed out the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership. The focus of this paper is on detailed accounts of incidents involving leader-employee interactions and the employees' emotional reactions to these interactions. The aim was to explore the emotional process of leadership, including the impact of emotions on employee cognitive responses to specific leader behaviours.

Leadership as a source of affective events in the workplace

In this study, leadership is examined from the perspective of Affective Events Theory (AET: Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In AET, factors in the organizational environment create 'affective events' (hassles and uplifts) that result in emotional reactions that, in turn, determine attitudinal and behavioral outcomes for organizational employees. Leaders are critical components of the organizational environment; consequently, leaders may be seen as architects of affective events experienced by organizational employees within the AET model. George (2000) describes how leaders displaying feelings of excitement, energy, and enthusiasm arouse similar feelings in their employees. Likewise, leaders who display negative emotions are likely to engender negative emotions in employees. In a demonstration of this, Lewis (2000) found in a laboratory study that leaders expressing anger towards their employees provoked negative feelings of nervousness and fear. Thus, in terms of AET, leader behavior can be seen as an affective event in the workplace producing constant positive and negative moods and emotions in employees.

Within AET, employees see their leaders as sources of hassles or uplifts. The literature suggests that effective leaders will provide regular small uplifts, such as positive feedback, praise, or inspiration, which serve to ameliorate the daily hassles experienced by employees. As a consequence, employees experience positive emotional states, and are therefore more likely to engage in positive behaviors, such as organizational citizenship (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), and to express positive attitudes such as improved job satisfaction (Fisher, 2000). Thus, the first research question to be explored is:

Research Question 1: What is the nature of positive and negative interactions between leaders and employees, and how do these interactions influence the following behaviors and attitudes of employees?

The asymmetrical nature of employee perceptions of affective events

Consideration of the exact nature of employee perceptions of affective events extends the coverage and depth of this examination of the emotional process of leadership. In particular, I suggest that the asymmetry effect will influence the nature of employee recollections of affective responses to leader emotion-evoking behaviors. The *asymmetry effect* attempts to explain why people do not pay equal attention to positive and negative valence items. A particular asymmetrical effect is that of the *negativity bias*, in which humans to give greater weight to negative entities than to positive entities (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). The aim here is to explore if these processes exist within the emotional process of leadership.

There have been many experimental studies conducted on positive-negative asymmetries within the field of psychology (see Blanz, Mummendy, & Otten, 1997; Lewick, Czapinski, & Peeters, 1992; Peeters, 2002). Many of these have focused on positive and negative outcomes; for example, the outcomes resulting from inter-group and social discrimination (see Gardham & Brown, 2001; Blanz, et al., 1997; Crisp & Hewstone, 2001). Across these studies, strong empirical support has been found for the asymmetry effect, with Gardham and Brown going as far as asserting that they can "confirm the reality of the positive negative asymmetry effect" (p.31).

In examinations of asymmetry effects, researchers have used normative and cognitive accounts to explain the phenomenon. Blanz, et al. (1997) use normative explanations for explaining the asymmetry effect present in evaluations of outcome allocations. They suggest

that asymmetry effects are caused by factors related to appropriateness, what is expected, or what is socially acceptable. I acknowledge the value of such normative explanations for the valence asymmetry effects. Nonetheless, like Crisp and Hewstone (2001), I focus only on the *cognitive aspects*. To illustrate, in a study on the cognitive consequences of asymmetry, Crisp and Hewstone asked participants to recall specific information from previous positive and negative encounters (favorable and unfavorable newspaper stories). Following on from this, it is argued that asymmetry effects can best be examined in the workplace through a cognitive approach, via employee recall of positive and negative interactions with their leaders.

A common example of the asymmetry affect is that of the negativity bias, or the negative prominence effect. In terms of asymmetry, a positive bias also exists (the "Pollyanna Principle", see Rozin & Royzman, 2001, p.297); however for the purpose of parsimony, this study only focuses on the negativity bias – as this bias is of greater concern for leaders in the workplace. The main advocate of the negativity bias, Peeters, asserts that negative stimuli elicit more cognitive processing and attention than positive stimuli, and he has produced many demonstrations of this (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). As a result of the tendency to analyze for negative events more intensively than positive events, Peeters (1992) argues that negative events will bring about more prominent responses than positive events. More recently, in a follow-up study attempting to explain the negativity bias, Peeters (2002) found that negativity bias occurs when people focus on the avoidance or prevention of negative outcomes, rather than on the approach of positive outcomes.

While prior work in this area has mostly focused on the valence of outcomes (positive and negative outcomes), the asymmetry effect has also been linked to emotions and moods. For example, Clore, Schwarz, and Conway (1994) found that negative moods result in more

systematic processing. In a more recent study, Carretie, Mercado, Tapia, and Hinojosa (2001) examined the role of attention in relation to negativity bias, using an experimental design with emotional stimuli (positive and negative valence). Carretie and colleagues explored processes in the negativity bias by studying emotional response and attention-related event-related brain potentials activity. Findings from their experiment indicated that negative events did elicit, to a greater extent than positive ones, the mobilization of attentional resources of the brain. It was found that the attentional phases of the emotional response play an important role in the negativity bias. Therefore, following from these results, Carretie et al. suggest that brain activity during an emotional response is asymmetrical.

A second aim for this study is to explore cognitive responses to emotional stimuli. Specifically, in the context of leader-employee relationships, it is argued that, if given the choice to report on any kind of emotional interaction with their leaders, employees will be more likely to report on the negative interactions than the positive ones and would pay more attention to their description of the event. Thus,

Research Question 2: When employees recall emotional interactions with their leaders, are

negative incidents described in more detail (with greater accuracy) than positive

interactions? If so, to what extent?

Further, in a recent study of negative-based prominence, Willemsen and Keren (2002) found that choice led to enhanced sensitivity to negative features. Given the evidence of increased sensitivity, it is also argued that employees are likely to be more sensitive to the negative incidents they encounter with their leaders. Emotional experiences can vary according to not only valence (positive-negative), but also arousal (high-low activation) (Larsen & Diener, 1992). If employees are more sensitive to negative interactions, they will

experience higher arousal, or experience more intense negative emotions. Thus, due to increased sensitivity to negative features, another research question to be explored is:

Research Question 3: When employees recall negative interactions with their leaders, to what

extent will they describe the incident with greater intensity of emotion?

Finally, Rozin and Royzman (2001) discuss negativity bias or negativity dominance in detail, providing possible explanations for why such asymmetries occur. One argument they put forward is that, when it comes to emotions, there are a greater number of categories and response options for the negative side than the positive side. This is evidenced by the nature of "basic emotions" – there are more negative basic emotions than positive basic emotions (Izard, 1971). Literature on the asymmetry effect of emotions suggests that, when employees recall more negative interactions with their leaders, they will also use a greater number of negative emotions to describe them. Thus, the final question to be explored:

Research Question 4: When employees recall emotional interactions with their leaders, what

is the frequency of negative emotions words used to describe the incidents?

In summary, the aim of this research is to explore the affective process of leadership, and to determine if the asymmetrical effect of emotion is present in employee recollections of emotional interactions with their leaders in the workplace.

METHODS

Although qualitative leadership studies are relatively rare (Conger, 1998), such research is beginning to make inroads into the field of leadership (see Bryman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996; Beyer, 1999). In particular, qualitative research is the method of choice for topics as contextually rich as leadership (Conger, 1998). Given the nature of the research

questions to be explored, a qualitative approach is ideal given its ability to produce detailed descriptions of interactions and emotions as experienced by employees in response to the leaders' behaviors during these interactions.

The critical incident technique was employed as the primary method of data collection. This technique involves asking participants to recall a specific event and to explain the circumstances surrounding the incident. The critical incident technique, developed by Flanagan (1954), is especially useful when examining defined situations and situationally relevant aspects of managerial behavior (see also Boyatzis, 1998). Participants in this study were asked to describe workplace interactions with their leaders or employees during or after which they recall having a strong positive emotional reaction (a critical uplift) or a strong negative reaction (a critical hassle). Participants were not limited in their responses, they could recall both positive and negative incidents, as many times as they desired.

Participants

Participants included both leaders and employees, to represent both perspectives of their interactions. Parry (1998) suggests that a variety of perspectives increases validity of qualitative research. Patton (2002) suggests further that, to achieve external validity, sampling should include respondents from a variety of demographic backgrounds. Therefore, the sample included male and female informants; informants from private, government, and not-for-profit organizations; and informants from various levels in the organizational hierarchy. Alexandersson (1994; in Sandberg, 2000) advises a sample of at least 20 respondents is needed for maximum variation. Sample size was determined by theoretical saturation or information redundancy (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985), when few new data, concepts, or themes emerge. In the end, the sample comprised of individual interviews with 10 leaders (8

males, 2 females; ages ranging from 35 years to 61 years), and focus group interviews with 24 employees (12 males, 12 females; ages ranging from 19 years to 50 years).

Focus Groups

The use of focus groups allowed us to gain insights from groups of employees about their leader. Since employees interact daily in organizations, we believed that, by reflecting this reality in the data collection phase of the research, the information gathered would be more insightful. The focus groups consisted of homogeneous participants; all were employees of a particular work group and at the same level in the organization. This was to ensure participants felt secure enough to provide honest answers (as recommended by Kumar, Aaker, & Day, 1999), and to provide the benefit of past knowledge.

The focus groups consisted of four participants on average, described by Greenbaum (1998) as a 'mini' focus group. The main benefit associated with smaller groups is it that they allow more speaking time per participant, providing the opportunity for more in-depth discussion (Fern, 1982). We felt that this was critical to the research because we wanted detailed accounts of the hassles and uplifts as experience by the employees.

Validity of Data Collection

All interviews and focus groups were taped, and then the contents of the tapes were transcribed verbatim (to maximize validity of the data collection efforts). On average, the textual transcripts from the interviews were approximately 28 pages type-written single-spaced, while the focus groups resulted in approximately 38 pages type-written single-spaced. Field notes were also taken during the data collection process to capture additional information that would be missed in the transcriptions, such as volume and urgency of speech, indicating importance of behaviors and intensity of emotion. In addition, the field notes were

crosschecked with the participants following the interviews and focus groups to ensure their accuracy.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was used to quantify participants' statements into frequencies. A valid content analysis scheme depends on the ability to code all the data from the interviews, as well as the precision of the coding categories. Coding categories are precise if they are mutually exclusive, if they only allow for statements to fit one code. Given these aims, there is a tradeoff between obtaining rich complex information through a larger number of categories, and reliable simplicity through less coding categories (Larsson, 1993).

The content analysis scheme we used to code the interview data included the category label as well as definitions. Some of the categories were predetermined by the nature of the interview (Leader/Follower Perspective), and by the interview questions themselves (Negative/Positive Incident). Others were derived from the interview content (Leader Behavior categories and Emotions). An example of a category derived from the interviews is "Empowerment", defined as whether the employee participated in decision-making, if they felt empowered, and if leaders were seen to allow employees control over what they did.

First, statements were coded for Perspective (Leader/Follower) and then the nature of the incident (Positive/Negative). Next, the statements were coded for leader behavior, using the operational definitions decided by the researchers. Following this round of coding, statements were then re-coded to reflect to the emotional reactions of the participant. This involved using statements in the transcripts, field notes, and coders' judgments in order to link the leader behavior to specific emotional reactions. An example of coding for a leader behavior and the corresponding emotional response is: "my leader acknowledges individual

employees' efforts" (Leader Behavior); following a description of such an incident, the employee reported that she "felt happy and proud" (Emotional Response).

Data Analysis – Content Analysis of Transcripts

As the final step in the data reduction process, we used thematic analysis to analyze the focus group and individual interview transcripts. Do accomplish this, we employed QSR NUD*IST (Qualitative Solutions and Research, Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing), the leading computer software package for qualitative research. This software is a 'code and retrieve' system, allowing for multi-level coding of unstructured data. It assists in maintaining large data sets (Parry, 1998), and contributes to the maintenance of precision and rigor in data analysis (Richards & Richards, 1992).

The unit of analysis for the purpose of coding was a sentence. The average number of text units in the focus groups was 481 (range: 398-578), and for individual interviews the average was 342 text units (range: 111-664). While a number of sentences could make up an identifiable segment in a flow of conversation (with dominant content), sentences were chosen to reflect the importance and intensity of the leader behaviors and the resulting emotions. Thus, if an employee mentioned a particular leader behavior many times, we interpreted this to be indicative of the importance this behavior had for the employee. Similarly with emotional responses to leader behaviors, if an employee reported that they felt angry a number of times, we interpreted this to mean that the anger was more intensely experienced by the employee than had the employee only mentioned it once.

Following the assumptions of content analysis presented by Cohen (1960), first the transcripts were independently coded by the interviewer, aiming for mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. Following this, two research assistants (RA 1 and RA 2) of equal

intellectual capacity to the initial researcher, independently categorized the data guided only by the content analysis scheme. In addition, the guidance of the coding scheme, the raters were also able freely to assign coding units to any category and were given the option of creating a new category if required. Both assistants were blind to the research purpose, and conducted the coding separately. This is critical in establishing the integrity of the content analysis scheme (Larsson, 1993).

Reliability of Content Analysis

Three people independently coded the data, two of whom were blind to the theory behind the study. To determine the reliability of the coding, the inter-rater reliability was calculated based on a random representative sample of interview transcripts (5 individual interviews, 2 focus group interviews). The proportions of agreement were: between the Interviewer and RA 1, 0.69; between the Interviewer and RA 2, 0.72; and between two RA's, 0.66. According to Curral, et al. (1999), reliability at this level is acceptable. Nonetheless, coding decisions that were not agreed upon by all three coders were examined. In most cases there was not disagreement *per se* concerning the category, but simply the omission of a code by one of the two independent coders (omission rates were 22%, 14%, 13%). To counter this, the two independent coders were asked to re-examine their coding and add in any additional codes they may have missed initially. As a result, the new codes they added were almost identical to those identified by the interviewer, which they had missed previously. All three coders discussed any other coding disagreements, and the final codes were determined by 'consensus resolution' (see Larsson, 1993).

RESULTS

In general, findings from the individual interviews and the focus group interviews consistently supported the idea that effective leaders are managers of affective events, and that ineffective leaders are sources of employee hassles. When employees recalled incidents with their leaders, they recalled more negative incidents, and used more intense emotions to describe these negative incidents.

Focus group results suggest that employees react acutely to hassles they experience, leading to intense negative feelings. Employees see leaders who deal with these negative emotions, by regularly providing appropriate uplifts, even small things like an encouraging word, in a positive light. These perceptions, in turn, promote harmonious relationships that motivate employees to be productive. On the other hand, when leaders exacerbate hassles, or generate the hassles themselves, they are seen in a negative light. We now outline specific findings in relation to the research questions.

Leader Behavior as a Sources of Affective Events

As anticipated, it was found that leaders are on-going sources of employee hassles and uplifts in the workplace. Employees and leaders themselves see leadership as a source of affective events, with leader behaviors prompting either positive or negative emotional responses in employees. First, the positive emotions evoked by specific leader behaviors are discussed, followed by a discussion of the negative emotions evoked by leader behaviors. Table 1 below provides details of the frequencies for specific leader behaviors and the associated positive and negative emotional reactions to these behaviors.

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Insert Table 1 here

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Leader emotion-evoking behaviors – positive emotion

When reporting positive critical incidents (uplifts), employees indicated that they experienced small but regular positive interactions with their leaders, saying that it was "hard to pick one…just everyday kind of things" and, "there are examples of small positive incidents, twenty times a day". Positive incidents were mostly related to the leader showing awareness of employee concerns, and respect for all employees. Other leader behaviors prompting positive employee emotions were motivational and inspirational behaviors. Employees also felt positive about being empowered by their leaders, and by having effective communication with the leader.

The positive emotions experienced by employees ranged from "excitement" and "enthusiasm", to "comforted" and "calm". Generally, employees expressed positive emotions -- such as being comforted, calm, and satisfied -- when leaders behaved in a manner they expected them to; and when leaders displayed behaviors associated with effective leadership, such as transformational leadership (see Bass, 1998).

Employees reported high levels of respect and admiration for leaders who consistently provided small uplifts for them throughout the day, and often reported that such leaders were role models that they aspired to be like, and someone who other leaders should try to be like. The admiration felt by employees was often a result of the leader being motivational and inspirational through their behavior, for example by displaying expertise on the job and "leading by example".

As a result of these positive interactions, employees consistently reported they were motivated to work harder, were more likely to perform 'citizenship' behaviors. They also reported experiencing higher levels of job satisfaction and having more positive opinions of

their leader. Employees who reported many positive incidents with their leaders tended to have a much more favorable opinion of their leaders than those who reported only a few positive incidents. The positive incidents were often small things, such as simply saying "thank you" for completing a task. Most interestingly, leaders who frequently initiated small uplifting experiences for their employees were regarded as the best leaders in the organization, even though specific uplifts were small in comparison to other positive events experienced by employees.

Leader emotion-evoking behaviors – negative emotion

Although negative incidents were not a daily occurrence according to employees, the experience of negative incidents aroused intense emotions such as anger and frustration. The most common negative incidents revolved around cases of ineffective or inappropriate communication by the leaders. In some cases, employees felt annoyed they had not been made aware of important issues; in other cases, employees were spoken to in a rude manner, leading to anger toward the leader. Specific examples of communication leading to negative emotional responses in employees are, "when he yelled at me I was terrified …", "after being so arrogant toward me … I was just enraged", etc.

Other negative incidents were related to lack of awareness, respect, support, and acknowledgement. In the cases of lack of support, employees felt "betrayed", "disappointed", "like a disgruntled postal employee". In the case of poor acknowledgement, employees felt "frustrated", "annoyed", and "under-appreciated". Lack of empowerment was also an issue. When leaders were too controlling, or employees felt they were forced to perform work activities, the employees became annoyed and frustrated. Basically, when leaders did not

perform the behaviors they were expected to, or when they performed the behaviors inappropriately, employees experienced negative emotions in response.

As a result of these negative interactions, employees reported they lost respect for their leaders, their work environment had decayed and, in extreme cases, employees had left their position to escape their leader. A small number of employees reported frequent hassles prompted by their leaders. These employees expressed the lowest levels of commitment to the organization and the lowest levels of respect for their leaders. Often, those employees who had worked in these unhealthy situations for a long time developed strong negative feelings to wards their leaders, even hatred. Some even reported a desire to sabotage projects so that the leader would have to take the blame from a higher level. Frequent hassles prompted by leaders appeared to promote the development of loathing and a desire for revenge. The findings indicate that leaders who regularly promote hassles for employees, for example by scolding them in public, are not effective.

As illustrated in Table 1, leader behaviors prompt both positive and negative employee emotions. In response to Research Question 1, therefore, it was found that leaders as elements in the employees' environment do in fact promote affective events for their employees through their workplace behaviors.

The Nature of Employee Accounts of Emotions - Asymmetry

The findings also indicate that the frequency of these positive and negative affective events is important. Consistently, and as anticipated, employees spoke more frequently about negative interactions they had had with their leaders. Employees themselves indicated that a negativity bias exists. One employee summed it up by saying, "you never really remember the good experiences, but boy, you can remember the bad ones!" Another employee explains,

"you remember the bad incidents because they are really burnt into your mind". Others reported, "you don't tend to remember the positive ones…but the negative ones are easy to pick up", and "negative ones stay in your mind longer than the positives …without a doubt".

In comparing the frequency of negative incidents and positive incidents (see Table 2), there were significantly more negative incidents, 742 counts, than positive incidents, 664 counts (χ^2 = 6.566, p = .038). This indicates that employees do recall slightly more negative events than positive events. This finding does provide information relating to Research Question 2, however, the accuracy of these reports is not definite due to concerns of interview impression management (potential positive bias in the case of interviews with leaders). Thus, the negativity bias may actually be underrepresented in this particular study.

Insert Table 2 here

Research Question 3 concerned the intensity of the emotional response of employees to leader behaviors. The intensity of the emotional response was determined by the arousal or level of activation associated with each emotion. We utilized Larsen and Diener's (1992) Circumplex Model to represent the level of emotional arousal. Using this model as a guide, levels of intensity were allocated to each emotional response recalled by employees. From Table 2, it is clear that the majority of positive emotional responses fall within the low-medium arousal categories (90%). On the other hand, the negative emotional responses fall most often within the high arousal category (80%). Clearly, negative emotions experienced by employees in response to leader behaviors involved higher activation in terms of arousal.

Research Question 4 concerned the asymmetry effect of emotional recall. This was assessed based on the number of different words employees used to describe their emotional

response to leadership behaviors. It was found that employees did report more negative emotions words (11 words) than positive emotions words (7 words), and this finding was consistent across all employees' responses.

In terms of intensity of negative emotional responses, employees had vivid memories of them despite some incidents occurring a long time ago. Despite this, employees often had positive opinions of their leader. Probing of these employees revealed that this was because regular positive incidents or uplifts provided by the leader since the negative incident cancelled out the effects of the hassle over time.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the findings support the idea that leaders are managers of affective events. Findings show that employees react acutely to hassles they experience, leading to negative feelings. Employees do recall more negative incidents, and they describe these incidents with greater intensity. Given the negativity bias in employee recollection of emotional interactions with their leaders, leaders must attempt to manage these incidents with care. Employees see leaders who deal with their negative emotions, by providing appropriate uplifts, in a positive light. These perceptions, in turn, promote harmonious relationships that motivate employees to be productive. On the other hand, when leaders exacerbate hassles, or generate the hassles themselves, they are seen in a negative light.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research makes several contributions in terms of theoretical development and practical applications. The major theoretical contribution of this study is the linking of affective events theory and the asymmetry effect of emotions. This has not been addressed

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previously, nor have the two theories been applied to the context of the emotional process of leadership. Leadership research has traditionally focused on cognitive and behavioral aspects of leader behavior; however, recent advances in leadership research have begun to examine emotional aspects also. Affective events theory and the asymmetry effects of emotions provide two theoretical lenses through with we can learn more about the emotional process of leadership. It is hoped that the promising exploratory findings presented her using these lenses will promote more research of this nature so more can be learnt about the complex emotional processes that exist in the workplace.

A further area of theoretical development is within the domain of transformational leadership. The findings suggest that, to evoke positive emotional responses in employees, leaders must display behaviors associated with transformational leadership. Transformational leaders charismatically inspire their followers to achieve a vision, such that the followers feel highly motivated and strongly connected to the leader (Bass, 1998; Conger & Kanungo, 1998). The elements of transformational leadership are individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and charisma or idealized influence (see Bass, 1998). The findings show support for each of these transformational leadership behaviors being affective events, which bring about positive employee responses.

This research also informs the leader-member-exchange (LMX) field. Prior research on LMX quality has found that high leader-member relationship quality is related to increased job performance, satisfaction with supervision, overall satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions (see Gerstner & Day, 1997). In this research, it was found that these outcomes are related to emotional responses of employees to specific leader behaviors within leader-

member interactions. Thus, future LMX research should consider specific interactions between leaders and members, as well as emotional responses following these interactions.

The research also contributes to theoretical development by incorporating emotional intelligence into affective events theory. This is essential for the development of emotional intelligence as a valid theoretical construct. Emotional intelligence, despite early reservations, continues to be a popular topic in management, evidenced by escalating book sales and article publications. More recently, scholars have begun to take serious academic interest in emotional intelligence. Progress has been made in the measurement of emotional intelligence (see Caruso, et al., 2001), and researchers are now investigating relationships between emotional intelligence and other variables such as leadership.

Given that our research was conducted in organizations with real leaders and employees, we feel that our findings also point to some important practical applications regarding positive leader behaviors and leader emotional intelligence.

To promote positive employee feelings and behaviors, leaders should acknowledge individual efforts and achievements wherever they can. Successful leaders instill knowledge and develop a sense of appreciation for work within the organization (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000). Through individual consideration for each employee, leaders develop a sense of gratitude for the work their employees do, which adds to the sense of each one feeling special and instills a sense of trust in the leader (George, 2000). Employees feel they are valued, which in turn motivates them to perform at their optimum level for the leader and the organization. Praising employees for a job well done can lift the spirits of not only the individual receiving the reward, but also of other employees looking on through emotional

contagion. Through leaders evoking such emotional responses from employees, the organization should benefit from increased organizational commitment.

Yukl (2002) has noted that leaders can inspire and encourage their employees to be creative, pushing them beyond their comfort zones to solve problems. Our findings suggest that effective leaders do empower their employees, enabling them to use their skills and abilities to their full potential. When employees are empowered they feel inspired, motivated, and excited about new possibilities. Our results indicate that leaders can deliberately arouse each of these emotional states in their employees to assist in achieving organizational goals.

Based on our observations, we recommend that leaders must be able to manage their employees' emotions if they are to be able to achieve organizational goals. In this regard, leaders need to display behaviors associated with emotional intelligence. For those leaders who do not behave this way naturally, training in this area may be highly beneficial. As suggested by Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel, and Hooper (2002), specific training that addresses particular emotional abilities may be beneficial for the leader and the organization. In their research, Jordan and his colleagues found that team emotional intelligence could be developed over time. Further, Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2000) showed how adults have higher levels of emotional intelligence than adolescents. Given that emotional intelligence can increase with age, over time, and with experience, we predict that specific emotional intelligence training can provide leaders with increased emotional skills such as the ability to understand and to manage the emotional responses of employees.

Future Research Opportunities

In the process of the initial data analysis, we uncovered interesting findings outside the scope of this particular project, which may also prove fruitful in future research efforts. First,

we found some initial support for the contagion of negative emotions (see Barsade, in press). Rozin and Royzman (2001) suggest that negative entities are more contagious than positive entities. We found that negative emotions did spread among employees, and as they did so they became more intense. For example, an employee was aware of a department experiencing constant bickering between a leader and another employee. When the employee was reporting it, he spoke about it with great passion, saying, "The tension is phenomenal". The employee said it was "disgusting" and that such disputes made him "angry". Given that this employee was not directly involved with the department concerned, it was interesting to see the level of emotional attachment he had to the incidents. Research could be conducted to determine the impact of emotional contagion on the level of emotional arousal.

Future research should also examine how emotional intelligence of employees influences their relationship with their leader. In the initial coding, in a sub-sample it was found that 20% of lines referred to employee emotional control and emotional awareness. In this study, evidence was found for employee emotional intelligence behaviors, such as "not taking what the leader says personally", and being aware that the leader will have "good days and bad days". Further, 7% of lines provided evidence of employee using their emotional reactions to learn from experiences, for example "you get the sh*#*! (you get really mad), but you learn from it". More data should be collected to explore how employees learn from negative affective events in the workplace.

Limitations

This research was qualitative, and is therefore subject to some important limitations that must be acknowledged. In the first instance, qualitative research does not allow definitive testing of theory. In addition, interpretation of qualitative data is subjective, so the biases of

the researchers can intrude. To overcome this potential weakness, attempts were made in this study to maximize the reliability and validity of the findings in the data collection and data analysis phases of the research.

Further, focus group interviews and individual interviews are social situations. Often, in interviews the interviewees feel they must comply with social norms, resulting in positive bias of results (Alvesson, 1996). As Conger (1998) has discussed, the study of leadership is highly prone to presentational data. Often when asked about their leaders, employees will answer in a socially desirable manner to protect themselves. On the other hand, when leaders themselves are asked about their own behaviors, they often attempt to enhance their own image, using various forms of impression management (Conger, 1998). Taking this into account, perhaps our findings of a slight negativity bias are actually underrepresented. Despite this potential misrepresentation, overall, the findings presented here provide a useful exploratory glimpse of the role of leaders as managers of affective events, and provide a springboard for future more rigorous qualitative theory testing.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to shed light on why emotions are so important in the process of leadership, what happens, and how leaders can use this knowledge to improve their leadership behaviors. The specific intention was to focus on how leader behavior evokes emotional responses in employees, bringing about particular consequences in terms of employee cognition and subsequent employee behaviors and perceptions of their leaders. The discovery of support for affective events theory and the asymmetry effect of emotions, suggests that the management of emotions is a crucial skill practiced by effective leaders. Such leaders will use emotionally intelligent behaviors to harness the moods and emotions of

employees. As a result, they will attract the admiration of employees, and ultimately promote achievement of organizational goals through supplying constant positive emotional uplifts for employees.

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Table 1: Leader Emotion-Evoking Behaviors

Leader Behavior	Rank	Frequency	Emotions Evoked
Awareness and Respect	1 (+)	138	Happy/Pleased, Comforted/Calm/Relaxed
	2 (-)	132	Annoyed/Anger, Loathing, Frustration
Motivation and Inspiration	2 (+)	108	Excitement/Enthusiasm, Happy/Pleased, Admiration
	6 (-)	33	Annoyed, Frustration
Empowerment	3 (+)	90	Happy/Pleased, Enthusiasm, Comforted
	3 (-)	100	Annoyed/Anger, Frustration, Loathing
Communication	4 (+)	89	Happy/Pleased, Comforted/Calm/Relaxed
	1 (-)	247	Annoyed/Anger, Frustration, Disappointed, Loathing,
Reward and Recognition	5 (+)	54	Happy/ Pleased
	5 (-)	68	Anxious/Distressed, Annoyed/Anger
Accountability	6 (+)	52	Comforted/Calm/Relaxed
	4 (-)	71	Annoyed, Disappointed

Table 2: Intensity of Recalled Employee Emotions

Rank	Emotion – Valence	Arousal - Intensity	Frequency (lines)
	POSITIVE (47%)		
1	Happy/Pleased	Medium	271
2	Comforted/Calm	Low	243
3	Admiration	Medium	79
4	Excited/Enthusiastic	High	71
	NEGATIVE (53%)		
1	Annoyed/Angry	High	263
2	Frustration	High	148
3	Disappointment	Low	120
4	Loathing	High	98
5	Anxious/Distressed	High	51
6	Fear/Apprehension	High	31
7	Dejected/Fatigued	Low	31