

11. Organisational Behaviour  
Competitive Session

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**An Integrated Model of Interactional Justice, Emotions and Proactive  
Work Behaviour**

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## 11. Organisational Behaviour Competitive Session

### **An Integrated Model of Interactional Justice, Emotions and Proactive Work Behaviour**

#### **ABSTRACT**

*Proactive work behaviour in organisations has increasingly become important for practitioners and researchers in recent years. Past research in this field has mostly focused on understanding proactive work behaviour through different dispositional and situational factors in isolation. Although, research has considered the role of affect in proactive work behaviour the role of emotions and its impact on proactive work behaviour is yet to be explored. We develop an integrated model of proactive work behaviour using Affective Events Theory (AET) as an underpinning theoretical framework to propose the role of interactional justice and negative emotions on proactive work behaviour in organisations. We also propose self-monitoring as a moderator. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.*

Keywords: Emotions, Attitudes, Proactive work behaviour

## AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF INTERACTIONAL JUSTICE, EMOTIONS AND PROACTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR

The concept of proactive work behaviour has recently gained popularity amongst researchers (Belschak, Hartog, & Fay, 2010; Bindl, Parker, Totterdell, & Hagger-Johnson, 2012; Spychala & Sonnentag, 2011; Wu & Parker, 2013). Modern organisations are seeking employees who don't wait to be told what needs to be done, and want employees to be proactive in taking personal initiative in doing their work (Frese & Fay, 2001; Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996; Grant & Ashford, 2008). The concept of proactivity has been identified to have three key attributes of self-starting, change oriented and future focused (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). According to Hall and Chandler (2005), career researchers argue that in current-day careers, individuals rely less on their organisation telling them what to do and instead take initiative themselves when it comes to their personal and career development. Hence, considering the importance of having a proactive employee in today's work environment, it has become critically important to understand what makes employees proactive.

Researchers have identified various dispositional and situational factors to explain proactivity (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006; Wu & Parker, 2013). For example, research suggests that proactive work behaviour can be predicted by certain dispositional characteristics such as proactive personality (Crant, 2000), and by situational features such as job autonomy, and transformational leadership (Wu, Parker, & Bindl, 2013). Moreover, research recently suggested that proactive work behaviour is driven by motivational states of "can do" (whether individuals are capable of being proactive), "reason to" (whether they have some sense that they want to bring about a different future) and "energized to" (whether they experience positive affect that fosters their proactive actions) pathways (Parker et al., 2010). To date, research has mainly studied proactive behaviour's dispositional characteristics and situational features in isolation. While current research shows that situational features and dispositional characteristics will drive proactive work behaviour, we propose a central role of emotions in this process. Our aim in this paper, therefore, is to present a model that shows the central role of emotions in developing proactive work behaviours for employees. In particular, we focus on the role of negative emotions in this process as employees experiences of

negative emotions at work is far greater than their experience of positive emotions (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002).

We propose an integrated model of proactive work behaviour, which is underpinned by Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). We propose that when an affective event takes place, it will cause emotional arousal in employees which then depending on the personality of employee will affect their proactive work behaviour. We argue that proactive work behaviour will depend on employee's perceptions of interactional justice. This in turn determines how employees emotionally react to that situation. We also argue the dispositional characteristic of self-monitoring will moderate the relationship between a negative emotional reaction and the employees potential to enact proactive work behaviour. Next, we develop our theoretical model and propositions.

### **THEORETICAL MODEL AND PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT**

We outline our theoretical model in Figure 1. The independent variable in our model is the employees' perceptions of interactional justice or specifically in this case injustice. We posit that an experience of interactional injustice triggers negative emotions (e.g., anger or frustration or sadness). While there is research to suggest that such an emotional reaction may lead to withdrawal (Scott & Christopher, 2011), for a number of employees, we argue that for some employees the experience of negative emotions may result in the employee displaying proactive work behaviour (e.g., whistleblowing in reaction to a significant injustice). We further propose that the relationship between negative emotions and proactive work behaviour will be moderated by self-monitoring. The justification for these proposed relationships is presented below.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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In developing this model we drew upon two major theories. The first is Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and the second is Justice Theory (Bies & Moag, 1986). Affective Events Theory (AET) proposes that organisational events are proximal causes of affective reactions. Weiss and Cropanzano (1996:11) argue that "things happen to people in work settings and people often react emotionally to these events. These affective experiences have direct influences on

behaviors and attitudes". In our model the affective event is a perception of injustice. Organisational justice is composed of three dimensions: distributive justice (J.S Adams, 1965), which describes the perceived equity in rewards and contributions between oneself and others; procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), which is an evaluation of the fairness of the criteria applied during the decision-making process; and interactional justice, which is the perception of equity in the relationships between superiors and employees (R. J Bies & Moag, 1986). Research shows that perceptions of justice influences behaviour in organizations (Greenberg, 1996). On this basis, we believe that AET and Justice theory are appropriate theoretical frameworks to underpin our model.

### **INTERACTIONAL JUSTICE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS**

The term organisational justice refers to perceptions of fairness and evaluations concerning the appropriateness of workplace outcomes as processes (Le Roy, Bastounis, & Poussard, 2012; van den Bos, Vermunt, & Henk, 1997). In our model we specifically focus on interactional justice. Greenberg (1993a) conceptualises interactional justice using two dimensions: informational justice and interpersonal injustice. Informational justice refers to the accuracy and quality of received information, whereas interpersonal justice describes the quality of interpersonal interactions (e.g. dignity and respect, truthfulness and propriety), particularly those between hierarchical superiors and their subordinates (Le Roy et al., 2012). In other words, it refers to the quality of treatment experienced by individuals in their interactions with supervisors in their organisation, with an emphasis on those supervisors making decisions (R. J Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Kilduff & Day, 1994). When supervisors make decisions offering adequate justification, with truthfulness, respect and propriety, and when the information is timely, reasonable, and specific, interactional justice is said to be present (R. J Bies & Moag, 1986; Kilduff & Day, 1994; Scott & Christopher, 2011).

We believe that interactional justice plays a major role in determining the proactive behaviour of an employee. Employees react to the way they perceive they are being treated (Moorman, 1991). Interactional justice is defined as the degree to which people are treated with dignity and respect when decisions are made (R. J. Bies, 2001). In our model, we argue that violations of interactional justice may be the trigger that creates negative emotion. This may be best shown through a practical

example. For instance, during an organizational change process an employee may have ideas for improving the current circumstances at workplace, which are related to safety of the workers in a factory. The employee approaches the manager to explain the ideas for improving the safety of the workers in the factory. At this stage, the boss does not fully consider the employees concern and says that he/she will think about it later. Even after repeated attempts to convince the boss of the importance of incorporating this idea into the change program, the change process is implemented without the employee's suggestion and with no communication explaining why their idea was not used. Suddenly, one day an avoidable accident happens in the factory and one of the workers is severely injured. In response the manager blames the worker and blames the employee who initially expressed these safety concerns. This incident is highly likely to trigger negative emotions (e.g., anger) in the employee that gave safety recommendations to the manager. Drawing on their anger the employee may decide to become proactive to resolve the situation and blow the whistle on the manager and report them for being negligent in the change process. The lack of interactional injustice during the change process resulted in an avoidable accident and the triggered negative emotions in this case (anger) resulted in proactive behaviour (seeking redress for an avoidable accident).

In our model we specifically focus on the negative emotions of anger and sadness. There is clear evidence to show that anger emerges from perceptions of injustice (see Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012). On this basis, it is likely that the experience of injustice will lead to the experience of anger (Harlos & Pinder, 2000). There is however another path that could emerge in terms of negative emotions, that of sadness. Sadness is an emotion that emerges as a result of a perceived loss. There would be circumstances in which a perceived interactional justice violation could result in feelings of loss and sadness (Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998). Therefore, we believe that when employees perceive that the interactional justice is not fair, it is likely to result in negative emotions. Hence we propose:

***Proposition 1:*** *Employees who experience perceived interactional injustice at workplace are likely to experience negative emotions in response to those emotions.*

## NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND PROACTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR

Research on emotions in organisations has gained increased attention in recent decades (Elfenbein, 2007). People's work affects their emotions, thoughts, feelings, and actions in the workplace as these variables are an integral part of human behaviour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Brief & Weiss, 2002). For a long time organisational researchers ignored the topic of emotions in the workplace, perhaps because emotions were viewed as antithesis of the orderliness and rationality of organisations (Richard, 2006). Emotions were thought of as irrational, unstable, and biased influences on workplace decision making. As a result they were ignored by managers who wanted employees to be objective and stable (Arvey, Renz, & Watson, 1998; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Recently, however, researchers have begun to realise that even objectivity and stability emerge from emotional states and on this basis emotions should not be excluded from research into organisational phenomena. Indeed Damasio (1998) argues that emotion is an essential element in decision making and that without emotions we cannot make decisions. To make this argument Damasio (1998) draws on the example of Phineas Gage who following an industrial accident in which the emotional part of this brain was damaged, was able to reason quite well but was unable to make a decision. Based on this view of emotion, it has been acknowledged that emotions can be used in ways that contribute beneficially to organisations (Arvey et al., 1998). As a result, researchers found new merit in the study of emotions in organisations. Although research on emotions in organisations is on the rise, the link of emotions with proactivity is yet to be established.

To now, researchers have tried to simplify research into emotions by focusing on positive or negative emotions. Recently, researchers have encouraged others to investigate discrete emotions, as discrete emotions allow greater insights into workplace phenomenon (Gooty, Gavin, & Ashkanasy, 2009). Lindebaum and Jordan (2012) note that a dominant research paradigm has emerged suggesting that positive emotions are likely to give positive outcomes and negative emotions are likely to give negative outcomes. In response, Lindebaum and Jordan (2012) have encouraged researchers to look beyond the simple symmetrical outcomes of positive and negative emotions and think about looking at asymmetrical relationships of emotions and outcomes (positive emotions leading to negative outcomes and negative emotions leading to positive outcomes). Taking up both lines of argument we examine

discrete negative emotions of anger and sadness and we believe that negative emotional experiences can result in proactive work behaviours.

In developing this argument we draw on practical real life example. To redress this situation, these employees have engaged in proactive behaviours such as whistle blowing. Organisational justice theory has been proposed as one of the best theoretical frameworks for explaining the process of whistleblowing (Siddhartha & Kesharwani, 2010). For instance, there are situations where interactional injustices have resulted in anger in employees. Further, Haidt (2003) found that anger can motivate behaviour and often encourages individuals to retaliate against an offender or redress injustice, as suggested by equity theory (Adams, 1963).

For example, how the present research sheds light on the whistle-blowing incident involving the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In brief, the FBI did not view its handling of information related to the terrorist attacks as indicative of controllable and stable organizational behavior (Ripley & Sieger, 2003). One of the employees brought this to the attention of FBI but was ignored. That employee of the FBI perceived that this information was mishandled and that this behavior was due to controllable and stable causes. Consequently, she viewed the FBI as responsible for this mishandling and was angry enough to blow the whistle (Ripley and Sieger, 2003).

Therefore based on the evidence presented in this section, we propose:

***Proposition 2:** Employees who experience negative emotions may react by engaging in proactive work behaviours.*

## **MODERATING ROLE OF SELF-MONITORING BETWEEN NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND PROACTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR**

The idea that stable differences in human personality can systematically influence individuals' reactions to the workplace has a long history in organisational studies (Mehra & Schenkel, 2008). Although the relevance of personality variables for predicting work-related outcomes was once suspect, there is now abundant evidence for the robustness of many personality characteristics in understanding work related outcomes (Day & Schleicher, 2006). In recent years, one personality



variable in particular has received significant attention from organisational researchers is self-monitoring (Leone & Hawkins, 2006).

Self-monitoring theory has been offered as a theory of expressive control, specifically, as a construct that is useful for understanding and measuring the extent to which individuals strategically cultivate public appearances (Day & Schleicher, 2006; Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). High self-monitors tend to be social pragmatists who are chameleon-like in adjusting the public expression of their attitudes and behaviour to fit with the expectations of others. They are also likely to construct and project images with the goal of impressing others (Day & Schleicher, 2006; Snyder, 1974).

Conversely, low self-monitors are likely to attempt actively to convey to others that they present no false images. Low self-monitors appear to be both less willing and less able to project impressions that are different from their privately experienced self. Gangestad and Snyder (2000) further suggested that low self-monitors also care about their impression, but only to the extent that impression is a genuine reflection of self.

We believe that when high self-monitors are facing negative emotions, instead of reacting negatively, they will evaluate the situation to make sure they don't hurt their chances of growth in the organisation. As high self-monitors have been positively related to a number of important workplace outcomes, such as promotions (Kilduff & Day, 1994), and leadership emergence (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001), we think that high self-monitors will manage their negative emotions better and work more proactively so that their image is enhanced. On the other hand, as low self-monitors are less attuned to the requirements of different situations than to their own self-beliefs and values (Mehra & Schenkel, 2008), when faced with negative emotions, we believe that they are more likely to behave genuinely and be relatively rigid in their reactions to those negative emotions. On this basis they are less likely to engage in any proactive work behaviour. Therefore we propose:

***Proposition 3:*** *High self-monitors will moderate the relationship between negative emotions and proactive work behaviour, such that the relationship is stronger for employees with high self-monitoring and negative emotions than for those employees who are low self-monitors.*

#### **SCOPE OF THE MODEL**

It needs to be acknowledged that there could be numerous other factors that may influence proactive work behaviour in workplace. Other variables, which may impact proactive work behaviour, could be leadership styles, other types of organisational justice etc. Although the model presented here is not all encompassing, it does attempt to explore further the reasons that can influence the proactive work behaviour of employees.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Implications For Theory And Research**

Our model makes a number of contributions to the literature on proactive work behaviour. First, we develop a model that explores how interactional justice can influence proactive work behaviour, mediated by negative emotions. By focusing on the relationship between interactional justice and negative emotions and proactive work behavior we have shown how negative emotional experiences can lead to positive outcomes. We have also shown how the individual difference of self-monitoring can act as a buffer in controlling negative emotions to give an outcome of proactive work behavior. We believe this extended current thinking in the area.

Second, the proposed model contributes to the literature on emotions at work by providing an example of how Affective Events theory (AET) as an underlying theory can be linked to behaviours that emerge from perceptions of justice. In this respect, researchers have seldom considered the use of AET in the proactive work behaviour literature.

### **Implications For Practice**

Besides the theoretical contributions, we believe that the proposed of proactive work behaviour, interactional justice and emotions has practical implications. The model builds upon the premise that interactional justice and negative emotions can have a profound impact on the proactive work behaviour of an employee. We suggest that managers should pay attention to understand how an employee perceives about the interactions that take place within the organisation by engaging in open communication with employees.

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**Figure 1: A Model of emotional reactions and proactive work behaviour**

