

How to influence people's feelings

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Why do feelings matter in the workplace?

From May's tears to angry Trump, is modern politics too emotional?

HOW TO BE LESS EMOTIONAL AND MORE PRODUCTIVE
AT WORK

4 Ways Your Emotions Can Screw Up Your Decisions Your emotions can easily cloud your judgment. 

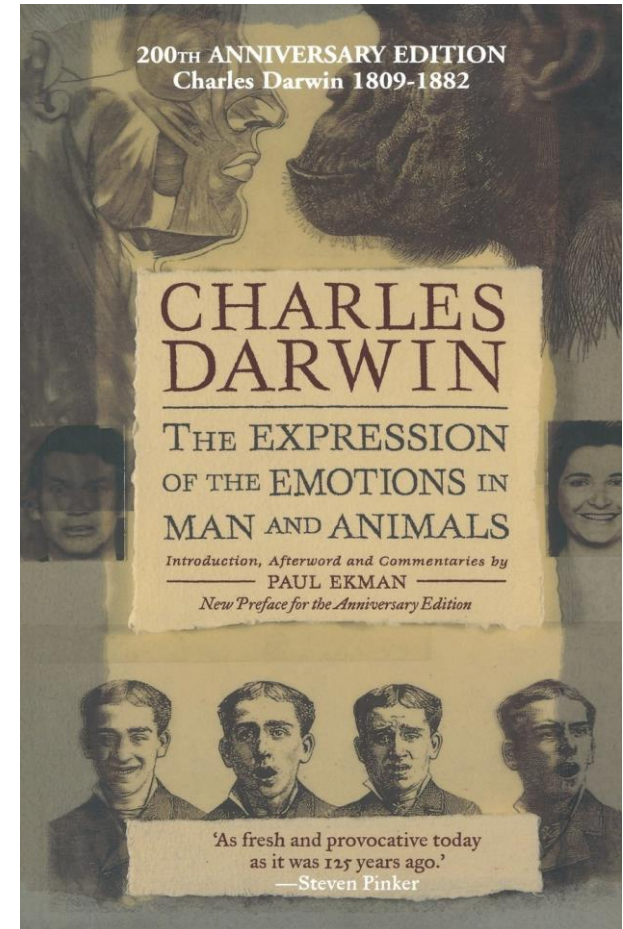
The Damage From Leaders Who Are Driven By Emotion

Why do feelings matter in the workplace?

Starting with Darwin, researchers argue that emotions are not *irrational*

They are central to achieving most work-related goals

- Emotions shape our **well-being**
- They can facilitate our **performance**
- Emotions characterise and affect the development of our **relationships**



Interpersonal emotion regulation



If emotions are central to achieving work goals, how can we influence them???

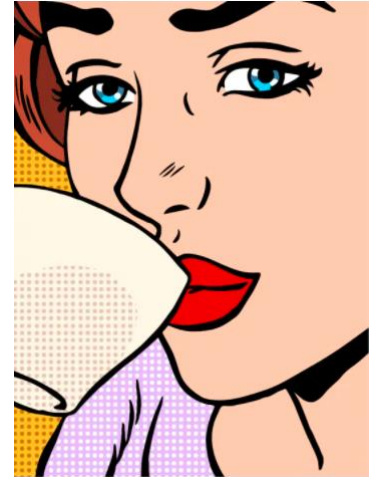
‘Interpersonal emotion regulation’, is the **process of strategically shaping others’ feelings**

Research programme seeking to:

- Explore relevance to everyday organisational life
- Identify the distinctive behaviours people use to shape others’ feelings
- Map out the effects of influencing others’ feelings

How *can* we influence others' feelings?

Dear Karen, my colleague feels anxious and stressed over his high workload. What can I do to help?



- Offer to take on some of his work for him
- Joke with him to distract him from his work
- Reframe the workload as a good opportunity to get noticed by management
- Empathise with him and listen to his concerns
- Tell him to stop worrying and calm down

Problem-focused approach

Cognitive approaches
(diversion and reframing)

Socio-affective approach

Response-focused approach

How *can* we influence others' feelings?

**Problem-focused
approaches**

**Socio-affective
approaches**

Cognitive approaches:

- Diverting
- Reframing

**Response-focused
approaches**

How *should* we influence others' feelings?

If your priority is to make a short-term change in someone's feelings, like in a service encounter

Problem-focused approaches

Socio-affective approaches

Cognitive approaches:

- **Diverting**
- **Reframing**

Response-focused approaches

Example: Call centre

- Fixing callers' problems or changing how they thought about them helped to reduce negative emotions
- Trying to distract callers or telling them to 'calm down' exacerbated their bad mood



How *should* we influence others' feelings? – Getting the best from others

If your priority is to make a longer-term change to others' performance, like when leading teams

Problem-focused approaches

Socio-affective approaches

Cognitive approaches:

- **Diverting**
- **Reframing**

Response-focused approaches

Example: Sales teams

- Sales reps generated higher sales when their leaders tried to tackle or reframe their problems
- They underperformed when their leaders dealt with problems by telling them to 'cheer up' and 'don't worry'



How *should* we influence others' feelings? – What about bonding?

If your priority is to form or strengthen work relationships, like when joining a new organisation or working in a low trust context

Problem-focused approaches

Socio-affective approaches

Cognitive approaches:

- Diverting
- Reframing

Response-focused approaches

Example: High-security prison

- Trust and friendship increased over time when people in the prison tried to improve each other's feelings
- Effects observed even when staff members were influencing inmates and vice versa



How *should* we influence others' feelings? – What about bonding?

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Problem-focused approaches

Socio-affective approaches

Cognitive approaches:

- Diverting
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Response-focused approaches

Example: Social media popularity

- The number of tweets containing terms relating to care, validation, empathy predicts an increase in follower numbers
- The number of tweets with terms about reappraisal, reframing predicts a decrease





First Year at MIT
@FYEatMIT

You're almost done and you're doing great [#finalsweek](#)
[#YouGotThis](#)



IT'S OK TO FEEL
STRESSED. TAKE A
BREATH. YOU'VE GOT
THIS. YOU CAN DO IT.

EMM ROY



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EXAMS
AREN'T
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EMM ROY



How *should* we influence others' feelings? – It's not just about behaviour

The reason *why* we try to influence others' feelings shapes the effectiveness of our efforts

To benefit the person whose feelings you are trying to influence ('prosocial motives')

To benefit yourself ('egoistic motives')

Example: 'Marketing' company

- Leaders' attempts to improve feelings had positive outcomes compared with attempts to worsen feelings
- Benefits were only evident when the leader appeared to be acting in employees' interests



(e.g., Niven, 2016; Niven, Henkel, & Hanratty, 2018; Niven, Troth, & Holman, 2019)

How *should* we influence others' feelings? – What about ME?

Trying to influence others' feelings can be effortful, especially when it's part of your core job role

If we influence others effectively, we receive positive feedback which is energising and can result in benefits

Example: School teachers

- Trying to improve students' feelings enhanced teacher well-being and performance, via positive feedback from students
- Well-being benefits were even felt the next morning at home



Warning! If we fail to receive positive feedback, the experience of regulation can be draining

Summary

Most effective behaviours will involve

- Helping people to tackle their problems
- Casting problems in a different light
- Validating and empathising with people

Avoid behaviours that involve

- Distracting people from the problem
- Telling people to cheer up, don't worry about it

Coming across as **authentically** acting in others' interests is important

Trying to make others feel worse typically has negative consequences
but sometimes negative emotions are necessary and functional

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