Communicating emotion at work, by V. R. Waldron

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Communicating emotion at work, by V. R. Waldron

Abstract
Manage by numbers. This mantra and business philosophy is challenged by Waldron's Communicating Emotion at Work. This text argues that the expression of emotion pervades organizational life, yet is often trumped by the emphasis on financial and other numerical data used for managerial decision making. Waldron emphasizes the expression of emotion rather than the source or appropriateness of any given emotion. Thus, the text situates communication in the foreground of the realm of emotion and organizational life. Waldron's compilation collects information about emotional communication in organizational settings for a primarily undergraduate student audience. The author relies on empirical research examined over his career, anecdotes from students, and the research and writings of other qualified scholars. Waldron is highly qualified to author this book because of his research and his careful selection of support from other sources. These sources of information intersect in this book to present a current, thoughtful collection of issues attached to the communication of emotion at work.

Disciplines
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Comments
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Summary

The six chapters of the text segment emotion at work into descriptive, functional, relational, moral, and visionary topics. The first two chapters of the book are descriptive and introduce readers to concepts that are central to understanding and discussing emotional communication at work. The third chapter identifies key emotional functions germane to specific occupations. Some occupations, by their very nature, require tremendous emotional expression to complete job tasks. The emotional expressions in this book are personified as emotional believers, prescribers, elicitors, meaning makers, resilience builders, orchestrators, coolers and soothers, and moral emoters. The fourth chapter takes on a relational tone by exploring workplace relationships and the emotions expressed at work to build, maintain, and manage these relationships. The author considers prevalent emotions unique to supervisor-subordinate and co-worker relationships. Then, emotional displays in any type of workplace relationship are introduced to emphasize the relational and communicative displays and de-emphasize the relationship context itself. Examples of these emotional displays include provoking, detecting, maintaining, intensifying, forgiving, and soothing, among others. The fifth chapter extends
emotion into ethical and moral situations by considering emotions attached to moral and ethical situations at work and the ways in which these emotions are expressed. The author considers both positive and negative situations and the emotions attached to either. The last chapter of the book suggests a vision for the future of research and practice. Some of the trends noted by the author include emotional connection and expression in workplaces marked by increasing technological connectivity, emotional jobs, desensitization, justice and forgiveness.

Evaluation

This book is unique because it is the only one of its kind. Most interpersonal communication textbooks rely on the research of romantic, family, and friendship contexts, with an occasional chapter on the workplace setting. This bifurcation from organizational settings is necessary so as not to blur the lines between interpersonal and organizational communication, yet interpersonal communication takes place at work, and emotional communication is one aspect of interpersonal communication. Waldron’s book zooms in on the emotional communication and shows its application in the workplace. This junction is important for both interpersonal and organizational communication teachers and scholars. For the teacher, particularly, this text would make a nice supplement to an interpersonal communication class. Additionally, it would stand as an appropriate text for a senior level topics class or masters level course when combined with supplemental readings. For the business practitioner, this text would seem a bit dry without catchy phrases or visual images. However, the text is written using accessible, vivid language that business practitioners would appreciate.

The author is successful in achieving his goals for the book. The chapters are inclusive of important aspects of communicating emotion at work. Specifically, the author recognizes that jobs themselves involve an emotional component and jobs can be organized by the prevailing emotions necessary for the work. Also, individuals display emotions and/or manage the suppression of emotional displays in the course of a days’ work. This text recognizes the various ways emotions are conveyed and the potential consequences of these displays. By comparison, the text also acknowledges that the management of emotion through restraint or counterfeit displays have implications for workers and organizations. A rational, objective approach to the discussion of management rarely includes the element of emotion because organizations are “supposed” to be absent of emotion. The professional is marked by control and composure and the organization focuses on data, outcomes, and results. Thus, this book underscores the importance of emotion at work while simultaneously elaborating on the ways in which the communication of emotion at work has been studied.

The text also has some surprises and points that could be strengthened. For example, the section on emotional occupations catches the reader off guard. This reader predicted a discussion of counselors, doctors, flight attendants, or teachers, among other occupations, and elaboration on the communication of emotion unique to these occupations. However, Waldron surprises the reader by focusing on emotional functions and offers examples of occupations that utilize these emotional
displays frequently. It is these emotional function labels and corresponding examples where the author has an opportunity to strengthen the text. This particular chapter of the text could be enhanced by offering a strong definition and description of the label before elaborating on the exemplars. As in qualitative research, the writer must define the parameters of a theme before offering the thick, rich quotes to support the author’s interpretation. Accordingly, Waldron and guest writer Joshua Danaher could bolster this chapter by including a strong, clear description at the outset of each section on the emotional functions. This chapter of the book is important and unique. Strengthening the chapter in this way makes it exceptional.

Employees’ emotional experiences and displays deserve attention within a discussion of management practice. Communicating Emotion at Work enriches the current body of literature on management practice in new and unique ways.

Author Bio

Tina A. Coffelt (Ph.D. University of Missouri) is an Assistant Professor in the Communication Studies Program at Iowa State University. She holds an MBA from Northwest Missouri State University and has interests in the intersections of interpersonal communication concepts in the workplace. Her research has appeared in Qualitative Research Reports in Communication and the Northwest Journal of Communication.