Emotions & Creativity

James Averill
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
USA

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Two Views on Emotional Creativity

• "When a person has an inborn genius for certain emotions, his life differs strangely from that of ordinary people, for none of their usual deterrents check him“ (William James, 1902).

• “There are ‘cognitive virtuosos’ . . . but there are no ‘emotional prodigies.’ We can speak of an ‘intellectual giant’ but an ‘emotional giant’ is an absurdity” (Robert Zajonc, 1998).
Creativity Applies to Standard Emotions

Standard Emotions are those recognized and named in ordinary language, for example:

• Fear (medo)
• Anger (raiva)
• Grief (tristeza)
• Love (amor)

And hundreds more in most European and Asian languages (many fewer in some other languages).
Three Features of Standard Emotions

• (1) Emotions are syndromes, comprising behavioral, physiological, and experiential components;

• (2) No single component or type of response is essential to the whole;

• (3) Social norms (beliefs and rules) are the main organizing principles that lend emotional syndromes their coherence.
Csikszentmihalyi’s Systems Perspective on Creativity

Creativity is not a function of the person or situation alone, but includes the domain and field.

- **Domain:** Enduring beliefs and practices that make up aspects of culture.

- **Field:** Social institutions that act as gate keepers to the domain.
Two kinds of Obstacles

• **Domain Absurdity:** (Recall Zajonc’s assertion that an ‘emotional giant’ is an absurdity)
  “Absurd” implies a fundamental flaw in reasoning; that a statement is not just mistaken, but that it is ridiculous, preposterous.

  What might that flaw be?

• **Field Impediments:** Throughout most of the last century, it was difficult to obtain funding for, or to publish research on, the emotions.

  That is changing; hence, I will not discuss field impediments further.
Sources of Domain Absurdity

Emotions are closely tied to a person’s sense of self, and to cultural values.

• Any attempt to change emotions may be interpreted as an attack on established values.

• “Caution is enjoined both in the name of morality and in the name of worldly wisdom, with the result that generosity and adventurousness are discouraged where the affections are concerned” (Bertrand Russell)
Theoretical Implications

Emotional Creativity requires that we change the way we conceive of emotions (e.g., from a more Cartesian to a more Spinozan point of view).

Traditionally, emotions have been conceived of as a kind “of human bondage” (The title of Part IV of Spinoza’s, *Ethics*)

Prop. III: “An emotion . . . ceases to be a passion, as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it” (*Ethics*, Part V, “of human freedom”)

Corollary to Prop. III: The more we know an emotion, the more it is “within our control, and the less does the mind suffer from it.”
Practical Implications
Some Thoughts on Emotional Creativity at Work

Virtuous Organizations are characterized by:

- **Optimism** (that challenges can be met)
- **Forgiveness** (coupled with high standards)
- **Trust** (in colleagues and leaders)
- **Compassion** (concern for others)
- **Integrity** (honest and trustworthy)

Which lead to Affective Commitment to the Organization

Two Questions:

• Does Affective Commitment lead to greater innovation and productivity?
  – Creative persons are not known for being unusually nice, no less virtuous. Something similar might be said of creative organizations.

• What might be added to the list Organizational Virtues to make an organization more creative?
  – Freedom, risk-taking, excitement, demanding (even stressful, in its negative as well as positive aspects)
  – Opportunities for flow (Csikszentmihalyi), where challenges match expertise.
A Paradox

• People are more likely to experience flow at work;

• Yet, they prefer Leisure to work.

Resolution (Csikszentmihalyi): People disregard immediate experience, and base their judgment on stereotyped notions of what work is supposed to be.
How Might We Change the Negative Stereotype of Work?

Encourage an Aesthetic Attitude
(Sandelands & Buckner, Research in organizational behavior, 1989.)

Main Features of Aesthetic Experience

Enjoyable (often mixed with negative affect, as when we enjoy a sad or frightening movie)
Absorbing (“Flow,” again)
Intrinsically motivated (sometimes referred to as “aesthetic distance” or more simply, as “freedom”)
Demanding (stretches the mind, leads in new directions)

Each of the above presumes self-awareness and a sense of personal control; together they also help define emotional creativity.
Concluding Observation

One the greatest obstacles to creativity in the domain of emotion is the belief that it is “absurd.” I hope that I have been able to convince you otherwise. Our future well-being depends as much on our emotional as on our technological creativity.
O FIM
(The End)

OBRIGADO
(Thank You)