An interpersonal Communication Aspect: The power of Moods in Interpreting Nonverbal Messages.

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Abstract:

The social perception and cognitive functions are two key factors in determining social behavior by evaluating social cues and the emotional responses of others. Emotions play a fundamental role in human cognition and researches on emotional communication mainly focus on facial expressions. Previous researches show agreement on a universal set of emotions which are associated with specific facial displays.

Present research is conducted in line with discrete emotion theory postulating that "affect programs for basic emotions produce prototypical response configurations that include emotion-specific patterns of facial expressions" (Scherer, Ellgring, 2007:113) in order to interpret the interpersonal communication process which is the issue in every part of life especially in professional stage.

The current study aims to examine the effect of moods on the perception of facial images in the scope of the Affect Program Theory of Facial Displays (APT) proposed by Ekman (1997). The process is interpreted from the categorical perspective of the perception of facial images. In order to determine the short-term mood of the participants, Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) is administered and the facial expression images from the Pictures of Facial Affect (PFA) database (Ekman and Friesen, 2003) are used to measure the perception of facial images. The studied population of this preliminary study included 112 social sciences students. The results revealed a rather small negative effect of negative affectivity on affect perception throughtout facial pictures.

Keywords: Affect program theory of facial displays, positive and negative affectivity, pictures of facial affect, emotions

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotions have been interpreted as a configurational setting opposing actively from the processes the most desirable and the most noble of the reason. Emotions holds the cohesion in between people in social groups, help to determine the priorities in relations, enable people to sense the state of the environment and that of other people both inside and outside of work. Researchers who define emotions as states of sentiments measured those states via self-assessment tests by assuming that emotions are conscious and that individuals reach to those conscious states and measure their intensity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the affective structure end by defining two dominant dimensions. Watson and Tellegen (1985) presented a two-factor model called Positive Affect and Negative Affect. Even those two dimensions are highly negatively correlated, instead of being two edges of one dimension; they have emerged as two distinctive dimensions. Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988:1036) define Positive Affect (PA) as a state in which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert. High PA is "characterized by high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement where low PA is characterized by sadness and lethargy". On the contrary high NA is defined as a state where people feel "anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness". Low NA is characterized as calmness and serenity.

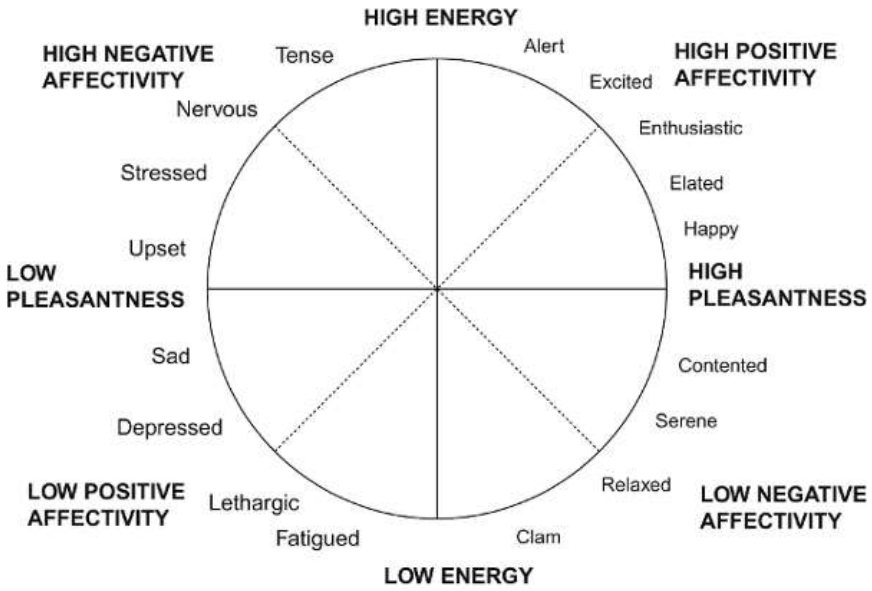

Fig.1. High/Low Positive and Negative Affectivity (Casciaro, 2014)

The important role of emotions in organizational research is empathized after 1990s. Since then, emotions have been subject to many organization studies besides personality, cognition, attitudes, behavior. The researches focusing on moods and emotions have highlighted the boosting effect of positive emotions on achieving task goals and to organizational functioning (Casciaro, 2014), job satisfaction (Fisher, 2000), physical health, mental well-being, creativity, resilience, the mood of others, positive memories and relationships (Hazelton, 2014).

Ashkanasy (2003) offers a five level model of emotion in the workplace (see Figure 2) to range the emotions according to the scope of its impact. This model enables the placement of emotions in organization life.

Fig.2. The five-level model of emotion in the workplace (Ashkanasy, 2003:11)

Researchers developed methods in order to measure facial expressions (e.g. Ekman et al., 1983). In his following studies Ekman ended up by talking about "families of emotion" (Ekman, 1994) and then defining them as "open programs" that are modifiable by culture or individual learning (Ekman, 2003). Scherer and Ellgring (2007) pointed out that discrete emotion theorists imply emotion-specific expression of a particular emotion should lead to correct recognition of the expressed emotion by observers. In their

research, Schneider et al. (1993) put forth the impact of the stimuli consisted of happy and sad facial expressions on the mood induction. They found that, people tend to rate themselves as relatively happier/less sad during the happy mood-induction while relatively sadder/less happy during the sad mood-induction.

III. Research Model

Perception and interpretation of the stimuli coming from others constitute an important factor in interpersonal communication in every state of life. The objective of the study is to determine whether the emotional state of a person influence his/her perception of incoming nonverbal messages or not.

The research question of the study focuses on how the emotional mood-states affect the interpretation of facial displays of others.

IV. Methodology

A. Outline of the Research

The study adopted the survey method. Participants of the study (N=112) are chosen from Social Sciences students which are composed of 76 females and 36 males (Mean age = 21; Std. Dev. = 1.16). The survey including the research instruments are given to the students in the classroom and they are told to fill the PANAS questionnaire then to interpret the face images that are projected on the wall. Every student had the same time limit to interpret every face image.

Due to the preliminary nature of this study, the participants are chosen among university students. Bowen (2014) highlights the similarity between the emotional dynamics of students in the classroom and the employee in the workplace which reflect on group performance, decision making, leadership development, interpersonal relationships and stress reduction. From this point of view, we can admit the potential benefits of representational advantages of using students as sampling.

B. Research Instruments

In order to get the present moods of the participants, PANAS (the Positive Affectivity and Negative Affectivity Schedule) is used (Watson et al., 1988). PANAS is composed of 10 positive affectivity related adjectives and 10 negative affectivity related adjectives which are measured by using a 5-point likert scale (from 1:very slightly/not at all to 5: extremely). Cronbach Alpha coefficients are found to be .88 for PA and.84 for NA respectively.

In order to evaluate the perception on emotion of facial display, face images set by Ekman &Friesen (2003) are used. A set of 16 pictures is shown to students just after their statement about their mood via PANAS questionnaire. Some examples from the test are shown in Figure 3.

Fig.3. Facial display image set (Ekman & Friesen, 2003)

V. Results

In order to observe the effect of the mood (Positive and Negative Affectivity) on the interpretation of facial expressions, the answers of the participants concerning the facial display image set are narrowed down in two main factors which are “negative” and “positive”.

Regression analysis was used to test if the positive and negative affectivity significantly predicted participants’ ratings of interpreting facial expressions in a positive way (e.g. happy). The results of the regression indicated the two predictors explained 45% of the variance ($R=.046$, $F(.025)=5.18$, $p<.05$). It was found a rather small negative prediction of negative affectivity on the interpretation of face pictures as happy ($\beta= -.21$, $p<.05$). On the other hand it was found no significant effect of positive affectivity on affect perception positively nor negatively ($\beta=.04$, p=n.s.).

VI. Discussion

The results revealed the negative effect of negative affectivity on affect perception which indicates that the more the sample has higher negative affectivity, the less they interpret the facial pictures through positive attributes (e.g. happy) or the more the sample has lower negative affectivity, the less they interpret the facial pictures through negative attributes (e.g. angry). On the other hand, no significant prediction effect is found for positive affectivity on the face interpretations.

The results of the study showed the strong psychological effect of negative emotions. People in negative moods have the tendency to reflect their state of mind to the people around them. Considering the five-level model of emotion in the workplace of Ashkanasy, this negative tendency will affect not only within-person and between persons; but also interpersonal interactions, groups, and organization-wide.

VII. Conclusion and Limitations

These results can be accepted as a start point for the design of a wider model. Even if the research is conducted with students, it aims to be a preliminary step to improve and diversify the content and the participants.

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