When leaders display emotion: how followers respond to negative emotional expression of male and female leaders

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Summary
A leader’s emotional display is proposed to affect his or her audience. In this study, observing a male or female leader express negative emotion was proposed to influence the observer’s affective state and assessment of the leader’s effectiveness. In a laboratory study, a leader’s specific negative emotional tone impacted the affective state of participants in the study. Negative emotional display had a significant and negative main effect on participant assessment of leader effectiveness compared to a more neutral emotional display. Further, a significant interaction between leader gender and emotion was found. Male leaders received lower effectiveness ratings when expressing sadness compared to neutrality, while female leaders received lower ratings when expressing either sadness or anger. Copyright © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

Leaders displaying emotion: this phrase conjures up images ranging from George Patton rallying his troops, to Martin Luther King inspiring Civil Rights activists, to Bill Clinton expressing contrition over his infidelity. Beyond the images, however, are the consequences of emotional display of a leader, and the effects on the followers. Little is known about the impact of a leader’s emotional display on those who are in the organizational audience.

Leader behaviors and traits have been proposed and found to have an influence on leader/follower relationships (Meindl et al., 1985). Leaders who use emotion appropriately to communicate, or who demonstrate better knowledge of their own emotions and those of others, are argued to perform at a higher level (Goleman, 1998). For instance, transformational leaders use emotion to communicate their vision and to motivate followers (Conger and Kanungo, 1987, 1994, 1998; House et al., 1991; Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996; McHugo, 1985). According to

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Conger and Kanungo (1998), transformational leaders may use strong emotions to arouse similar feelings in their audience. They may also express emotions, modeling for followers what is appropriate to feel in a given situation. However, little is known about the effectiveness of using emotions to either convey or model feelings to an audience. Specific research in the area of emotional display of leaders and how this emotional display affects the leader/follower relationship has yet to be fully explored.

The purpose of this study is to extend our knowledge of leadership and emotional display by looking specifically at the consequences of negative emotional expression by a chief executive officer (CEO) level leader on followers. Does observing negative emotions expressed by a leader create negative affect in followers? Does it impact follower evaluation of a leader’s effectiveness? Do the consequences of emotional display vary based on the gender of the leader?

This study focuses on male and female leaders at a higher organizational level, specifically, a CEO. By examining display of emotion at this level, we are able to isolate the effect of emotional expression outside of the day-to-day experience one might have with a supervisor level leader. Here, we examine effects of emotional display of an individual who is viewed as a leader, has impact as a leader, but may not be well known to the follower. The follower reactions of interest are: (1) emotion aroused in the follower, (2) ratings of leader effectiveness.

Leadership and expression of emotion

Leader traits and behaviors related to emotional expression

Leadership originally was thought to be inherent in an individual—it was argued that leaders were born not made (Bass, 1990). Traits such as self-confidence, integrity, intelligence and a sense of humor were among those found to be associated with effective leaders (Kenny and Zacarro, 1983). Today, we recognize that personal attributes of leaders do explain some variance in whether a person will emerge as a leader (Kenny and Zacarro, 1983) or whether a leader will acquire the necessary skills to be effective (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). Some traits identified with effective leadership are related to emotion. Important emotional traits include emotional balance and control (Bass, 1990) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998). Additionally, expression of emotion can provide data to followers who may then infer certain traits such as self-confidence, integrity, or loss of control.

In addition to leader traits associated with emotional expression, there are emotional behaviors. Contingency theories of leadership argue that choosing appropriate behaviors contingent upon characteristics of the situation have significant impacts on individual, group, and organizational outcomes (Bass, 1990; House, 1968). In a specific organizational context, choosing appropriate emotions to express reflects a leader’s ability to respond in an effective way.

Leader’s emotional display and follower emotional experience

Emotions expressed by leaders vary from positive to negative (Larsen and Diener, 1992; Watson and Tellegen, 1985). Leaders often express positive emotions such as enthusiasm (active positive)
and satisfaction (passive positive) to motivate followers. Leadership theorists have argued that a leader’s expression of positive emotion can have inspirational and motivational consequences (Bass, 1990; Conger and Kanungo, 1998). The focus in this study is on expression of two negative emotions: sadness (passive negative) and anger (active negative). Negative emotion may have the potential to adversely impact a follower’s emotional state and arousal or motivation level. Negative emotions could also affect follower perceptions of leader effectiveness and credibility. On the other hand, it is conceivable that some displays of negative emotions could have positive consequences (Conger and Kanungo, 1994). For instance, a display of anger against an outside party might enhance in-group cohesion and identification, thus arousing motivation to compete with the outsider, given appropriate attributions and expectancies (Bass, 1990; Kouzes and Posner, 1995).

When followers observe and experience the emotional expression of a leader, they may be emotionally influenced through emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1994). There are three ways in which an individual can ‘catch’ another’s emotion: through conscious cognitive processes, conditioned or unconditioned emotional responses, and mimicry/feedback. Conscious cognitive processing occurs when individuals empathize with someone who is expressing an emotion, actually attempting to internalize and feel the emotion expressed (Davis, 1996). Transmission of emotion through this cognitive process varies based on a variety of factors related to the sender and receiver of the emotion. Followers may empathize with a leader expressing an emotion they cognitively interpret as appropriate. On the other hand, followers may respond emotionally (conditioned or unconditioned) without empathy based on prior (similar) emotional experiences. Or, followers could mimic the leader expressing emotion. Any of the above mechanisms could occur in the leader–follower situation. However, extensive research into the cognitive experience of emotion supports the cognitive processing process (e.g., Arnold, 1970; Izard, 1977; Schachter, 1970).

The current literature indicates that experienced emotion has elements of physiological (Lange and James, 1922), behavioral (Izard, 1977), and cognitive processes (Arnold, 1970; Izard et al., 1984; Schachter, 1970). Early emotion theorists Lange and James (1922) believed that it was the perception and assessment of an event that initiated an emotional experience. Experiences are often perceived instinctively, but primarily cognitively as social and environmental context is interpreted (Crawford et al., 1992; Schachter and Singer, 1962). When we observe emotional expression in others, we cognitively process the information surrounding the experience, and the result is emotional contagion (Frijda, 1986; Hatfield et al., 1994). Thus, emotion of the follower is proposed to be influenced by the leader’s emotional display. We are interested in this emotional experience because positive and negative emotions or moods at work have been shown to impact important employee outcomes, including absenteeism and satisfaction (George, 1989; George and Jones, 1997; Staw et al., 1994).

Followers’ affective responses can be described using the circumplex model of affect (Larsen and Diener, 1992). In the circumplex model of affect, positive and negative emotion can vary from active to passive. Burke et al. (1989) identify the four variations on this model as Positive Arousal, Negative Activation, Low Arousal, and Low Activation, each positioned around the circumplex of affective experience. This model is shown in Figure 1. Positive Arousal, or Enthusiasm, is characterized by high levels of active feelings, excited and strong feelings, enthusiasm, peppy and elated feelings. Negative Activation, or Nervousness, is characterized by high levels of distress, scorn, hostile feelings, fear, nervousness, and jittery feelings. Low Arousal, or Fatigue, is characterized by sleepiness, dullness, drowsiness, and sluggishness. Low Activation, or Relaxation, is characterized by high levels of calm, relaxation, at rest feelings, and placid feelings.

As shown in Figure 1, when a follower observes a leader expressing a negative emotion it is proposed to lead to higher negative affect and lower positive affect. Specifically, observing a more passive negative emotional expression, sadness, is proposed to lead to feelings of low arousal and lower feelings of positive arousal. Observing more active negative emotional expression, anger, is proposed to lead to higher feelings of negative activation and lower feelings of low activation.

Hypothesis 1a. Observation of a leader expressing passive/weak (sad) emotional expression will result in higher Low Arousal (Fatigue) and lower Positive Arousal (Enthusiasm) than when the leader expresses no emotion.

Hypothesis 1b. Observation of a leader expressing assertive/active (angry) emotion will result in higher Negative Activation (Nervousness) and lower Low Activation (Relaxation) than when the leader expresses no emotion.

Leader emotional display and follower perceptions of leader effectiveness

The experience of followers—emotional and otherwise—as they observe emotional expression in leaders is proposed to have a direct effect on their perception of a leader’s effectiveness. Followers associate certain emotions expressed as representing desirable—or undesirable—traits. For example, a leader expressing sadness may be perceived as lacking self-confidence, a trait consistently associated with effective leaders (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). In addition to emotions as indications of traits, followers evaluate emotional expression according to social and role norms for leader behaviors (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987, 1989, 1990; Sutton, 1991; Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988). In the role of a CEO level leader, anger has often been associated with strong leadership (Bass, 1990). However, anger may indicate lack of emotional control, which Goleman (1998) found to be consistently related to leader ineffectiveness. The specific consequences of expressing negative emotions on evaluation of leader effectiveness have yet to be explored.

In this study, it is anticipated that expression of emotions in general will be considered to represent poor judgement on the part of the leader. This is due primarily to the fact that
expressing anger and sadness will be perceived as outside of leader role norms (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987), representing a lack of emotional control (Goleman, 1998), and signifying a lack of self-confidence (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). When participants observe these role-violating emotions, it is anticipated that they will perceive the leader to be less effective. Therefore, the second hypothesis is as follows.

Hypothesis 2. CEO level leaders using negative (non-neutral) emotional tones in communication will be seen as less effective than leaders using neutral tones.

Followers are also believed to consider gender and gender-related stereotypes about emotional expression in their assessment of leaders who display emotion. Stereotypes about gender and emotion are common in many cultures. While these stereotypes may vary somewhat depending on culture, there can be no doubt that one of the most agreed upon differences between men and women lies in the experience and expression of emotion (Brody and Hall, 1993). Most research on the actual differences between men and women finds significant differences regarding emotion expression and experience (Shields, 1987; Stearns, 1992).

Female leaders are often perceived to have different leadership styles than men (Eagly and Johnson, 1990), and their effectiveness is often evaluated different than men (Eagly et al., 1995). Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that women were evaluated as less effective when exhibiting more masculine styles. Anger is often associated with masculinity, and thus expression of anger may result in lower ratings of leader effectiveness for females (Eagly et al., 1992). Eagly et al. (1995) found that women were evaluated as less effective than men in roles that were defined in more masculine terms.

Therefore, in addition to the main effects outlined in Hypothesis 2, interaction effects are anticipated. Due to the role expectations for male and female leaders, the leader’s emotional tone will influence the follower’s assessment of the leader differently depending on whether the emotion expressed is ‘gender endorsed’ or not. Specifically, anger is considered to be gender endorsed for males (more masculine and assertive), but not for females (less feminine), and sadness is considered to be gender endorsed for females (more feminine and passive), but not for males (less masculine) (Shields, 1987). The expression of non-gender endorsed emotion is anticipated to result in lower assessment of a leader. Leader gender alone is not proposed to be related to assessment of a leader. Thus, in addition to Hypothesis 2 relating to neutral versus negative emotional tones, gender is anticipated to interact with the negative emotion expressed to result in different evaluations for male and female leaders, depending on the perception of how ‘gender endorsed’ the emotion expressed.

Hypothesis 3a. Female leaders who display anger (non-gender endorsed emotion) will be rated as less effective than females who display no emotion.

Hypothesis 3b. Female leaders who display sadness (gender endorsed emotion) will be rated as less effective than females who display no emotion.

Hypothesis 3c. Female leaders who display sadness (gender endorsed emotion) will be rated as more effective than females who display anger (non-gender endorsed emotion).

Hypothesis 4a. Male leaders who display sadness (non-gender endorsed emotion) will be rated as less effective than male leaders who do not display emotion.

Hypothesis 4b. Male leaders who display anger (gender endorsed emotion) will be rated as less effective than male leaders who display no emotion.

Hypothesis 4c. Male leaders who display anger (gender endorsed emotion) will be rated as more effective than male leaders who display sadness (non-gender endorsed emotion).
Methods

Research participants

Participants were undergraduate psychology students ranging in age from 17 to 53, with an average age of 20.7 years (standard deviation of 4.5 years). The 368 participants were all volunteers drawn from a pool of psychology students attending a university in the southwestern United States, and any student enrolled in the university could participate. Of the total number of participants, 104 (28 per cent) were men and 264 (72 per cent) were women. Participants were diverse in their ethnicity, with 12 per cent Hispanic American, 44 per cent Asian American, 31 per cent Caucasian, and 13 per cent of other races.

Design and task

In order to isolate the impact of gender and emotional display of CEO level leaders, data collection took place in a laboratory setting. The laboratory study utilized videotapes to standardize the six role-play scenarios viewed. Pre-testing with several doctoral students was done to evaluate the efficacy of the videos in portraying the emotions intended. Each video portrayed one of two actors, a woman or a man, enacting the same script with one of three different emotional tones (neutral, sad, or angry).

Professional actors were used to portray the leaders, and the participants perceived them, on average, to be of moderate physical attractiveness. However, a one-way t-test found that participants perceived the woman to be slightly more attractive than the man. Both actors were approximately the same age (50–60 years old). Each subject viewed only one video. Therefore, there were six different treatments in a 2 (actor gender) by 3 (emotion displayed) completely crossed factorial design. Number of participants in each treatment ranged from 56 to 68.

The script used in the video described a situation that was generally negative for the hypothetical organization the followers and leader were proposed to work in, outlining the fact that the company had just finished a poor financial year. The reason for this poor performance was not clearly stated. The leader in the video urged the participants as hypothetical employees to work harder to assist in improving the company’s performance. The overall script was pre-tested, and was shown to be believable and understandable with any of the three emotional tones (neutral, sadness, or anger) expressed.

The actors in the study altered their voice, demeanor, and used gestures to demonstrate the three emotional tones. For neutrality, the actors maintained a non-emotional manner, with few gestures, and a clear, constant neutral tone of voice. For anger, the actors raised their voice several times, looked stern, and pounded the lectern at important points. For sadness, the actors teared up, spoke in a quiet, pleading tone of voice, and occasionally dabbed at their eyes as sniffing.

Procedures

Participants were informed that the experiment would examine the effectiveness of various kinds of leader behavior, and that they were to view the video as if the leader observed was speaking directly to them, as an employee of the company for whom this leader was the CEO. They then
viewed one of the six videos. After the video was finished, participants received a survey containing measures of their affect and assessments of the leader, as well as the manipulation check questions at the very end of the survey.

Dependent measures

Follower affect
The Job Affect Scale (JAS) was used to provide information as to the affective state of followers during and immediately after viewing the video presentation (Brief et al., 1988). The JAS was selected due to the high factor reliability found by Burke et al. (1989) and Brief et al. (1988) in their studies. The JAS asks participants to rate 20 adjectives reflecting affect. The measure asks ‘Think carefully about how you felt while you were watching the video. Please rate how you felt using the following scale’. The scale goes from 1, ‘slightly or not at all’, to 5, ‘very much’. The JAS has been validated in several studies (Brief et al., 1988; Burke et al., 1989). Factor analysis provided support for Burke et al.’s (1989) four-factor model (positive arousal, negative activation, low arousal, low activation). Therefore, all hypotheses were tested using Burke’s scoring to determine the participant’s affective state. Reliabilities of the scales are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations of dependent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Negative activation (nervous)</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Low activation (relaxed)</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-0.36*</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Positive arousal (enthusiastic)</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.53*</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Low arousal (fatigued)</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.49*</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leadership effectiveness</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>-0.14*</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Diagonals indicate reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for each measure. All intercorrelations are Pearson’s correlations.

*p < 0.01.

Follower’s assessment of leader
Five questions were used to ask the participants to evaluate the leader in the video on the following dimensions: communication skills, ability to do a good job, leadership ability, likability as a boss, and ability as a supervisor. These items were rated on a scale of 1–5, with 1 being ‘very poor’, and 5 being ‘excellent’. All five items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 3.428, accounting for 68.6 per cent of the variance. The reliability of the five-item scale was 0.88. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all dependent measures are shown in Table 1.

Manipulation checks
Several manipulation checks were conducted to ensure that the emotions expressed by the actors were perceived as intended. First, a pre-test was conducted with several doctoral students who observed all six tapes and filled out a survey on the emotions they felt were expressed by the actors. This pre-test confirmed that the emotions were perceived as intended. Second, at the end of the survey, the last question asked what emotion respondents perceived the leader to be expressing. Participants were given the choice of 10 emotions, and an 11th option of ‘Could not not
detect any emotion’. Those observing the angry leaders perceived anger 50 per cent of the time and disgusted 26 per cent of the time. Individuals observing sad leaders perceived sad 61 per cent of the time and afraid 24 per cent of the time. Nineteen per cent of the participants observing leaders expressing no emotion picked ‘Could not detect any emotion’, versus only 3 per cent of those observing sad or angry leaders. In addition to those who could not detect any emotion, 26 per cent perceived disgusted, 11 per cent angry, 10 per cent afraid, and 9 per cent attentive. This distribution over several emotions indicates that participants did not clearly perceive any one emotion, and in fact may have attributed an emotion to the message rather than the actual emotional tone observed.

Results

Means and standard deviations for each cell of the $2 \times 3$ model for each of the five dependent variables are shown in Table 2. Hypotheses 1a and 1b concerned whether follower affect would be influenced by the emotional tone of the leader. The results of two-way analyses of variance for leader gender and leader emotion for the four affect measures are presented in Table 3. The results of the ANOVAs demonstrated consistent main effects for leader emotion on follower affect.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported by the data. Table 4 contains the results of one-way analyses of variance and planned comparisons, which show that Negative Activation (Nervousness) was significantly higher, and Low Activation (Relaxation) was significantly lower, for participants observing the leader expressing active negative (angry) emotion when compared to both the passive negative (sad) emotion and the leader expressing no emotion. Positive Arousal (Enthusiasm) was significantly lower, and Low Arousal (Fatigue) was significantly higher, for those observing the leader expressing passive negative (sad) emotion when compared to both the active negative (angry) emotion and the leader expressing no emotion.

Table 2. Affect measures and leadership effectiveness ratings: means and standard deviations for the $2 \times 3$ model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male leader</th>
<th></th>
<th>Female leader</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive arousal (enthusiasm)</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>1.625</td>
<td>1.940</td>
<td>2.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$S.D.$</td>
<td>0.786</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative activation (nervousness)</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>2.044</td>
<td>2.369</td>
<td>2.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$S.D.$</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td>1.065</td>
<td>1.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low arousal (fatigue)</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>3.125</td>
<td>2.788</td>
<td>2.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$S.D.$</td>
<td>1.165</td>
<td>1.126</td>
<td>1.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low activation (relaxation)</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>2.910</td>
<td>2.763</td>
<td>2.356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$S.D.$</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td>9.940</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership effectiveness rating</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>2.219</td>
<td>2.749</td>
<td>2.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$S.D.$</td>
<td>0.671</td>
<td>0.706</td>
<td>0.866</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis 2, which concerns whether emotional tone will impact perception of leader effectiveness, received strong support from the data. The two-way analysis of variance on leader effectiveness rating (Table 3) showed a significant main effect for leader emotional tone on ratings of leader effectiveness. To determine the direction of this main effect, post-hoc tests were conducted, reflecting the fact that neutral emotional tone received the highest rating (3.03), significantly higher than both anger (2.59) and sadness (2.29).

The third set of hypotheses concerned whether ratings of leaders expressing non-gender endorsed emotion would be more negative than those of leaders expressing no emotion, and also than those expressing gender endorsed emotion. As shown in Table 3, there was a significant interaction of leader emotion and leader gender on perception of leader effectiveness. To provide a clear presentation of the differences in means among the three emotion displays for each gender, one-way analyses of variance were performed for each gender (see Table 4).

Hypothesis 3a was supported by the data. One-way analyses of variance reflect that in the female leader treatments, the evaluation of the leader displaying non-gender endorsed emotion (anger) was significantly lower than the mean for the leader displaying no emotion. Hypothesis 3b was also supported. Female leaders who displayed sadness were rated lower than those displaying no emotion. However, leader evaluation for the female leader displaying non-gender endorsed emotion (anger) was not significantly lower than that for the leader displaying gender endorsed emotion (sadness). Thus, hypothesis 3c was not supported. Women were rated lower for both sadness and anger, and rated higher for neutral emotion.

One-way analyses of variance showed that in the male leader conditions, the evaluation for the leader displaying non-gender endorsed emotion (sadness) was significantly lower than the mean for the leader displaying anger, and also for the leader displaying no emotion. Thus, hypotheses 4a and 4c were supported. The results indicate, however, that there was no significant difference

Table 3. Affect measures and leadership effectiveness ratings: univariate analyses of variance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of variation</th>
<th>dF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive arousal (enthusiasm)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of leader</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.446</td>
<td>7.144</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.575</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader emotion × leader gender</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.021</td>
<td>2.652</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative activation (nervousness)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of leader</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.970</td>
<td>15.944</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.239</td>
<td>2.385</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader emotion × leader gender</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.210</td>
<td>1.289</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low arousal (fatigue)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of leader</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.243</td>
<td>7.005</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.909</td>
<td>7.509</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader emotion × leader gender</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.895</td>
<td>0.679</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low activation (relaxation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of leader</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.124</td>
<td>15.700</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.144</td>
<td>2.565</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader emotion × leader gender</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.317</td>
<td>1.576</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership effectiveness rating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion of leader</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.530</td>
<td>27.890</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.967</td>
<td>3.319</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader emotion × leader gender</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.877</td>
<td>8.229</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.01; †p < 0.001.
between effectiveness ratings for men expressing anger or neutral tone—thus hypothesis 4b was not supported.

In order to clarify the results for gender and emotion interaction, graphical comparisons are included in Figure 2. As shown, female leaders are rated highest when expressing no emotion, and lower for anger and sadness. Male leaders, however, are rated the same whether expressing no emotion or anger, and receive lower ratings when expressing sadness.

**Discussion**

The results of this study show that the emotional tone of a CEO level leader has a significant effect on follower affect and perception of leader effectiveness. In addition, an interaction of the leader’s gender and emotional tone had a significant effect on assessment of leader effectiveness.
These new findings add to our knowledge of how leaders influence followers through expression of emotion.

One contribution of this study relates to the effect of leader emotional expression on follower affect. Expression of sadness seems to reduce arousal, while leader anger increases follower arousal. This is important in light of research results showing that affect influences motivation, performance, satisfaction, commitment, and other organizational outcomes (George, 1989; George and Jones, 1997). The affect-related findings indirectly suggest that a leader’s anger may create motivation to work harder to improve the situation on the part of followers, while a leader’s expressed sadness may lead to passive acceptance rather than effort to make things better.

One potential mechanism by which a leader’s emotional display may influence action is through the attributions and expectations cued by a leader’s expressed emotion. Observing an emotion in a leader may help followers interpret ambiguous situations, such as a company experiencing problems. Sadness may suggest stable causes of failure with consequent low expectations that effort will improve the situation. Anger may facilitate the attribution of blame to an external, unstable cause against which timely, forceful action will be effective. While the present study did not explore the effect of displayed emotion on follower attributions or expectations, this may be a productive avenue for future research.

There may be characteristics of followers that will moderate the effect of leader emotion on follower affective responses and actions. Follower pre-existing attitudes towards leaders, such as perceptions of trust, integrity, or credibility, may magnify the effects of the emotion, due to...
higher levels of empathy for the leader. Trust in a leader may develop when followers feel a leader cares about them and is helpful to them (McAllister, 1995). In addition, followers may empathize more strongly with a leader they identify with. Identification with a leader could occur when followers perceive them to be similar to them (i.e., part of an in-group) or if friendship exists. Thus, a follower’s affective response may be moderated by feelings of empathy developed due to previous relationships, identification with a leader, or prior caring or helpful behavior exhibited by a leader.

Another contribution made by this study is to extend our understanding of gender-role expectation effects on perceptions of leader displayed emotion. Women leaders were rated lower on leader effectiveness when expressing either anger or sadness versus no emotion. However, men were rated the same on leader effectiveness when expressing anger or no emotion, and lower for expressing sadness. Future research could examine the mechanisms by which emotional display influences perceptions of effectiveness. One possibility may be through influencing subordinate perceptions of important leader traits and qualities. For example, researchers could ask followers to explicitly rate important leader traits (e.g. integrity, self-confidence, competence, etc.) after viewing displays of different emotions. One might expect that either anger or neutrality expressed by a male leader would lead to high ratings of integrity, confidence, and assertiveness (all associated with strong leadership), while anger from a female leader may lead to perception of instability, aggressiveness, or other negative traits.

Other future research could explore the difference between leader level and emotional expression. This study examined emotions displayed by leaders at the highest level in an organization. As mentioned above, previous relationships with leaders may influence interpretation of a leader’s emotion. Followers are more likely to have previous relationships and experience with leaders who are closer in level to them. Leaders who are direct supervisors, or at an intermediate level, may display emotion with different, more complex effects, primarily due to this expanded previous experience, and possibly increased (or decreased) empathy or trust, felt for such leaders. By going into the field and exploring leaders at all levels displaying emotion, our understanding will be further informed as to how affect and perception of leader effectiveness is impacted by a leader’s emotional expression.

In future research, observation of the effect of emotional tone and gender of leaders on follower assessment and affect should be conducted in the field through observation and interviews. This may help to clarify the relationship between perceived emotion expressed and affective leader effectiveness rating consequences. In this study, followers clearly observed negative emotions, but when given a variety of emotions to choose from, sometimes did not choose anger or sadness as the emotion they observed. In a more qualitative study or field experiment, participants could more clearly describe the emotion expressed by the leader, and why they perceived this expression to occur.

One weakness of this study was the fact that participants were not real followers of the leaders they observed, and that the leaders were people they had no prior knowledge of or experience with. These design features might be expected to weaken the effect of leader expressed emotion on follower affective response, since participants had little at stake in the presented scenario. On the other hand, this methodology may enhance the impact of leader expression on ratings of leader effectiveness, as there is little other information available on which to base effectiveness ratings. Research in more realistic settings would help strengthen the contributions made in this study.

More effort should be made in the future to examine the effect of leader emotional display on the effort and performance of followers. This study indicates that leaders can ‘infect’ followers through emotional contagion by expressing emotion. Exploring what emotions specifically increase (or decrease) motivation and performance would benefit leaders who want to improve
organizations. Knowing the relationships between leader emotional expression, affective response, and follower motivation and performance would contribute greatly to our understanding of the role of emotion and emotion expression in the workplace.

References


