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Emotional Aperture and Strategic Renewal: The Accurate Recognition of Collective Emotions

Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks
Stephen M. Ross School of Business
at the University of Michigan

Quy Nguyen Huy
INSEAD

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Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks
Management and Organizations
Ross School of Business at the
University of Michigan
701 Tappan Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
Tel: 734.615.6351
E-mail: jsanchezburks@umich.edu

Quy Nguyen Huy
INSEAD
Strategic Management
Boulevard de Constance
77305 Fontainebleau
FRANCE
Tel: (33) 1 60 72 44 98
E-mail: quy.huy@insead.edu

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Abstract

This article introduces *emotional aperture*, defined as the ability to recognize patterns of specific collective emotions. We show how emotional aperture can help leaders recognize and deal with diverse collective emotions that arise during strategic renewal and other emotionally turbulent processes. We describe key psychological-cultural enablers and impediments, moreover, to achieving the necessary focus and accuracy required for an effective emotional aperture in organizations. This article provides an initial conceptualization of how leaders can adjust their focus to group-level emotions and thus complement existing notions of emotional abilities (e.g., emotional intelligence), which focus on individual-level emotions.

Emotional Aperture and Strategic Renewal

The Accurate Recognition of Collective Emotions

The ability to accurately recognize collective emotions helps leaders manage emotionally turbulent situations that are characteristic of strategic renewal. Strategic renewal denotes a temporal process that interrupts organizational inertia, causing changes in routines, core competencies, and strategic direction, in response to competitors (Chakravarthy and Doz, 1992; Helfat and Peteraf, 2003). Leaders' tasks include recognizing cues that signal the need for strategic renewal (e.g., organizational stress), and thus provide a bottom-up prompt to experiment with and implement new strategic direction (Huff, Huff, and Thomas, 1992; Floyd and Lane, 2000). As this process unfolds, top- and mid-level managers can face many challenges in their attempts to facilitate learning among their employees (Chakravarthy, 1982); empower, motivate, and inspire them (Bower, 1970; Quinn, 1980; Hart, 1992).

Dynamic managerial abilities are central to this process (Adner and Helfat, 2003). To accomplish strategic renewal, leaders often have to manage the tension between deploying existing competencies and fostering the development and implementation of new ones (Crossan, Lane, and White, 1999). These seemingly conflicting goals can generate role conflict and emotional discord among employees who are already worried about time pressure and resources (Floyd and Lane, 2000). Moreover, upper and middle managers' emotional reactions to alternative strategic direction can be particularly intense (Kanter, 1983; Fineman, 2003a) amplified in a context of new, contested, and shifting ideas.

These emotions are not merely those of individuals. Collective reactions and informal coalitions can form in response to new ideas and their perceived implications for various groups (Lazarus, 1991; Cyert and March, 1992). Collective emotions, in turn, can influence the ways in which those groups think and behave in relation to both the firm and other groups within it (Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000; Weiss and Brief, 2001; Barsade, 2002). These emotional threads are tightly woven throughout the process of strategic renewal, in short, highlighting the need for a dynamic managerial ability (cf. Adner and Helfat, 2003) that has heretofore not been articulated: accurately reading the collective emotions that

comprise the emotional landscape of an organization in flux. In this article, we address this need by introducing *emotional aperture*, defined as the ability to recognize the distribution of specific collective emotions.

Focusing on patterns of specific emotions (e.g., contempt, excitement, anger, surprise) can be particularly useful in the context of strategic renewal, for example, by allowing leaders to assess the specific interpretations and reactions of their teams, departments and business units. As a result, leaders can use emotional information to assess support for specific proposals and think about how to coordinate resources (Flier, Van den Bosch, and Volberda, 2003), how to schedule changes (Huy, 2001, 2002), and to evaluate successes and failures along the way. In short, we propose that managing strategic renewal requires a functional, dynamic emotional aperture.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we discuss the active role of emotions in companies and the ability to recognize individual emotions. We distinguish the latter from collective emotions and argue that recognizing patterns of specific collective emotions requires abilities that go beyond those that enable recognizing individual emotions. Next, we discuss several psychological and cultural enablers and impediments to the effective use of emotional aperture--that is, being attuned to collective emotions and being able to decode specific negative or positive ones. We continue by showing how leaders can use emotional aperture to facilitate strategic renewal. Finally, we discuss the implications of all this for future research.

Emotions in Organizational Life

Emotions refer to psychobiological responses that link socially embedded cognitive appraisals, physiological reactions, action tendencies, and subjective experiences (Lazarus, 1991; Zeelenberg et al., 2000). People can express these both verbally and also through facial expressions and other non-verbal behavior (Ekman and Friesen, 1974; Rosenthal et al., 1979). Emotions reflect the ways in which people perceive of and interact with others in their social contexts (Kemper, 1978, 1993). The interdependence of emotion and strategic renewal suggest that emotions are not necessarily aroused by favorable or

unfavorable conditions; sometimes they are aroused by actual or expected changes in these conditions (Frijda, 1988).

Scholars have shown that personal emotions play a significant role in the effectiveness of collective efforts (George, 1990; George and Brief, 1992; Fineman, 1993; 2001). Emotions direct attention, prompt and inhibit particular actions, and allow employees to coordinate their efforts (Kemper, 1978; Ekman, 1992; DePaulo and Friedman, 1998; Keltner and Haidt, 1999).

Emotional cues are often subtle, particularly when the social context makes them difficult to convey explicitly (Ekman, 1985; Choi, Gray, and Ambady, 2005; Elfenbein, in press). Emotional cues such as facial displays indicate how others construe their roles in changing events and social structures (Kemper, 1981; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987). Recognizing emotional cues provides useful information about opinions, preferences, and potential behaviors—even where people are unaware of their emotions or consciously try to control their expression (Scherer, Feldstein, Bond, and Rosenthal, 1985; DePaulo, 1992; Ashkanasy, Härtel and Zerbe, 2000; Ekman, 1972).

Recognizing Individuals' Emotions

The ability to recognize emotions in other people is a key component of *emotional intelligence* (Davies, Stankov, and Roberts, 1998; Salovey and Grewal, 2005). Scholars have shown empirically that accuracy, with respect to individual emotion displays, is related to effectiveness in managing interpersonal relationships in many occupations and organizational roles (Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, and Archer, 1979; Lopez, Grewal, Kadis, Gall, and Salovey, 2004; Côté and Miners, 2006; Elfenbein, Foo, White, Tan, and Aik, 2007). For example, studies show that high emotion-recognition ability among managers correlates positively with perceptions of transformational leadership among their subordinates (Bass, 1999; Rubin, Munz, and Bommer, 2005) and in negotiation, accuracy correlates with value for both parties (Elfenbein et al., 2007). Surprisingly, decoding emotions accurately can happen very quickly and with limited temporal exposure to the emotional cues (cf. Elfenbein and Ambady, 2002).

Together, research has demonstrated the importance of accurately decoding emotional expressions.

This relatively recent literature on emotion recognition, however, has generally been limited to the recognition of individual-level emotions. Recent evidence of collective emotions offers new perspectives and raises important new questions about how to manage these collective emotions.

Collective Emotions

Social psychologists and organizational scholars have gathered compelling empirical evidence that emotions spread from one individual to another, creating clusters of collective emotions (Barsade and Gibson, 1998; Brief and Weiss, 2002). The convergence of personal emotions and collective ones can occur in small workgroups and teams (Totterdell, 1999; Bartel and Saavedra, 2000; Barsade, 2002) and larger units that exhibit distinct affective tones (George, 1990). As strategic renewal is unlikely to affect all units or groups in the same way, these clusters of collective emotions might be particularly varied in large organizations inhabited by collectives with distinctive roles, values, and interests (Cyert and March, 1992). For instance, some groups might feel content or proud because they perceive that managers are heeding their calls for a new strategic direction. Other groups might feel contemptuous, on the other hand, because they believe their own ideas about new strategic directions are better than the ones their managers have proposed. In turn, collective emotions can prompt either action or inaction at the group level, motivating mobilization for or against change (Huy, 2002; Reus and Liu, 2004; Sy, Côté, and Saavedra, 2005). In this way, collective emotions can influence the success of their managers in charting and implementing new strategic directions (LaNuez and Jermier, 1994; Piderit, 2000).

Several mechanisms contribute to the emergence of collective emotions. These include shared interpretations, experiences, identities, and organizational culture (Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989; Schein, 1992; Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000). Faced with an important event (e.g., announcement of a new strategic direction), groups of employees can experience emotions similar to one another if they have similar interpretations about the impetus for strategic renewal, or if they have had similar experiences with regard to the ensuing costs and benefits for their business units (Schein, 1992; Gump and Kulick, 1997). For example, employees who strongly identify themselves with their companies are likely to experience emotions similar

to one another when faced with events that enhance or threaten the organization's identity through a radical shift in strategic focus (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). Organizational culture represents another subtle yet powerful form of control that informs and guides the emotions of employees and contributes to shared emotional experiences (Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989).

There is also an automatic, non-conscious psychological mechanism through which people experience shared emotions: "emotional contagion." This is an innate human propensity to adopt the emotional experiences of those around us (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, 1994; Neumann and Strack, 2000). The mere perception of a person showing anguish, for example, can lead to a sad expression on the perceiver's face (Ekman, 2004). In turn, these unintentional changes in facial and other muscles can lead to similar emotional states in perceivers (For a recent review, see Niedenthal, Barsalou, Winkielman, and Krauth-Gruber, 2005). Studies have found that these non-conscious but contagious effects produce clusters of shared emotional experiences in many organizational settings (Totterdell, Kellett, Teuchmann, and Briner, 1998; Bartell and Saavedra, 2000; Barsade, 2002; Totterdell et al., 2004).

In short, a series of recent and provocative empirical studies in psychology and organizational behavior have established the veracity of collective emotions, mechanisms that contribute to their development, and their effects on important organizational outcomes—including those that require collective action. Within the specific context of strategic renewal, we propose that recognizing collective emotions can offer important diagnostic information.

Recognizing Collective Emotions

Research on emotional experiences in organizations and of groups within them suggests the need to expand theories to cover collective emotions. So far, though, knowledge and understanding about emotion recognition has been limited to the domain of individual-level emotions. Our goal here is to fill this gap by introducing *emotional aperture*—an ability that complements and extends the notions of managerial social intelligence (Goleman, 2006) and emotional intelligence (Barrett and Salovey, 2002;

Côté and Miners, 2006) within the context of organizational strategic renewal (See Agarwal and Helfat, in this special issue).

Strategic renewal provides a particularly apt context for understanding emotional aperture in several ways. First, it is an emotion-laden context where collective emotions can change, gradually or suddenly. For example, managers could see growing frustration over current routines in some groups as a signal of the need for change. Or, as strategic renewal gains momentum, they could see collective contempt in some groups in response to dissatisfaction with particular proposals. Collective emotions such as surprise, sadness, or disappointment similarly provide diagnostic cues about the optimal pacing of strategic initiatives. Additionally, the shared roles of top- and mid-level managers in this process (facilitating, directing, and implementing strategic renewal) provide opportunities to describe emotional abilities that are not exclusive to any one level of leadership. Moreover, the heightened demands and limited resources, which strategic renewal presents at all leadership ranks, highlight the need for managers to recognize collective emotions.

In the next section, we integrate research on cognitive and cultural psychology to discuss specific challenges to the use of emotional aperture in organizational contexts, the distinct perceptual lens that it requires, and the specific hurdles to distinguishing between negative and positive emotions. We draw on cross-cultural studies of emotion recognition, moreover, to discuss the use of emotional aperture in globally connected and culturally diverse organizations. Following this, we develop testable propositions around a novel research agenda: recognizing and responding to collective emotions in organizations.

Emotional Aperture

Emotional aperture entails automatically recognizing the distribution of specific collective emotions. By emotion distribution, we refer to the proportions of specific emotions that occur both within and between groups. After the announcement of a pending shift in strategic direction, for instance, 65% of

the marketing group might show signs of hope and 35% of fear.¹ Within manufacturing, however, the proportion of fear might be smaller but the proportion of contempt higher. Because collective behavior drives many organizational actions, we argue that managers benefit from taking a broader perspective to detect emotional experiences at the group level.

During the tumultuous times of strategic renewal, constraints—the pressure on leaders to multi-task while using fewer resources and less time—place heavy demands on the cognitive and temporal resources that they can devote to recognizing the emotions of their employees (Van Kleef, De Dreu, and Manstead, 2004). Furthermore, these constraints make it nearly impossible for managers to assess the individual emotions of each of their employees. Emotional aperture is an alternative, holistic, and cognitive-perceptual orientation (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan, 2001) that offers leaders a way to maximize these resources in service of gauging patterns of emotional responses in the organization. Under resource and time constraints, it might be more realistic for managers to focus on the most critical emotional distributions of groups as opposed to the scattered emotional states of individuals.² Additionally, time spent processing non-verbal cues and accuracy at detection are not always positively related (Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, and Archer, 1979; Choi, Gray, and Ambady, 2005; Todorov, Pakrashi, and Engell, 2007), and managers may derive a relatively accurate portrait of an organization's emotional landscape from a brief but wider perceptual focus on emotional distributions. Indeed, there is compelling evidence that brief 'thin slice' perceptions can lead to greater accuracy than judgments based on longer observations (Gottman, 1993; Ambady, Bernieri, and Richeson, 2000; Ekman, 2004). This suggests that quick, automatic evaluation and assessment of the emotions that occur both within and between groups might provide critical information for effective coordination of relational and task resources.

¹ For the sake of illustration only, we describe displays of a single dominant emotion at any moment. Recognition becomes difficult when people display several contradicting emotions at once (Young, Rowland, Calder, Etcoff, Seth, and Perrett, 1997).

² There are exceptions, of course, to this pattern--for example, when people (such as union representatives) wield great influence over those around them.

By defining emotional aperture in reference to evolving emotional distributions, the construct explicitly takes into account the temporal shifts in emotional experiences during strategic renewal (Eisenhardt, 1989; Hackman, 1993; Huy, 1999, 2002; George and Jones, 2001). Initial emotional reactions to organizational stress, for example, evolve as employees evaluate and respond to events, and strategic renewal gains momentum (Isabella, 1990; Liu and Perrewé, 2005). Patterns of specific emotions are likely to shift for other reasons as well. For example, due to the passage of time and/or managerial interventions, some fearful employees might gradually become hopeful; contempt due to perceived unfairness might grow within one group but diminish within another (cf. Wiesenfeld, Brockner, and Thibault, 2000). As organizational power and influence over various groups shift, employees who believe that their own in-groups are becoming stronger may become angry at the threatening out-group and to take action against it (Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000). These emotional changes suggest that emotional distribution is not static and that using emotional aperture can be particularly useful throughout the renewal process.

Emerging psychological and organizational research on emotional attunement and emotion recognition suggests several distinct challenges for emotional aperture with regard to perception and interpretation. In the next section, we will develop empirically testable propositions for each type of challenge to the use of emotional aperture.

Attending to Emotional Information at Work: The Initial Hurdle

The initial step of emotional aperture involves a dual perceptual focus of decoding social-emotional information embedded in organizational behavior along with processing task-specific information (e.g., items on a meeting's agenda). Accuracy at emotion recognition is often proposed to be the initial stage in models of emotional intelligence (e.g., Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004), but there is evidence of an even more basic yet under-appreciated initial one (Gross, 1998). Recent research indicates a widespread perceptual habit in most Western companies to filter out much of what unfolds in the social and emotional domains (for a review, see Sanchez-Burks, 2005). While it is neither uncommon nor

inappropriate to focus on emotion-laden cues (such as someone's tone of voice, facial expression, or non-verbal gestures) beyond the workplace, it is both less common and often considered inappropriate to do so in the workplace. The norms of professionalism, therefore, create blind spots.

Scholars have explained this reduced sensitivity to emotions as a pervasive work ethos: the Protestant Relational Ideology (PRI) (Sanchez-Burks, 2002), a concept closely associated with beliefs about the moral importance of work that underpins the Protestant work ethic (PWE) (Weber, 1904/1930). Although these two belief systems have long been secularized and incorporated into organizational practices, they are based on beliefs of the Calvinist Puritans. These early Protestant communities set in motion a mode of organizational behavior that exemplified two beliefs, both novel at the time: that work is a moral obligation, and that it requires restricted attention to emotional and relational matters (Bendix, 1977; Lenski, 1961; Weber, 1904/1930). One result of these deep-seated beliefs is the assumption that social and emotional matters will interfere with business effectiveness. To be professional, therefore, is *de facto* to focus attention exclusively on tasks instead of emotions (Heaphy, Sanchez-Burks, and Ashford, 2007).

In some workplace contexts, this assumption is justifiable. Medical first responders must make priority judgments for urgent care, for instance, and they must base these on unemotional assessments of injury. Their training teaches them to ignore patients who cry out intensely for help, because those patients who cry out most intensely are seldom the ones most in need of immediate help. But other contexts imply the opposite. Consider the post-divestiture situation of AT&T. Top management's inadequate dealing with middle managers' emotional stress, caused by massive restructuring and firing, produced widespread but covert anger and depression. These emotions de-energized AT&T managers and reduced the collective and innovative dynamism of the restructured organization (Moses, 1987).

Nonetheless, earlier research suggests a general tendency within Western-based organizations to decrease attention to emotional information in the workplace. Remarkably, the same people who show impoverished attention to emotional cues at work might be highly attuned to similar ones away from

work (Sanchez-Burks, 2002; Lee et al., 2003). This contextual variation in emotional attunement suggests that emotional aperture might require breaking a habit of perception—that is, unknowingly switching it off at work. Personal and cultural differences found for PRI suggest that the need to do so varies from one person to another but might be particularly important wherever PRI is widespread (cf. Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, and Ybarra, 2000). The implication of PRI for organizations and managers during strategic renewal is that they must learn about the deep-seated habit of filtering out precisely the type of information they need in responding to emotional behaviors. This bias in workplace cognition inhibits the necessary and initial step in emotional aperture, perceiving emotional information in others, a bias that can affect the organization in general and its managers in particular.

Proposition 1a: *The strength of Protestant Relational Ideology within an organization correlates negatively with the emotional aperture level of its employees by reducing their overall attention to emotion-related information.*

Proposition 1b: *The strength of Protestant Relational Ideology for specific managers correlates negatively with the level of their emotional aperture by restricting overall attention to the emotional dimension of their work.*

Thus, the first step in increasing emotional aperture is to overcome culturally grounded beliefs that restrict attention to emotional cues at work. A focus that includes emotional perception is especially important for those who manage the role conflicts and emotional tensions that arise during strategic renewal. Attention to collective emotions provides leaders with the information they need to provide prompt psychological care for their employees (Fox and Hamichai-Hamburger, 2001; George, Jones, and Gonzales, 2001; Huy, 2002; Liu and Perrewé, 2005).

Adjusting Emotional Aperture: From Personal Displays to Distributions in Collectives

Focusing on emotional information is a necessary but not sufficient step in recognizing emotional distributions. Emotional aperture departs from other constructs of social and emotional intelligence by switching from sensitivity to personal displays of emotions to collective ones—that is, detecting the

distribution of emotional clusters within an organization. In particular, emotional aperture describes a process of adjusting perception to recognize a broader array of emotional displays. Through emotional aperture, managers can make accurate inferences about the proportions of specific emotions at a given moment—recognizing, for instance, that frustration and even contempt are prevalent within the manufacturing department but also the prevalence of surprise and anger within the marketing department.

Our focus on emotional distribution does not downplay the benefits of a focus on personal emotion. Particularly with direct reports, accurate recognition of personal emotion can improve the quality of interpersonal interactions, negotiations, and perceived leadership (Foo, Elfenbein, Tan, and Aik, 2004; George, 2000; Rubin, Munz, and Bommer, 2005). But a managerial focus on that alone, perhaps on the emotions of very close or very outspoken employees, could be misleading in regard to the whole organization's pattern of emotional distribution. As we have proposed, not every group feels the same emotion at the same time during strategic renewal. Moreover, specific emotional patterns can provide important clues about the urgency of specific emotions. Some frustration over product innovation might be healthy, because it can motivate increased effort (George and Zhou, 2002). But contempt for managers might not be so healthy to the extent that this particular emotion signals the end of relationships (Gottman, 1993; Pelzer, 2005). Being attuned to the proportion of employees who express contempt versus frustration, for instance, can provide clues about whether the organization is near a tipping point (Gladwell, 2000) for collective disengagement.

Recent research on analytic versus holistic perception provides insight into the basic challenges involved in recognizing distributional patterns. (For a review, see Nisbett et al., 2001). People vary widely in their ability to process social information holistically—seeing patterns in an entire field (“forest”) as opposed to focusing on specific individuals (“trees”). This ability, we propose, is essential to those who must recognize encompassing patterns of emotional information. In a study of particular importance to holistic processing of emotional information, Masuda and his colleagues (2006) asked participants to evaluate a picture depicting a person surrounded by a group that showed a contrasting emotion. A

common response of participants was to focus on the individual and ignore information about the group. A follow-up experiment, using eye-tracking measurements, confirmed that participants were not simply discounting information about the group but focusing their attention on one or two individuals instead of perceiving the group more holistically. Thus, when perceiving a group, people tend to narrow their attention to a few *individuals* and to evaluate only them in detail (Masuda et al., 2006). As a result, they automatically filter out information embedded in the larger social context, such as emotional distribution. Illustrating a wider aperture of attention are Japanese and other East Asian groups. Scholars have found that they more often process social information holistically (i.e., focusing on broad patterns within the group as opposed to those of a few salient individuals) (Masuda et al., 2006). Thus, a challenge to achieving this group-level aperture of attention is a fundamental tendency, particularly in Western societies, to highlight individuating information at the expense of social and contextual information (Nisbett et al., 2001).³

In sum, research on holistic processing suggests that the skill in processing individual-level information might not translate into skill in processing group-level information. Moreover, people tend to apply either a narrow or a holistic perceptual focus in any specific context. For many, however, using one's emotional aperture entails breaking perceptual habits. This suggests the need for managers to adjust their aperture of attention from the individual and the group level when undergoing strategic renewal.

Proposition 2: *Managers who excel at holistic cognitive processing will show high levels of emotional aperture and thus be more likely to recognize patterns of emotions in their organization.*

The Challenge of Asymmetry in Accuracy for Negative Emotions versus Positive Emotions

During emotionally turbulent times, accurately recognizing distributions of both positive emotions (e.g., the proportion of pride to hope) and negative emotions (e.g., that of contempt to fear) is critical to understanding a collective emotional profile. Although scholars have shown that experiencing

³ For an analogous discussion on the holistic processing of individual human facial features, see Ellison and Massaro, 1997 and Tanaka and Farah, 1993.

positive emotions (e.g., hope and attachment) is as critical to personal and organizational success as negative ones (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Huy, 1999, 2002), the latter remain more difficult to decode accurately. Empirical evidence indicates a reliable asymmetry in emotion recognition, showing less accuracy for negative emotions than for positive ones (Elfenbein and Ambady, 2002). Therefore, attention to collective emotions alone does not necessarily lead to accurate recognition of all emotions.

Misreading the proportion of negative emotions within either the organization as a whole or its departments in particular, we propose, can impede strategic renewal. A manager who underestimates the prevalence of contempt in any department might unwittingly press on with a particular strategic initiative, for instance, only to encounter attempts to sabotage its success (cf. LaNuez and Jermier, 1994; Piderit, 2000). To illustrate the predictive power of specific negative emotions, we highlight *contempt*; an emotion that can wreak havoc but also one that few scholars have discussed (Pelzer, 2005). Contempt arises when people think more highly of themselves than they do of their targets (i.e., managers of renewal), thus denying the latter legitimate authority. Darwin's (1872) study of emotions underscored contempt as a potent emotion, which entails scorn and disdain. Later research confirmed his proposition that contempt is a basic emotion that generates distinct facial and other physical expressions (Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000; Matsumoto and Ekman, 2004). Even a brief video clip of an interpersonal interaction is enough to reveal contempt. Its presence provides a reliable signal that a relationship will likely be antagonistic or even end quickly (e.g., Herzog, 1998; Gottman, 1993).

Within organizations, the ability to detect shifting proportions of contempt during strategic renewal provides managers with valuable information about the effectiveness of past actions and the likely success of new ones. Contempt signals the belief among employees that those in charge of change have inadequate ideas, act incompetently or unprofessionally, and are therefore unworthy of trust. It may predict whether some groups of employees will quit their jobs, or resort to quiet disobedience or even sabotage (LaNuez and Jermier, 1994). Managers can use emotional aperture to monitor the changing

proportion of specific negative emotions within various groups. Unlike differentiating between global negative and positive emotions, differentiating between specific ones provides fine-grained cues about potential behavior. For example, both contempt and anger are negative emotions. Whereas anger is amenable to resolution, contempt most often is not (Gottman, 1999). Thus, misreading one negative emotion (anger) for another (contempt) can lead to adverse unintended consequences.

Despite the utility of recognizing specific negative emotions, because they typically signal a problematic state of affairs, many people are unable to detect negative emotions correctly. (For a review, see Elfenbein and Ambady, 2002; Barrett, 2006). In their meta-analysis of 97 studies, Elfenbein and Ambady (2002) found that accuracy rates ranged from 68% to 79% for detecting positive emotions but only from 43% to 67% for negative ones. Contempt had the lowest rate (43.2%), followed by fear (57.5%); but happiness had the highest (79%). The explanation for this handicap might be the lower frequency with which people encounter negative emotions. Given their potentially destructive consequences in social interactions, most people might try to hide their own negative emotions-- especially in front of their employers (Argyris, 1993). This further inhibits the ability to decode negative emotions and adversely affects emotional aperture by increasing the odds of underestimating the proportion of negative emotions

Proposition 3: *The level of emotional aperture for assessing the proportion of negative emotions in an organization will be lower than that of positive emotions; consequently, people are likely to underestimate the prevalence of specific negative emotions.*

Unique Challenges of Culturally Diverse and Globally Situated Businesses

As with many other features of interpersonal relations, emotion recognition abilities reflect the interplay between culture and cognition (Sanchez-Burks and Lee, 2007). Given the increasingly global and culturally diverse nature of companies and the triggers of strategic renewal (e.g., global acquisitions and international alliances), cultural differences in emotional expression can present a challenge to high levels of emotional aperture. Although there is some degree of universality in non-verbal displays of

emotions (Ekman, 1972; Haidt and Keltner, 1999; Mesquita and Frijda, 1997), enough variation remains to produce culturally unique ‘accent’s in emotional displays that create a handicap at decoding the emotions expressed by people with cultural backgrounds different from the perceiver (cf. Elfenbein and Ambady, 2002).

Scholars have suggested that this disadvantage is due to more exposure to people from similar backgrounds than to those from different ones (Elfenbein and Ambady, 2003; Beaupré and Hess, 2006; Elfenbein, 2006). Chinese people living in China are less accurate than Chinese people living in the United States, for example, at decoding Anglo-American faces; Africans living in the United States are more accurate at decoding African and Anglo-American faces, not surprisingly, than at decoding Chinese ones (Elfenbein and Ambady, 2003). However, training in recognizing emotional facial expression produces greater improvement for emotions expressed by out-groups than by in-groups. This result supports the notion that lack of exposure decreases accuracy (Elfenbein and Ambady, 2003). Although this disadvantage has been demonstrated only in relation to recognizing personal emotions, information gleaned from in-group members will likely skew one’s inferences about the emotions of out-groups. This bias presents another challenge to accurate emotion recognition.

Proposition 4: *(a) Accuracy at recognizing proportions of specific emotions in groups will decrease as the level of ethnic/cultural diversity in the target group increases. (b) This relation between accuracy and diversity will be moderated by the level of experience with ethnic/cultural diversity.*

Having explored some of the key factors that enable or hinder emotional aperture in work settings, we will next describe how emotional aperture can be concretely applied to facilitate strategic renewal process.

Applying Emotional Aperture to Strategic Renewal

Strategic renewal has been described as a system of social interactions that enables knowledge development and organizational learning (Crossan, Lane, and White, 1999). Managers must balance the need for competition among groups with the need to promote the organization as a whole. Creating a

climate of trust to encourage voice (Hirschman, 1970) can reduce role conflict, which is endemic during renewal (Floyd and Lane, 2000).

Managers may be able to improve their accuracy in emotion recognition by comparing their judgment of facial emotions with other non-verbal behaviors over a period of time. Managers can pick up these behavioral cues through direct observation or through what Ashford and Cummings (1983) refer to as indirect observation/monitoring. Moreover, direct conversations with these groups might allow further decoding of both verbal and non-verbal information (cf. Ford and Ford, 1995). Emotional aperture followed by conversations with specific groups in their work contexts can significantly increase the accuracy of managers in reading both the emotions of employees and what causes those emotions. Emotional aperture thus provides the first informational cues that invite them to interact more closely with specific groups. It might be easy for people to mask their true emotions in brief, distant, and infrequent encounters but less so in focused and extended interactions, potentially allowing managers to better detect misalignment between displayed emotions or other non-verbal behavior and verbal statements more easily (Huy, 2002).

In the early stages of strategic renewal, groups close to the market—which is to say, those who often directly experience the shortcomings of a strategy—are likely to experience several specific emotions. These emotions, in part, provide the initial signals of organizational stress (Huff, Huff, and Thomas, 1992). But these groups do not always express them explicitly or boldly. Employees are likely to fear punishment for behaviors that do not conform to the preexisting strategy, and this increases the need for managers to be attentive to subtle emotional cues that reveal dissatisfaction. These cues may additionally offer direction about where managers might look for alternative courses of action. Where groups do not engage in explicit issue selling (Dutton and Ashford, 1993), the ability to detect more subtle emotional reactions to daily routines and the distribution of these emotions can help managers examine the reasons for these emotions and their prevalence. Managers who can recognize widespread fear and disappointment, for instance, can see the need for immediate investigation. They might discover

that these widespread emotional states stem from the dissatisfaction of low-level managers with reluctance to modify the official organization's strategy along the lines that they have been championing for a long time (Burgelman, 1994). By encouraging more voice, authentic expression of emotions, and open debate about the pros and cons of modifying the organization's official strategy (Huy, 1999; Fox and Amichai-Hamburger, 2001), top- and low-level managers might be able to agree both cognitively and emotionally on altering the organization's strategy and allocating resources to modify the associated organizational competencies.

Other groups might be angry or sad that the organization's current strategy does not help them meet the changing needs of customers. Consequently, they may become unable to meet their group objectives in terms of revenues or profit growth. Anger provokes action, but sadness inhibits it (Oatley and Johnson-Laird, 1987). Recognizing either can prompt managers to interact more intensively with these groups to learn more about their particular market situations and therefore how to help them overcome their difficulties (George, 2002). Conversely, managers might more readily notice a small but joyful group of employees and subsequently engage this group to find out what contributes to this positive affect. For example, if the group has just discovered a creative way to address the needs of customers, then managers could adapt its solution to the angry or sad group's needs—unless, of course, the two groups do not interact much because of rivalry and mistrust.

Managers can act as links between two such groups, managing emotions in a way that both find satisfying (George, 2002). Although managers can elicit pride in the creative and joyful group by praising and rewarding them (Lewis, 2000), for instance, they could provide direction to help avoid gloating when explaining its innovation to the angry and sad group--reminding the former that the latter has other valuable resources that could benefit them. In helping these two groups work together, leaders can regularly monitor displays of sympathy, anger, or contempt and decide to provide additional coaching and support to improve relations. Recognizing and attending to emotions instead of relying on impersonal

bureaucratic controls thus can foster mutual adjustment and coordination, that, in turn, can increase organizational flexibility.

Emotional aperture also can be useful when everyone accepts the need for change but no one has agreed on the new direction. Low-level employees might experiment with novel solutions to emerging problems, and mid-level managers might champion the most promising ones to top-level managers (Floyd and Lane, 2000). Not all companies promote the kind of emotional climate that fosters creativity.

Substantial research has suggested that people who experience positive affect (Isen, 1999; Amabile et al., 2005) are likely to be more creative than those who do not. Through emotional aperture, managers can learn approximately the proportion of employees who enjoy their work--particularly in departments that need creativity most, such as marketing or research and development.

If most employees are unhappy--fearful, angry, or bored--managers can investigate the reasons for these emotional cues. Honest conversations are necessary, partly because even negative emotions can foster creativity in an enabling context—that is, when employees know why they are dissatisfied and can expect rewards for finding creative solutions to their problems (George and Zhou, 2002). Managers can thus manage negative affect if it signals to people that the status quo is problematic, that people need improvements, and that they want more efforts to foster truly novel and useful ideas. Consequently, managers will look for an enabling organizational context for creativity or create one if necessary. They can do so by providing adequate resources to the focal group: time and money for research; few distractions; little pressure; praise for courageous experiments, even if these under-perform; that provide valuable lessons to the organization (Mainemalis, 2001).

Though middle managers will champion the most promising ideas to top management, companies differ in providing contexts that promote the championing of new ideas (Dutton et al., 1997). Emotional aperture may increase the likelihood managers can detect situations where groups that have promising ideas are reluctant to bring them forward. Leaders might detect that fear or shame, for example, prevails among the middle managers of particular work units. These emotions indicate not only excessive risk

aversion and defensive or avoidance behavior (Öhman, 2000; Lewis, 2000; Lerner and Keltner, 2001), but also predict that some employees will quit their jobs due to diminished self-esteem (Liu and Perrewé, 2005). Conversely, pride in groups may signal collective beliefs that their managers support and will “sell” their new ideas to upper management (Dutton, 2003; Verbeke, Belschak, and Bagozzi, 2004). If these managers can engage various groups in an open exploration of the causes for emotional differences, they are in a better position to try to come up with adjustments that would encourage even more middle managers to champion promising new ideas to top managers.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In this paper, we have advanced emotional aperture as an ability to recognize the distribution of specific emotions in groups. It remains an empirical question whether individuals who are skilled at recognizing emotions in others at the individual level will be similarly competent in doing so at the collective level. Emotional aperture may in fact represent a distinct component of social and emotional intelligence. We have described how dealing with collective emotions during strategic renewal relies on accurate perception of the shifting distributions of specific emotions. Emotions can provide top- and middle-level managers with valuable information that allows them to act more effectively in response to the emotional needs of diverse groups. However, we have also discussed in addition various enablers and challenges to the effective use of emotional aperture in work settings. Dynamically adjusting emotional aperture to meet organizational demands is neither natural nor easy, because basic cognitive and cultural biases often prevent people from taking this holistic approach. Finally, we have shown how managers can use emotional aperture in a flexible and dynamic way to foster strategic renewal.

In addition to the implications described in our propositions, researchers could begin several empirical projects on emotional aperture. First, our theory of emotional aperture has delineated conditions that moderate its utility. The importance of emotional aperture is likely to increase, for example, with the level of emotional turbulence and with the level of cultural diversity in the organization. The interaction hypothesis suggested by the emotional turbulence moderator could be empirically tested, for example, in

a cross-panel design over time in one organization in flux or between different organizations that vary in the intensity or magnitude of change.

Future researchers also could investigate the degree to which emotional aperture is a skill that people can develop. Recent studies have provided data suggesting that training can increase the ability to decipher personal emotional displays (Elfenbein, 2006). Similar results might be found for emotional aperture training. The ability measures of emotional aperture required to assess the effectiveness of such training, would also provide a metric that organizations could use to establish their success in building this dynamic managerial capability. Importantly, such a metric should avoid self-reported measures of accuracy. People are generally overconfident about their accuracy in judgments about others (Ames, 2007). Yet, the most confident judgments are not the most accurate. As Ames puts it, the drivers of confidence differ from the drivers of accuracy (also see Wilson and Nisbett, 1977; Todorov, Pkrashi, and Engell, 2007).

Although we have restricted our discussion about the applicability of emotional aperture to managing strategic renewal, future researchers could explore this ability in related contexts such as transformational leadership, organizational change, learning, and creativity. In short, our concept of emotional aperture promises to open new and exciting terrains of research, particularly on collective emotions, and link the latter to important processes such as strategic renewal and organizational innovation, which contribute to a firm's competitive advantage.

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