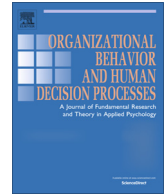




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Who's bringing the donuts: The role of affective patterns in group decision making



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ABSTRACT

Two studies examined how intragroup affective patterns influence groups' pervasive tendency to ignore the unique expertise of their members. Using a hidden profile task, Study 1 provided evidence that groups with at least one member experiencing positive affect shared more unique information than groups composed entirely of members experiencing neutral affect. This occurred because group members experiencing positive affect were more likely to initiate unique information sharing, as well as information seeking. Study 2 built upon this base by showing that confidence mediates the relationship between positive affect and the initiation of unique information sharing. Additionally, Study 2 investigated the role of negative affect in group decision making and how negative and positive affect concurrently influence decision making when groups are composed of members experiencing each. The results are discussed in terms of the role affect plays in influencing group behavior and the resultant importance of investigating specific affective patterns.

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Introduction

Groups are often chosen to make decisions rather than individuals because of their greater knowledge base and the diversity of their members' perspectives (Kerr & Tindale, 2004). However, a multitude of studies have shown that collectives often fail to exploit this potential because they are unable to effectively utilize the specialized knowledge of their members. Instead, they tend to favor the much smaller set of member's commonly held information (Lu, Yuan, & McLeod, 2012; Mesmer-Magnus & DeChurch, 2009; Wittenbaum, Hollingshead, & Botero, 2004). The results of this issue have severe consequences considering the omnipresence of groups in modern organizations and the necessity of combining knowledge to solve the complex problems organizations face (Devine, 1999; Gully, Incalcaterra, Joshi, & Beaubien, 2002). In response to these findings, several research endeavors have identified cognitive factors, such as creating critical thinking norms or instilling counterfactual mindsets, which increase group information sharing and improve group decision making (e.g. Galinsky & Kray, 2004; Postmes, Spears, & Cihangir, 2001; Stewart & Stasser, 1995). Yet, few studies have investigated the role of affect in group decision making, despite emotions being ubiquitous in group interactions (Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Huang, 2009). Because of this

central role, it is important to understand how affect influences group behavior.

Complicating the issue, previous studies investigating the influence of affect on group decision making have reported mixed results. For example, a series of two studies found that groups composed of individuals high in trait negative affect were more likely to integrate disparate information and make better decisions than groups composed of members experiencing positive affect (Kooij-de Bode, van Knippenberg, & van Ginkel, 2010; van Knippenberg, Kooij-de Bode, & van Ginkel, 2010). Conversely, a separate investigation found that state positive affect allows groups to ignore preliminary biases and exchange unique information, resulting in more effective decision making, while state negative affect stifles these tendencies and reduces group decision making performance (Bramsfeld & Gasper, 2008). Further, experiencing state positive affect has been found to increase people's awareness of expertise that is different from one's own, resulting in effective usage of that expertise (Urada & Miller, 2000).

One reason for these mixed results may be inattention to the specific affective patterns that can exist in group environments. Previous studies have either focused on individual affect or groups composed of members experiencing identical affect (e.g., Bramsfeld & Gasper, 2008). Real world groups, however, are likely to be composed of members experiencing different affective states. Studying these patterns is important because understanding the specific affective composition of a group allows for explicit

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investigation of how group members' affective states influence their behavior, and further, how they interact to influence group decision making as a whole (Jehn, Rispens, & Thatcher, 2010; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). For example, when studying intragroup conflict, Jehn, Rispens, and Thatcher (2010) found that the degree to which members differed in their perceptions of conflict, as opposed to the actual group conflict climate, predicted group creativity and performance. Similarly, investigating group affective patterns at multiple levels will allow researchers to understand how the processes driven by individual level affect influence individual group member behavior, and how group affective composition influences behavior at the group level (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).

To clarify and extend previous findings, two studies were conducted investigating how specific patterns of affect (both positive and negative) existing within three-member decision making groups influence information exchange processes and decision making performance at both the individual and group level. Positive affect was chosen for the preliminary investigation because the results of studies conducted over more than 30 years have provided a large amount of evidence that positive affect increases individual's flexibility and carefulness in thinking, resulting in improved problem solving (e.g., Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1997; Isen, 1993; Isen, 2008; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987; Staw & Barsade, 1993). The second study builds upon this base by exploring the specific mechanisms through which affect influences group decision making. Additionally, Study 2 utilizes the evidence that negative affect increases careful and deliberate information processing (Bless & Schwarz, 1999; Forgas, 1995; Forgas, 1998; Forgas & George, 2001; Frijda, 1988) to investigate the influence of negative affect on group decision making. Finally, Study 2 provides evidence that positive and negative affect can concurrently and beneficially affect group decision making performance.

Individual positive affect and information exchange

Central to the thesis that the specific pattern of affect existing within a group influences group members' behavior is the premise that a group can be viewed as a collection of individuals, each interacting within an interpersonal collective environment (Carley & Krackhardt, 1996; Crawford & LePine, 2013). Therefore, the extensive line of individual level research explaining the role of positive affect in information seeking and processing is vital to understanding the role of positive affect in groups since groups are one environment, albeit unique, in which individuals must seek out and utilize information to make optimal decisions.

Previous research suggests that positive affect should facilitate these processes and positively influence group information exchange by promoting both the divergent, or broadened thinking necessary to recruit information concerning a problem, and the convergent, or focused thinking necessary to analyze that information, integrate it with other information, and apply it to reaching a feasible solution (e.g. Baumann & Kuhl, 2005; Djamasbi, 2007; Estrada et al., 1997; Fredrickson, 2001; Isen, Johnson, Mertz, & Robinson, 1985). These tendencies have been demonstrated numerous times at the individual level in problem solving tasks such as the Remote Associates Test (RAT), Duncker's candle problem (e.g. Isen et al., 1987), complex decision tasks such as physicians making diagnoses, and choice or categorization tasks (Erez & Isen, 2002; Estrada et al., 1997; Nadler, Rabi, & Minda, 2010). For example, in the RAT, participants are asked to find a common word that links three given words (e.g. for "river, note, account" the answer is "bank"). To solve such problems, participants must consider multiple properties and meanings of the given words, and narrow them down until a common word is found. Likewise, in the medical

diagnosis problem, the task requires open-minded consideration of possible diagnoses, followed by narrowing down the field and carefully checking possible solutions (Estrada et al., 1997).

Similarly, in group environments individuals must be able to recognize information that is applicable to a group task and synthesize that information with knowledge provided from fellow group members to make optimal decisions (Stasser & Titus, 1985, 2003). However, a multitude of research has shown that the goal of combining individual's expertise to utilize a greater knowledge base when solving complex problems is often unrealized (Mesmer-Magnus & DeChurch, 2009). The tendency to ignore the unique expertise of individual group members happens for three reasons. First, information people have in common is more likely to be mentioned, and thus focused on, simply because it is available to more people (Gigone & Hastie, 1993; Stasser, Taylor, & Hanna, 1989). Second, there are social costs to bringing up unique information in discussion, since it is difficult to establish credibility with unique information that no one else can vouch for (Stasser & Titus, 2003). Third, discussing unique information evades the psychological benefits of discussing shared information. Although both unique and common information are necessary to make high quality decisions, the discussion of common information has the added benefit of allowing for one's own information to be corroborated by fellow group members. This leads to feelings of competence and credibility for the person sharing the information as well as the other group members who have similar information (Wittenbaum, Hubbell, & Zuckerman, 1999). So, in order to attenuate this bias, group members must seek unique information from their teammates and not be dissuaded from sharing their own unique information with them.

Individuals experiencing positive affect should be better able to do this because of their increased ability to connect and combine information, and apply that information to reaching a feasible solution to a problem. Specifically, the increase in divergent thinking caused by positive affect should allow happy group members to be better able to search their own expertise and the task environment for information relevant to whatever problem the group is facing. Then, they should be better able to link new information to the group's preexisting information pool, facilitating problem solving. Thus, positive affect should work both to allow group members to seek out unique information and to subsequently connect that information to the problem at hand.

H1a. Individuals experiencing positive affect will share more of their own unique information with fellow group members than individuals experiencing neutral affect.

Still, the ability to integrate information may not be enough for people experiencing positive affect to overcome the social cost of sharing unique information. In other words, even if someone knows a piece of information has not been discussed they may be hesitant to share it for fear that it may be discredited or ridiculed (Stasser & Titus, 2003). However, one mechanism that has consistently been shown to allow people to overcome this fear and share unique information is having confidence in both the amount of knowledge they have regarding a particular problem and the quality of that knowledge (Bock & Kim, 2002; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002). In turn, positive affect has consistently been linked to increased task-specific confidence (Bandura, 1997; Brinol, Petty, & Barden, 2007; Forgas, 1995).

Positive affect enhances people's confidence for two reasons. First, positive affect increases access to positive thoughts in memory (Isen, Shalker, Clark, & Karp, 1978), specifically those regarding past successes (Bower, 1981). Therefore, people experiencing positive affect are more likely to recall instances of past success and thus be more confident engaging in current endeavors

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