Emotions at work

Isabella Poggi
Dipartimento di Scienze dell’Educazione
Università Roma Tre
Via del Castro Pretorio 20
00185 Roma - Italy
+39 06 49229296
poggi@uniroma3.it

Manuela Germani
Dipartimento di Scienze dell’Educazione
Università Roma Tre
Via del Castro Pretorio 20
00185 Roma - Italy
+39 06 49229296
mangerm@tin.it

ABSTRACT
We present a goal and belief model of emotions and on this basis we classify the emotions people feel while at work. Among “individual” emotions we distinguish the so-called primary emotions and their “families” from cognitive emotions like curiosity and boredom; among “social” emotions we include those linked to attachment, Image and Self-Image, and the Image of the Other. We describe an empirical research that investigates what emotions are felt at work and how they are linked to gender, status and creativity of job, and we account for the results in terms of the model presented.

Keywords
Work, emotions, social emotions, cognitive emotions, status, creative work.

INTRODUCTION
In the years of the cognitivist concern for emotions (Frijda, 1986; Ortony, 1988; Lazarus, 1994), a relevant issue was the discovery of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; Caruso & Wolfe, 2001) and of the relevance of emotion awareness and regulation for work performance. But what has been less studied were the specific qualities of emotions that people feel while at work; the causal relationships between workplace, job, status and the emotions felt; the link of emotions to a person’s motivation, social relationships, cognitive and professional performance, and to the possible arising of stress, burn-out and mobbing.

In this paper we explore two issues: what emotions a person more frequently feels at work; and how these emotions are linked to gender and to structural aspects of her work, like her status and the creativity of her job.

We present a theoretical model of emotions (Castelfranchi, 1988; 2000), and on this basis we distinguish different groups of emotions felt at work toward the work, oneself or other people. We present an empirical research about the emotions people feel at work and, on the basis of the model presented, we try to account for the relationships we found between work features and reported emotions.

EMOTIONS
According to the model of emotions we adopt (Castelfranchi, 1988; 2000), stemming from a goal and belief model of cognitive and social action (Conte & Castelfranchi, 1995), an emotion is a complex subjective state that is triggered in a System (a human, an animal or even a machine) any time an important goal of the System is, or is likely to be, achieved or thwarted. Thus, an emotion is an important adaptive device aimed at monitoring the state of the System’s most important goals. In a Human, any time a real or imagined event is evaluated as relevant to its goal set, the “emotional syndrome” is triggered, encompassing different aspects:

1. cognitive aspects: the beliefs about the event and the goal to which it is relevant;
2. subjective feelings: pleasant for goals being or likely to be achieved, unpleasant for goals being or likely to be thwarted;
3. physiological aspects: visceral – somatic responses;
4. expressive aspects: perceivable movements or morphological changes in the System’s body;
5. motivational aspects: the goals typically activated (like flight for fear or struggle for anger).

The mental ingredients of emotions
The model we adopt is particularly concerned in analysing the “mental ingredients” of emotions, that correspond to its cognitive and motivational aspects: they include beliefs, inferences, causal attributions about the event, the Subject’s goals being (or likely to be) achieved or thwarted, and the goals eventually activated. For example, in shame Subject A believes that his/her goal of esteem or self-esteem (the goals of being evaluated positively by others or oneself) is or is likely to be thwarted (Castelfranchi & Poggi, 1990); in envy A believes that another Subject, B, has achieved some goal that A has not achieved, hence A also believes one’s goal of self-esteem is thwarted, and has the goal that some other goal of B be thwarted (Castelfranchi, 2000). In surprise, A believes that a new belief utterly disconfirms his/her previous beliefs; in admiration, A believes that B has some positive
qualities, that A would like to have, at a greater extent than others do, and has the goal of staying with B and of imitating B, of taking B as a model.

**Types of emotions**

On the basis of the mental ingredients shared by groups of emotions, it is possible to propose a typology of emotions that looks useful also for studying the emotions felt at work.

1. Individual emotions

Some emotions, like envy, admiration, contempt, can only be felt toward someone else, while others, like fear or joy, need not: even if they can also be felt toward someone (I can fear my boss, I can be happy for my friend) they do not necessarily and intrinsically mention another person in their mental ingredients. In this class of “individual” emotions we include some of the so-called primary emotions, like joy, sadness, anger, and their “families”, that is, other emotions differing from them mainly for intensity. So, in the family of joy we may include gladness, euphoria, happiness, enthusiasm; in the family of sadness, displeasure, disappointment, unease; in the family of anger, annoyance, rage, fury.

2. Cognitive emotions

We define cognitive emotions the ones felt about knowledge or knowledge acquisition: interest, curiosity, surprise, boredom...

3. Attachment emotions

Some emotions, like love and hatred, sympathy and dislike, are felt when we have the goal of staying near or far from some person, or of doing something for or against them. They are intrinsically social emotions, in that they are necessary felt toward some person.

4. Image and Self-Image emotions

An important class of emotions are those that monitor the goals of Image and Self-Image: shame, guilt, embarrassment, pride, satisfaction...

5. Other-Image emotions

Some emotions are linked to the image we have of others: esteem, admiration, contempt...

Of course, including an emotion into one or another class is not always straightforward, because different ingredients of an emotion may lead to include it into different classes. Envy for instance, encompassing a feeling of malevolence (Castelfranchi 2000) might belong to the class of negative Attachment Emotions; while entailing a decrease in self-esteem, it might be included among Image Emotions.

**EMOTIONS AT WORK. AN EMPIRICAL STUDY**

While at work, we feel emotions toward our work, ourselves, and other people. About the work, we mainly feel individual and cognitive emotions; about ourselves, Image-and Self-Image emotions; toward others, Attachment and Other-Image emotions.

But what emotions do we feel most? Do males and females feel the same emotions? And are the emotions felt determined by our status or by our type of job? To explore these issues we carried on an empirical research.

**Hypotheses, Subjects, and Method**

280 subjects, 125 males and 155 females, between 19 and 73, of different status and type of job, were tested through a questionnaire of open and multiple choice questions, asking what emotions they happened to feel at work, toward whom or what, and why. A list was proposed of 53 emotions, but Subjects could add other emotions. To answer the question “why”, the subjects described a situation in which they had felt that emotion.

Our data were subject to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis was performed through SPSS software. The qualitative analysis was aimed at finding out the common features of the situations in which each emotion was felt, and the mental ingredients of the emotions in those situations.

**RESULTS. THE EMOTIONS WE FEEL AT WORK**

The emotions mentioned by our subjects were 55 (with enthusiasm included both among individual and cognitive emotion, anger among individual and negative attachment emotions, and envy and jealousy among attachment and self-image emotions).

1. Individual emotions

positive: euphoria, happiness, joy, gladness, enthusiasm
negative: agitation, anguish, anxiety, disappointment, disgust, displeasure, hurt, worry, anger 1, feeling of injustice, frustration, stress, fear, sadness, unease.

2. Cognitive emotions

positive: curiosity, enthusiasm, surprise
negative: boredom, disorientation.

3. Attachment emotions

positive: feeling of belonging, sympathy, tenderness
negative: dislike, anger 2, envy 1, jealousy 1

4. Image and Self-Image emotions

positive: gratification, pride, feeling of power, feeling of superiority, feeling of being useful, satisfaction.

negative: envy 2, jealousy 2, guilt, embarrassment, dissatisfaction, feeling of inadequacy, feeling of insecurity, feeling of impotence, feeling of inferiority, feeling of uselessness, humiliation, shame, feeling of exclusion, feeling of alienation.

5. Other-Image emotions

positive: gratitude, esteem, admiration
negative: empathy, pity, compassion, contempt.
Types of emotions

Often the 55 emotions were mentioned more than once by Subjects, thus summing up to 625 mentioned emotions, of different types. Fig. 1 shows the distribution of the positive and negative emotions in each type.

53% of the emotions felt at work are “social” emotions, among which 28% are about the person’s image or self-image, 12% entail attachment or withdrawal from other persons, and 13% sustain attachment or withdrawal by signalling the Subject’s Image of the Other. Among emotions not directed to other people, only 6% concern the cognitive investment in one’s job, while 41% belong to primary emotions and their families.

Positive and negative emotions

Altogether, 55% of the emotions felt are negative, vs. 45% positive, but this relation is not the same in all types: negative ones clearly prevail among “individual” emotions (33% vs. 8%), while positive emotions prevail in all other types.

GENDER

Many emotions are felt at the same extent by males and females, but some are more typically felt by men while others by women (Fig. 2).

Women feel agitation and anxiety more than men, and they also feel anguish, which in men is absent; more, they report more feeling of inadequacy, feeling of insecurity, feeling of inferiority, and unease. Men instead feel more stress than women.

Men tend to feel more gratification, pride and satisfaction (+ 6%, 5% and 10%). 6% of men report a feeling of power, which women do not feel at all, and 5% of men, as against 3% of women, a feeling of superiority (Fig.3); finally, men are more subject to envy and jealousy (10% and 2%, respectively, more than women).

CREATIVE VS. REPETITIVE JOBS

To assess if emotions are causally linked to the quality of people’s work, we distinguished two kinds of jobs: creative ones (51% of our Subjects), allowing a creative contribution and change of tasks, and repetitive ones (49%), quite mechanical and leaving little room to personal variation. The former include jobs and professions like advocate, judge, researcher, architect, actor, craftsman, cook, baby-sitter; the latter, jobs like barman, driver, factory worker, postman.

Positive and negative emotions

Women feel some emotions that sustain social relationships more than men: more empathy, sympathy, more feeling of belonging, pity, compassion, and much more tenderness than men. This provides an interesting profile of how men and women are at work: men more self-confident and competitive, women more insecure but more ready to social relationship and help (Fig.4).
Positive emotions in general, and specifically satisfaction and gratification, as opposed to dissatisfaction and frustration, are felt more frequently in creative than in repetitive jobs (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). Moreover, creative workers report more feeling of usefulness and more enthusiasm, but less stress and no feeling of alienation.

Cognitive emotions
An unexpected result regards the cognitive emotions of curiosity, that is reported more for repetitive jobs (17% vs. 14%), and boredom, reported more for creative jobs (1% vs. 0%).

STATUS
To explore the relationship between status and felt emotions, Subjects were distinguished into five different statuses: the first includes autonomous workers, like advocates, architects, animators...; the others are four different types of “hierarchical” workers, from high to low status: 1. directors, judges, principals, doctors...; 2. actors, cooks, cartoonists, teachers, policemen, nurses...; 3. barmen, waiters, drivers, secretaries...; 4. factory workers.

Positive and negative emotions
Figure 7 shows the distribution of positive and negative emotions in the different statuses.

While in autonomous workers positive equal negative emotions, these prevail in all the hierarchical workers and, strangely enough, they are felt most often in the highest and lowest statuses.

This might lead to think that a general negative mood about work is mainly determined by having to do with other people: if one could arrange one’s work by oneself, and had not to deal with too many responsibilities (for the highest status) nor with too many bosses (lowest status), one could feel generally happier.

But let us see how specific sets of emotions are felt according to different statuses.

Anger and feeling of injustice
Anger and feeling of injustice have something in common: not only in that they are both negative, and, in some cases, “social” emotions, since they are felt toward somebody, but also because often anger is felt toward someone who has transgressed some norm (Aristotle, 1967; Averill, 1982). As shown by Fig. 8, even if anger is felt in the average 10% more than feeling of injustice, the two emotions have very similar profiles, which confirms their qualitative similarity. Both are highest in Status 4 workers and mainly toward their superior (50% for anger, up to 71% for feeling of injustice). But also Status 1 workers feel a high amount of these emotions: 33% directed to colleagues, 18% to users, 17% to the boss, 8% to the whole team and 8% to one colleague in the team, 8% to the institution (firm, school, hospital...), 8% (probably misunderstanding the answer) to oneself.

Envy
Envy is reported by very few subjects, as could be expected, given the heavy social sanction on this emotion and its confession. Yet, some interesting results can be outlined (Fig. 9).

First, envy does not hold among autonomous workers: which is perfectly predictable, since this emotion requires a comparison with other people in the same ecological niche.

Second, envy is felt by Status 1 workers at the highest extent, it decreases in Status 2 and 3 and increases again in Status 4.
That highest status workers suffer envy more than all others is only seemingly paradoxical; after all, envy is a typical emotion of Power: its function is preventing the individual from having less power than others (Castelfranchi, 2000); it is the emotion of competition (this is also why we included it in both attachment and image emotions). Furthermore, as we shall see for the feeling of impotence, it is only if you want to have power that you can feel envy. In fact, the profile of envy (Fig.9) is quite similar to that of the feeling of impotence (Fig.13).

Third, Status 1 workers only envy same status persons, which is generally congruent with the analysis of this emotion, according to which we envy only peers, only people at our own level. But among Status 2 workers, 77% envy their colleagues, while 23% envy their superior; different from Status 3 and 4, where envy is only felt toward colleagues.

That Status 2 workers can also envy their superior might be accounted for by the fact that Status 2 are more close to Status 1 workers than Status 3 and 4, and, as Alberoni (1991) claims, closeness increases envy. But an alternative account could be a self-protecting function of envy. If I can envy only my peers, envying my superior entails implicitly assuming that he is only unduly, unjustly in that place: I could be in his place with more right than he is. In this self-protecting function, envy mixes up with the feeling of injustice. In fact, feeling of injustice can be linked to envy, because provided that we envy someone, acknowledging our envy would be acknowledging our failure; so we mask our envy under the feeling of injustice: I did not succeed while he did, not because he is clever than I, but because he was unduly helped (Castelfranchi, 1988).

**Satisfaction/dissatisfaction, gratification/ frustration**

An interesting result concerns the profiles of satisfaction and gratification vs. dissatisfaction and frustration (Fig. 10 and Fig.11).

**Figure 10: Satisfaction and Gratification**

As shown in Fig.10, autonomous workers, quite strangely, report the same amount of satisfaction as lowest status workers; this emotion is higher for Status 2 than Status 3, while status 1 workers report the least amount of satisfaction.

**Figure 11: Dissatisfaction and Frustration**

Fig. 11 shows similarly unexpected results: the two most dissatisfaction workers are autonomous and Status 2 workers, the two least dissatisfied are Status 1 and 4. One more striking thing is, finally, that Status 4 workers show an inverted trend both between satisfaction and gratification (Fig.10) and between dissatisfaction and frustration (Fig.11): in brief, they look the most satisfied but the least gratified, and, symmetrically, the most frustrated but the least dissatisfied workers.

To account for these seemingly strange results, let us resort to our qualitative analysis of these emotions.

What are the features shared by the different cases mentioned by subjects? Both gratification and satisfaction are felt for the achievement of a goal of one’s work (e.g., for an actress, joy of transmitting emotions during her work), and for the external acknowledgement of one’s capacity, commitment, competence – that is, achievement of the goal of image (appreciation by colleagues) or of self-image (as you feel you have done something good). Satisfaction, though, may also occur thanks to an internal acknowledgement of one’s capacity or commitment, or of the importance of one’s role in an institution (a subject is satisfied since he was able to get soon acquainted with a new department); in other words, satisfaction is linked more to the goal of self-image than to the goal of image. In fact, satisfaction is close to pride, because it stems from achieving a goal we ourselves want to achieve, independent on whether others know or expect we achieve it.

The same difference holds between frustration and dissatisfaction: frustration occurs when you did not succeed for causes not depending on you, dissatisfaction when you were investing not only on the task but also on you personal worth.

In brief, gratification and frustration are more linked to the goal of image, satisfaction and dissatisfaction to self-image. This accounts for the results above.

First, Status 4 workers might feel the least gratified and the most frustrated since they are at the lowest level in the work hierarchy and everybody can command on them, while no one is supposed to praise them. But at the same time, when they feel they have worked well, they can be satisfied with their performance.

Second, autonomous workers feel both the most satisfied and the most dissatisfied just because their performance depends on them solely, not on external
causes: they are indebted only to themselves, both when they succeed and when they fail.

**Feeling of power and feeling of superiority, feeling of impotence and feeling of inferiority**

Figure 12: Feeling of Power and Feeling of Superiority

What strikes in Fig.12 is the large divergence between feeling of power and feeling of superiority in autonomous as opposed to Status 1 workers. This means that you can feel a sense of power only if you have to do with other people who depend on you, while the feeling of superiority is determined by a comparison of respective powers, not on having power over someone (Castelfranchi, 1990).

Figure 13: Feeling of Impotence and Feeling of Inferiority

Feeling of impotence and feeling of inferiority, instead, show very different profiles (Fig.13). The interesting thing here is that the profile of the feeling of impotence is much steeper but quite similar to the feeling of power. Both are felt most by Status 1 workers, where 22% (among department chiefs) feel it toward their boss, 11% toward the work and 11% toward themselves. Both feeling of power and feeling of impotence presuppose the goal of having power over things or people, and the presumption you have it; so you feel impotent any time something goes wrong and you realise you have no control over it. That Status 2 workers report more feeling of impotence than Status 3 could confirm this account: Status 2 subjects presume having some control over events or other people more than Status 3 do.

Another reason why the feeling of impotence is felt at such a large extent by Status 1 workers might be the self-image protecting function of this emotion: impotence entails an implicit external attribution; you implicitly acknowledge it is not your fault if something goes wrong. This could lead to think that Status 1 workers, just because they have a greater responsibility than others, but responsibility is also a heavy load, use more self-protecting strategies, not to be overwhelmed by sense responsibility and sense of guilt.

**Feeling of insecurity**

Figure 14: Feeling of Insecurity

As shows Fig.14, the feeling of insecurity is totally absent in Autonomous and Status 4 workers, very low in Status 1, but quite high in Status 2 workers, who feel it 50% toward their work, 36% to the boss, and 14% to Users. Perhaps because the Status 2 worker is pressed by three different factors: a work which is not trivial, a quite high responsibility in front of users and possibly also over other workers, and, moreover, the duty to comply with the superior.

**Agitation, Anxiety, Worry, Stress**

Figure 15: Agitation, Anxiety, Worry, Stress

As shown in Figure 15, agitation is felt much more by autonomous than by hierarchical workers; anxiety more by Status 1 and 2, and very little by Status 3 and 4 workers. Autonomous workers feel significantly less worry and more agitation than other status subjects, while Status 4 feel more worry and less stress than Status 3 workers.

From qualitative analysis of the triggering events, it results that agitation, anxiety and worry are felt as one assumes that some goal is at risk, and that one is not certain about one’s internal or external resources to confront the situation. The threatened goal may concern one’s work, Image, or Self-Image; for agitation and anxiety, but not for worry, it may concern one’s role (a teacher was agitated for a hurt child); for agitation it may also concern an altruistic goal.

Agitation is felt more about work or oneself, anxiety about Users and bosses, and it contains one more
ingredient: others threaten your goal to feel quiet, not to feel always aroused or alerted. Worry differs from both because 1. sometimes the goal is already thwarted (a collaborator has made a mistake and you worry about how the whole firm will go on), while in agitation and anxiety the goal is only threatened; 2. the event that triggers worry about does not contain an ingredient of novelty, as is the case for the other two emotions.

Stress instead contains an ingredient of lack of control: a stressed person feels she does not have all the resources (of time, for example, then, mainly external resources) needed to cope with the situation. The profile of stress then suggests it could depend on two factors, resources and responsibility: the more you feel responsible the more you need to have control over resources: and if you feel a lack of control over the resources needed, you feel stressed.

The ingredient of lack of control is what stress shares with the feeling of impotence. In fact, we could even say that the feeling of impotence is the starting point of stress: stress could be viewed as the result of a repeated or even steady feeling of impotence.

CONCLUSION
The research we have presented was aimed at providing a first overview on what emotions people feel while at work. We found out that more than a half of emotions are felt not so much because of the work itself but because of the social relationships holding at work, and because of how a person feels with herself due to both work and social relationships. In the traditional trend that opposed reason to passion, and used to draw a rigid distinction between reason and passion in the workplace, the emotions felt out of the cognitive aspects of work would have been the only accepted one. And yet, from our data it results they are but a small portion of the emotions we feel about work. A great part are caused by interaction with other people: some are linked to the struggle for power in the workplace, to the goals of image and to competition, and, in their turn, they sustain attachment or withdrawal from other people, cooperation or aggression. Moreover, our work has a relevant effect on how we see ourselves, and then many of our emotions at work are linked to our self-image.

The results of this first overview also show that the emotions felt at work, and their specific qualities, are linked not only to individual factors as gender or the type of work, but also to the social structure of one’s work, and to one’s status within the organization.

In conclusion, the emotions we feel at work are both effects and causes of our life and behavior in the workplace. In viewing emotions as a causal factor in work, we think that positive emotions can be the engine of motivation and commitment to one’s job, while a negative mood on the job is far from helping; hence, it is important to monitor aspects of a person’s work like her relationship with her job and her social interaction with other people, in such a way as to maximize occasions for positive emotions and minimize negative ones. In viewing emotions as an effect of work on people, some results in this paper clearly show how relevant work is for the people’s well being, thus reminding us how to provide people with a good job environment could contribute to the quality of their life.

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