

# Emotion sharing at work leads to greater productivity, innovation

By [Dammon Rice](#)

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Recent research from London Business School has shown that encouraging people to bottle up their emotions, whether good or bad, can hinder them and their organisation.



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Conducted by Michael Parke, Assistant Professor of Organisational Behaviour at London Business School and Myeong-Gu Seo, Associate Professor of Management and Organisation at the Robert H. Smith School of Business, the paper points out that workers, who feel comfortable and safe about expressing their true feelings, tend to be more productive, innovative and creative.

“What emotions and experiences are allowed, encouraged and supported and how does this impact an organisation’s strategic priorities such as innovation?” Dr Parke asks. “When people are invested in their jobs, they can get upset or frustrated with things but they should be able to share those emotions so it doesn’t stymie their work or creativity.”

The study also proposes that leaders are one of the main driving forces when it comes to establishing such a climate. The researchers came up with four positive traits found in organisations where people are encouraged to be open and honest about their emotions:

- Relationship performance – establishing strong ties with colleagues
- Productivity – the amount of work a team accomplishes when given a certain level of resources
- Creativity – the number of new and helpful ideas a team generates
- Reliability – the ability to avoid making mistakes or errors, particularly in high-pressure situations

As the researchers point out, from early on in our careers, people are often taught to put emotions to one side when dealing with colleagues. “Feelings of frustration, disappointment or even anger are discouraged by leaders who want a harmonious workplace with no disruptions,” says Dr Parke.

Ultimately this creates higher levels of conflict and stifles creativity and any authentic climate that leads to better team work, staff retention and customer satisfaction. Organisations are made up of individuals with different skills sets, talents, life experiences, prejudices and personalities. All of these constitutes the basis of inter-personal and group dynamics and provide many opportunities for misunderstanding, miscommunication, contentious disagreement and conflict.

## **Becoming a driving force**

The research suggests managers start by assessing the type of emotion climate in the organisation – through surveys, observing people's emotional responses and asking people.

The challenge is that traditional ways of addressing these issues are often ineffective. Some managers do not like dealing with emotionally charged conflicts. Often conflicts are solved in an autocratic way; the symptoms of the matter are dealt with but the underlying causes not, so resentment or underlying issues remain; the process for dealing with conflict or issue in organisations is not clear. People just leave their positions or they escalate the matters to the legal system because they do not believe that it will be resolved and don't want to expend energy on trying.

What we need is a new approach and tools for alternative ways to engage staff, ensuring employees feel genuinely enthusiastic and excited to be at work, and new ways to resolve conflict that lead to solutions that are more creative and sustained positive relationships.

In a tough economic climate with uncertainty such as in South Africa, managers tend to default on focussing on functions such as scrutinising budgets, operations and projects. South Africa now seems to epitomise the leadership-training acronym 'VUCA' – Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous.

There appear to be many challenges lying ahead, especially as we look for find ways to navigate the economic and political landscapes as they unfold before us. It is easy to feel despondent, overwhelmed and negative about where we find ourselves. When uncertainty and risk seems to be everywhere, we tend to retreat to what we know.

However, as the research points out, the untapped potential within the organisational culture and positive outcomes from authentic emotional experiences could be where our resilience and success rests.

There will be a Creative HR workshop on 8 June 2017; for more information, email [dammon.rice@ccdi.org.za](mailto:dammon.rice@ccdi.org.za)

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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