

## Emotional Response to Supervisor's Evaluation

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### Abstract

A model is tested that depicts subordinates' emotional responses to either approval or disapproval from their supervisor. The model depicts that the agreement, or disagreement, between the subordinate's self-perception and the supervisor's perception of the subordinate influences the subordinate's emotional response. The data includes the subjects' national origin and that variable is used as a surrogate for *culture*.

Six hypotheses are tested. The findings somewhat support the model, however the initial findings are tentative and not conclusive. The research is ongoing; the conference attendees are requested to assist in gathering data that will further test the model.

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A model is tested that depicts subordinates' emotional responses to either approval or disapproval from their supervisor. The model depicts that the agreement, or disagreement, between the subordinate's self-perception and the supervisor's perception of the subordinate influences the subordinate's emotional response. The data includes the subjects' national origin and that variable is used as a surrogate for culture.

Six hypotheses are tested. The findings somewhat support the model, however the initial findings are tentative and not conclusive. The research is ongoing; the conference attendees are requested to assist in gathering data that will further test the model.

## Introduction

**Emotional Response.** Thompson and VanHouten (1970) assert that, either explicitly or implicitly, other people are frequently evaluating us and that these evaluations do have consequences for our emotions. That is, the feelings that we experience are effected by others' evaluation of us. Thompson and VanHouten assert that one can face two kinds of information about one's self-concept: 1) Information which influences one's belief about one's performance, such as direct feedback from the task itself, and 2) the evaluation that one receives from others, such as one's supervisor's evaluation about one's task performance.

This research is designed to test a model that depicts subordinates' emotional responses when they receive either approval or disapproval of their work performance. These emotional responses might be influenced by the cultural experience of the subject, therefore this research is also designed to compare the emotional response scores to the subjects' national origin. These emotional responses might also be influenced by the relationship the subject has with the supervisor. The perceived relationship with the supervisor is measured as an *extent of satisfaction* with supervisor score.

**Culture.** In organizations, whether as a superior, as a peer, or as a subordinate a person is both being evaluated and is making evaluations almost constantly. Both the evaluator and the evaluated might have formed their self-concept, their ways of adapting and responding, and their communication methods in different cultures. Their beliefs about preferred or desirable goals, their norms, their beliefs about reality, and their beliefs about causation are not necessarily the same. When an employee is working in an unfamiliar culture it seems likely that he will try to adapt to the unfamiliar culture using learning and interpersonal skills that were acquired, and might be applicable in, a very different culture.

## Culture as a Variable

The word [culture] has been derived metaphorically from the idea of cultivation, i.e., the process of tilling and developing land. When we talk about culture we are typically referring to the pattern of development reflected in a society's system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day ritual. The word is also frequently used to refer to the degree of refinement evident in such system of belief and practice....

When talking about society as a culture we are thus using an old agricultural metaphor to guide our attention to very specific aspects of social development. And it is a metaphor that has considerable relevance for our understanding of organizations. (Morgan 1986: 112)

Hofstede's (1985) work pertaining to culture suggests that the supervisor-subordinate relationship is influenced by national differences among four dimensions, 1) *power distance*, 2) *uncertainty avoidance*, 3) *individualism*, and 4) *masculinity*. Hofstede also lists nations that can be grouped by these dimensions. The data obtained in this research will be tested for its ability to discriminate both individual nations and groups of nations. No attempt is made however, to consider culture as an organizationally specific construct such as it considered by Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders (1990).

For this research the word *culture* is used consistent with Morgan's first definition, i.e., a system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day ritual. Accepting this definition, the writers assert that the way a person perceives a situation, at least in part, is a result of that person's inculcation into or adaptation to the world, i.e., one's understanding of a situation results from one's learning from the culture. From our culture we learn how to adapt and respond to others, including how we adapt to our supervisor.

A person's emotional response to others and to organizational situations is in part derived from the culture. Consequently, how each of us adapt and react to organizational situations is influenced by our cultural learning. It is reasonable to hypothesize that one's culture will influence one's response to a supervisor's praise or criticism. This is not to conclude however, that only a culture variable influences one's response to a supervisor's praise and criticism. There are undoubtedly numerous intervening variables that influence the emotional response to a supervisor's evaluation.

For this research the subordinates are asked in which nation their emotional responses were formed. The respondent's nation is utilized as a surrogate of culture and is designated as the *cultural* variable.

### **The Emotional Response Model**

In their discussion of personality in everyday affairs, Thompson and VanHouten (1970) provide the context and the framework for the model that has been adapted and applied to the supervisor/subordinate situation by Summers, Covington, & Summers (1997). The assertion that underlies the model is that our emotional response to another's approval or disapproval of our behavior is influenced by our own self-perception. That is, our emotional response and the intensity of that response to our supervisor's evaluation are in part determined by our own evaluation of our work performance.

The Summers et al model (Figure 1) asserts that the extent of the agreement between the subordinate's self-perception, and the supervisor's perception that is communicated to the subordinate, influences the subordinate's emotional response. Summers et al also suggest that a more complete construct will include the cultural and geographic differences that influence the supervisor and subordinate interaction. That is, a more complete model should consider the cultural differences of those individuals that are depicted in the model.

Supervisors influence their subordinates' behavior by approving or disapproving their work performance. The emotional response experienced by the subordinate resulting from either approval or disapproval is influenced by the subordinate's self-concept pertaining to the situation. The subordinate's *behavior* that results from the supervisor's approval or disapproval is influenced by the subordinate's *emotional response* to that approval or disapproval. It seems reasonable to assume that the supervisor can better influence a subordinate's work behavior if the subordinate's emotional response to the supervisor's intervention is anticipated and understood by the supervisor.

The model being tested in this research narrows the self-perception, and the approval or disapproval of another, to the subordinate-supervisor situation. The model depicts the emotional response to a supervisor's evaluation. The supervisor's evaluation of the subordinate's performance might be either *favorable* or *unfavorable*, and the subordinate's perception of his own performance might be either *favorable* or *unfavorable*. While the model seems to make intuitive good sense, to the writer's knowledge this model has not been tested.

**The Supervisor/Subordinate Interaction.** The model predicts that when the subordinate's and the supervisor's perceptions of the subordinate's work performance **are in agreement:**

- 1) if the subordinate and the supervisor each have **favorable** perceptions, the subordinate's emotional response will range from *satisfaction* to *euphoria*; and
- 2) if the subordinate and the supervisor each have **unfavorable** perceptions, the subordinate's emotional response will range from *embarrassment* to *shame*.

The model predicts that when the subordinate's and the supervisor's perceptions of the subordinate's work performance **are not in agreement:**

- 1) if the subordinate has a **favorable** perception and the supervisor communicates a **unfavorable** perception, the subordinate's emotional response will range from *frustration* to *anger* and,

2) if the subordinate has an **unfavorable** perception and the supervisor communicates a **favorable** perception, the subordinate will experience an emotional response of *ambiguity*.

The present research is designed to test the model (Figure 1), and to identify whether cultural differences influence the degree of emotion experienced. Specifically, do the subjects report experiencing the feelings which are asserted by the model, and does the extent of those feelings (emotional responses) vary among subjects from different nations?

#### Relationship With Supervisor

It seems reasonable to suspect that the subordinate's present relationship with the supervisor will influence the emotion the subordinate experiences from either the supervisor's praise or criticism. The value one places on the supervisor's opinion, the trust one has of the supervisor, one's opinion of the supervisor's knowledge to assess one's task performance accurately, and one's belief regarding one's supervisor's ability to make task judgements, each might influence one's emotional response to being evaluated. For this research the variable, *Your present relationship with you supervisor*, has been selected as the variable to measure this supervisor-subordinate relationship.

#### Data Collection Sheet

The Data Collection Sheet Version 2, (Exhibit 1) , is designed to obtain data to test the model (Figure 1). In addition the subject is asked to indicate, 1) the extent that the present relationship with the supervisor is perceived as satisfactory, and 2) the subject's national origin.

The first design of the Data Collection Sheet did not in all cases obtain the expected results. Evidently the pilot testing of the Data Collection Sheet was not adequate, some of the subjects marked each scale on each item; it was expected that the subject would select one scale in each situation. The Data Collection Sheet was revised to improve this instruction. Exhibit 1 is the revised Data Collection sheet.

#### The Sample

The sample is a convenience sample. Various colleagues in various countries were mailed data collection sheets and requested to obtain data from their contacts such as students that had work experience. The researchers know of no reason that this sampling method prejudices the results. The researchers had no prior knowledge of the subjects or which subjects might elect to complete the Data Collection Sheet.

Ninety-five data collection sheets were returned. Seventy-four data collection sheets contained the single answer to each scale referred to above and these 74 were used for analysis. These 74 subjects represent 16 nations. Table 1. presents the percent of the subjects' responses to the emotional response scales of the four evaluation situations depicted in the model.

#### Analysis of the Findings

The data were separated into two data groups: 1) Those subjects that completed the data sheet by scoring only one scale per situation; 2) Those subjects that scored most or all of the scales in each situation. Only the data from the first group are analyzed in this paper. The data from the second group will be analyzed in a future paper.

**Hypotheses tested and the results.** The below hypotheses are drawn from the previous discussion. The conclusions regarding the first four hypotheses are drawn from inspection of the frequency analysis (Table 1.) For convenience the four quadrants of the model are labeled alphabetically. (see Figure 1.)

favorable – favorable (upper left) Quadrant A  
favorable - unfavorable (upper right) Quadrant B  
unfavorable – favorable (lower left) Quadrant C  
unfavorable - unfavorable (lower right) Quadrant D

Hypothesis 1. When the supervisor's perception of the subordinate's work behavior or performance is *favorable*, and subordinate's self-perception is *favorable*, the subordinate will experience a feeling ranging between satisfaction and euphoric.

Quadrant A in the model is represented by Item 3., Situation 1 of the data collection sheets. The expectation from the theory is that the scale, *satisfaction-euphoric* will be selected. The data strongly support the model. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2. When the supervisor's perception of the subordinate's work behavior or performance is *favorable*, and the subordinate's self-perception is *unfavorable*, the subordinate will experience a feeling of ambiguity.

Quadrant B in the model is represented by Item 3, Situation 2 of the data collection sheet. The expectation from the theory is that the scale, *slightly ambiguous-very ambiguous* will be selected. That expectation is not supported by the data. Hypothesis 2 is not supported. The results perhaps are ambiguous, (pun intended).

Hypothesis 3. When the supervisor's perception of the subordinate's work behavior or performance is *unfavorable*, and the subordinate's self-perception is *favorable*, the subordinate will experience a feeling between frustration and anger.

Quadrant C in the model is represented by Item 2, Situation 1 of the data collection sheet. The expectation from the theory is that the scale, *frustration-anger* will be selected. That expectation is strongly supported by the data. Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4. When the supervisor's perception of the subordinate's work behavior or performance is *unfavorable*, and the subordinate's self-perception is *unfavorable*, the subordinate will experience a feeling ranging between embarrassment and shame.

Quadrant D in the model is represented by Item 2, Situation 2 of the data collection sheet. The expectation from the theory is that the scale, *embarrassment - shame* will be selected. That expectation is weakly supported. Hypothesis 4 is weakly supported.

These findings lead the researchers to the question, is anything being measured by the model? Inspection of the frequency results (Table 1) certainly lead to a conclusion that the scales are measuring something. While the present data are certainly not conclusive, the evident conclusion is that the model has value for research and for learning about the subordinate-supervisor interaction as regards the emotions that are being elicited within the subordinate.

Hypothesis 5. The subject's responses to the questionnaire items will group by culture.

Hypothesis 6. The subject's responses to the intensity of their emotional response will group by culture.

The results of discriminate analysis do not indicate that *culture* is a discriminating variable in these data. If one drew a conclusion only from these data the conclusion would be that *culture* as defined here, did not effect the subjects' responses. This seems contrary to one's expectations. The findings may have been confounded by the fact that most (13) of the national groups are represented by 3 or fewer subjects. The three other national groups contain 7, 17, and 26 subjects. These are too few from which to draw useful conclusions. Certainly as regards the variable *culture* more data needs to be gathered. It will be interesting, informative, and perhaps curious if the findings pertaining to *culture* in this study are supported by additional data. Based on the findings of this study Hypothesis 5 and 6 are not supported.

Satisfaction with Supervisor. Fifty-three of the 65 responding subjects indicated a *satisfactory* relationship with their supervisor with a mean score of 2.26 and a standard deviation of 1.176 (9 subjects omitted or did not score this item). The sample size and the small variance exclude any useful analysis of this variable.

## Summary, Conclusions, Recapitulation, Extensions, and Discussion

The extent to which a subordinate may actually reveal his emotional response to supervisor is, of course, quite another set of considerations. Many organizational and cultural variables constrain or facilitate whether one reveals one's emotions. If the future research pertaining to the model is fruitful, then it will be useful to examine these considerations. This will especially be true if it appears to be useful to apply the model in organization improvement.

It is possible that the surrogate of culture used in this study is inadequate as a measure of culture. It is also possible that "people are people" and have very similar emotional response to evaluation regardless of their cultural experience. That is, across cultures people might be more similar, than different, in their reactions to evaluation.

A new hypothesis is suggested. The frequency analysis suggests that the *frustration – anger* and the *embarrassment – shame* scales may be closely related emotions and this possibility needs further consideration in future studies. Thus, a new hypothesis may need to be written and tested.

In addition, more precise anchor words might need to be devised. The deletion of the notion of scales may prove to be useful, e.g., one word, rather than a scale selected for an emotional response. Further testing of the model with attention to words that may prove to be better anchor words on the scales should be considered.

If the model, or some modified version of the model, continues to be supported, then the implications for organizational development and training need to be considered. Including variables of cultural differences needs to be continued until further research is conducted. The importance of understanding and adjusting for cultural differences will increase as more people work in unfamiliar cultural settings, and as more people with very different cultural backgrounds work together. It seems reasonable to conclude that, into the foreseeable future, understanding and adapting to cultural difference in the work place will be important.

It seems reasonable that the compatibility between the subordinate's and the supervisor's cultural experience is an important variable. In this research no data are collected pertaining to the supervisor's cultural experience. Consequently such a compatibility test is not possible. For future research such a compatibility measure of a *compatibility variable* might need to be developed and tested.

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**Figure 1**

		SUBORDINATE'S SELF-PERCEPTION	
		Favorable	Unfavorable
SUPERVISOR'S COMMUNICATED PERCEPTION OF SUBORDINATE	Favorable	Quadrant A satisfaction to euphoric	Quadrant B ambiguity
	Unfavorable	Quadrant C frustration to anger	Quadrant D embarrassment to shame

adapted by Summers, B.I. from Thompson, J.D. & VanHouten, D.R. 1970. *The behavioral sciences: An interpretation*. softbound ed. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, pp. 183-185.

The model is most recently published in:  
Summers, B.I., Covington, W.G. Jr., & Summers, S.L., 1997. The supervisor-subordinate dyad: The discipline interview episode. *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference*, Eastern Academy of Management International, Dublin, Ireland. *Managing in a Global Economy VII Europe Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Convergence and Divergence*, p. 519.

**Table 1.**

**Frequency Analysis**

**Item 2.**

Situation 1. Unfavorable feedback from Supervisor, one's self-perception is favorable (Quadrant C).  
The expected emotional response is *frustration – anger*

	Percent selected	Percent omitted
satisfaction to euphoric	10.9	89.2
frustration to anger	74.3	25.7
slightly to very ambiguous	4.1	95.9
embarrassment to shame	10.8	89.2

Situation 2. Unfavorable feedback from Supervisor, one's self-perception is unfavorable (Quadrant D).  
The expected emotional response is *embarrassment – shame*

	Percent selected	Percent omitted
satisfaction to euphoric	12.2	87.8
frustration to anger	31.1	68.9
slightly to very ambiguous	5.4	94.6
embarrassment to shame	52.7	47.3

**Item 3.**

Situation 1. Favorable feedback from Supervisor and one's self-perception is also favorable (Quadrant A).  
The expected emotional response is *satisfaction – euphoric*

	Percent Selected	Percent Omitted
frustration to anger	2.7	97.3
slightly to very ambiguous	2.7	97.3
embarrassment to shame	0.0	100.0
satisfaction to euphoric	91.9	8.1

Situation 2. Favorable feedback from Supervisor and one's self-perception is unfavorable (Quadrant B).  
The expected emotional response is *ambiguous*

	Percent Selected	Percent Selected
satisfaction to euphoric	20.3	79.7
frustration to anger	21.6	78.4
slightly to very ambiguous	27.0	73.0
embarrassment to shame	27.0	73.0



**Item 2. Negative feedback from your supervisor.**

Please recall your emotions (how you felt) when your supervisor told you that your work is **unsatisfactory**. The disapproval might have been communicated to you verbally or in writing. If you cannot recall a specific incident, please indicate the feelings you believe that you experience during such a negative feedback experience.

Please consider these two situations:

Situation 1. Your work is important to you. You believe that your work performance is **good**, but, your supervisor tells you that your work performance is **not good**. What is your emotional response? Please select the only one Emotional Response Scale below that you believe best indicates your emotions, and on that one scale place a check ( ) that indicates the intensity of that emotion.

Emotional Response Scales

Select only one

satisfaction	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	euphoric
frustration	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	anger
slightly ambiguous	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	very ambiguous
embarrassment	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	shame

Situation 2. Your work is important to you. You believe that your work performance is **not good**, and your supervisor tells you that your work performance is **not good**. What is your emotional response? Please select only the one Emotional Response Scale below that you believe best indicates your emotions, and on that one scale place a check ( ) that indicates the intensity of that emotion.

Emotional Response Scales

Select only one

satisfaction	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	euphoric
frustration	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	anger
slightly ambiguous	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	very ambiguous
embarrassment	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	shame

(Please continue on page 3)

**Item 3. Positive feedback from your supervisor**

Please recall your emotions (how you felt) during a incident when your supervisor told you that your work is **satisfactory**. The approval might have been communicated to you verbally or in writing. If you cannot recall a specific incident, please indicate the feelings you believe that you experience during such a positive feedback experience.

Please consider these two situations.

Situation 1. Your work is important to you. You believe that your work performance **is good**, and your supervisor tells you that your work performance **is good**. What is your emotional response? Please select only the one Emotional Response Scale that you believe best indicates your emotions, and on that one scale place a check ( ) that indicates the intensity of that emotion.

Emotional Response Scales

Select only one

satisfaction	euphoric
1-----2-----3-----4-----5	
frustration	anger
1-----2-----3-----4-----5	
slightly ambiguous	very ambiguous
1-----2-----3-----4-----5	
embarrassment	shame
1-----2-----3-----4-----5	

Situation 2. Your work is important to you. You believe that your work performance **is not good**, but your supervisor tells you that your work performance **is good**. What is your emotional response? Please select only the one Emotional Response Scale below that you think best indicates your emotional response, and on that one scale place a check ( ) that indicates the intensity of that emotion.

Emotional Response Scales

satisfaction	euphoric
1-----2-----3-----4-----5	
frustration	anger
1-----2-----3-----4-----5	
slightly ambiguous	very ambiguous
1-----2-----3-----4-----5	
embarrassment	shame
1-----2-----3-----4-----5	

**Item 4. Cultural variable.** Please write-in the country where you believe the emotional responses you indicated above were formed. Most likely, but not necessarily, this is the country where you spent your early years.

Country? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much