Conceptualising Passion: problematising ‘positive’ emotions

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Abstract:
Until recently it has been routinely assumed that passion is a positive emotion. As a consequence calls for people to be more passionate about their work and lives have had a moral imperative – it is something that people ‘should’ be interested in pursuing. This research problematises this construction of passion by examining the relationship between organisational and individual passion as constructed in the popular management literature. The frame analysis of 30 books and 39 articles in business journals highlights some of the dilemmas of constructing passion as a positive emotion. The analysis identifies four types of passionate worker-organisation relationship, and while it is evident that mutual passion can indeed be advantageous, there also exists the potential for exploitation, burnout and chaos. The research finds that in conceptualising passion we need new tools for appreciating the ‘positives’ and ‘negatives’ associated with this way of being in an organisation.

Conceptualising Passion: problematising ‘positive’ emotions

The popular management literature (PML) is a medium in which management ‘truths’ are constructed and reconstructed. Passion, along with spirituality and emotional intelligence, is one of the latest concepts to be used to generate such ‘truths’ about work and management. The PML actively pursues the promise of passion: ‘gurus create new images, use new languages and reshape the thinking of managers by formulating their ideas in accessible and very persuasive language’ (Hatcher 2003: 394). In this sense passion is being constructed as a moral imperative, something that should be sought and utilised. The question this research seeks to examine is whether the assumption that passion is overwhelmingly positive stands up to analysis.
discovered (from interaction with the world),
about whether such an object has to be uncovered (from within the self) or
focus. The object has to have subjective meaning, although there is ambivalence

3. Object of meaning: The object of meaning provides passion with its direction and

motivation.

energy is often used interchangeably with passion in discussions of diverse and
physical and mental energy. In the literature (e.g., Piaget, 1997; Chomsky, 2004),

2. Energy: Passion is embodied through the way it generates, uses, and shapes

and produced, and for the intensity of their expression.

the expression of particular emotions, the ways in which emotions are combined

Characteristics: Although not an emotion in itself, passion provides the context for

papper defines passion as a supportive concept that contributes to meaning. From

Chomsky, 2003; Himmel, 2003; Kline, 1999; Warrick and Power, 2003; Piaget, 2002; Bronn, 2002; and

are synonymous with the expression of particular emotions. In and

passions, which are synonymous with the expression of particular emotions. In many

Before entering further discussion of the positive aspects of passion, it is first necessary

which is beneficial for both the organization and its members.

prescriptive, these are good reasons to think that incorporating passion into organizations

recreation of our own and others' subjective (Chomsky and Premack, 1992). From this

reasoning, in concluding on the basis of desire (Broth and Chomsky, 2003) and of

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reasoning, in concluding on the basis of desire (Broth and Chomsky, 2003) and of
4. **Attachments.** In addition to being attached to a particular object of meaning, passion also leads to attachments to other people and social groups interested in this same object. These attachments help to generate a shared vision, a sense of belonging, and stronger commitment.

In this paper I draw on concepts relating to emotions in organisations to explicate ways of conceptualising passion. Two such theories are particularly relevant to the data analysis – those relating to emotional management and those relating to emotional intelligence. Mumby and Putnam (1992), distinguish between ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild 1983) and ‘work feelings’ in theories of emotional management. They argue that emotional labour occurs in organisations structured according to rational principles (albeit in a bounded form of rationality). Emotionality in these organisations is therefore treated as a means to serve organisational ends such as efficiency, profit and productivity (1992: 471) where the emotions are co-opted and alienated.

In contrast, Mumby and Putnam’s notion of ‘work feelings’ provides an approach to thinking about emotional management and emotions as central to individual wellbeing, motivation and job satisfaction. Work feelings take place within a relational framework (which Mumby and Putnam call bounded emotionality), and given that much of the literature on passion is about creating stronger attachments to various aspects of an organisation, it could provide a more positive framework for conceptualising passion.

The literature on emotion management introduced the idea that there were not only ‘rules’ associated with the display and feeling of emotions, but that particular skills were required if emotions were to be used effectively. Goleman built on this idea to develop the concept of emotional intelligence, or the ‘capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships’ (1998: 317). This involves five competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills.

While it is apparent that passion might be a form of emotional intelligence, emotional labour or work feelings, these do not – in themselves – explain whether or not passion could promise a more human way of being in an organisation. I argue that while they are useful for providing insights into the use of passion by organisations and individuals, it is
emotional intelligence. These frameworks of passion, it was evident that passion was being constructed as a form of
success. Within this frame, it is measured more in psychical than material terms. In both of
their work, so their work becomes more intrinsically fulfilling and meaningful.

hypertextualization and the need for meaning in people's lives. The answer is to find and
in itself. The issue that passion addresses within this frame is the perceived hollowness of
On the other hand, passion was also discussed as being an intrinsic characteristic, an end

sustained, although their own passion may be other stimuli of success.

they work. The goal here is for leaders to recognize and advocate passion among their
construction of emotional relationships between members and the organization for which
become more competitive, creative and flexible. Passion enables these to occur through the
extrinsic characteristic of a means to an end, with the end being increased success.

of this state of affairs (see King 2005). On the other hand, it was discussed as being an

The analysts found that passion was found in two ways (see 1986).

progress and the motivation for taking action (Snow et al. 1986).

problem, the

passion in relation to the three core framing articles. In their problem, the
research examining social movement, marketing and media research to examine the discourse strategies used
although (Snow et al. 1986; Cresser et al. 2002) were implemented. From my analysis, it is clear in
strategy (Snow et al. 1986; Cresser et al. 2002) a methodology called "frame
constructed of passion in the PDL, a methodology called "frame
the discourse of passion in the PDL, a methodology called "frame
research involved constructing a discourse analysis of the popular management

The Premise of Passion

stimulated (from the head) or sincere (from the heart).

level of congruence in the object of passion and whether the performance of passion is

also necessary to take account of the ways in which passion is being framed as either
In addition to the two macro frames used to discuss passion in the PML, there were two types of entities for which passion could make a difference: organisations and individuals.

The Relationship between Individual and Organisational Frames

Two questions arose from the initial frame analysis of the PML: what are the implications – for individuals and organisations – of subscribing to these framings of passion? And is being passionate necessarily ‘positive’ for people working within organisations? Saliency theory (Stryker 2000) suggests that passion is most likely to have positive results if there is a level of convergence between the frames of individuals and that of the organisation. Using the different framings of passion and the relationship to those framings by individuals and organisations (see Table 1) it is evident that such convergence does not always take place.

The framing of passion is not, however, the only factor in determining convergence. There also exists the possibility of individuals and organisations having different objects of passion. An environmentalist, with a passion for improving environmental objectives might, for example, work for a mining company in order to achieve change from the ‘inside’. Nevertheless, mining companies, despite rhetoric to the contrary, necessarily place environmental objectives below that of others for which they might express passion (safety, quality product, efficiency, profitability).

This analysis contradicts the literature where there is an implicit assumption that there will be convergence between individual and organisational passion in relation to the objects of passion, the expenditure of energy and the construction of attachments (see for example Bruch and Ghoshal 2003). Consequently, passion is inevitably constructed as a win-win situation and hence its construction as a positive emotion. It is in questioning this convergence that the issues relating to theorising passion as a positive emotion become more evident.

Table 1: The relationship between the framing of individual and organisational passion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intrinsic (Organisation)</th>
<th>Extrinsic (Organisation)</th>
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<td>Passion Driven</td>
<td>Passion Advocating</td>
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Conclusion

The concept of passion is crucial in understanding the dynamics of the workplace. Passion can be a catalyst for individual and organizational success. However, it is important to recognize that passion is not always positive, especially when it becomes the driving force behind behavior. Employees who are passionate about their work can be productive, but they can also become rigid and resistant to change. This can lead to a lack of innovation and creativity, which are essential for organizational success.

A balanced approach to passion is necessary. Organizations should encourage employees to pursue their passions, but at the same time, they should create a culture that promotes adaptability and flexibility. This can be achieved through training and development programs that focus on emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. By doing so, organizations can create a work environment that is conducive to innovation and creativity, while still maintaining a focus on productivity and efficiency.

In conclusion, passion is a double-edged sword. While it can drive individuals to achieve great things, it can also lead to burnout and disengagement. Organizations that are successful in managing passion are able to harness its power in a way that benefits both employees and the organization as a whole.
Passion is likely to be at its most creative when it occurs within a context of bounded emotionality – the provision of organisational support for mutually constructed objects of passion. Where the objects of passion differ, the meaningfulness of the work and extent of psychic income gained will decrease and it could create an environment that is more emotionally frustrating than emotionally expressive.

**Convergent frames - Passion as a skill**

Where both individuals and organisations adopt an extrinsic approach to passion, with a view to using passion to mutually improve their competitive advantage, passion becomes a skill that is used to generate and advocate a passionate commitment (from members) to the organisation. This may require leaders to be passionate but, more importantly, it requires them to be seen to be passionate. The skills associated with this emotional performance can be learned or developed (Hackett and Spurgeon 1998: 70) and involve both emotional competencies and high levels of energy focused on a shared goal or collective purpose related to corporate success. In this sense, passion is a form of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1998) that is encouraged and valued by the organisation.

In critically analysing this mode of convergence, it is evident that although the objects of passion are likely to be similar – given their overall objective of competitive advantage, leaders are likely to seek alternative organisations if the objects diverge to any great extent – the performance of passion as either simulated or sincere does make a difference. In particular, where passion is simulated it might be more appropriate to conceptualise it as a form of emotional labour with the potential for dissonance and emotional exhaustion. However, Hatcher argues that the instrumentalisation of the emotional performance of passion (whether simulated or sincere) has itself created ‘a new technique for managing managers, by requiring them to manage themselves’ (2003: 407). This form of governance, under the guise of self-development and self-expression, enables managers to ‘glamorize’ their routinized work and help them to ‘ease the burden of hard decisions.’ From this perspective, it is evident that passion as a form of emotional intelligence is not always positive, and that rather than being viewed as an asset, emotional intelligence can
In developing these emotional competencies, individuals could discover intrinsic passion as well as that of the organisation.

Particular emotional competencies around recognition of discovering their own passion as a means to the development of emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Where organisational passion is concerned, it is an intrinsic framework of organisational passion to meet their own goals for success and competitive advantage. In some instances, however, it is the individuals who can be instrumental in shaping

Deviant Frames - Passion as a conduit

emotional dissonance.

Evidence of passion would lend to situations in which individuals feel high levels of passion differ, as the lack of a shared vision combines with strong commitment to their own goals are needed. Where this happens, individuals can be expected to develop and reproduce under them the instrumental organisation framing of passion perceived as a characteristic of individuals. Where passion is concentrated as being creative, differences are likely to arise, which may bring out the need for some level of redefinition in individuals who and emotional labour in co-op for extrinsic, instrumental approaches. Where the organisational passion is concerned, it is the role of emotional labour to promote most creative where individuals are co-oped

Deviant Frames - Passion as co-oped

individuals and organisations.
organisational passion (e.g., Body Shop). Where passion is a conduit it might be conceptualised as either a form of bounded emotionality – in cases where there is an alignment of objects and a sincere expression of passion by individuals; or a form of emotional labour, where individuals are willing to perform passion in order to meet their own goals for success within an organisational context that prescribes it as a modus operandi; or as a form of emotional intelligence in which the skills required to achieve and manage the required goals are developed.

Conclusion

The preceding frame analysis of the popular management literature reveals that whether passion is likely to be ‘positive’ depends upon several factors. Firstly, there is the way that passion is framed as either intrinsic, in which there is a strong relationship between passion and identity through the construction of meaning; or extrinsic, in which passion is used instrumentally to achieve external goals such as success. Secondly, there is the way in which the framing of passion for individuals relates to the framing of passion by organisations. This relationship between the framing of individual and organisational passion needs to take into account the level of convergence regarding the objects of passion, and whether the approach to passion is simulated or sincere. Each of these factors affects the experience and consequences of being passionate in an organisation.

In exploring the relationship between organisational and individual passion, this research sought to use current theories about emotions in organisations to try to find a means of conceptualising passion as a way of being in an organisation. While none of the theories could, in themselves, provide an adequate framework for conceptualising passion, together it was possible to build a picture of the emotional dimensions of passion in work. To conceptualise this, however, we may need to look beyond our current toolkit and consider developing new concepts (perhaps the emergent idea of emotional capital might be relevant) to fully appreciate the promise and the pain of being a passionate member of an enterprise.
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