

Setting the Stage for Sociological Analyses of Emotion and Kotter's Organizational Culture Change Process

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Sociological analyses of emotion in the workplace represent a substantive body of literature. The Kotter process for organizational culture change is iconic in the field but has remained outside the lens of systematic sociological analysis. A focused review of selected research in this domain sheds light on thematic consistencies among the Kotter process and sociological analyses of emotion in the workplace. After explicating these thematic connections, four recommendations for future sociological research of organizations undergoing the Kotter change process are delineated. It is argued these opportunities could provide information beneficial to the practices of researchers, change leaders, and managers in the 21st century.

Field of Research: Management

1. Introduction

Management in the 21st century is informed at both practical and theoretical levels. In general terms, this paper focuses on theoretical literature found within sociological analyses of emotion and practical literature regarding organizational culture change as separate but thematically connected bodies of literature. For example, culture change may be initiated because organization leaders seek to modify the emotional environment of an organization (Pelzer 2005) and organization members react emotionally to the change process (Fugate & Kinicki 2008; Kotter 1996a; Schein 2004). Despite claims of an “affective revolution” (Barsade, Brief & Spataro 2003, p. 5) in organizational behavior literature, at least one iconic model of organizational culture change has remained on the periphery of sociological emotion-based analysis. Kotter's (1996a) model for organizational culture change is one of the most widely recognized change models in management. More recently, Kotter acknowledged the importance of emotion in the workplace through his new focus on communicating feelings (Kotter International n.d.), but his work remains in the applied domain and does not provide a sociologically informed theoretical analysis. On the other hand, while a substantial amount of literature emphasizes sociological analyses of emotion in the workplace and a lesser amount has discussed organizational culture, the Kotter change process has yet to be examined through the theoretical lens of sociology. This paper attempts to contribute to the body of knowledge by identifying thematic linkages between organizational culture change exemplified in the Kotter change process and the sociology of emotions in the workplace. These linkages are presented as legitimation and the starting point for the second contribution of this paper, four proposed topics for future research from the standpoint of sociology. It is argued that the proposed research endeavors could provide theoretically grounded insights for managers, change leaders and researchers in the 21st century. The Kotter change process is outlined below, followed by a selected review of sociological literature of emotion in the workplace, a more focused discussion on the role of the organization, and recommendations for future research from a sociological standpoint.

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2. The Kotter Change Process

Kotter (1995; 1996a; 1996b; 1998; 2003; 2008) developed his eight-step model for change in response to problems he identified in organizations that failed to accomplish culture change. First, in order to overcome complacency toward the change process, Kotter recommended change leaders create urgency by identifying crises within the organization and communicating this message throughout the organization. Kotter's second step is to establish a strong leadership team to guide the change process, a "Guiding Coalition" (1996a, p. 21). His third recommendation was to create a new and dynamic vision for the organization and a strategic plan to achieve that vision. Sharing this vision and strategy throughout the organization is step four. Step five is confronting obstacles head-on and resolving them. He recommended organization members be encouraged to take risks and that risk-taking be organizationally supported. The sixth step in his process is ameliorating anxiety caused by the change process through public exhibition of progress. "Without short-term wins, too many people give up or actively join the ranks of those people who have been resisting change" (Kotter 1995, p. 65). A short-term win is not the final win, however. Encouraging change leaders to continue the change process in its entirety is step seven, and the eighth final recommendation is to solidify the new values, norms and behaviors within the organization as normal, accepted, and natural.

Kotter recognized that each organization has its own goal or target when it comes to culture change, but this is secondary to his eight steps because the primary emphasis of this model is the *process* of change rather than the end result. He did, however, identify two elements of organizational cultures he defined as optimal. It is significant that both elements relate to human emotion.

The two core elements are, first, that the management group deeply, honestly, sincerely values the various players in the corporate drama. And not just themselves. They highly value the basic constituencies that support their businesses – customers, suppliers, employees and stockholders.

. . . The second core characteristic of healthy cultures is that initiative and leadership are encouraged at every level. (Kotter 1998, p. 14)

Deeply valuing and encouraging others are intrinsically emotive acts. Further evidence of a link with emotion is Kotter's assertion that his change process is best achieved through connecting with people at an emotional level (2003). He argued emotional connection enables deeper levels of interpersonal relationships that can, in turn, facilitate a personal motivation to change. Kotter argued these deeper relationships combat change-inhibiting emotions such as fear and anger. "You don't have to spend a million dollars and six months to prepare for a change effort. You do have to touch people emotionally" (Kotter 2003, p. 3). Kotter's model does not identify emotion as a factor to be addressed but it is clear he recognized the significance of emotion as it relates to successful completion of his process. Kotter has recently acknowledged the importance of addressing human emotion more directly (2003, Kotter International n.d.), but his work is applied and does not offer a theoretical sociological analysis. In order to set the stage for such an analysis, a selected review of sociological literature on emotion in the workplace is presented below.

3. Emotional Labor to Emotion Management

The natural starting point for a sociological understanding of the nature of emotion management is Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* (1983). Situated within a Marxist framework, Hochschild argued that a significant component of much paid labor is emotional in nature and she referred to this work as "emotional labor" (1983, p. 7), which she defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (1983, p. 7). Emotional laborers may perform these labors upon themselves, as in the case of a sales clerk deliberately choosing to appear happy when greeting a customer, or on other people, as in the case of a flight attendant calming an agitated passenger. In either case, emotional labor is performed at the behest of the employer, who also controls the nature of emotional labor performed and the circumstances within which it is performed. Hochschild asserted that organizations have rules about emotionality and that these 'feeling rules' determine the nature and process of emotive expression within that organization. However, emotional feelings are intrinsically individual and personal. Transforming such private acts into public labor requires a process of "transmutation" (p. 19), through which one's personal and even unconscious emotional processing "fall(s) under the sway of large organizations, social engineering, and the profit motive" (p. 19). Hochschild's example of a 1980 training session for new Delta Airlines flight attendants shows how transmutation of emotionality can be facilitated while teaching organizational feeling rules to new employees. During this training session a pilot said the following to a group of young women, "Now girls, I want you to go out there and really *smile*. Your smile is your biggest *asset*. I want you to go out there and use it. Smile. *Really* smile. Really *lay it on*" [italics in the original] (1983, p. 4). Hochschild concluded that,

In the case of the flight attendant, *the emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself*. . . . Seeming to "love the job" becomes part of the job; and actually trying to love it, and to enjoy the customers, helps the workers in this effort [italics in the original] [quotations in the original]. (1983, pp. 5-6)

This pivotal study established emotionality as a phenomenon suitable for theoretical and empirical analyses and has engendered a substantive body of sociological literature on emotion in the workplace. Hochschild's role in this area of research was articulated by Bolton (2004), who reflected, "the originality of Hochschild's work has meant that there is little that has been written concerning the subject of emotions and organisations in the last 20 years that does not take 'The Managed Heart' as a reference point" (sp) (2004, p. 60).

James (1989, 1992) extended Hochschild's work with a delineation of the characteristics of emotional labor in contemporary capitalism:

1. It is a commodity in the workplace.
2. It is a commodity of low status and minimal respect within the workplace.
3. It is performed primarily by women.
4. It is controlled by external areas of the organization which are typically male-based and recognized as emphatically rational rather than emotional.

Yyelland

5. The form it takes is shaped by the circumstances within which it is performed.
6. It is not recognized as skilled labor.
7. It must be fit in along with other labors.

James focused her sociological analysis on Western capitalism in general, rather than organizational culture change specifically; however, there are strong consistencies among her typology and Kotter's change process. The location (workplace) and motivation (organizational agenda rather than personal choice) commodify emotional connection within the change process and therefore support James' first point. Support for her second point can be found in Kotter's (1996) definitions of successful change. He referred almost exclusively to examples of increased productivity and performance while ignoring emotional support. The gender hierarchy described in points three and four are also supported in organizational change because many organizational leaders are male and change is predominantly initiated for rational reasons such as economic solidity or growth (Weis 2001; Schein 2004; Mokbher, Ismail & Vakilbashi 2011). One explanation for Kotter's finding that many organizations tend to quit the change process prematurely could be that stakeholders place little importance on something as intangible and 'soft' as emotionality within the workplace. James's final three points are supported in that the valuing and encouraging noted by Kotter are not unique tasks, they are work that must be performed alongside other organizational duties which take precedence.

Moving away from Hochschild's traditional critical analysis, Bolton (2004) argued that emotionality in the workplace is far more complex than Hochschild suggested. "Where is any sense of the satisfaction, enjoyment and reward that can be gained from various forms of work? . . . Where is the innuendo, humour and imperfect customer service? Where *are* the social actors?" [italics in original] (Bolton 2004, p. 62). Bolton replaced Hochschild's term 'emotional labor' with 'emotion management', adding that commercial motivations are not the only motivations guiding emotion work. She delineated emotion managers as constrained by the circumstances of their work but actively guiding their emotional responses and behaviors through conscious decisions. This argument has relevance to Kotter's change process in recognizing that emotion work may be performed for economic reasons but also for personal reasons, such as in the case of an organization member who truly values other members of the organization and encourages them to become leaders in order to make their organization a friendlier, happier and more emotionally supportive place to work.

Lopez (2006) also challenged Hochschild's conceptualization. First, he argued that although her definition of emotional labor has found considerable support in the literature, her theory of transmutation has not. He asserted that Hochschild had "overestimated the extent to which employers are able to control workers' emotional lives" (2006, p. 135). His second challenge targeted Hochschild's emphasis on the negative dimensions of emotion work and added support to the more complex argument provided by Bolton.

It is a good thing, after all, for preschool teachers to care about children. Likewise, the requirements of social justice and dignity for the elderly and infirm who are institutionalized cannot be realized without genuinely

Yyelland

caring and nurturing relationships between nursing home aides and residents. (Lopez 2006, p. 136)

A predominant theme throughout these sociological analyses is the role of the organization in determining emotion work. This theme is discussed in more detail below.

4. The Role of the Organization

Sociological analyses of emotion in the workplace have long accepted the role of the organization as pivotal. Hochschild argued that many organizations treat emotion management as relatively unskilled labor not worthy of professional respect or remuneration. James (1989) expanded this argument to suggest it is not just specific emotions or forms of emotional expression that are constrained, but the processes of emotion management in general, even when the emotions being managed are congruent with organizational objectives. She found that employee workloads for nurses in the United Kingdom had no time in their work schedules for emotion management even though this might be seen as the 'care' part of care giving. Yyelland (1994) found that nursing in Canada is constrained at both ideological and structural levels. These sociological analyses are congruent with organizational culture literature in that ideological constraints occur at the level of underlying assumptions and values within the organizational culture (Schein 1992, 2004) and include the general devaluation of emotion and of emotion-related processes. Organization members who perform emotion management are perceived as wasting valuable time and resources performing unskilled and organizationally inappropriate behaviors. Consistent with James's work in the UK, Yyelland found structural constraints in the form of policies and procedures that hinder nurses' abilities to perform emotion management (Yyelland, 1994). Examples of structural constraints include workloads that fail to provide time for emotion management, policies that prohibit emotional interaction with colleagues and/or clients, and procedures that limit behavior to instrumental tasks rather than expressive tasks. Laborers react to these constraints with feelings of frustration, powerlessness and anger (James 1989; Yyelland 1992, 1994; Bolton 2004; Hebson, Earnshaw & Marchington 2007).

Some organizational strategies facilitate and enable emotion management. Structural facilitators include flexibility in the work schedule (James, 1989), time to perform emotional management (Yyelland 1994), and the physical space to perform this work (Bolton 2004; Bolton & Boyd 2003; Van Maanen 1991). Ideological facilitators (like the constraints) are found within the organizational culture. A facilitative culture features a respect for emotion and a willingness to encourage and produce positive emotions for organization members and clients (James 1989; Schein 1992, 2004; Yyelland 1992, 1994; Kotter 1996b; Bolton 2004; Bolton & Boyd 2003).

Lopez (2006) extended the understanding of organizational influence through his continuum of organizational levels of support for emotion management. He placed Hochschild's concept 'emotional labor' at the low-support end to reflect a coercive emotion managerial style with constraining working relationships that result in alienation and dissatisfaction for the employee. Organizational cultures at this end of the continuum inhibit emotion work by maintaining coercive and restrictive feeling rules. Workers in such an organization are told explicitly that dealing with emotional

Yyelland

issues at the workplace is deemed unprofessional and must be relegated to personal time. This appears a logical and reasonable policy; however, Lopez argued that prohibiting open discussion of emotional issues bleeds over to constrain other discussions, including important discussions about the job. Members of such organizations can develop feelings of isolation and alienation as they suffer in silence. A second consequence of this organizational strategy is that employees experience a “reconstruction of the work identity” (Weir & Waddington 2008, p. 74) as they are socialized to remain emotionally detached from the problems experienced by individuals but caused by the organization. In sum, “emotional labor, whose central element is the managerial prescription of affective requirements . . . to which workers are expected to conform, is an inherently coercive approach” (Lopez 2006, p. 137).

Organizational strategies in the mid range of Lopez’s continuum feature systems that impose emotional labor as outlined above but offset this coercion with supportive policies and organizational strategies. This portion of the continuum is consistent with Bolton’s (2004, Bolton & Boyd 2003) term ‘emotion management’. Management in emotion management organizations does “not talk about the importance of hiding one’s own feelings or problems but rather about the importance of connecting with residents and building relationships with them” (Lopez 2006, p. 145). In some cases, the change from an emotional labor culture to an emotion management culture can be small but have profound impact. Lopez cited the example of a nursing care home in which employees gained a more respectful and a humanistic approach to the elderly residents when large photographs of these residents when they were young and healthy were affixed to their doors. This seemingly insignificant procedure enabled younger employees to better relate to the elderly residents as fellow human beings. Members of emotion management organizations are more aware of the importance of social interaction and emotional support as dimensions of their work-related duties. They are encouraged to see their work as encompassing both instrumental and expressive tasks, and organizational policies are in place to support both.

‘Organized emotional care’ encapsulates the high-support pole of Lopez’s continuum. He characterized this form of organization as similar in many ways to the emotion management organization, but including a far more comprehensive system of organizational support for emotionality. Organizational policies and procedures providing opportunities in the daily work schedule for activities and interactions designed to enhance the emotional well-being of the interactants. Lopez acknowledged that workers in such an environment may still perform emotional labor in the Hochschildian sense, but the expansive organizational support for a more empowered approach to emotion management reduces classic ‘emotional labor’ within this organizational structure to the exception rather than the rule.

Organized emotional care does not prescribe feeling states or display rules but rather consists of organizational attempts to create hospitable conditions for the development of caring relations between service providers and recipients. The defining characteristic of organized emotional care is that managerial attempts to legislate how workers are supposed to feel are replaced by organizational rules, procedures, and recordkeeping, aimed at the creation of organizational spaces within which caring relationships can develop. (Lopez 2006, p. 137)

Yyelland

Lopez stopped short of advocating that all organizations should adopt an organized emotional care approach and openly questioned the viability of this organizational strategy in many public domain organizations. "It is difficult to imagine how or why a supermarket chain, for example, would pursue a strategy of organized emotional care" (2006, p. 158). Even within these organizations, however, one could argue that members need protection from emotional abuse. Organizations lacking systematized support for members are breeding grounds for bullying (Rosicigno, Lopez & Hodson 2007) and the 'hostility triad' of contempt, anger and disgust (Pelzer 2005).

5. Propositions for Future Research

The preceding review of selected literature provides the basis for the following propositions for future sociological investigation. This not intended as a definitive list, but rather, as a jumping off point for theoretical and empirical work that could provide significant insights to managers, change leaders and researchers. The first recommendation is informed by Kotter's claim that managers of successful organizations must deeply value the members of their organizations and must develop a culture of emotional connection and support. This claim opens the door to in-depth sociological analyses of managerial decisions and their impact upon the cultures of organizations undergoing the Kotter change process and others that have completed the process. Macro sociological analyses of power, gender, social class and age can shed light on factors influencing collective and individual behavior, as can interpretivist analyses of constructions of identity, role and 'the other'. Comparative research of the perceptions held by managers and employees could also prove enlightening.

Lopez found the most emotionally supportive organizational strategies develop policies and procedures to facilitate positive emotional support in the workplace. These structural supports are concomitant with an ideology that defines emotional support as a worthy organizational endeavor. Lopez's continuum sets the stage for analyses of ideological and structural facilitators promoting emotion work in organizations that have undergone or are undergoing the Kotter culture change process. These investigations could be conducted as case studies of individual organizations or a more broad-scope survey of multiple organizations. Comparative analyses across geographical and cultural environments could prove especially illuminating, as could comparisons with organizations that used other change processes.

A third area of research might examine ideological and structural constraints on emotion and emotional support. Once again, this research could be conducted with one organization or many, and with a comparative focus. As above, this analysis could be informed by any of the traditional sociological frameworks, although measuring a contemporary Kotterized organization against the early arguments of Hochschild and James could provide informative historical comparison.

The fourth recommendation is a longitudinal empirical analysis of an organization as it undergoes the Kotter change process. An ethnographic analysis of this process from start to finish and of the organization as it experiences this change could provide highly information data regarding the lived realities of organization members. Interpretivist analyses would be appropriate to investigate changes in constructions of

Yyelland

identify, role, 'the other' and perceptions regarding the culture, itself. Alternatively, feminist analyses can be applied to discover gendered allocations of power, status, reward and punishment. Labour process analyses can add examinations of the division of labor throughout the change process and compare the pre- and post-change labor processes. Finally, critical theory is well-informed for analyses of power and alienation within the pre- and post-change culture, and throughout the change process.

6. Summary and Conclusions

Lopez (2003, p. 40) argued the "people" are a key element in successful organizational culture change, and developed a continuum to illustrate varying degrees of organizational support for an emotionally supportive work environment. Kotter (1996) developed an eight-step process for achieving organizational culture change and acknowledged that the process must include emotional connection between organization members if it is to be effective. His brief description of an optimal organizational culture is congruent with the most emotionally supportive end of Lopez's continuum. Despite thematic consistencies with this and other sociological literature regarding emotion in the workplace, the Kotter change process has remained on the periphery of sociological analysis. Attempting to address this gap, this paper has presented a synopsis of the Kotter change process, a selected review of sociological literature related to emotion in the workplace, and a discussion indicating thematic consistencies connections Kotter's change process with this literature. The paper has attempted a contribution to the body of knowledge by proposing four recommendations for future sociological analyses of the Kotter change process. It has been argued that such research could provide meaningful information that could inform the practices of researchers, change leaders, and organization managers in the 21st century.

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Yyelland

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