

### 3 FEELING AT WORK

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It seems psychology hasn't got feeling quite right. It thinks feeling is a moment's appraisal of opportunity or threat on the way to approach or avoidance, yet we live among powerful and enduring moods that lack a clear evaluation or motive. And psychology thinks feeling is an individual affair, yet at the office water cooler, or in the tavern or therapist's office, we hear stories of feeling tangled in webs of personal and group relationships. The more psychology thinks about feeling, the more we feel it has got it wrong.

Our discomfort with the idea of feeling grows with anthropology's wagging finger of cultural bias. Most people in most times and most places do not intellectualize feeling and do not individualize feeling the way that psychology does today in the West. Watts (1961), for example, identifies feeling in the Eastern tradition of Zen Buddhism with a natural social order of mutual interdependence and oneness in which persons are not rational individuals, but instead a-rational 'beings in relation'. And Levy-Bruhl (1926), for example, describes feeling in the 'primitive' cultures of the Melanesian islands, not as an individual event born of personal experiences and judgements, but as a feature of the person's participation in the living group. The Melanesian does not think of him/herself as separate from the group (indeed he/she does not think of him/herself at all), but rather as a 'member' – literally a body-part, of the group. The Melanesian feels the group's aims and activities.

This chapter is frankly philosophical – not in the pejorative sense of verbal nitpicking, but in the positive sense of conceptual husbandry. Scientific concepts have two masters. There is a requirement for empirical content. Concepts must fit experiences. And there is a requirement for theoretical system. Concepts must together make a consistent and coherent whole. We find that prevailing concepts of feeling in psychology do not satisfy both masters. In particular, these concepts put theoretical system ahead of empirical content. Powerful assumptions and propositions define feeling apart from concrete experiences. Concepts of feeling are not abstracted from experience, but imposed on it. The result is theory too open to cultural bent and not enough open to human nature. In view of the failings of current theories of feeling, we suggest new ways of thinking about feeling.

Our focus in the chapter is captured in the play on words in the title. The chapter is both a study of how feeling works *and* a study of feeling at work. To the first point, we find that psychology misunderstands and gives short shrift to feeling because it does not see how feeling works in group life. It

mistakes feeling as an experience and function of an autonomous actor. We find that feeling is not primarily an individual response, but a crucial faculty of a life lived in groups. People feel their parts in the life of the group. When welcomed in a safe, vital and active group, they feel secure, vital and active themselves, and take pleasure in these feelings. When confined in a moribund or passive group, they feel deadened and passive themselves, and take no pleasure in these feelings. And when excluded from the group, they feel worst of all – cut off, isolated, alone and unhappy. Feeling is how social life appears in consciousness.

To the second point, we come to these conclusions about feeling from our studies of feeling in the workplace (see especially Sandelands, 1988; Boudens and Sandelands, 1999). Far from the psychological laboratory which isolates people or collects them in ephemeral aggregates, the workplace enjoins people in the life of the group. Arguably the workplace is the best place to study feeling. This is not only because as much as half of our waking life is spent at work. And it is not only because some of the most intense and varied forms of group life are found at work. Even more it is because the way work has evolved in the most industrialized nations, often in the name of ‘progress’ has created crises of feeling for many workers from which we can learn a great deal. Technical concerns of machinery and optimization have been put ahead of human concerns for a stable and emotionally satisfying group life (Mayo, 1945). Where the human heart is broken we learn of what it is made.

We begin the chapter by setting the stage. First, we describe the idea of work feeling in psychology today. Second, we compare this idea against feelings people report at work. We then take up the main argument of the chapter, which also comes in two parts. First, we argue that psychology misrepresents feelings at work by turning them into something they are not, rational assessments of job satisfaction. Second, we show how work feelings are more accurately and fully represented in stories about group life at work. We conclude the chapter with ideas about how research on work feelings should proceed.

### **Feeling in theory**

Current concepts of feeling reflect a powerful tradition of Western culture that diminishes feeling in favour of reason. Beginning in the rationalism of the Greeks, Aristotle and especially Plato, continuing into the Renaissance in thinkers such as Descartes, Locke and Hume, and carrying into today’s rational choice theories of Bentham, modern economics, and psychology there has been a strong conviction that human action, unlike that of lower animals, originates in reason, and is ideally uncoloured by emotion. In all but a few domains, emotion is regarded as the enemy of reason, as something to be managed and overcome (see also Fineman, 1996). We have subordinated emotion to reason so completely and for so long that we no

longer question its marginality. We build special quarters for the exercise and display of emotion, such as the concert hall, movie theatre, football field and therapist's office. Where emotions are especially intense, such as in love or grief, we confine them in ceremonies or rituals to regulate their appearance and expression.

With a focus on reason has come a focus on the individual. The individual reasons and the individual acts. Whereas emotion has traditionally been regarded as what makes people alike, reason is what distinguishes among them (Zajonc, 1998). Psychology today combines a focus on reason with a focus on the individual, to see emotion as a special form of reasoning: as valenced or 'hot' cognition. Feeling is identified with appraisal. Feelings are said to result from assessments of the *personal* significance of situations or events (Arnold, 1960; Solomon, 1976; Lazarus, 1991; Cacioppo and Gardner, 1999). Some of these assessments are made crudely and rapidly (Lazarus, 1991). Many are made unconsciously (Freud, 1920) or non-consciously (Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). All are supposed to have evolved for the benefit of the *individual* organism (Cacioppo and Gardner, 1999; Zajonc, 1998).

This Western conception of feeling is epitomized in studies of feeling at work. These studies of work psychology keep to mainstream assumptions that feeling is rational and individual. Moreover, these studies canvas work and workplaces rationally designed to keep feelings out of the way and under control. The most commonly studied feeling, by far, is rational and individual to its core – job satisfaction. According to Locke (1976: 1300), job satisfaction is 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences'. The most widely cited theory of job satisfaction, by far, is the Job Characteristics Theory formulated by Hackman and Oldham (1976). According to this theory jobs that offer greater task identity and task variety that allow for the use of varied skills, and that supply greater autonomy and knowledge of results, are judged to be more satisfying. Further, according to this theory these relationships are most developed in persons whose needs for individual growth are most developed. Again, work feelings are reasoned judgements people make about themselves at work.

### Feeling in fact

It is good to have a strong and clear idea of feeling. It is even better to have an idea of feeling that fits the facts. We want to know how well psychology's idea of feeling fits the facts of feeling at work. We want to know where is the feeling in work and what is the nature of this feeling.

We turned to three sources to find out how people feel about their work (for details, see Boudens and Sandelands, 1999). Two were studies of work today. Terkel (1972) invited 133 workers, of various ages, ethnicity and social status, and employed in a variety of occupations, to talk about

their work. His book consists of edited interview transcripts and offers minimal analysis or interpretation. Garson (1975) also invited workers to talk about their work, but unlike Terkel concentrated on low-level workers from a few manufacturing concerns: among them a maker of ping-pong equipment, a fish cannery a cosmetics factory and a car assembly plant. Her book consists of interview excerpts and summaries along with her own observation and commentary. A third source was Hamper's (1986) best-selling chronicle of his life and times working on a car assembly line. Organized in loose chronology his book is a compendium of vivid anecdotes and tales.

Our first finding was a surprise. When asked about their jobs, people do not talk much about what they actually do. They are not closely attuned to their movements. In jobs that demand little attention, they stow their minds away in daydream. In jobs that require them to think ahead, they look past the moment to focus on goals or ends. The physical details of the job (its tasks, working conditions, movements, skills) seem to matter little to its feeling. Indeed, most jobs involve a high degree of efficient repetition. And this is as true of white collar and professional occupations as blue or pink collar occupations – heart surgery is a lot of standing on your feet and painstaking cutting, clamping and sewing. Where physical details are felt it is usually in crude terms of wear; as fatigue, tension or stress.

Also a surprise, we found that while people occasionally talk about their desire for meaningful work, this desire is not, as theories of job satisfaction would have it, born of a concern for personal growth, or 'self-actualization' (Argyris, 1957; Maslow 1954). People are not concerned to be all they can be on the job. They are also not concerned to shed social convention to feel, think and act for themselves, as individuals. What people want for meaning is more modest and mundane. It is a connection to others. Here, for example, is one of Terkel's (1972) informants, Kitty Scanlan, an assistant professor of occupational therapy on working with others:

Until recently I wasn't sure how meaningful my work was. I had doubts. A surgeon does a really beautiful job. That's meaningful to him *immediately*. But it's not the kind of sustaining thing that makes a job meaningful. It must concern the relationship you have with the people you work with. We get hung up in the competition: 'Who's responsible for saving this life?' 'Who's responsible for the change in this dying patient?' Rather than saying, 'Isn't it beautiful that we all together helped make this person's life better?' (p. 494)

Another informant, Steven Simony-Gindele, finds the meaning of work to be a pretence of intellectuals, who have never worked themselves but who nevertheless seek grandiosity in something higher, beyond the work itself.

The Depression in the thirties was a unique period. People were willing to work and there wasn't work around. I think the mentality of the thirties and the mentality today is different. Now the thing is to want something *meaningful*. I despise that word. They must be willing to take whatever they find and they must

grow from that. *Fulfilling*, that's another one they stumble on. I didn't start out as president of a company with a hundred thousand subscribers. It was necessary for me to scrub toilets. I scrubbed them. Not that I liked doing it. But I didn't feel debased by it. It was better than doing nothing. Any work is better than no work. Work makes a person noble.

This is a lie about meaningful work. It comes from teachers, Ph.D. s who ve never really worked. They feel they have a special knowledge to impose upon a lower being, who goes to work when he s thirteen or fifteen and settles down and goes forwards (pp. 449–50)

We believe Simony-Gindele s thoughts point in a useful direction. Current ideas about the meaning and feeling of work reflect values of limited generality. No doubt many academics value work that is personally challenging and that affords opportunities for personal growth. Intellectual work is solitary and growth oriented. But this is not true of all people and all work. The meaning and feeling of work may be other than or more complex than theories of job satisfaction say

Our most important positive finding in Terkel, Garson, and Hamper is that when people talk about work, they talk primarily about other people. They talk about relationships, about the intrigues, conflicts, gossips and innuendoes of group life. They talk about their friendships and the importance of camaraderie at work. There is endless fascination in this, and endless feeling. Feeling has mostly to do with the life of the group – with its divisions and play. Contest and conflict are the engines of feeling at work. Status is a principal dynamic within and between groups. Conflicts between workers, unions and management are also important dynamics. People are pleased to be in the group on top, or at least in a group above others, and are miserable to be in the group at the bottom or beneath others. A great deal of feeling goes into the relationship between workers and management, a relationship often passionately antagonistic and full of intrigue. Workers feeling runs hot in stories of abuse by managers or stories of union organizing and retribution. Managers' feeling runs hot in stories of worker laziness, ingratitude and subterfuge, or stories of being unjustly cast as ogres. One senses people feel most alive and most energized when there is a battle or war going on. No slight or humiliation is too small to nurse and add to the litany. Nostalgia waxes for the heady days of the wildcat strike or union revolution.

We found innumerable ties between worker's feelings and their involvement in the group. Of these, a few relate positive feelings, as in this example from Garson (1975) of a university keypunch operator speaking of her pleasure in an unspoken involvement with the operator seated next to her:

'This'll sound crazy she said, 'but I like to keep a certain rhythm sound going. I mean I'd move forward when the woman next to me was halfway through another field and then she'd move in when I was halfwav through the next. So

you'd get a constant – like, bum, bum, bum, zing, bum, bum, bum, babum, zing. You could only do that with certain jobs.

No, no, she didn't know what I was doing. If she slowed down I'd sort of slow down, but if she made a mistake or stopped I'd just have to go on. (p. 155)

More common are negative feelings, in which a person is angry or hurt by being slighted or rejected by the group. One is reminded of the troubled attachments people feel toward parents. Hamper (1986) offers a case in point in a story about his friend Jack.

Jack also presented me with one of my first confrontations with an enigma that had been bothering me since I had hired in. He was so resolute in his hatred toward General Motors that it completely baffled me as to why he hung around. He had this persecution complex that ate at him like a bellyful of red ants. I didn't really understand it. I was still relatively raw, but I assumed that a deal was deal. GM paid us a tidy income and we did the shitwork. No one was holding a gun to anyone's head. I didn't harbor any hatred toward GM. My war was with that suffocating minute hand. With Jack, General Motors was the taproot for all that was miserable and repellent in his life. To hear him tell it, GM was out to bury him. He was obsessed with vengeance and anarchy

Whenever I asked Jack why he just didn't quit and move on to something that was less aggravating, he would jump all over me. 'Goddamnit, that's *precisely* what they're banking on. That I'll weaken and bow to their endless tyranny NO WAY! They'll have to drag me out of here. (pp. 49-50)

Rare compared to the frequency of positive and negative feelings of life in the group are alienated or isolated feelings of being cut off from the group. Terkel (1972) supplies a troubling example of a nurse's aide, Cathleen Moran, whose work in a helping profession could not compensate or overcome her aloof detachment:

I don't know any nurse's aide who likes it. You say, 'Boy isn't that rewarding that you're doing something for humanity?' I say 'Don't give me that, it's a bunch of boloney. I feel nothin'. I like it because I can watch ball games in the afternoon.

That's why if I'm a nurse, I'd go into administrative work and I'd work in surgery. The only thing you have to deal with in surgery is who you work with. You don't have to deal with the patient – like sympathize with them and say 'Gee, we couldn't get all the cancer out' and stuff like that. I like working in ICU because they're all half-dead, and you can give a patient good care and not have to deal with them. I'd enjoy that. It's terrible. (p. 477)

I never thought of myself in terms of a machine – though that's what I am. I don't have no feelings. I do, but somehow I don't have them any more. I can't explain. It's kinda goofy. (p. 478)

Hamper (1986) provides a vivid picture of the social nature of work feeling in the following exchange with his friend Dave. We see how feeling rests with the life of the group: no life, no feeling.

After Dave had transferred, I occasionally visited him on his new job. I couldn't find a solitary reason to envy his relocation. All Dave did all night was shuffle back and forth poking an occasional dipstick into some half hidden hole and yawning like a hippo in the mud. His neighbors resembled the Stepford Wives at a linen sale. It was fuckin' eerie. No revelry no pranks, no communication, no turmoil, no nothin' No, thank you. (p. 148)

In sum, when people talk about their work and its feelings they rarely speak of what they do on the job or the meaning of the job. They talk almost exclusively about their involvement in the life of the group, including the need to limit or regulate this involvement. Feelings are not identified with evaluations of the job, even less with personal growth and development. Instead, feelings are strongly identified with a person's place and activities in the life of the group and the place of their work in the larger scheme of things. Pleasure is taken in certain involvements, pain in other involvements, and detachment or boredom in still other involvements. Work feelings vary in almost infinite degree, but always the group figures as a key element.

Upon these bare clues we come to an idea of feeling at odds with theories of job satisfaction. We come to an idea of feeling that is not embedded in job tasks or rewards, but in the life of the group at work. Feeling comes in one's relationship with others and the group. People say little about what they do on the job, but more about how they get along with others. We come to an idea of feeling tied not to static appraisals of the job but to living experiences on the job with others. Experiences of work, like experiences of relationship with others, are never constant; they change from moment to moment. This is why Hamper's and Terkel's and Garson's informants do not speak of feelings in the past tense, but always as a continuing dynamic feature of their work life.

As we are about to suggest, scientific psychology misses feelings by thinking of them too much as static appraisals rather than as ongoing experiences, and by focusing too much on individuals and not enough on groups. For missing the ongoing experience of life in the group, scientific psychology misses feelings. We find that study of feelings at work calls attention to the social dimensions of feeling, and particularly calls attention to the forms of the person's involvement in the group.

### **Feeling lost**

Theories of job satisfaction do not work as well as they should, either to predict feelings on the job or to predict outcomes of feelings such as work motivation, performance, commitment and turnover (Brief, 1998, Côte, 1999, Wright and Doherty 1998). It is rare to find correlation coefficients exceeding 0.30 and thus to find more than 10% of variance in outcomes explained by job satisfaction.

The empirical deficiencies of job satisfaction theories begin with the concept of job satisfaction itself. This concept is a poor map of work feeling

for two reasons. First, job satisfaction and work feeling are different kinds of psychic states. Job satisfaction is what philosophers call an intention. It is an inner state, of evaluation, that refers to an outer object, the job. The person stands apart from the job as its judge. Thus, Hackman and Oldham (1976) describe job satisfaction as an individual evaluation of objective job characteristics. Work feeling, however, is not an intention. It is an inner state that refers to no outer object. Work feeling is *of* work, not *about* work. The person is, in an entirely non-mystical sense, one with the work. James (1890) describes feeling as an appearance of bodily activity in consciousness. Bruner (1962) describes feeling as a play of impulses at the fringe of awareness. And echoing these views, Sandelands (1988) describes work feeling as an aspect of doing on the job. 'Feeling and doing are coexistent, coterminous, and coordinate. Feeling merges with doing and is experienced as a quality of its form (p. 439). Although feelings may be subsequently attributed to specific entities (such as jobs), or to characteristics thereof (such as job characteristics), such attributions come only after the fact, upon further thinking. This difference of intentionality between job satisfaction and feeling implies that the former is more logical and reasonable than the latter. Job satisfaction is supposed to be stable and internally consistent. One cannot both think well and think poorly of one's job. A job is good or bad, hard or easy boring or exciting. Indeed it is this very consistency that allows researchers to construct reliable questionnaires to measure job satisfaction. Work feeling, however, is not stable or internally consistent. Just as we can feel both love and hate in relations with significant others, we can feel both love and hate in our work, even at the same time.

Second, and related, job satisfaction is a poor map of work feeling because the two belong to different things. Job satisfaction is a property of the individual; it is a judgement he/she makes about his/her job. Work feeling is a property of the group; it is an awareness of its living form. As noted earlier, in Terkel, Garson, and Hamper we find that feelings always involve the group. This is not the surprise it seems. The group turns out to be a central figure even in theories of job satisfaction that are supposed to be about individuals. To wit, a close look at the job characteristics said to decide feelings by Hackman and Oldham (1976) finds they are not about a person working on a job alone, but about a person immersed in the life of a group. *Autonomy* is not simply about the person's ability to decide actions for him/herself. Even more it is about the person's responsibility in the group, a responsibility that fixes his/her place in the group and directs his/her attentions and energies in the life of the group. Likewise *task identity* and *task significance* are more than personal vanities. They indicate one's place in the social scheme, as central or peripheral, valued or not, needed for a reason. To have a job that relates obviously and importantly to the work of the group is to be firmly put in the life of the group. And finally *feedback* is not only about the self-satisfaction and esteem of accomplishment. It is also about being noticed and recognized by the group, perhaps for doing something of value to the group. Hackman and Oldham confuse group life



and feeling with individual experience and judgements of job satisfaction. Their confusion notwithstanding, feelings belong to the group, not to the individual.

Thus, theories of job satisfaction misread work feeling as a personal judgement about an objective job. Job satisfaction is no feeling. Whereas job satisfaction is an intention, work feeling is not. Whereas job satisfaction is of the mind, work feeling is of the body. Whereas job satisfaction is personal, work feeling is social. And whereas job satisfaction is static, work feeling moves. As we might expect, the mistake in the idea of job satisfaction is clearest where work feeling is clearest – as for example in instances of play art, flow transcendence and peak experience. Here ideas of job satisfaction based on judgements of objective job characteristics become awkward, heavy even ugly. According to writers such as Koch (1956), Bruner (1962), Buber (1958) and Sandelands and Buckner (1989), to explain such poignant feelings there is no use in objective appraisals. In these instances, the person merges with the group, the person merges with the job, and feeling comes not by evaluation or thinking, but directly and unmediated through the body (it is 'bodied forth' in Buber's terms). In these instances, the person becomes one with the work and one with the group, as this report by Hamper (1986) illustrates:

After about four months down on the Rivet Line, I had truly perfected the mental and physical strain of the pin-up job. The blisters of the hand and the mind had hardened over, leaving me the absolute master of the puppet show. I developed shortcuts at every turn. I became so proficient at twirling my rivet gun to and fro that the damn thing felt as comfortable as a third arm. I mashed my duties into pitiful redundancy.

The truth was loose: I was the son of a son of a bitch, an ancestral prodigy born to clobber my way through loathsome dung heaps of idiot labor. My genes were cocked and loaded. I was a meteor, a gunslinger, a switchblade boomerang hurled from the pecker dribbles of my forefathers' untainted jalopy seed. I was Al Kaline peggin' home a beebee from the right field corner. I was Picasso applyin' the final masterstroke to his frenzied *Guernica*. I was Wilson Pickett stompin' up the stairway of the Midnight Hour. I was one blazin' tomahawk of m-fuggin' eel snot. Graceful and indomitable. Methodical and brain-dead. The quintessential shoprat. The Rivethead. (p. 94)

We could ask Ben Hamper to tell us about the objective characteristics of his job (about its skill variety, identity, significance, autonomy and feedback), but this would bring us no closer to understanding his feelings than asking him the time of day. His feelings have nothing to do with the objective job.

Whitehead (1937) observed that ideas relate to experiences in different ways. Properly scientific ideas are abstracted from experiences. They distil the essence of experiences. Improperly scientific ideas are put over on experience, like a wool cap. They do not follow experience, but abduct experience to their own ends. We believe psychology puts ideas of feeling such as job

satisfaction ahead of experiences of feeling. And we believe psychology as a result, does not see feeling as it is. Feeling takes the shape of the theoretical mould into which it has been poured. Work feelings are fitted to the concept of job satisfaction, rather than the other way around. Work feelings have not had a chance to make themselves known.

### Feeling found

We need new concepts to represent feelings: concepts true to experiences, not imposed on them by theory. The irony of this need is that the problem of putting feelings to words is met and mastered all the time in daily life, by everyone *except* scientists who demand that language be used literally and denotatively. The key to conveying feeling appears to be indirection. In the three works we examined, people rarely speak directly of their feelings at work. They speak instead about significant events and especially about relationships at work. When people do name a feeling at work – ‘I am happy in my job’ or ‘I feel like a robot at the plant’ or more commonly ‘I find work stressful’ – they rarely go on to describe or explain the feeling. It is as if stating a feeling leads nowhere and leaves nothing more to say. More typically when people name a feeling at work, they follow it up with a story about an event at work that exemplifies the feeling. Indeed, a common pattern is to name a feeling either just before or just after telling a story about the job, as if to preview or summarize the feeling of the story. A case in point is this excerpt from one of Terkel’s informants, a piano tuner named Eugene Russell. The excerpt begins and ends with a stated feeling sandwiched around a story:

I have a mood of triumph. I was sitting one day tuning a piano in a hotel ballroom. There was a symposium of computer manufacturers. One of these men came up and tapped me on the shoulder. ‘Someday we’re going to get your job.’ I laughed. ‘By the time you isolate an infinite number of harmonics, you’re going to use up a couple of billion dollars’ worth of equipment to get down to the basic fundamental that I work with my ear. He said, ‘You know something? You’re right. We’ll never touch your job. The cost of computerized tuning would be absolutely prohibitive. I felt pretty good at that moment. (pp. 322–3)

If people do not often name their feelings and almost never describe them, how do they get them across? And how do readers of Terkel, Garson, and Hamper come away with a clear sense of the feeling of work? When we ask where is feeling in people’s accounts of work, we find it not in statements of feeling, but in stories about work. We found stories everywhere in the accounts of work we studied, 399 in all. Terkel’s book is a compendium of life stories in which we find many shorter stories. Garson’s interviews and Hamper’s chronicle likewise comprise and consist of stories. These books succeed because their stories succeed. Their stories invite readers into the workplace, to see and feel what workers see and feel. Many of the stories are moving, some deeply so.

*Why stories?*

Narratives are ubiquitous in daily life. Theodore Sarbin conducts an informal ongoing survey of the way people talk about their emotions. He asks them to give him an illustration of a particular emotion; almost always they tell a story (Sarbin, 1989). Narratives organize experiences into coherent wholes (Polkinghorne, 1988). This tells us not only that stories are pervasive, but that they are a primary means of making sense of experience, and a common and well-accepted way of communicating that experience to others.

Given the prominence of stories as expressions of feeling in everyday life, it is no surprise that stories are an important means and method in psychotherapy where they are used to elicit and convey emotion that cannot be brought out and expressed in any other way (Siegelman, 1990). It is a surprise, however, that for all the attention given them in clinical psychology stories are ignored in other research disciplines of psychology focused on feeling, where they are thought too subjective and too idiosyncratic to lead to general understandings. This is a mistake.

Narratives have long been a staple in the study of human experience in the humanities. Lately encouraged by the postmodern turn of the humanities away from scientific claims of objective truth, and by the multicultural turn of the humanities toward unique perspectives and personal truths, a number of behavioural and social scientists have embraced narratives as a means for discovering and validating the experiences of the disenfranchised (for example, Polkinghorne, 1988). We too urge the use of narratives in the human sciences, but not for these reasons. We believe, instead, that narratives can be used to discover universal human truths about the feelings and forms of human life. Campbell (1973), following Jung, showed that people of widely disparate cultures independently invented many of the same stories or myths. Stories, which can be repeated in folk tales, written down in scriptures, or limned on the walls of caves or pyramid burial chambers, are objects that represent universal human feelings and forms of life. By studying these objects we come to understand and know these feelings and forms. By studying these objects a science of feeling at work becomes possible.

*How do stories work?*

Where is the feeling in a story? Music is an apt comparison. In both instances, feeling is of the whole, is immanent in the whole (Langer, 1953; Davies, 1997). We feel the movements and dynamics – the life – of the whole. The psychological key to the success of music and narrative alike is empathy. Empathy is a perceptual capacity – probably our first and oldest perceptual capacity – to feel with others. Empathy is the ability to discern in the whole of a performance – be it a piece of music, or a story or a simple emotional outburst – the feeling that went into its making and informed its every part. Through empathy the listener forges a connection to the performer that is more direct and fully developed than any that could be denoted in words.

We looked at stories of work to ask how they convey feelings. We found they do this the way all stories do, by epitomizing the felt forms of group life. This is effected by the story device of plot – a device like melody in music. Plots are not inert listings of events in sequence (first A happened, then B, then C), but rich patterns of play opposition, conflict, cause and effect (Goodman, 1954). Plot is a Gestalt representation of group life. It links characters, actions, and events in a unified whole. And it is this unified whole that is felt. Aristotle described plot as ‘unified action’. He found plot to be an abstract whole made of a stage-setting *beginning* which identifies characters and their intents, an action-developing and tension-articulating *middle* which brings characters into richer and more intense interaction, and a climactic, tension-resolving *end* which brings or reclaims a more stable order among the characters. Unlike the skeleton to which it is often and inaptly compared, plot is not an inert structure but a vital process, a living form. It is more organism than mechanism. By means of plot, stories convey living form in a way that invites a reader or listener to participate in it and to share its feelings. Thus, we come to an understanding of stories reached years ago by Goodman (1954):

Then we can see the plausibility of looking for the importance of the experience in the internal structure of the presented work. When we are absorbed, the motions, proportions, and conflicts presented are the motions, proportions, and conflicts of our experiencing bodies (at rest, in isolation). And these motions, conflicts, and resolutions of experiencing *are* the various feelings, attitudes, and concerns that are important for us. Thus it is plausible to say as we shall, ‘Fear is such-and-such a sequence in the complex plot’ or ‘The characteristic attitude of Catullus is the Phalaecean rhythm’

Elsewhere, one of us, following Langer (1967), described art broadly as the objectification of feeling by living forms (see Sandelands and Buckner, 1989; Sandelands, 1998). Stories are a kind of art; a kind of living form that objectifies feeling. Stories share with other arts four basic features of form: boundaries, dynamic tensions, growth (movement), and possibility. *Boundaries* distinguish a story from other elements in the flow of communication. Boundaries allow a listener to appreciate the story openly for what it is, an emotional communique. The story’s *dynamic tensions* capture the listener’s interest and draw him or her into the story by eliciting curiosity about what will happen next and especially about whether everything will turn out all right. *Growth* is that element of a story which projects a pathway for tensions to be elaborated and eventually released. Growth is a significant element of the story because it affirms life in the dimension of time. All living things change over time and most change in ways that indicate a cumulative development. Finally *possibility* appears in the most artistic stories as a hint or indication that while a reconciliation of the story’s immediate tensions may have been reached, there are questions and unresolved issues to ponder. The best stories invite the listener to return, to ask for more. These four elements conspire in the story to establish a semblance of life and feeling. All

living things, all things that feel and are felt, are bounded in time and space, are animated by forces in constructive tension, are growing, and are full of unrealized possibility. These principal elements of life and feeling are the generic elements of art – art being our ‘language of life and feeling. Art is the most general name we have for objects or events found or made to represent life and feeling (Sandelands and Buckner, 1989; Sandelands, 1998).

By representing feeling at work, stories serve two important functions in the workplace. One is to collect and communicate the life and feeling of work. With stories people can grab hold of feelings that would be otherwise inexpressible and unmemorable. For better and worse, stories reinforce and amplify feelings at work. A second and probably more important function of stories is to define the group for those inside and outside the group. By virtue of who is included in them and who they are told to, stories are almost always, implicitly about an ‘us and a ‘them. Stories are thus a powerful way that people learn about who they are and who they like and dislike. Certainly a profound pleasure in many stories told at work, in the army in church, among one’s peers, especially those told in secret, is the sense of belonging they inspire.

We can illustrate the workings and functions of stories in representing the forms and feelings of work life with a story from Terkel (1972) by Diane Wilson, a process clerk in a social service bureaucracy who recounts a morning with a boss, Mr Roberts:

One day I’d gotten a call to go to his office and do some typing. He’s given me all this handwritten script. I don’t know to this day what all that stuff was. I asked him, ‘Why was I picked for this job?’ He said his secretary was out and he needs this done by noon. I said, ‘I’m no longer a clerk-typist and you yourself said for me to get it out of my mind. Are you trying to get me confused? Anyway I can’t read this stuff. He tells me he’ll read it. I said, ‘Okay I’ll write it out as you read it.

There’s his hand going all over the script, busy. He doesn’t know what he’s reading. I could tell. I know why he’s doing it. He just wants to see me busy.

So we finished the first long sheet. He wants to continue. I said, ‘No, I can only do one sheet at a time. I’ll go over and type this up. So what I did, I would type a paragraph and wait five or ten minutes. I made sure I made all the mistakes I could. It’s amazing, when you want to make mistakes, you really can’t. So I just put Ko-rect type paper over this yellow sheet. I fixed it up real pretty. I wouldn’t stay on the margins. He told me himself I was no longer a clerk-typist.

I took him back this first sheet and, of course, I had left out a line or two. I told him it made me nervous to have this typed by a certain time, and I didn’t have time to proofread it, ‘but I’m ready for you to read the other sheet to me. He started to proofread. I deliberately misspelled some words. Oh, I did it up beautifully (Laughs.) He got the dictionary out and he looked up the words for me. I took it back and crossed out the words and squeezed the new ones in there. He started on the next sheet. I did the same thing all over again. There were four sheets. He proofread them all. Oh, he looked so serious! All this time he’s spendin’ just to keep me busy? Well, I didn’t finish it by noon.

I’m just gonna see what he does if I don’t finish it on time. Oh, it was imperative!

I knew the world's not gonna change that quickly. It was nice outside. If it gets to be a problem, I'll go home. It's a beautiful day the heck with it. So twelve-thirty comes and the work just looks awful. (Laughs.) I typed on all the lines, I continued it anywhere. One of the girls comes over, she says, 'You're going off the line. I said, 'Oh be quiet. I know what I'm doing. (Laughs.) Just go away. (Laughs.) I put the four sheets together. I never saw anything as horrible in my life. (Laughs.)

I decided I'd write him a note. 'Dear Mr. Roberts: You've been so much help. You proofread, you look up words for your secretary. It must be marvelous working for you. I hope this has met with your approval. Please call on me again. I never heard from him. (A long laugh.) (pp. 50-1)

This story objectifies feeling in two ways. First, it depicts feelings of persons and groups. We see Wilson's vindictiveness punish Roberts and play ambivalently against accepted norms of responsible work. We see Roberts' cowering submission to Wilson and imagine his ambivalence in patronizing someone who manipulates him. And we see group feelings, as the disenfranchised enjoy revenge on the powerful, and as the powerful grapple with the exasperation and fear of failing to understand and control workers. Second, and more important theoretically, this story symbolizes the feeling of group life. This is the artistic function of the story. We see the excitement of a well-told story that builds to a climax and is then resolved with the question of what will happen and whose wishes will prevail. Here we do not feel the actions of either person alone – their separate movements on the job have little intrinsic meaning. Rather, we feel the actions of both persons as they together exemplify the life of the larger group. This story is not only or even primarily about the individuals Wilson and Roberts (it could be about anybody); it is a story about a living group riven by conflicts of status, dignity, work values and will.

Regarding this second more important function of the story, we can note how the artistic elements of living form represent feeling. Plot *boundaries* are marked by a clear beginning and end. The story begins, as if a fable, with a variant of 'Once upon a time – in this case, 'One day I'd gotten a call'. The story ends, again as if a fable, with a variant of 'And they lived happily ever after' – in this case, 'I never heard from him again'. With these markers the listener recognizes the story as a bounded event, as an episode told to communicate feeling. Plot *tension* is established early in the story with the revelation that Wilson is no longer a clerk typist and resents being asked to perform in that capacity. With the tension of opposition established, the listener is drawn into the story, curious to know how it will turn out, and with what effects. The plot thickens and *grows* as this tension is elaborated in the middle of the story. The listener learns of the many obstacles Wilson has thrown Robert's way and of the shoddy work she returns for his troubles to help her. The listener learns also of the impending deadline that promises to bring that conflict to a head. With this growth of tension the listener is drawn further into the story and further into its feelings. And finally, while the plot draws to a close with Wilson's snide note and departure from the

scene, it leaves the listener to mull *possibilities* in wonder about what will become of the principals.

We can also look at this story to see how it functions in the workplace. A clear function of the story is to capture and hold onto the feelings of work. As noted, feelings of resentment, vindictive hostility pride, self-satisfaction, ambivalence, patronizing submission, exasperation, frustration and excitement are conveyed by its basic elements of plot. For old-timers in the group, the story confirms familiar feelings. The story literally 're-minds' them of these feelings. For newcomers to the group, the story is a map of the work place. Hearing the story even for the first time, a newcomer learns what it feels like to work there. A related and perhaps more important function of the story – for old-timers and newcomers alike – is to make the group real (Sandelands, 1998). The story establishes the life of the group. It shows that the group is bounded in space and time, that the group is animated by tensions, that the group's tensions grow and develop through time, and that the group holds interest by reconciling tensions while leaving room for unresolved possibilities. By making the group real, the story answers the most basic human need to belong. By establishing the life of the group, the story brings interest and even a kind of joy to members who live in and through it.

For the note-taking and catalogue-making social scientist, this story articulates the structure and dynamics of the group. It shows how the group is divided into parts – in this case between management and staff – and how parts play with and upon one another to create social order. By defining the structure and process of the group, the story identifies key actors and locates them in time, space and relation. Thanks to Wilson's story her troubled workplace is made a little more real and a little more comprehensible in the mind's eye. No doubt other stories would tell us more and help complete the picture.

We found a great many stories in Terkel, Garson, and Hamper that speak of the feelings and forms of work life. All of these stories could be analysed according to their artistic properties of living form and according to their functions in the workplace. Many of the better-told stories are moving and impossible to forget. They are poetry to cherish because they do their tellers and listeners the most good. To live among good stories is to really live.

Finally we note that stories have a unique epistemological significance. They can tell a truth about feeling even while they tell many lies about fact. This is because a story states facts but exemplifies feelings. A story has to be put together a certain way in light of a certain feeling, in order to be a story. A person tells a story about work and, accurate or not about details, we know the feeling. The emotional truth of a story is evident. This is a crucial point for scientists whose concern is with the truth. Stories supply truths about feeling at work, even when they are fables or myths.

### **Feeling's future**

Fineman (1993) describes work organizations aptly as richly textured social dramas, emotional arenas' We have argued that stories offer a unique and indispensable opportunity to study feeling at work. Stories are objects (scientists can collect them, analyse them, talk about them). Stories are general (people in all cultures and all places tell stories). And stories are indicative (they exemplify the feelings and forms of work). It remains, finally to say a few words about how social scientists can use stories to study feeling at work.

The considerable scientific value of stories comes in their mapping of the feelings and forms of social life. This mapping suggests two courses for science to take. First, research is needed to explore how stories can be used to discover the feelings and forms of work. What kinds of stories are told about work? What do these stories tell us about the forms and feelings of work? And how do the forms and feelings of work map onto one another? Carlo Gozzi proposed that there are only 36 kinds of stories and only 36 kinds of emotions to go with these stories (see Polti, 1921). Rudyard Kipling said there were 69 kinds of stories and, presumably 69 kinds of feelings in reading them (see Tobias, 1993). To answer such questions, we must collect as many stories about work as we can with the aim to establish their kinds and the aim to establish how they map feelings of work onto forms of work. To this end, the editor and several contributors to the present volume look at stories to chart the feelings and forms of organized life. We join these efforts in work that focuses on formal elements of story – particularly of setting, character and plot – that we believe represent formal elements of work life and feeling (see Boudens and Sandelands, 1999).

Second, research is needed to explore how feelings of work are used in creating, telling and enjoying stories about work. As noted earlier, psychotherapy shows that one way people come to terms with their feelings is by telling stories about their lives. By telling stories that capture their feelings people learn that they can change their feelings by changing their stories – that is, by altering the plot lines of their lives. We agree with Fineman (1993) to suppose that people at work use stories in the same way to come to terms with feelings and, in some cases, to change their feelings. To address this issue, we should ask people to create, tell and interpret stories at work. Then, by looking at the forms of stories, and by looking at the steps taken to create, tell and interpret stories, we can again see how feelings at work map onto the forms of work.

Stories are an appealing focus for research on work because they reveal its profoundly social and restlessly vital feeling. For too long researchers have studied feeling at work with measures of job satisfaction that mistake feeling for an intellectual judgement about an individual job. We have been at pains in this chapter to argue that feeling is not a judgement and is not about an individual job. Feeling at work is a non-intentional awareness of the life of the group. Feeling at work is symbolized figuratively in art forms such as



stories. By offering an image of feeling faithful to its logical form and social nature, stories offer an objective basis for a science of feeling at work.

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