

The Concept of Work Feeling

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This paper is a study of the concept of work feeling. It seeks to establish what a work feeling is and what scientific psychology can say about it.

The paper begins by reviewing the scientific literature on work feelings. This literature is found to say very little about the way people feel when working, but rather much more about the judgments they make about their work (see, Locke, 1976). The paper continues by proposing a concept of work feeling based on the idea that feeling *emerges* from ongoing work activity as a property of its form. This concept is developed from investigations of: 1) what is felt in work; 2) the distinction and relation between work feelings and thoughts about work; and 3) how work feelings are influenced by characteristics of the work, worker, and work situation. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the proposed concept of work feeling for expanding the scope of scientific research on work.

TWO IDEAS ABOUT FEELING

Below are four well-known descriptions of feeling, one concerned specifically with work feelings, the other three are more general. These descriptions are similar in essential respects to those found elsewhere (e.g., Arnold, 1960; Izard, 1971; Mandler, 1975; Plutchik, 1980; Solomon, 1976; Strongman, 1971).

Since satisfaction is an emotional response, the meaning of the concept can only be discovered and grasped by a process of introspection, that is, an act of conceptual identification directed to one's mental contents and processes [pg. 1300]. . . Job satisfaction may be viewed as the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the perception of one's job as fulfilling or allowing the fulfillment of one's important job values, providing these values are compatible with one's needs [Locke, 1976: 1342]

This article is confined to those aspects of affect and feeling that are generally involved in preferences. These aspects are reflected in the answers to such questions as "Do you like this person?" "How do you feel about capital punishment?" "Which do you prefer, Brie or Camembert?" "Are you pleased with the review your recent book received?" In short, I deal with some hot cognitions . . . and try to distinguish them from the cold ones [Zajonc, 1980:152].

. . . an emotional state may be considered a function of a state of physiological arousal and of a cognition appropriate to this state of arousal [Schacter and Singer, 1962:380].

In theories of adult emotional response, cognitive appraisal now functions as the central construct [quoted from Campos and Sternberg, 1981:273]. Its role is to mediate the relationship between the person and the environment. The appraisal process gives rise to a particular emotion with greater or lesser intensity depending on how the relationship is evaluated with respect to the person's well-being. Cognitive appraisal means that the way one interprets one's plight at any given moment is crucial to the emotional response [Lazarus, 1983:1019].

These descriptions highlight a basic dilemma in discussions about feeling — namely, that the concept of feeling is employed in the service of two different and antagonistic ideas. On one hand, 'feeling' is a response to a stimulus. It is an evaluation of, or judgement about, a specific object or thing. This is reflected above in use of the adjective 'emotional' to modify the nouns 'state' and 'response', and in identification of 'affect' and 'feeling' with terms such as 'preference', 'hot cognition', and 'appraisal'. Feeling is a product of information processing and it is *about* something else.

On the other hand, 'feeling' is also a process. This is reflected in the use above of active verbs to describe feelings. Zajonc identifies emotion with questions asking how one feels about; does like; or, is pleased. Lazarus speaks of the appraisal process as something that gives rise to emotion, and such that "the way one interprets one's plight at any given moment is crucial to the emotional response" (pg. 1019). Locke speaks similarly of the emotion of job satisfaction as resulting from [active voice] the perception of one's job as fulfilling [active voice] important job values. Here, feeling is not a discrete response, but an occurrence in its own right having its own dynamisms, transmutations, risings and fallings. Here feeling is *of* an ongoing process or activity.

These two ideas about feeling are rarely distinguished in the literature on work. Terms that refer to *feelings of* work such as work affect, emotion and job feeling often are used the same way as terms that refer to *feelings about* work such as job attitude, job satisfaction, and commitment.¹ The unhappy result is that feelings of work are made into something they are not; they are reified as judgments.² Instead of being seen as processes, they are made into thoughts; by-products of information processing. Lost are the important differences between them and thoughts about work. Lost also are the feelings themselves.

That work feelings would be given over to theories of information processing is perhaps symptomatic of the cognitization of psychology generally (see, Markus and Zajonc, 1986). No doubt this was helped along by a tendency to see work (like feeling) as too much of a thing — as a task, job or occupation. This makes work an object to be judged, instead of a process to be felt. Another factor

is that work feelings are difficult to talk about. They are not mediated symbolically and do not fit neatly into the dress of language (Langer, 1967).

This paper proposes to reclaim work feelings; to recall the fact that they are processes not thoughts. This paper speaks to the problem that Landy (1978: 535) identified this way:

If one accepts the proposition that job satisfaction represents some affective state that is an important component of most theories of work motivation, it is distressing to recognize that attention has been paid almost exclusively to the conditions *antecedent* to that state. Little or no attention has been paid to the characteristics of the state itself or to the intra-individual past history of that state.

However, to bring about a true study of work feelings, what is needed is not simply more attention, but a suitable concept of work feeling — one that is not *about* work, but *of* work; one that identifies feeling not as an outcome of information processing, but as an emergent property of ongoing work activity.

TOWARD A CONCEPT OF WORK FEELING

A satisfactory concept of work feeling must reckon with three problems. It must specify what is felt. It must be clear about how work feelings are different from thoughts about work. And, it must offer a satisfactory account of how feelings are influenced by characteristics of the work, the worker, and the work situation.

What is Felt

The basic premise of this paper is that feeling is an aspect of doing. Feeling and doing are coexistent, coterminous, and coordinate. Feeling merges with doing and is experienced as a quality of its form. Work feelings exist as qualities or phases of activity on the job. They contrast with cognitions about work (e.g., thoughts, beliefs, attitudes) which result from information processing and are not directly part of the work itself.

Work Feeling An Emergent Property. What does it mean to say that work feeling emerges as the form of activity on the job? Is feeling caused by work activity? Or, is it the activity itself? Queer though it may seem, the answer is that it is both. Work feeling is not something extra, but simply the way work activity is experienced. This is the idea of emergence.

'Emergent properties' are ways complex systems appear in perception. These properties have been called 'Ehrensfeis properties' (after the person who first called attention to them), 'translocal properties' and 'Gestalt properties' (see e.g. Kohler, 1947:102-122). A familiar example is the liquidity or 'wetness' of water. This property emerges as a higher order property of the complex and dynamic flux of molecular activity. As Searle (1984) has drolly noted, this

property is not characteristic of individual molecules — i.e. one cannot pick one out and say it is wet. By the same token, this property is not unique to water. Any substance can be “wet”. Perhaps an even more “classic” example of emergence is melody in music. Melody emerges as a higher-order property of the occurrence of musical notes. Here, the dissociation between the emergence and its substrate system is more striking. Even if all the notes of a melody are translated to another key (thus replacing its content while preserving its form) the same melody is heard. These translations are called “allomorphs”; they are different versions of a single form.³

In the same way, work feeling is an emergent property of ongoing activity at work. It emerges as the form of work activity and is one way work activity is experienced. This is how work feeling is both caused by and the same thing as work activity. A compelling virtue of this concept of feeling is that it is anchored securely in the work itself — this cannot be said of *feelings about* work or cognitions about work generally. Another virtue is that it offers a *modus vivendi* with the mind-body problem. Here, a psychological event (feeling) is paired with a physical event (behavior) through the concept of emergence. One wonders if this isn't the only way to join these uncompanionable processes (see Searle, 1984).

Work Feelings and Work Forms. What kinds of work forms are felt? An initial approach to this question can be made by example. Consider the feelings Katherine Mansfield has when finishing one of her short stories:

I wonder why it should be so difficult to be humble. I do not think I am a good writer; I realize my faults better than anyone else could realize them. I know exactly where I fail. And yet, when I have finished a story and before I have begun another, I catch myself *preening* my feathers. It is disheartening. There seems to be some bad old pride in my heart; a root of it that puts out a thick shoot on the slightest provocation . . . this interferes very much with work. One can't be calm, clear, good as one must be, while it goes on. I look at the mountains, I try to pray, and I think of something *clever*. It's a kind of excitement within one, which shouldn't be there. Calm yourself. Clear yourself. And anything that I write in this mood will be no good; it will be full of *sediment*. If I were well I would go all by myself somewhere and sit under a tree. One must learn, one must practise, to *forget* oneself [in Hanson, 1987].

What Katherine Mansfield feels are certain forms of behavior. Her pride emerges from thinking about and glorifying in the completion of a story. Perhaps she imagines that the story is magnificent and that its completion is an accomplishment. Perhaps too she imagines that the story will bring her fame and fortune. These fancies are set against, and indeed made possible by, a measure of insecurity — for pride is always a child of doubt. Another felt form is her chagrin when discovering once again and too late that her vanity interferes with her work. This could have been, should have been, avoided. As in the case of pride, this form consists of elements in dynamic interplay (e.g., the opposition of pride and good work, contrasting images of what happened and what should have happened). Here again, feeling is dynamic form.

The concept of feeling as dynamic form has been suggested before, albeit not in connection with work feelings. Kohler (1947:105) described 'emotion' as a general class of processes involving distribution and regulation of mental events to form functional wholes. Working in the same vein, Arnheim (1966:310) described emotion as:

... the tension or excitement level, produced by the interaction of mental forces. In the mechanics of the mind, emotion is the stress caused by the tractions and pressures that constitute mental activity. Thus, emotion does not contribute impulses of its own; it is merely an effect of the play of forces taking place within the mind.

Although it is not exactly clear what Kohler and Arnheim mean by 'mental events', or even whether they mean the same thing [i.e., whether these 'events' are physiological happenings in the brain, or something more ghostly], it is clear that they intend these events to define a dynamic form and that it is this *form* that is felt. This basic idea is implied by virtually all of the Gestalt (or Gestalt inspired) concepts of form — e.g. 'dynamic self-distribution' (cf. Kohler, 1947), 'psychological field' (Lewin, 1935); 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger, 1957) and 'cognitive balance' (Heider, 1958). Each refers to a dynamically structured system of events or forces. Each refers also to a definite feeling; be it the subtle pleasure of perceiving or making a 'good figure'; the animating tension of striving toward a goal; the anguish of cognitive dissonance; or the upset of imbalances among interpersonal sentiments. Festinger (1957), for example, defines 'cognitive dissonance' as a discomforting state arising from "non-fitting *relations* among cognitions" [pg. 3, emphasis added].

Recently, Buck (1985) described feeling as a sort of running progress report or 'readout' on the status of several different motive systems — including simple reflexes, instincts, primary drives, acquired drives, primary affects and effectance motives. Although Buck's theoretical model does not identify motive forms corresponding to specific feelings, its promise is suggested by even a crude example. Consider an activity motivated by a basic tissue need such as for food or water. This activity can be described as a dynamic form consisting of a motive (e.g., a drive or need) and an array of internal and/or external constraints that regulate its actuation and resolution.⁴ Over time, this system could assume two different forms corresponding to feelings of 'relief' and 'frustration'. 'Relief' would be the form in which the motive is dissipated by satisfaction of the tissue need. 'Frustration' would be the form in which the motive is maintained or reinforced by impediments to satisfaction of the tissue need.⁵

These examples share the idea that feeling emerges as the *form* of activity. This is true whether activity is represented as a process of thinking, or as a system of motive forces, or even as a physical process.⁶ Feeling need not be associated with any particular type of process, though it must be expressed in

terms of one or another. For some purposes it may be convenient to identify feeling with a pattern of thinking, for others it may be convenient to identify feeling with a configuration of motives or tensions, and still others with an organization of physiological events. These are different ways of talking about the form of activity. Each reveals something different about feeling.

Work Feelings Not Intentional. Given that work feelings emerge as the form of work activity, they cannot be "about" anything. Although they often are attributed to specific entities (objects, things or persons), these attributions come only after the fact, and then only upon enlistment of an additional process of thinking about the feeling (a process that may itself be felt). Again, what is felt is *not* some outside object or thing, but always an ongoing process.

The argument usually advanced for the intentionality of feelings is that they are almost always about something. Most of the time it is easy to identify an object to which the feeling could be directed or attached. Thus, a person is said to be "angry about a recent review", or "in love with somebody", or "frustrated by traffic congestion". According to Rorty (1980), although the object of emotion is not always its cause, the object is an essential part of its explanation. For Solomon (1973), the most compelling fact about the emotions is that they coincide so faithfully with more "thoughtful" appraisals of the situations in which they occur. Why, he asks, are the emotions so sensible? He surmises that emotions must be a kind of judgment — and as such, partly "chosen", partly "purposeful" and partly "voluntary". According to Solomon, it is not possible to just feel "angry", or "in love", or "frustrated". An object of feeling must always be specified or inferred. Emotions, he writes, cannot be decomposed into a feeling component *and* a something else that is what the feeling is "about". Emotions are not made of unallied feelings.

Opposing this argument are three rather more compelling reasons to suppose just the opposite: that feelings are essentially objectless and that whatever object referents they acquire come only after thoughtful reflection. First, objectless feelings are not hard to find. Even the most ardent advocates of the intentionality of emotions concede certain "degenerate" cases in which it is difficult to locate a credible object for the feeling. Perhaps the most familiar examples are the so-called "moods" of euphoria or depression. Usually, these feelings are called "moods" to distinguish them from feelings which already have been assigned to specific objects and which thereby deserve the appellation "emotions" (see, e.g., Arnold, 1960; Lazarus, 1982). However useful it may be to distinguish "moods" and "emotions", this does not in any way establish that feelings are intentional.

Second, the evidence for the intentionality of feelings is unconvincing. Not only is it exceptionable (see above), but it is equivocal in any case. People may identify objects for their feelings, not as a condition for having them, but in order to explain them to themselves and others. The coincidence of feelings and objects may reflect self-justification, not a logical property of feelings.

Third, when we think about our own feelings their intentionality is not at all obvious. For many feelings we do not trouble with objects, but are content to just have them. Freud believed that unconsciousness about the objects of feeling was a kind of repression and potentially a source of pathology. Yet, it could be just the opposite, that feelings do not natively have objects and that pathology results from our efforts to make them up. Sometimes we light on the "wrong" objects, sometimes none at all. Thus, it could be suggested that modern psychotherapy helps people find "good" reasons for their feelings — either by helping them to locate one in the first place, or by helping them to replace self-destructive reasons with more salutary ones. The fungibility of objects of emotion again raises questions about their necessity.⁷

Finally, and relatedly, the objectlessness of feelings is indicated by the way they come into being. They strike lightning-quick, unannounced and seemingly without regard for whether or not the person has a specific object in mind. This is reflected in the way we talk about emotions — such phrases as "struck by jealousy", "plagued by remorse" or "overcome by joy". Although Solomon (1973) has argued that his language is premised on faulty philosophical analysis, it does seem telltale about the surprising, consuming, unplanned and essentially objectless nature of feelings.

Work Feelings Compared to Thoughts about Work

Work feelings thus are essentially different from thoughts about work. Thoughts are symbols — they stand for and refer to other things, real or imagined (i.e. they are intentional). They are also outcomes of information processing (hence the metaphor of the computer in cognitive psychology). In order to think about the colour blue, a person must have in mind a particular thing that is blue (e.g., a blue sky). In contrast, and as already shown, feelings do not stand for or refer to anything (i.e. they are not intentional). They emerge as the form of ongoing activity. A person can feel "blue" and not be blue about anything in particular.

Work feelings and thoughts about work also are experienced differently. First, work feelings spring into awareness ready-made; as if by intuition. Thoughts, on the other hand, seem to tumble forth discursively from a process whose steps sometimes can even be remembered. Feelings emerge, thoughts are made.

Second, work feelings often are ineffable in a way that thoughts about work are not. It can be difficult to express how one feels on the job, even when the feeling is securely held. Feelings do not fit neatly into the categories of language. By comparison, it is usually not difficult to find words to express one's thoughts about a job (e.g. that it is tiring, or challenging, or stressful, or exciting). When thoughts are hard to express, it is usually because the right word cannot be found, or because the thought itself is unclear (indeed, it is helpful sometimes to play with words in order to get the thought straight).

Third, there are differences in memorability. Feelings, it seems, cannot be remembered at all. As James (1890:474) noted:

The revivability in memory of the emotions, like that of all the feelings of the lower senses, is very small. We can remember that we underwent grief or rapture, but not just how the grief or rapture felt. This difficult *ideal* revivability is, however, more than compensated in the case of the emotions by a very easy *actual* revivability. That is, we can produce, not remembrances of the old grief or rapture, but new griefs and raptures, by summoning up a lively thought of their exciting cause.

By comparison, thoughts about work are revived easily. They seem a kind of possession — tucked away in a storehouse (literally, the 'long term store'), waiting only to be trotted out as occasion demands. Thoughts are "owned", feelings are merely "rented".

Finally, work feelings have definite kinesthetic associates whereas thoughts about work do not.⁸ One wonders, again along with James, whether feelings could exist at all if not for their visceral and neuromuscular efferences:

If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no 'mind stuff' out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains [1890:451].

These phenomenal differences between work feelings and thoughts about work follow directly from the concepts themselves. One need know only that thoughts are symbols and that they are outcomes of information processing to make sense of their halting formation, felicitous verbal expression, and ready retrievability from memory. By the same token, one need only know that feelings are direct appearances of ongoing activity to make sense of their more immediate formation, ineffability and kinesthetic associates.

Although work feelings are different from thoughts about work, this does not mean that they are unrelated. Indeed, the main reason for considering their differences is to make clear just how they are related. As we have seen, thinking at work can be felt and feelings of work can be thought about. It seems also that thinking about work can recall some of its feeling — e.g. its tedium, or excitement. These ideas are supported by findings that feelings appear together with thoughts about pleasant and unpleasant events (Isen, Daubman and Nowicki, 1987), remembered events (Bower, 1981), causal attributions (Weiner, 1985), and creative impulses (Isen *et al.*, 1987), to mention but a few.

The intimacy between feeling and thought is puzzling. They are together so often that it seems artificial to speak of one without the other. And yet, they have uncompanionable forms. However, this puzzle gives way when it is recognized that they concur not as cause and effect, but as co-incidents.

Even from what little has been said so far, it is clear why there can be no direct or causal connection between feelings and thoughts. Feelings and thoughts are

different kinds of things or 'types' (see, e.g. Ryle, 1949: 11-24). Whereas feelings emerge as forms of activity (being both caused by and the same thing as activity), thoughts are produced by information processing (they are symbolic, intentional, discrete). These differences make interaction between them impossible. Our sense of their intimacy stems only from their coincidence. They are cognates.

Although consistent with the discussion thusfar, this concept of the relation between work feelings and thoughts about work conflicts with the view that feelings are brought to mind by thoughts (see, e.g., Arnold, 1960; Schachter and Singer, 1962; Mandler, 1975; Lazarus, 1982; Locke, 1976). Writes Arnold (1960:73): "There must be an estimate that one kind of functioning is good, that is, favorable for the organism, and another unfavorable, before the one can be felt as pleasant, the other as unpleasant". Lazarus (1982:1021) argues that "By and large, cognitive appraisal (of meaning or significance) underlies and is an integral feature of all emotional states. Are there any exceptions? I think not . . .". On this view, feeling is created by some sort of process that appraises objects or events for meaning or significance.⁹

On the present view, thoughts are neither constituents nor precursors of feelings. These two states occur together because this is the way most things are experienced (i.e., they are both felt and thought about). This is why it is possible for feelings to be dissociated from thoughts (e.g., in cases of mood, free floating anxiety, drug induced feelings). Such thoughtless feelings have always been troublesome to the view that feelings are based on thoughts. Arnold (1960:79-80) dismisses these wayward feelings by condemning them to the second-citizen status of "mood". Lazarus (1982:1019) chooses to ignore them, noting that "when these components (feelings and thoughts) are dissociated, we are left with something other than what we mean by a true emotional state".

Finally, the present formulation of feeling and thinking may seem a restatement of the dual-system model proposed by Zajonc (1980). It is not. The feelings Zajonc writes about are *feelings about*. He shows that these feelings (what he calls preferences) are processed earlier and apart from thoughts (what he calls inferences). He assumes, however, that both *are processed*. In contrast, the feelings spoken of here are "feelings of"; these are not processed at all. In addition, whereas Zajonc finds that feelings and thoughts can influence one another causally, we find that causality is impossible because feelings and thoughts are not the sorts of things that can interact in this way.

Influences on Feeling

A central problem for the theory of work feelings is to specify how work feelings are related to characteristics of the work, worker and work situation. The standard answer is that information about these characteristics is used to make judgments about feelings (Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Wall and Martin, 1987). Indeed, a preoccupation of recent research has been to decide which of

the three informs these judgments most (e.g., O'Reilly and Caldwell, 1979; Griffin, 1985; Staw, Bell and Clausen, 1986).

This answer suffers two problems. First, as already shown, work feelings are not judgments, and thus could not result from judgment processes. Second, even if feelings were judgments (which they are not), there is less to the idea of judgment process than appears. The concept is nearly empty. The verb 'to judge' is an example of what Ryle (1949) called an 'achievement verb'. It does not name a definite process, rather it only implies a process by naming its outcome (in this case, an emotion). This verb thus encompasses *every process* that does or could lead to an emotion. By referring to practically anything, it refers to nothing.

The proposed concept of feeling as an emergent quality of work — as a feeling of — denies that feelings are determined by information of any kind. Feeling is not processed information. The reason why characteristics of work, worker and work situation are related to feelings is not because they inform feelings, but because they coincide with particular forms of felt work activity. These characteristics are separately discernible aspects of the same work activity; they are neither precursors nor influences. Feeling differences between jobs, or between workers, or between work situations, can everywhere be attributed to differences in the form of activity on the job. These are always differences in the way work is done.

Though this interpretation contradicts the idea that feeling is a judgment about work, it is not incompatible with existing research on work feeling. For example, it is well established that jobs having certain characteristics (e.g., skill variety, task identity, autonomy) feel better than jobs not having these characteristics (see, e.g., Wall and Martin, 1987). Although commonly this is explained as an effect of these characteristics on how work is perceived and evaluated (Roberts and Glick, 1981), it could be just as easily explained as a coincidence of these characteristics and directly felt forms of activity. Indeed, the latter explanation is simpler and assumes less. It does not require that these characteristics be perceived or that they be used by the worker to make judgments about the work. It requires only that these characteristics coincide with differently felt forms.

This same reasoning can be applied to research on dispositions and work feelings. Staw and his colleagues (Staw *et al.*, 1986) have shown that people feel work in self-consistent ways. They argue that this is because people are predisposed to evaluate their work in a particular way (thus presuming, as above, that feeling is a judgment and work a thing to be judged). Again, a simpler explanation is that people do their work in ways that have particular forms and feelings. Thus, people who are disposed to enjoy their work do it differently from those who are not. This concept of disposition is given further weight by the role that learning plays in feeling. What people know affects how they act and how they feel. As Bruner (1986) has pointed out,

feeling cannot be separated from the knowledge that makes it possible. Learning the rules of culture makes possible certain socially-based feelings (e.g. embarrassment, disgust, shame), learning motor skills potentiates others (e.g. clumsiness, grace) and learning perceptual skills others still (e.g. aesthetic pleasures).¹⁰

Finally, it is possible also to explain relations between work situations and feelings as coincidences of the form of work activity. Once again, the common view is that situations influence feeling by affecting judgments people make about their work. For instance, Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) argue that the social environment impacts work feelings, either by influencing the way work characteristics are perceived, or by demanding specific expressions of attitude. Once again, a simpler alternative is to see that situations coincide with feeling because work is done differently in different situations.

None of this is to minimize the value of previous research on the coincidences between work feelings and characteristics of work, worker and work situation. Knowledge of even simple coincidences can help people choose between jobs, or help organizations match people and jobs. This knowledge can also provide clues about the nature of felt forms. For example, from the fact that jobs with autonomy feel better than those without, we learn that an important aspect of work form may be the relationship between work and self. The same goes for the tendency to enjoy jobs more when they provide sufficient and timely feedback.

Summary: The Concept of Work Feeling

A concept of work feeling has been presented based on four key ideas. First, work feelings emerge as the form of activity on the job. Second, work feelings are distinguished from thoughts about work both conceptually (e.g. in terms of intentionality and origins) and phenomenally (e.g., in terms of how they come to awareness, verbalizability, memorability and kinesthetics). Third, work feelings and thoughts about work are not associated causally, but are related coincidentally as different ways of experiencing (and talking about) activity on the job. And fourth, work feelings are not based on information about the work, worker or work situation. Characteristics of the work, worker and work situation coincide with feeling but do not arouse it.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This concept of work feeling calls attention to new questions, new problems, and new directions for research. Principally we want to know: What forms of work are felt? How can they be compared? How are they felt? And, what do they feel like? Associated with these questions are technical and philosophical problems which must be resolved as well.

Feeling and the Form of Work

More research is needed to discover the formal basis of work feelings. Studies of work mainly describe content (e.g., duties performed, skills required, tasks performed, amount of supervision, needs satisfied). When form is discussed (e.g., in models of job design) it is not in terms of feeling, but in terms of how information about it is used to make judgments about work. Hackman and Oldham (1976), for example, hypothesize that people use information about the form characteristics of skill variety, task identity, autonomy and feedback to decide whether or not they are personally responsible for performing well on a meaningful job. They maintain (incorrectly) that it is this judgment, not the form of the work, that is felt.

Despite the lack of dedicated research on the subject, there are suggestions that work forms can be felt directly, without aid or support from judgments or thinking processes. Baldamus (1961), for example, analyzed feelings of tedium and traction in manufacturing work. He discovered that tedium arises (emerges?) from the mental effort of joining two consecutive cycles of work activity, whereas its opposite, traction, arises from the inertia, pull, rhythm, and swing that is built into the task. These feelings, he argues, cannot be isolated from the form of the work.

Similar claims are made in the literature on motivation. Csikszentimihalyi (1975) studied a feeling called "flow", which he defines as "the kind of feeling after which one nostalgically says: 'that was fun', or 'that was enjoyable'" (p. 43). He found this feeling to be associated with forms of activity wherein: 1) action is merged with awareness; 2) attention is centered on a limited field; 3) selfish considerations are irrelevant; 4) there is control over action and environment; 5) there is clear feedback; and 6) action is pursued for its own sake. Koch (1956) wrote of this feeling in connection with intrinsic motivation. Based on introspections of his own, he concluded that this feeling arises from activity that is self-regulated, self-determining, self-motivated, self-energizing, and, unfortunately, self-liquidating. It contrasts with the feeling of instrumental forms; wherein one is compelled to do something by an outside agent or force (see also, Sandelands, Ashford and Dutton, 1983).

These studies are augmented by theoretical investigations that lead also to the conclusion that feelings emerge as the form of work activity. In a study of the aesthetic in work, Sandelands and Buckner (in press) reached the view that aesthetic feelings emerge from a particular form of thinking process — one that takes place at the fringe of awareness, free from the demands of the ego. In addition, they surmised that though this process is possible in any kind of work, it is more likely to emerge in work that has: 1) definite boundaries; 2) conflict or tension between parts; 3) opportunities to detect growth or progress; and 4) mystery or unresolved possibility. These particular characteristics seem particularly important in making aesthetic thinking possible. Definite boundaries allow thinking to proceed apart from outside demands.

Conflict or tension between parts motivates thinking to seek resolution. Opportunities to detect growth offer a way to organize the process toward resolution. And, mystery brings intrigue.

Another indication that feelings emerge as the form of work comes from research on task grammars (e.g., Sandelands, 1987). Task grammars describe how structures (work forms) are built up from elementary states and events. These grammars generate structures that feel different. This is shown by a comparison of the grammatical structure of two tasks: writing poetry and grading exams:

In poetry-writing, STATES and EVENTS are strongly linked. Where and how one begins affects where and how one proceeds which further affects how the task unfolds to completion. In exam-grading, STATES and EVENTS are joined more tenuously. Grading one exam has little to do with grading other exams. Associated with this difference in micro-structure . . . is a difference in the sense of continuity or 'flow'. In poetry writing there is a feeling of being pulled along by the task. In exam grading there is the feeling that without constant effort, the task would never get done [Sandelands, 1987:135].

The research to date provides only a glimpse of the formal basis of work feelings. Nevertheless, it offers promising leads. From recent theory and research on motivation (see Buck, cited earlier) comes the suggestion that there may be discoverable correspondences between motive structures and feelings. From the work on task grammars come suggestions for cataloguing work forms based on how they feel. Only further research can tell what these leads might bring. Lastly, there are suggestions that work forms can be discerned from the way people talk about their work feelings. Bedford (1984) has observed that people use feeling words in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes — only one being to communicate a particular state or experience. The principle function of feeling words, he writes, is judicial not informative. Often these words are used to praise, condemn, accept or assign responsibility, explain actions, or justify choices. Feeling words (quite apart from feelings themselves) thus are freighted with descriptive and explanatory significance. Perhaps by paying close attention to the way these words are used, something can be learned about the forms of work that are felt.

Problems and Prospects

The study of work feelings is not without hazard. There are problems of description and explanation that must be reckoned with if the concept of work feeling is to take a place alongside other scientific concepts of work.

Description. Scientific descriptions of feeling have a long history of fecklessness. No matter how adeptly formulated or phrased, feeling somehow never quite gets expressed. Even so thoughtful and eloquent a writer as James (1890) falls short, as for example, in his rendering of the physiognomy of 'hatred':

Withdrawal of the head backwards, withdrawal of the trunk; projection forwards of the hands, as if to defend one's self against the hated object; contraction or closure of the eyes; elevation of the upper lip and closure of the nose — these are all elementary movements of turning away. Next threatening movements, as: intense frowning; eyes wide open; display of teeth; grinding teeth and contracting jaws; opened mouth with tongue advanced; clinched fists; threatening action of arms; stamping with the feet; deep inspirations — panting; growling and various cries; automatic repetition of one word or syllable; sudden weakness and trembling of voice . . . [140]

The physical appearance can be recognized, but not the feeling behind it. There is more to feeling than its physical form.

Little better are descriptions based on meanings. Consider the compound emotion of jealousy as described by Arnold (1960:197–198):

. . . jealousy, for instance, includes love, a fear of loss, anger at the beloved (and the third party) for disturbing secure possession, and many other emotions, all of which depend on the various aspects of the situation that are emphasized and evaluated. . . . The jealous husband may consider that he has taken his wife for granted for a long time and has perhaps given her reason to feel neglected and to look for affection elsewhere. Then he may come to think of her as he used to during their first years together and may find that she is as lovable now as she was then. With this realization, his love for her will be rekindled and he may again show a lover's affection and consideration — until it seems to him that she does not respond in kind. At this point he may begin to think of her lack of affection for him, the bitter injustice of it, and may indulge in an outburst of angry vituperation.

In this description too, there is much that is familiar. Thoughts, actions and feelings are organized coherently and sensibly. Yet, the feeling once again is unidentified. Jealousy is defined but not described. Where in these words goes feeling?

The problem of describing feeling is linguistic. Feelings are not easily put into words (Arnheim, 1969; Langer, 1967). Language consists of a lexicon of morphemes and rules for arranging them in meaningful ways. It expresses ideas discursively; one at a time, in linear fashion. Feelings, however, are complex, dynamic, simultaneous, and interactive. By their very nature, they cannot be described atomistically as a sequence of events or happenings.

This incommensurability of language and work feelings can be mitigated somewhat by the use of figurations (Arnheim, 1969). Images of feeling can be evoked by such devices as simile or metaphor, or by instructing readers how to form images for themselves, through stories, myths or anecdotes.¹¹ Figurations, however, are regarded askance and often unappreciatingly within the scientific community. Scientific objectivity is said to require scrupulous, literal use of language. Ironically, the stringent and well-intentioned standards of science virtually guarantee that work feelings will be described ineptly. Here, as elsewhere in science, verifiability is traded for verisimilitude.

However, for the same reason that work feelings are poorly suited by language, they are well suited by extra- or non-linguistic media, and especially art. Art expresses feelings directly, as forms. Feeling is objectified by a form that can be inspected, analyzed, talked about, and compared to other forms.

Bruner (1962) has suggested that art is a mode of knowing, and surely one way we come to know feeling. Langer (1957:94) argues the case for art even more forcefully:

Art presents the life of feeling for our contemplation. It is the articulation of the morphology of feeling thru wordless abstraction. . . . Artistic expression abstracts aspects of the life of feeling which have no names, which have to be presented to sense and intuition, rather than to a word-bound, note-taking consciousness. Form and color, tone and tension and rhythm, contrast and softness and rest and motivation are the elements that yield the symbolic forms which can convey ideas of such nameless realities.

This suggests that art and other non-linguistic media could be helpful in studies of work feeling. For example, workers might be asked to draw pictures to show how they feel on the job (perhaps with an accompanying explanation). These pictures could be analyzed to see what (if any) structures (of forces or tensions) coincide with what feelings. Similar studies are reported by Arnheim (1969). People were asked to draw pictures of strongly felt concepts such as a good or bad marriage. These pictures showed interesting similarities (e.g., in forms chosen, elements used, ways of expressing intimacy and conflict). Another possibility is to study carefully the forms used by professional artists to express feelings of work. Between, for example, Chaplin's *Modern Times* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* runs a gamut of work feeling. We should like to know what forms underly these feelings.¹²

Explanation. Work feelings are explained by forms of work activity. Yet, these forms can no more be described than the feelings that issue from them — and basically for the same reason. Work forms likewise are destroyed by attempts to atomize them — whether by apportioning them into words, or by analyzing them in terms of their parts. These forms are emergent and unrationalizable. The best that can be done is to catalog as many of their bits and pieces as possible and hope thereby to somehow glimpse the unspeakable whole. It is ironic but true that even though work feelings are known to everybody, they cannot be explained by anybody.

This problem is manifest as a paradox of rational explanation. The logic of rational analysis suggests that work feelings can be explained by their parts. However, in order to identify these parts, it is necessary to have a concept of the whole feeling (the feeling to be explained) already in mind. The concepts of whole and part are mutually defining — the whole is defined by the parts and the parts are defined by the whole. This suggests that before there is a feeling to explain and parts of that feeling to do the explaining, there must be an earlier process which defines both. This earlier process, by its nature, cannot be rationally explained.

Earlier it was suggested that work feelings are intuitive. They emerge directly and spontaneously as qualities of work activity. They exist for themselves, of themselves, and by themselves. It can now be seen that it is only after the fact,

and after reflection, that they are known as 'things' made of this part or that. Work feelings can now be seen as examples of what Russell (1912) called 'knowledge by acquaintance'. They are experiences "of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths" [p. 46].

What is particularly significant about Russell's concept of knowledge by acquaintance is that it contrasts with what he called knowledge by description. The latter is knowledge which results from intellectual processes of reasoning (what today would be called information processing). Comparing the two, Russell found that the former is primary: "all our knowledge, both knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, rests upon acquaintance as its foundation" (p. 48). Said differently, understanding does not come primarily by thinking. Feeling is first. Rational explanation is not the father of understanding (as often supposed), but rather its son. Feeling is before explanation.

Finally, the problem of explanation recalls the problem with which the paper started — namely, that work feelings often are mistaken for rational judgments (feelings about), and on this basis mistakenly explained by information about the work. It now has been shown that work feelings cannot be explained this way. Whereas work feelings have in the past been represented incorrectly as *feelings about* work (which can be described and explained), they now are represented correctly as *feelings of* work (which cannot be fully described or fully explained). The main difference this makes, as has been shown, is in how work feelings are studied. Once it is recognized that work feelings cannot be explained rationally, there develops a need for concepts and methods to deal directly with the forms of work activity from which they issue. This not only returns value to familiar, though largely neglected, concepts of Gestalt psychology, but it finds new value in recent theories of motive form and task grammar, as well as in applications of art to the study of feeling.

CONCLUSION

This paper has advanced a concept of work feeling based on the idea that feeling emerges as the form of activity on the job. It also has identified some of the implications of this concept for expanding the scope of research on work feelings.

It remains, however, to employ this concept of work feeling programmatically as a basis for research. Thus, it is difficult to say what its future holds. Even so, it is clear that a new concept of work feeling is needed to reclaim feelings *of* work from the judgments people make *about* work. Thus, even if the proposed concept is wrong in detail (as it surely must be), it is offered for the

right reasons and with the best intentions. About feelings of work, we remain childlike. We know but cannot say.

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NOTES

¹ Landy (1978), for example, defines job satisfaction as an affective or emotional state. Staw, Bell and Clausen (1986) refer to 'job affect' as a disposition to evaluate stimuli in either positive or negative ways — a usage reminiscent of the classic definition of attitude as a readiness to respond positively or negatively toward a particular object (e.g., Allport, 1935). Others allow that there may be differences between job attitude and affect, but treat them alike. Hackman and Oldham (1976: 255–259), for example, present a model of job design in which positive affect is a judgment that occurs when a person "learns (knowledge of results) that he personally (experienced responsibility) has performed well on a task that he cares about (experienced meaningfulness)" (255–256). Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) begin their paper on work attitudes by pointing out that attitude statements are determined partly by affective experiences and partly by a melange of environmental, social and historical factors that constrain how affect is interpreted. Later, they equate job attitudes with, among other things, 'enjoyment of the activity' [pg. 235], and 'feelings of job pressure and of boredom' [pg. 239], both of which are feelings *of*, not feelings *about*. Finally, Herman (1973) begins her paper by noting that "A convenient conceptualization for attitudes is that they are affective responses to some stimulus or 'attitude object'" [209]. This definition, however, leaves unspecified whether affect is (like attitude) a kind of response (a *feeling about*) or a quality of ongoing activity (a *feeling of*). Later, in the very same paragraph, she speaks of both attitude *and* affect as responses to a level of job performance: "The perceived effect of that performance may act as a new attitude stimulus object and have an associated affect" [209].

² The dimensions of this problem were noted almost a hundred years ago by William James (1890: Vol. 2: 449):

The trouble with the emotions in psychology is that they are regarded too much as absolutely individual things. So long as they are set down as so many eternal and sacred psychic entities, like the old immutable species in natural history, so long all that *can* be done with them is reverently to catalogue their separate characters, points, and effects.

³ Emergent properties have always had a tough time as concepts (see, e.g., Hempel and Oppenheim, 1948). They are most famously and platitudinously known as the "wholes that are greater than the sum of their parts". This conveys the idea of emergence, but leaves unexplicated the relationship between parts and whole. Where this relationship is discussed, it is often in terms of the treacherous distinction between form and content. Emergent properties are said to be of form,

not content. Although these properties could not exist but for the content of a substrate system, the particular elements of content do not matter. But it is precisely this "do not matter" part that is so baffling. Even recognizing that a property such as 'melody' is more form than content, it is still clear that the content of a melody must be notes, and could not be, say, 'water molecules'. For this reason, the distinction between form and content is often buttressed by contrasting emergent properties with 'resultant' properties. 'Resultant' properties are defined exclusively by the content of a system. Examples of resultant properties are the sum of a set of numbers, or the illumination generated by multiple light sources. In both instances, the total is exactly the sum of the parts, regardless of how the parts are organized. Finally, emergent properties are said (correctly, but obscurely) to be of a different 'logical type' than properties of the elements of the system. This difference between macro-level emergent properties and micro-level properties of a system is purely conceptual — a 'distinction of reason'.

⁴ Note that here the concept of need functions differently than it does in traditional need-based theories of work feeling, such as proposed by Locke (1976). According to Locke, needs determine consciously held job values which the incumbent then uses when making judgments about whether the job is satisfying or dissatisfying. These are *feelings about* the work which are based on intellectual appraisal. In the present case, feeling emerges as the form of a motivational process which is described with the help of a concept of need.

⁵ This description of satisfaction and frustration as forms of motivated processes is similar in certain respects to models of feeling as a response to interrupted (or facilitated) activity sequences (see, e.g., Mandler, 1975; Weick, 1985). In these models, however, the interruption is regarded as a stimulus which elicits arousal and sets in motion a cognitive process of appraisal which produces the feeling as a response. In the present case, it is not the interruption that is felt, but rather the entire motivational structure of which the interruption is a part. Feeling is not a motivated judgment. It is just one way motivated processes are experienced.

⁶ Paralleling attempts to identify feelings with psychological forms are attempts to identify them with physiological forms. Among the earliest was that of James (1890) who detailed salient physiognomic correlates of feeling. According to James, were one to go through the whole list of emotions that have been named by men, one would but:

... ring the changes of the elements which these three cases involve. Rigidity of this muscle, relation of that, constriction of arteries here, dilation there, breathing of this sort or that, pulse showing or quickening, this gland secreting and that one dry, etc . . . [447].

Since James, a good deal has been learned about physiognomic and neurological forms associated with feeling. Research has identified correlates of feeling in patterns of facial expression, facial blood flow, cortical arousal, and even aspects of brain function — e.g. such as hemispheric lateralization and dynamics of the limbic system. However, even with the considerable progress made in this area, it will still be some time before a satisfactory account of work feelings can be given in these terms. For most practical purposes (i.e. prediction, control) it remains necessary to forego the precision and appeal of physiological description in favor of more abstract descriptions based on other kinds of forms.

⁷ Once it is recognized that emotions are not natively intentional, there is less mystery in such phenomena as the substitution or displacement of emotional objects. These phenomena become simple errors of judgment.

⁸ Although thinking seems not to involve a kinesthetic component, it is interesting to note that such a component was ascribed to thinking by early behaviorists such as Watson (1928). To the behaviorist, thinking was a kind of inward verbalization whereby ideas are formed as unspoken *but* *muscularly formed* words.

⁹ The awkward modifier "some sort" is used to recognize that there are significant differences between authors in the way they conceptualize the appraisal process. Schachter and Singer (1962) describe a labeling process that occurs in conscious awareness. Arnold (1960), on the other hand, refers to a process that is more "sense-like", one that is intuitive and unwitting.

¹⁰ So important are previous experiences in laying the groundwork for feeling that many have been led to posit a central role of formal education (particularly in the arts — see e.g. Arnheim, 1966: 136–150) in the development of feeling. Langer (1957) has gone so far as to suggest that our modern emotions (in the West at least) are largely Shakespeare's poetry.

¹¹ It is instructive how the problem of conveying work feelings is often solved in everyday conversation. Consider how one might describe a feeling such as 'frustration'. One could simply say they 'feel frustrated'. But this doesn't communicate the feeling, it only names it and communicates the fact of its possession. Alternatively, one could (and probably would) describe the situation and course of events from which the frustration emerged, thereby inviting the other person to feel for him/herself a similar (though probably not identical) frustration. That people often do resort to this more cumbersome means of communicating their feelings attests to the inadequacy of language for expressed feeling.

¹² One must be careful not to make too much of the representative powers of art. The aims of the artist are importantly different from those of the scientist. As Bronowski (1978) points out: "whereas the scientist seeks to mean the same thing to everybody who listens to him, the artist is content to say something universal and yet mean different things to every body who listens to him".

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