

# **Critical Perspectives on Organizational Enactments of Leaders' Emotions**



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# Critical Perspectives on Organizational Enactments of Leaders' Emotions

## Thesis Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore the research question – what are the political implications of the enactment of emotions by leaders in organizational settings? While leaders may enact emotions keeping instrumental objectives in mind, these performances are likely to be immersed in political implications that connect organizational and social worlds. Emotional enactments of leaders are presented as a humanizing element in organizations, where complex relationships between people are foregrounded. Often, leaders are interested in the possibility of engineering these relationships to produce optimal outcomes. I explore these attempts by leaders to outline imaginations and fantasies that are a part of leadership work, and how emotions play an unexpected and uncontrollable part in the labour of leadership.

I draw on the narratives of corporate leaders, film directors and directors of business schools to problematise conventional understandings of the emotional enactments of leaders. I adopt a narrative methodology to uncover the stories of fifteen corporate leaders, fifteen film directors and fifteen directors of business schools to understand the ways in which emotions informed decision making. Two common perspectives prevail in the field of organization studies about the role of emotions in decision making processes. According to the first perspective, emotions hinder the rationality of decision making and reduce its efficacy. According to the second perspective, emotions enhance the intuition and imagination available for decision making, and improve the outcomes.

I problematise both these perspectives to indicate that rather than draw on the binary between emotion and reason, it is necessary to engage with the political implications of the organisational enactment of emotions. I draw on the theoretical work of Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva to indicate that emotions are not transparently knowable but inhere in structures of unknowability. For Butler, emotions constitute performative elements of life that have the potential to operate at the border zone of received norms. For Derrida, emotions emerge from fields of mediation and difference, and it is difficult to access emotions without engaging with the fields of difference in which they are situated. For Kristeva, emotions signify the possibility of engaging with alterity as a form of cultural self-understanding and the corporeal signification as an articulation of the unspeakable.

I foreground the theoretical perspective in this dissertation that emotions are not transparently knowable, and the positivist linkages of emotions with instrumental outcomes are a part of the fantasy of optimality. Imagination has a significant role to play in the performance of emotions. The performance of emotions is a politically laden process and locates organizational enactments in terms of their broader interface with social inequality. The performance of positive emotions by leaders is located in the concealment of organizational processes alluding to decollectivisation, responsabilisation and the masking of structural forces that produce inequality. Emotions become a part of the labour of leadership that attempts to foreclose resistance by moving the conversation away from the ways in which organizations accentuate inequality.

I organize the dissertation into six essays. The first two essays provide a Derridean entry into understanding the context of the corporation, cinema and the business school in India. In the third essay, I reflect on a wide range of themes and tensions that run through in the

dissertation and also expand on the terms that I use in the dissertation, the unwisdom and dupes in which they are situated. In the subsequent three essays that follow, I analyze the experiences of leaders in different organizational settings. In the fourth essay, I draw on narratives of corporate leaders to indicate that their enactments of paternal care and positive emotions produce ambiguous outcomes. Paternal care and positive emotions erode structures of resistance and oppositional performances to produce unitarist fantasies of consent in organizations. In the fifth essay, I present the stories of film directors to outline how they use emotions such as pride, self-assurance, apprehension and excitement to navigate their work. I show that these emotions mask an underlying experience of precariousness which the film directors want to displace using a language of enterprise and achievement. In the sixth essay, I draw on the narratives of directors of business schools to show how they enact the emotions of empathy, trust and optimism to engage with multiple stakeholders. I outline how these emotions mask the political situatedness of the business school in reproducing conditions of inequality and erosion of the process of dialogue that is crucial to academic praxis.

I contribute to the study of organizations by indicating that leaders' use of emotions are immersed in the marginalization of resistance and oppositional action. Leaders seek to engender consent by building fantasies and imaginations of care where emotions become a humanist attempt to balance the material realities of precariousness which are a part of the lived realities of organizations. I indicate that emotions may not be the characteristic of individuals expressing their feelings in autonomous ways, but there are structures at play which seek to produce consent for unequal and subordinating relationships. I show that by recognizing how emotions conceal the structural inequalities at play, it becomes possible to engage with alternative subject positions which allude to the unspeakable. The significations

of the unspeakable are located in processes of dialogue through which alterity becomes a basis for cultural self-understanding.

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