ABSTRACT

The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Oil?
On the Interpersonal Effects of Boredom Expression

by

Manuel Francisco Gonzalez

I explored how people react to employees who express boredom at work. I consider boredom expression as a social signal that the current situation does not adequately stimulate the expresser. The expression may then propel others to help stimulate the expresser, depending partly on how others’ initial appraisals and reactions to the expression, and on the surrounding context. In Study 1, using qualitative surveys, I uncovered various affective, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to employees who expressed boredom. In Study 2, using experimental vignettes, I manipulated the emotion expressed by a “subordinate” (boredom, enthusiasm, or no emotion) and the manager’s beliefs about the task at hand (as interesting, boring, or neither) to examine managers’ emotions (anger, guilt), cognitions (inferences about the expresser’s job apathy), and behaviors (punishment, individualized consideration) following subordinates’ emotional expressions. I found that relative to other emotion expressions, boredom expressions led to greater anger, guilt, and inferences of job apathy. Expressions of boredom and enthusiasm both led to stronger desires to punish the expresser, relative to no expression. Lastly, boredom expressions indirectly led more punishment and less individualized consideration toward the expresser via inferences of the expresser’s job apathy. My dissertation thus illuminates how
expressions of boredom influence reactions to bored employee in favorable or unfavorable ways for the expresser and the organization.