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A Study on the Fundamental Aspects and Theory of Emotional Communication

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Abstract

In this paper four working definitions of emotional communication are introduced, each of which is based on a different theory of emotions. In the second part of the paper, an integrative framework is proposed that reconciles the four working definitions and their underlying theories of emotion. It also discuss how emotional communication can be described in terms of general communication theory, and conclude that the three complexity levels are heterogeneous with regard to definitional issues in general communication theory. Hence, emotional communication cannot be subsumed under a single theory of communication. Taken separately, however, each complexity level of emotional communication can be related meaningfully to approaches in general communication theory.

Keywords: Emotional Communication, Theory

Introduction

The fundamental tenet of the theoretical framework we provide is that communication is not just about exchanging knowledge but also about exchanging feelings. In other words, the process of mutually influencing the emotions of communication partners is how emotional communication is conceived. We provide four working definitions, each based on a distinct theory of emotion, to better clarify this fundamental idea of emotional communication. The first working definition is based on models of neuroscience, the second on theories of evaluation, the third on the prototype method, and the fourth on social constructivist emotion theories. The four emotion theories described were chosen because they each provide us a clear, thorough explanation of the mechanisms that give birth to emotions. We could be able to demonstrate how well these processes are impacted by other people's experiences if we understand the mechanisms that give birth to emotions.

Neuroscience models

Models of emotion in neuroscience claim that certain brain systems are responsible for emotions (LeDoux, 1996). Emotional brain systems primarily serve two purposes: They start by examining the emotional significance of the stimulus. By associatively matching sensory properties with inborn emotion elicitors, this is achieved. It's interesting that these natural emotion elicitors seem to include other people's emotional displays. Systems of the emotional brain are engaged in the evaluation of others' expressions critically. The release of hormones, the activation of the autonomic nervous system, the display of emotion via voice, face, and movement, the allocation of cognitive resources to the scenario that elicited the emotion, and other emotional reactions are all controlled by the emotional brain systems. These functional characteristics of emotional brain systems add up to the following result: Emotional expression will cause the activation of related brain processes in communication partners if the same brain systems which generate emotions are also engaged in emotional expression and in the processing of other people's emotional expressions. Emotional communication may thus be characterised as a process of reciprocating stimulation of emotional brain systems on the basis of neuroscience theories of emotion.

Appraisal Theories

At a very different level of study, appraisal theories of emotion explain the processes that give birth to feelings. According to appraisal theories, cognitive assessments trigger emotions (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 1984; Smith and Ellswort, 1985). Novelty, valence, goal conductivity, certainty vs. uncertainty of consequences, self-vs. other's action, coping capability, and normative appraisal are some of the evaluation factors that are related to emotion. Each emotion is brought on by a certain set of evaluations. Therefore, it is thought that emotional expression contains extensive information concerning cognitive assessments. Some appraisers even contend that emotional expressions are made up of many muscular contractions, each of which represents a separate evaluation element. For instance, according to Scherer (1984), communication partners may utilise the evaluation information supplied by

emotion expression in two ways: to resolve ambiguities in one's own assessment of the circumstance and to deduce the motivations and probable actions of others.

Prototype Approach

In a study Shaver et al. (1987) extended the prototype method to emotions after developing it as a theory of natural language. The prototype method makes the assumption that emotional information is represented by nonverbal emotion scripts. Emotional scripts provide information on common triggering circumstances, normal responses, and self-control techniques. These emotion prototypes serve two interconnected purposes: they help us arrange our own emotional experiences and they help us comprehend the emotions of others. The following is the result of this dual role of emotional scripts in evoking and perceiving emotions: The vicarious experience of an emotion must thus contain fundamental characteristics that match to the personal experience of an emotion if the same knowledge structures are active when feeling an emotion and when witnessing emotions in others. Even when the individual experiencing an emotion vicariously is aware that it "belongs" to someone else, they will still feel the sensation. Emotional communication may thus be described as a process of reciprocal activation of emotional scripts on the basis of the prototype method. Averill (1985) and Harré (1986) are a few examples of social constructivist theories of emotion that include this assumption.

Social Constructivists

However, social constructivists contend that emotional knowledge is only symbolically represented. This point of view holds that the types of people, circumstances, and acts to which an emotion word applies are specified by a set of rules that make up the meaning of emotion words. It is believed that the regulations governing the usage of emotion terms and other symbolic representations are equal to societal expectations around emotions. This implies that a person has both the moral right and the moral responsibility to feel the emotion in question and to act in accordance with it if they find themselves in a circumstance to which it applies. As a result, feelings are comparable to social roles (Averill, 1985). The person is not free to assign feelings to themselves at whim, much as with social roles in general. In order for emotional roles to be accepted and reciprocated by other people's complimentary role conduct, emotional roles must go beyond relying just on culturally set emotion norms. The theory's ramifications for the idea of emotional communication are obvious: If emotions are just a fact of socially shared reality, then the presence of an emotion in someone else's brain has the same impact on that feeling as it does in the head of the one experiencing it. As a result, emotional communication may be described as a process of symbolic negotiating of feelings on the foundation of social constructivist theories of emotions.

The Interconnections of Theories

The four emotion theories discussed above amply demonstrate the validity of the presumption that communication partners impact one another emotionally. Given that these theories use quite different terminology to describe the mechanisms that give birth to emotions, this is very amazing. While neuroscience models contend that emotion and cognition are separate modes of information processing, appraisal theories see the act of evoking emotions as a type of cognition. In contrast to social constructivist theories, which hold that emotion ideas are symbolic representations, the prototype approach holds that information about emotions is stored in the form of nonverbal prototypes. Social constructivist views see emotions as merely mental creations, while neuroscientific models believe them to be physical processes, etc. On the one hand, there are four solid arguments in favour of the idea that communication partners' emotions affect one another. However, there are several grounds to question whether the four emotion theories are referring to the same thing when they say that emotions exist. A thorough theory of emotional communication would need to cover the complete spectrum of processes mentioned by the four working definitions, however, if we assume that the emotion theories under consideration explain significant elements of the same reality. The presumption that multiple degrees of cognitive complexity are associated with emotion elicitation is a crucial step toward a comprehensive theory of emotional communication. As a result, these hierarchies of complexity levels may be considered as the common denominator throughout the whole area of emotion theory. Instinctual stimulus-response patterns, associative schemata, and symbolic conceptions are the three degrees of cognitive complexity that are referenced the most often (Bartsch and Hübner, 2004). The presumption that multiple degrees of cognitive complexity are involved in emotion elicitation is a crucial step toward a comprehensive theory of emotional communication. As a result, these hierarchies of complexity levels may be considered as the common denominator throughout the whole area of emotion theory. Symbolic ideas, associative schemata, and intrinsic stimulus-response patterns are the three degrees of cognitive complexity that are most often addressed.

There are three different degrees of complexity in the paradigm of emotional communication. The activation of emotional brain circuits on a reciprocal basis constitutes level one. The simultaneous activation of emotional codes makes up level two. The symbolic negotiation of emotions makes up level three. The three levels are connected in a manner that causes communication processes at lower levels of emotional communication to be automatically involved at higher ones. We put out the theory that controlling emotional communication on the lower levels of the hierarchy is one of the superordinate levels' key roles. Because typical characteristics of emotion expression on one level often overlap with typical aspects of emotion expression on other levels, such a model enables communication processes that traverse level borders. But there's still one lingering query: To what extent is it legitimate to classify the model's emotional exchange processes as a type of communication? Symbolic forms of message exchange are the foundation of a large variety of general communication theories. Symbolic communication theories, to name a few, include:

Rational Argumentation Theory (Cox and Willard, 1982),

Symbolic Convergence Theory (Bormann, 1985),

Narrative Paradigm Theory (Fischer, 1987)

Each theory is founded on distinct ideas such as logical justifications, fantastical themes, tales, and meanings; nonetheless, they all share the idea that communication involves the transmission of a symbolic message between sender and recipient.

Conclusions

The range of emotional communication processes described by the four working definitions cannot be fully captured by a single communication theory. Only level three may be used to apply the common notion of communication as a symbolic message transmission. A model of communication that incorporates natural co-orientation processes and reciprocal construction of expectations based on emotional scripts is necessary for the explanation of emotional communication at the most fundamental levels. In terms of definitional concerns in general communication theory, this suggests that the phenomena of emotional communication is highly varied. As a result, it cannot be addressed by a single communication theory. Instead, there are intriguing similarities between the debates over emotion and the debates about communication. Emotional communication is a particularly attractive area for communication theory and study because of these similarities.

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