International Academic Institute for Science and Technology

International Academic Journal of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management
Vol. 12, No. 2, 2025, pp. 1-6.

ISSN 2454-2210

International Academic Journal of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management

www.iaiest.com

Emotional Contagion and Its Role in Shaping Group Norms and Decision-Making in Workplaces

Reshma Khan [a], S. Sujatha [b]

[a]*Faculty of Management, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: rk2069@srmist.edu.in*
[b]*Faculty of Management, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: sujathas@srmist.edu.in*

Abstract

Emotional contagion-the quick leap of feelings from one face to a whole group more than a funny party trick. It grips the engines of every workplace and won't let go. Picture a Monday morning huddle: one confident grin might fire up the room, tighten loose friendships, and maybe even nudge the boss toward a brighter outlook before lunch. On the flip side, a sleepy sigh or a sprinkle of sarcasm can drag everyone into a slow-motion grind before the coffee runs out. Scientists now pin that twitchy mood transfer to hard-wired brain circuits and the tiny shifts in pitch that fly under most people's radar. Other teams sketch a second picture, one where the shared buzz quietly pushes the herd to agree, weighs the quality of ideas on the table, and even clouds personal calls with its layer of yep, I guess so. Researchers in psychology and neuroscience now credit quick, nervous-system reflexes for sending moods racing from one cubicle to the next, almost like a cold between coworkers. A different set of studies charts how that feeling of traffic can shove everyone toward the same opinion, polish or muddle the quality of choices, and quietly erode independent thought.

Lab sessions and boardroom post-mortems both note the bright side- speedy agreement and ironclad team spirit next to the dark side- suffocating groupthink and the burnout that follows. To snag the good and hold off the bad, the scientists urge bosses to run regular pulse-check surveys and to line up targeted emotional intelligence training whenever decisions start costing serious time or money.

Keywords: Emotional Contagion, Group Norms, Decision-Making, Workplace Behavior, Emotional Intelligence, Organizational Culture.

DOI:10.71086/IAJOBHRM/V12I2/IAJOBHRM1202
Received: 10 March 2025/Revised: 15 April 2025/Accepted: 20 May 2025/Published: 30 June 2025

Introduction

Emotional contagion is the silent way feelings jump from one person to the next, almost like catching a cold. One minute you're fine, and the next you're grinning because your buddy won't stop laughing. Experts say it works through tiny clues we barely notice of the eye, twitch of a lip, tilt of a shoulder- and those hints can flip our mood before we know what hit us. Neurobiologists trace the trick back to mirror neurons, those microscopic brain wires that spark whether we feel something firsthand or just watch it unfold, doing most of the emotional hauling all by themselves [2].

In busy offices, where messages ricochet down halls and across screens, these unwitting brain bots help lift or drag an entire team's emotional tone wall to wall.

A growing collection of studies insists that the emotional weather inside a workplace deeply matters and the title pages of recent journals no longer hedge the point [1]. The faces and voices of leaders pack a particular punch; palpable enthusiasm from a manager can propel a project group toward a burst of creativity, while habitual gloom seeps into meeting after meeting and inflates absentee rates [3]. Sophisticated firms now track this silent transmission stream and coach executives to steward their affective output lest unguarded moments create a ripple that lasts well past closing time.

Emotional contagion travels farther than the boardroom; it rides the bandwidth of every video call, Slack thread, and overdue email [4]. The flicker of a teammate's smile on a laptop screen or the curiously placed exclamation point in a chat can tilt an entire room's mood, regardless of where its members are seated [5]. In hybrid setups, a shift in punctuation, the choice of an emoji, or even a split-second delay becomes a vector for feelings to circulate. For managers and psychologists alike, tracking this invisible traffic is no longer optional if they want to keep teams harmonious and productive.

This study intends to map the pathways along which those circulating emotions steer group mores and decision-making. A literature sweep reveals the psychological and sociological roots of the phenomenon, demonstrating that it is not merely mimicry but an intricate feedback loop that shapes collective behavior. From there the paper lays out a conceptual model linking emotional spillover to cognitive shifts and action choices across fully in-person, hybrid, and remote configurations. Practical measures follow, aimed at curbing toxic effects and turbocharging the more uplifting kind so that organizations emerge tighter-knit and more effective in whatever space they inhabit [6].

Literature Review

Emotional contagion originated as a benchmark idea within social psychology but has since been traced into the human nervous system. Researchers such as Elaine Hatfield observe the phenomenon as a primary iteration of empathy and discern that momentary copying of someone's smile or frown often produces an almost identical swing in the observer's affect. Significantly, that overlap is not confined to posture or expression; it seeps into heart-rate patterns, pupil dilation, and even the daily ebb and flow of cortisol. Such widespread physiological mirroring reinforces bonds between people and nourishes a shared feeling of togetherness.

Social Identity Theory adds a further layer by insisting that the instinct to imitate emotion is far from random; it skews toward individuals whom one classifies as in-group partners, be they lab colleagues, study cohorts, or fellow sports fans [7]. Experiments keep showing that those tiny mirror neurons in our brains click into gear with way more excitement if the face in front of us carries the label we-jelly-belly, club crew, rather than the colder they. That spark pumps fresh life into whatever rules already run the group, so most people shrug off any loud complaints. You can see the same thing at work: one upbeat manager can lift the vibe of an entire department before lunch, but the same person in a bad mood can drag everybody down before quitting time.

Emotions drift through the break room, slip into forgotten anecdotes, and cling to the awards hung on the back wall of the conference hall. Some researchers call the chatter spread contagion and tag the quieter stories as an indirect spread, yet both leaks must be measured before anyone presses the START button on a new experiment.

A tilted shoulder, a lazy blink, or the stubborn freeze of a stare often spills a feeling long before words even warm up. In those blurry months of square monitors and frozen gifs, the rhythm of a text, the weight of an odd pause, and the color of a joke deliver the same message.

When good cheer rolls through, trust gets a weld, teamwork expands, and the whole crew usually lightens up. Panic, petty snipes, or raw anger, by contrast, rip at the threads of safety and shove in the cranky cousin called groupthink [8]. Teams that hum in lockstep reach choices in a blink, yet that very sameness can choke off the weird idea that saves the day.

Big-pressure moments often hand feelings the keys and shove logic into the backseat. Shared jitters might glue everyone to the cautious road; a flash of collective guts, on the other hand, can send them barreling toward a gamble no one rehearsed [10].

A quick check of how a team is feeling can shine a flashlight on hidden biases that creep into every plan they whip up. A small, stubborn group of scholars keeps bugging battlefield commanders to pair gut-level emotional reads with those tidy decision charts, betting that the mix will strap instinct down to hard numbers [9]. Oddly enough, the idea of emotional contagion hardly appears in management books, as if everyone already knows about it and no one wants to say so again. Whole frameworks that braid mood, thought, and group behavior have yet to show up in the wild. New AI mood boards and biometric wrist gadgets now let leaders eyeball morale minute by minute, and that real-time buzz is coaching researchers to run bolder field tests.

Proposed Model

A fresh theory now bouncing around suggests that one person's blue mood can slide right into coffee-corner chatter and eventually tinge the whole group's final call on a project. Rather than sticking to the private space of a diary page, feelings get treated as hidden currents steering behavior at every rung of a team.

Picture a wide-open office where a coworker's huffy sigh lands like a dropped coin on thin glass. That tiny sound drags half the people nearby onto the same cranky train faster than any stern memo could reel them back. A project lead who steadies her rhythm, sticks to hard numbers, and throws in a quick joke usually keeps the room's pulse pointed at fixing things, not airing fresh complaints.

The funny thing about habits-they that slide from one person to the next before anyone can say, Wait, I'm doing it too. Imagine a lab packed with veterans suddenly bursting out in loud, elbow-on-the-table laughter because the new DNA read finally looks crystal clear. Give it half an hour and a new intern is chuckling just the same, calling the win obvious even though she never hugged a pipette that long. Over a week those tiny echoes set up an unspoken playbook: this is when we celebrate, this is when we sigh, and, yes, this is when we shrug at the leak. Come crunch time, and keyboards are clicking like mad, the team mood picks whatever color is already painted on the walls; careful numbers-staring usually gets parked in the corner.

Sometimes, a wave of nausea-inducing anxiety crashes through a merger conference, blanking out even the sharpest spreadsheets and throwing the launch team's timetable into a blender. Other times, pure, unedited euphoria swoops in and slices days off the compliance audit because decision-makers are too busy high-fiving to read the fine print.

To push back against that wild drift, many companies throw half-day emotional literacy workshops into the schedule, sprinkled with low-stakes debriefs and quick exercises that pair stress tricks with to-do lists. Research keeps showing that the grooves people carve in those sessions stick around long after the PowerPoints slide into the recycle bin.

Supervisors can be taught to read the room's emotional weather and nudge it-steering a building-wide panic back to calm, or cooling runaway buzz instead of just sounding the alarm. Routine pulse checks, whether a sneaky end-of-sprint digital survey or a quick ceiling-to-floor scan of voice tone and body posture, drop the raw indicators into their hands, giving them the warning they need to act fast.

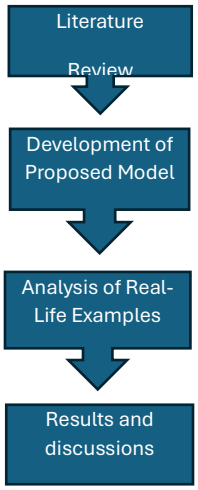


Fig. 1: Emotional Contagion Decision-Making in Workplaces

Fig 1 sketches a five-sided diagram that tries to trace moods as they splash from one desk to the next in open-plan offices. At the start, cameras, microphones, and chat logs snap quick pictures of faces, voices, and screen language until a basic lightness-or-heaviness score is steady. A second pass sorts every outgoing note into boxes like angry, hopeful, blank, or caring, then tags how each box tugs on trust, teamwork, and the unspoken rules nobody has written down. Fresh runs of the numbers watch whether high energy or low energy tips decision-making; if the wobble crosses a preset line, the system buzzes managers to roll out bite-sized emotional tune-up clinics or quick norm-reboot huddles so the place can think straight again.

Results and Discussion

A bunch of studies, classrooms, and warehouses keep finding the same curious thing: feelings show up faster than any press-release policy ever could. Take the story of a midsized game studio where the boss shot out of a cannon one minute, boiling over the next-stamped everyone with his whiplash highs and bottomless lows. Some teammates called the vibe thrilling, others called it a tornado, and when a calm paycheck finally crossed their desk a handful of coders shrugged and quit on the spot.

Flip to the packed trauma ward of a city hospital. One no-nonsense nurse handled a night full of chaos so smoothly that even the rattled surgeons later confessed her invisibly steady presence calmed their racing hearts. Moments like that prove feelings leak out without a filter and can either jack the crew up or drag it under, sometimes within one single exhausting shift.

Groups tend to freeze their shared emotion into hard, lasting rules you can almost touch. A crew that hauls a glitch-riddled app across the finish line the kind that survives on greasy pizza and 2 AM memes-usually walks away bonded for life.

The opposite flavor shows up when deadlines pile like dirty dishes; cynicism creeps in, one-liners turn sharp, and teammates start trading quiet, judgmental glances instead of high-fives.

A sharp-eyed boss who notices even tiny slips will often crank up coaching, shuffle the to-do list, or high-five the crew for small wins. That quick energy blast keeps the whole workplace from freezing up.

Field research out in the trenches has shown that a team's mood passes around like hot coals on a cold night. Handled well, the warmth sparks engagement, stitches loyalty into the group, and keeps everyone pulling in the same direction. Handled poorly, the heat turns into mindless groupthink, panic, or last-minute decisions that are honestly head-scratchers. Training leaders to spot those early flames and teaching them how to coach the crew on tipping points helps an organization build an emotional ecosystem where careful thought survives, disagreement isn't a crime, and tough problems get solved step by step.

Table. 1: Emotional Contagion Impact

Case Study	Group Performance Impact (%)	Decision Quality (1–10 Scale)
Startup (Negative Contagion)	-25	4
Healthcare (Positive Contagion)	30	9
Sales Team (Mixed Contagion)	5	6
Remote Tech Team (Digital)	-10	5

Table 1 catalogs how emotional contagion shifts according to workplace context and culture. Most new businesses blur together in a whirl of meetings, late nights, and coffee runs. If the bosses don’t steady themselves, nerves jump from one desk to the next and people start second-guessing the person sitting right next to them. Quantitative follow-ups suggest that such volatility can slice productivity by a quarter and downgrade judgment quality to a four on the nine-point internal scale. Literature surveys describe the same rapid uncertainty cascading through any flat hierarchy because the upward and downward gaze is near-constant and feedback loops are miniature. Every time a fresh pop lances through the intercom, the people at a pod desk shred the static into sense almost before the static stops. A single wobble can bloom into full-blown nerves before the coffee pot clicks off.

ERs run on a different voltage. When lead nurses and attending doctors anchor their faces, the silent message thumps-almost reassuring.

Traumas cameras catch those split-second bursts as three-heartbeat choices, and judges write the team-confidence meter at a nine. That quiet steadiness melts rivalry and lets strangers move as if they've run the drill a hundred times. It also stops the knee-jerk, fight-or-flight flinch that can yank a fraying crisis straight into an overt panic.

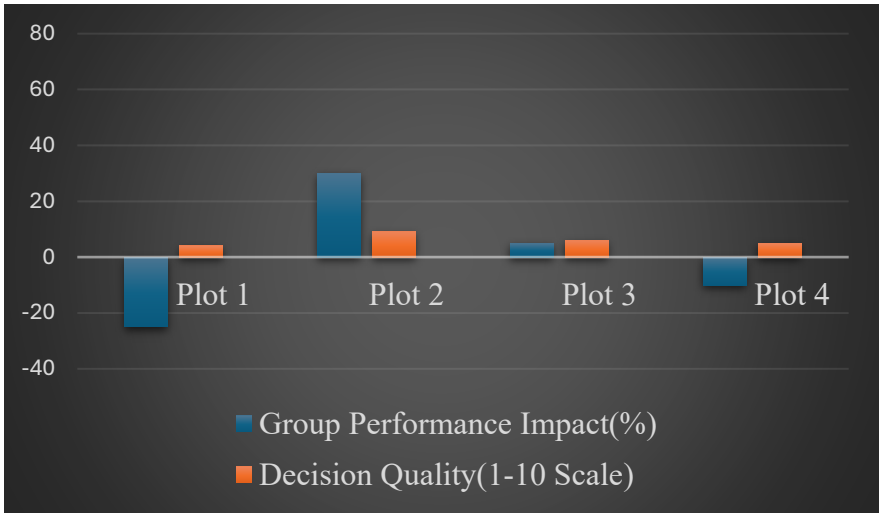


Fig. 2: Graph Emotional Contagion and Decision Outcomes

A chart tucked into the report lines up team spirit beside project wins and the way those two peaks slope upward looks like someone sketching bright blue mountains with a shaky pen. Where the curves meet, another wisp of bad news settles in: feelings leak across chat boxes and Zoom windows without anyone noticing. Emotional contagion winces at the buzzword if you keep sneaking into work groups and rewriting the rules in practically real-time. People substitute full faces with tiny headshots yet still copy the unspoken vibe, so giggles and quit-its slip right through. Once those moods stitch themselves into daily rhythm, they refuse to come loose no matter how many bullets points you throw at them. A skipper who dreams of brighter skies at the office cannot leave morale to luck. Targeted training in emotional acuity, blunt reminders that moods echo, and regular, no-nonsense pulse surveys fortify the breach. Absent those safeguards, buoyant workers drift into apathy, and the quality of decisions inevitably declines.

The emerging research frontier scans cultural frequency with a stopwatch and a spreadsheet. Smartphone sentiment meters, laboratory text-coding pipelines, and longitudinal studies that trail the same team through upswings and slumps promise to document how emotions cascade from one workstation to the next.

Clinical staff are already piloting brief mood pulses alongside routine biometric rounds, flagging a slipping crew before deadlines topple; that sliver of advance notice is precious, and dysfunctions almost always outpace the calendar. Building workplaces that survive their own emotions is less about cheerleading and more about reading the room in data form.

References

Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1993). Emotional contagion. *Current directions in psychological science*, *2*(3), 96-100. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.ep10770953

Martin, A. (2008). Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect With Others. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *47*(12), 1462-1463.

Barsade, S. G. (2002). The Ripple Effect: Emotional Contagion and Its Influence on Group Behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(4), 644–675.

Goleman, D. (2006). *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*. Bantam.

Derks, D., Fischer, A. H., & Bos, A. E. (2008). The role of emotion in computer-mediated communication: A review. *Computers in human behavior*, *24*(3), 766-785. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2007.04.004

George, J. M. (2000). Emotions and Leadership: The Role of Emotional Intelligence. *Human Relations*, 53(8), 1027–1055. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700538001

Hatfield, E., Rapson, R. L., & Le, Y. C. L. (2011). Emotional contagion and empathy. *J., Decety, W. Ickes,(Eds.), The social neuroscience of empathy*, 19-30.

Barsade, S. G., & Gibson, D. E. (2007). Why Does Affect Matter in Organizations? *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 21(1), 36–59. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2007.24286163

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 7–24.

Kelly, J. R., & Barsade, S. G. (2001). Mood and Emotions in Small Groups and Work Teams. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 86(1), 99–130. https://doi.org/10.1006/obhd.2001.2974