Title – Is Passion Influential? An Empirical Investigation of Managerial Displays of Passion on
Employee Performance and Engagement

Program of Study – Psychology

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Abstract: 
Research empirically investigating the construct of passion has only just become forefront in the
field of industrial-organizational psychology. It began to flourish when Vallerand and his colleagues
introduced the dualistic model of passion, comprised of harmonious and obsessive passion. These two
types of passion are distinguished by how a passionate activity is internalized by an individual.
Harmonious passion is internalized in an autonomous manner, free from external pressures where the
passionate activity remains in harmony with other aspects of the self. Contrarily, obsessive passion is
internalized in a controlled manner, where an individual engages in an activity due to external pressure
and that activity becomes a major aspect of his or her self-concept. Researchers have taken Vallerand’s
model and linked these two types of passion to differing organizational outcomes such as burnout,
organizational citizenship behaviors, and performance. However, passion researchers have only sought
to examine how the internalization of activities as passionate affects outcome variables for that person alone.
Contrarily, we seek to examine how the display of passion by someone else, such as a supervisor, affects
outcome variables for an individual employee. Few researchers have examined passion as a true,
manipulated independent variable in this manner. Chen and colleagues, however, did manipulate
entrepreneurial passion to investigate how displays of passion influenced funding decisions. We seek to
use a similar method to investigate how displays of passion influence employee engagement and
performance, as these two outcome variables are highly significant within the field of industrial-
organizational psychology. Our study will use a random sample of residential psychology students at a
Christian University. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of two groups: non-passionate or
passionate. They will view a video with the corresponding type of supervisor, where affective displays of
passion are manipulated. Using the same confederate and script, participants will be tasked with
completing a business simulation task where they must research competitors for their university’s online
program. They will be randomly assigned to one of three competitors, whose website they must utilize to
gather the necessary information to answer questions. The blocks of questions received will also be
randomized, with participants receiving either all easy or all difficult questions. Task performance will be
measured by number of correct questions completed within the given time frame. After completion of the
questions, participants will be given a scale measuring perceived displays of passion as a manipulation
check and a question about task likability to use as a covariate. Lastly, respondents will complete a
measure of work engagement and demographic questions. We hypothesize that participants will both
report higher levels of engagement and perform better when in conditions where the supervisor displays
passion. Additionally, we expect to see differences in results for those who receive difficult questions as
their task when compared to those who receive easy questions as their task. Consequently, if displays of
passion influence employee engagement and performance, organizations should seek to select individuals who frequently display characteristics associated with passion for supervisor and managerial roles within their company.