
An Introduction to Appraisal Theories

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According to cognitive assessment theories, also known as appraisal theories, emotion is the result of the cognitive assessments that the individual makes about the event, whether external or internal, or the situation that initiates the emotion [1]. These theories differ from the basic emotion theories in that they involve genesis mechanisms common to all emotions [2,3]. This approach assumes that, in order to understand emotions, it is first necessary to understand the individual's assessments of events in his or her environment [4]. Cognitive assessment is defined as a cognitive, rapid, automatic, unconscious process whose function is to evaluate perceived stimuli based on specific criteria as defined by Magda Arnold in 1960. The component model proposed by Klaus Scherer (1984, 1988, 2001) provides a precise definition of the nature of emotions. Indeed, it defines an emotion as a sequence of state changes occurring in five organic systems in an interdependent and synchronized manner in response to the evaluation of an external, or internal, stimulus in relation to a central interest for the individual [5-7]. He proposes to define emotion as a sequence of state changes occurring in five organic systems: cognitive (central nervous system activity), psychophysiological (peripheral responses), motivational (tendency to respond to the event), motor (movement, facial expression, vocalization), subjective feeling [8,9]. Most emotional theories support the idea that the specific nature of the emotional experience depends on the outcome of an event's assessment in terms of significance for the individual's survival and well-being [8-10]. In Scherer's theory, the set of criteria for evaluating the event is called "stimulus evaluation checks (SEC's)". Following the result of this evaluation, it will be possible to predict the type and intensity of the emotion elicited by the event [11-16]. The SEC's are organized around four main objectives, which are further subdivided into secondary objectives. Major SEC's are the most important types of information that the organization needs to have an appropriate response. It is about: Is this event relevant to me? Does it directly affect my person or social group? What are the implications or consequences of this event and how will they affect my well-being or goals in the short and long term? How capable am I of dealing with these consequences? How significant is this event in relation to my personal convictions as well as social norms and values? The evaluation of these checks is always done in a subjective way [17-19]. It therefore depends on the perceptions and inferences that an individual can make of a situation. Moreover, as already suggested in 1984 by Lazarus and Folkman, evaluation does not take place only once, it is repeated in a process called reassessment ("reappraisal") that allows for a gradual readjustment to the event [20,21]. Unlike the theories of discrete emotions, the model of components is not limited to a limited number of emotions (anger, joy, fear, sadness, disgust...) [20-

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22]. On the contrary, the emotional process is considered as a pattern of constant fluctuations of changes in different subsystems of the body allowing to bring out a very wide spectrum of emotional states [13,15-17,19]. However, the theory does not reject the fact that there are more frequent adaptation patterns in organisms that reflect recurrent environmental assessment results [14,18]. For example, reactions such as fighting or running away are universal and it is not surprising to find that the emotions associated with them, anger and fear, are found in almost all species. Depending on the model, it seems very likely that from the same combination of results to evaluation checks, regular patterns of specific state changes can be achieved. It is for this reason that Scherer speaks of modal emotions to describe these predominant results in SEC's that are due to general living conditions, constraints of social organization and similarities in genetic equipment and that are therefore found in almost all languages under the term of a short verbal expression, such as a simple word. However, the advantage of SEC's is that they can provide a large number of different emotional states of different intensities, which seems to correspond better to the feelings of individuals.

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