Interpersonal relations, emotion and decision making support: conceptualization and a proposal for measurement

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#### **Abstract**

Approaches to decision making support such as group model building reserve an important role for concepts laden with emotion. Depending on the relevance of the issue at hand, decision makers are more or less motivated to process information. In the decision process affective (relationship) conflict may emerge. Attending to information and to interpersonal relations helps to build problem understanding, culminating in joint commitment to actions to improve the situation. Regardless of the central role of emotion, descriptions of the decision making process focus largely on information exchange and cognition. It seems emotions are only desirable when attached to important goals, while the essence of decision making is a rational process of discovering the best options to reach these goals. Emotions emanating from interpersonal frictions are treated as an unwanted, but unfortunately sometimes unavoidable distraction from analysing information. In the decision support literature, decision making teams seem to consist of participants brought together for the first time, who squarely focus on analysing the issue at hand and in the process build positive interpersonal relations. In reality teams often do not start as a blank slate but instead members have worked with one another before, bringing their expectations and interpersonal preferences to the new cooperation. The interpersonal setting and task interact to create emotions, which subsequently influence both the type of information considered and depth of information processing. Studies of emotion in the workplace indicate that the organizational context sets limits on how and to which extent emotions may be expressed, making their presence and effects particularly hard to study. This paper describes the role of emotions and interpersonal relations in team decision making by deducing central concepts based on psychological theories and empirical studies in business and strategy. Concepts are operationalized and used to analyse a strategy formation process at a Dutch water authority. We end with recommendations for facilitators, team leaders and researchers.

### Introduction

Common wisdom dictates that emotions are best cast aside for the duration of our working day, to be picked up again when leaving the (virtual) workplace. Nevertheless, leaders and marketeers alike are expected to engage their audience, motivate employees and clients to align their behaviour with the organisation's goals, and to inspire loyalty to a team or brand. It seems difficult to do all this using only facts and logic, or in other words, by providing information and engaging 'cold' cognition. It is more likely that those seeking to influence our behaviour appeal to values and emotions, connect to identity and try to forge a relationship. This apparent contradiction can also be seen in organisational

decision making. Decisions are made in relation to issues or opportunities and ask for bringing together available information, followed by systematic and careful analysis. Put differently, the ideal decision making process is about gathering and processing information. It employs a rational approach that starts by defining options to address the problem or opportunity, determining preferences and the likelihood of alternative options meeting those preferences, and selecting the alternative with the highest expected value (Cabantous & Gond, 2011). The only step that remains is to implement the chosen option, which is assumed to be unproblematic (Rosenhead, 1989). Several authors note that while decision makers aspire to be or appear rational, there are other processes that shape the process and outcome of decision making. Pettigrew (1985: 443) points to the legitimising role of rationality: 'The content of strategic change is thus ultimately a product of a legitimization process shaped by political/cultural considerations, though often expressed in rational/analytical terms'. Quinn (1981) sees strategic decision making as a combination of rational analysis to assess the suitability of strategy content, and of political activity to make the strategy acceptable to senior management. Eden (1992) separates the negotiated social order (relationships between actors) from the socially negotiated order (definition of reality). Options to resolve an issue will have to change reality in the desired direction, but at the same time be acceptable in terms of the present social order.

Decision makers have a range of tools at their disposal to support rational decision making. These tools are taught in business school curricula and part of everyday organisational practice. They 'can be seen as "prostheses" that enable managers to make rational decisions by overcoming limited cognitive capacities' (Cabantous and Gond, 2011: 580). While most of these are stand-alone analytic tools, to be used by an individual analyst, other approaches were developed to assist teams in the rational as well as the social aspects of decision making. Model-based decision support is one such approach (Rouwette & Franco, 2024). At its core is a facilitated process of model building. The facilitator guides a team of participants through gathering ideas on the issue at hand, and then relating ideas in a model visible and changeable for all present. In this process task conflicts are likely to appear as participants will have different views of the issue at hand. Facilitated modelling helps to clarify differences in meanings and allows for including multiple views, which often helps to resolve task conflicts. In the process of exploring the issue relationship conflicts may also emerge. This type of conflict refers to differences in personalities and values and, in comparison to task conflict, is more likely to evoke emotions. If these 'hot' topics are not addressed, they may derail the decision making process and lead to so-called undiscussables (Edmondson & Smith, 2006): topics that are so fraught with emotional and interpersonal difficulties that the team attempts to avoid raising them. While affective conflict has not often been discussed in relation to team decision support, recent studies (e.g. Rouwette & Franco, 2024) suggest that also this type of conflict can be productively handled.

Model-based decision support comes in many forms (Mingers & Rosenhead, 2004; Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001). In system dynamics, facilitated modelling has a long tradition and is known under such names as group model building (Andersen et al., 2007), community based system dynamics (Hovmand, 2013) and participatory modelling (Antunes et al., 2015). What is striking is that although textbook descriptions and cases of model-based decision support reserve an important role for emotion-laden concepts, the process and outcomes of decision support are typically described in terms of information exchange and cognition. So, on the one hand facilitated modelling recognises the importance of emotion by referring to the crucial role of issue relevance, motivation to share and process information, task and relationship (affective) conflict, and commitment to recommendations. But on the other hand, case guidelines for facilitated modelling as well as reported cases focus on stages in information handling (divergence, convergence via modelling, and agreement on actions) and its effect on mental model change and consensus. This makes it seem as if the negative side of

emotion (affective or relationship conflict) needs to be minimised, and the positive side (motivation and commitment) emerges spontaneously when having rationally analysed all relevant information. What is missing from the literature is a discussion of antecedents and consequences of emotion 'in its own terms' and a way to recognise and work with emotion in the context of team decision support.

This paper is organised as follows. The next section outlines theories from cognitive and social psychology that point to the major role of central personal concerns in emotions. The subsequent section on operationalisation attempts to define central concepts and show how these can be recognised in team decision making. We then use these concepts to describe situations in a case. This concerns a strategy formation process in a Dutch water authority. We end with conclusions and implications for practitioners.

#### Theory

Emotions are intimately connected to issues of personal concern, which may be a reason why we often seek to hide them, in particular in a work context. When it comes to emotions, there is still debate about whether feelings and emotions are one and the same or different phenomena. There is a whole range of emotion theories (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 2014), of which the 'basic emotions' theories probably are best known. These theories posit that a limited number of basic human emotions, such as sadness, happiness, fear, or anger, exist in response to situations or events (Ekman, 1992). Other theorists deny that there are clearly distinguishable basic categories and argue that any set of basic emotions represents folk rather than scientific concepts (Mandler, 1984), and that emotions are psychologically constructed each time anew to suit the specific circumstances (Russell, 2003). There is, however, growing consensus that emotions are the dominant driver of most meaningful decisions: 'emotion and decision making go hand in hand' (Lerner et al., 2015: 801). A central role of emotions is to direct our attention to the most pressing concerns and prepare us to act (Elfenbein, 2023). It stands to reason, then, that concerns that are central to a person – those touching on identity, personal values, or core beliefs – will evoke the strongest emotional reactions (Oatley, 1992). This is in line with the observation by Edmondson and Smith (2006) that intense emotions are more likely when the topic under discussion involves differing values, belief systems or interests and stakes are high. (Note also that the uncertainties associated with these topics cannot easily be resolved based on facts alone.) These constitute the 'hot' topics described above, which may lead to undiscussables if not addressed in the right way. However, acknowledging and addressing emotions in a work setting is difficult, as in an organisational context there are limits as to how and to which extent emotions can be expressed (Elfenbein, 2023). This indicates that the role of emotion in organisational decision making is both important as well as elusive.

We follow Russell's theory of emotion (Russell, 2003, 2009; Russell & Barrett, 1999), in which emotions are characterized by a combination of two dimensions – pleasure-displeasure (pleasure or valence) and activation-deactivation (arousal or energy) – that orthogonally span a circumplex model of possible emotional states. Emotions cannot easily be observed (Elfenbein, 2007, 2023). Actors can regulate their emotions and suppress the expression of their feelings. Moreover, actors often prefer to provide a rational reason for their decisions, making their causal role difficult to determine. However, it is less difficult to infer from an actor's behaviour whether an emotional episode was characterized by pleasure or displeasure and activation or deactivation. Positive affect (pleasure) leads to an approach motivational orientation; negative affect (displeasure) leads to an avoidance motivational orientation. Activation leads to action, deactivation to inaction.

It would be a mistake to assume that positive emotions are inherently good and negative emotions inherently bad. Emotion is functional in social behaviour. 'Positive emotions function as rewards and encourage connectivity and exploration. However, negative emotions are helpful as warnings and punishments critical to survival – notably in relation to conflict resolution, appeasement, fair division of resources, and maintenance of effective relationships' (Elfenbein, 2023: 491). Affect greatly influences information processing and decision making. Positive affect facilitates more heuristic and holistic information processing, maybe even too heuristic and holistic where greater depth of thought would have been more appropriate, while negative affect facilitates more rigorous information processing (Lerner et al., 2015). Emotions arising from conflict, due to colliding interests and/or contradictory values and beliefs, such as in relationship conflicts, can easily influence the social and epistemic motivation of participants (De Dreu et al., 2008) and distort or disrupt information processing. Conflict management could help with this (Edmondson & Smith, 2006), but in practice is still in its infancy.

### Operationalisation

From the theories in the previous section, we deduce the following important concepts and dimensions.

|  | T   |
|--|---|
| Concern  | Personal or task goal that is at stake in the situation. Concerns have varying levels of importance, with goals related to identity or central values most important. Importance is also raised when an immediate, rather than delayed, reaction is needed (Oatley, 1992; Elfenbein, 2023)  |
| Emotion  | An episode of personal experience in terms of positive versus negative valence and high versus low activation, with prototypes of specific emotions. The more important the concern is, the higher the activation. If the situation is perceived to bring the relevant goal closer, valence is positive. If the situation is perceived as an obstacle to the goal or as a delay to its achievement, valence is negative (Russell, 2003; 2009).                                |
| Expression   | How emotion is expressed, based on relevant cultural and organisational rules on how or to what extent emotions can be expressed (Elfenbein, 2023).   |
| Reaction from other participants                     | Reaction or action from other participants in a situation: builds on the social role of emotions (Oatley, 1992; Elfenbein, 2023).   |
| Impact on information processing and decision making | How factors above change 1. artefacts in which information is stored, such as reports, contracts, or models and 2. rules or policies, informal or formal, for subsequent decision making (Lerner et al., 2015; De Dreu et al., 2008). The latter may include changes in organisational position of participants involved, or formation of 'undiscussables', i.e. topics that are so emotionally laden that they are avoided in future discussions (Edmondson and Smith, 2006. |

# **Application to case Dutch water authority**

In this paper we use the case study Proactive Collaboration Partner (PCP), a very fine-grained study into a strategy formation process at a Dutch water authority, to illustrate how emotions influence and sometimes seem to completely determine decision making (Schwarz, 2022). Meetings were observed

and audio-recorded throughout the process (which took a year), and all written communications were collected for research at the micro-level of separate actions and communications of those involved. Analysis of the data revealed a major role of emotion in the process. Thanks to the micro level of data collection, the data sheds light on how emotions shape behavioural decisions and actions of actors. We have selected several 'emotional events' from this case to illustrate how emotions can influence decision-making in such processes.

Project PCP was initiated by the board of a water authority after a series of discussions at board level about options to promote water-robust and climate-resilient spatial planning on its territory, which is largely below sea level and is protected by dikes. The problem PCP focuses on is that a water authority itself has few powers in the field of spatial planning but must bear the consequences of wrong decisions, because at regional level planning and decisions are made by provinces and municipalities, which often do not take sufficient account of water interests. PCP was decided to explore the options and formulate a strategy. Within the organization, director Bert was tasked with initiating and supervising the project, and the first step was to find and appoint a project leader.

#### Emotional event 1

Ed, the organizations' most experienced and expert policy advisor in the field of water and spatial planning, who had also participated in the preliminary discussions at board level, turned down the position of project leader. He knew that leading a project was not his strength. A few days later, at the lunch table in the company restaurant, Nico, another policy advisor — at the same level as Ed but with knowledge and experience mainly in a completely different area, namely water quality — heard by chance from a middle manager about project PCP and the search for a capable project leader. As he himself once noted, Nico has a certain need to take on challenges that allow him to show himself and others what he is capable of. In the conversation at that lunch table, impulsively he took a figurative step forward when he said that PCP seems like a nice and important project to him. Two hours later, to his surprise, Bert appointed him project leader.

Interpretation: The information about project PCP that Nico received from the middle manager at the lunch table elicited positive affect and combined with his desire for approval, led to an approach motivational orientation. This approach orientation resulted in approach behaviour: he expressed himself positively by saying that he found it a nice and challenging project, a signal that was clearly not overlooked by the middle manager who went to the director immediately after lunch and nominated Nico as PCP project leader.

| Concern                 | Personal, Nico's need to show his ability                                 |
|-------------------------|---|
| Emotion                 | The information about the project created positive affect and activated   |
|                         | Nico to express interest, project provides chance to show ability         |
| Expression of emotion   | Positive expression in words ('nice, important project')                  |
| Reaction from other     | The positive signal that Nico gave is picked up by the middle manager     |
| participants            | and, following his proposal, the director appoints Nico as project leader |
| Impact on information   | Appointment of a project leader PCP with little knowledge of the field    |
| processing and decision | of spatial planning   |
| making                  |   |

#### Emotional event 2

Ed and Nico are quite different personalities. Ed is a soloist who likes to debate and focuses mainly on directly advising board members and the board, the political level of the water authority. Nico is a team player, and he is mainly focused on the executive organization, inspired by the perspective of 'the learning organization'. They work at the same senior level and have been colleagues in the same department for years, where they have developed quite negative attitudes towards each other. Ed would never have chosen Nico as project leader. The day he heard of Nico's appointment, he promptly wrote an action plan for the PCP project at home until late at night, even though he had rejected the role of project leader and opted instead for the role of team member. That night he sent his draft action plan directly by e-mail to the director and the middle manager for comment, and only for notification to Nico, and to Marlies, also a policy advisor with experience in the field of spatial planning. He did not want to receive any comment from them. Nevertheless, Nico and Marlies both commented on Ed's draft action plan by email the next day. Ed then only responded to Marlies by email, not to Nico. And he also ignored Nico's suggestion to first discuss the draft together with director Bert before sending it to the board.

Interpretation: Nico's appointment turned out to be a distressing surprise for Ed, to say the least. It caused a high level of displeasure and arousal. In Ed's opinion, Nico always comes up with nice, but vague stories. And what did Nico even know of spatial planning? With Nico as project leader, the project would take a completely different direction than he had envisioned. To prevent that, he immediately wrote a plan of action as he thought it should be. His negative attitude towards Nico elicited a strong avoidance motivational orientation. Ed did not show his feelings and chose to bypass Nico and couldn't bring himself to have a conversation with him, either face-to-face or by email. This was an act of avoidance, but also an act of domination. In turn, Nico also didn't allow himself to express his feelings about Ed's downright hurtful actions, he regulated his emotions. He never spoke to anyone within the organization about what happened here. He responded apparently calm, and deftly adapted Ed's draft plan of action to his vision. But Nico himself also fell into avoidance behaviour. His already negative attitude towards Ed had certainly not diminished because of what had happened now. Both avoided each other as much as possible throughout the entire duration of the project. Ed was quite often late to team meetings, leaving early or missing them altogether, only responded to emails when unavoidable, and his first bypassing of Nico wasn't his last. Nico never acted on it.

| Concern                        | Nico would turn the project into something completely different than Ed had in mind, and could perhaps emerge as a competitor in the field of spatial planning |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Emotion                        | Ed felt a strong displeasure and a high level of activation to turn the tide   |
| Expression of emotion          | Both Nico and Ed chose not to express their emotions to each other, colleagues, and managers   |
| Reaction from other            | None   |
| participants                   |  |
| Impact on information          | Task conflict (opposing opinions on how to tackle the problem in   |
| processing and decision making | question) and relationship conflict (between Ed and Nico) were not addressed and therefore continued to spread like a peat fire                                |

### Emotional event 3

Shortly after the start of project PCP, an emotional event took place in another project that Nico led, a project in the field of water quality that had no further relationship with PCP. That project was already in its final phase. Both the director and the board member with water quality in his portfolio had already approved the final draft of the policy report that the project had produced, so Nico did not expect any major problems during the final discussion by the board. Things turned out differently. Onno, the board member with spatial planning in his portfolio and therefore his client for project PCP, fiercely attacked the recommendations in Nico's policy report. Nico was forced to thoroughly adapt that report he was proud of to Onno's views, a vision he fundamentally disagreed with. What touched him even more was the way Onno expressed his criticism. Nico realized that the same thing would probably happen with PCP in a while, that his own approach focused on collaboration and cocreation would again clash with Onno's coercive and transactional approach. The fun of project leader PCP had now completely disappeared for him. He tried to hand the project over to someone else, but that attempt failed, he was stuck with it. Because Onno's vision differed so fundamentally from his own, Nico simply could not bring himself to take Onno's perspective into account in the PCP project. Onno also stuck to his vision, so that the clash Nico feared did indeed become reality six months later.

Interpretation: Nico thinks and acts from a learning (teleological) perspective, in which the water authority, province and municipalities jointly explore options and co-create the best solution. Water boards formally have a weak position in the field of spatial planning, but their unique in-depth knowledge of regional and local water systems is an asset. Nico assumes that many problems can be prevented by proactively and collaboratively contributing this knowledge to the development of spatial plans. Onno thinks and acts from a political (dialectical) perspective, where there are conflicting interests and solutions arise from negotiations, in essence from power games. In Onno's approach, the water authority must first decide for itself from the perspective of water management what the best solution is, and thus enter the political playing field armed. It seems easy to see that a water authority should be able to use both approaches, that there are situations in which a joint approach is more appropriate, and situations in which conflicts of interest can ultimately only be resolved through negotiations. However, Nico and Onno fail to reach mutual understanding, probably because it concerns a deeper layer of personal values about how people - and organizations - should and should not interact with each other. Emotions arise when values come under pressure. Moreover, Nico still felt Onno had treated him unfairly. The regular progress discussions with Onno were therefore unsatisfactory and deactivating experiences for Nico. He kept saying that he did not understand what exactly Onno wanted, consistently pushed Onno's approach aside and did not include it in any way in the PCP project. Intentionally or not, Nico's recurring avoidance behaviour was also a form of domination.

| Concern               | Nico fears that at some point he will be forced to follow Onno's        |
|-----------------------|---|
|                       | approach (again), an approach with which he categorically disagrees     |
| Emotion               | Negative attitude towards Onno, and negative affect and deactivation    |
|                       | whenever Nico is confronted with Onno's approach                        |
| Expression of emotion | Nico keeps repeating that he does not understand what Onno wants        |
|                       | (see also emotional event 4)  |
| Reaction from other   | None in the early stages. Later, the director explicitly pointed out to |
| participants          | Nico several times that Nico really had to include Onno's vision in the |
|                       | project   |

| Impact on information   | Onno's (dialectical) vision was not included in the project in any way |
|-------------------------|--|
| processing and decision | until the clash, although it is in fact complementary to Nico's        |
| making                  | (teleological) vision  |

#### **Emotional** event 4

Ed left halfway through the second project team meeting. A few minutes later, Nico referred to Ed as Ed Brink. He never referred to the other team members by using both their first and last names. In that same conversation he referred to his client, board member Onno, also by his first and last name, Onno de Waard, and throughout the entire project he never referred to him only as Onno. He always called another board member, Karel, only by his first name.

Interpretation: The use of both the first and last names indicates emotional distance. Nico was probably never aware that he was doing this, and the team members probably never consciously noticed it, but it indicates covert conflict, and the emotional distance thus expressed is likely to have been felt by the team members.

| Concern  | Nico fears that at some point he will be forced to follow Onno's and Ed's approach (again), an approach with which he categorically disagrees |
|--|---|
| Emotion  | Negative attitude towards Ed and Onno, which is accompanied by negative affect  |
| Expression of emotion                                | Referring to Ed and Onno by using both their first and last names   |
| Reaction from other participants                     | No discernible  |
| Impact on information processing and decision making | Distancing himself from Ed and Onno in this way legitimizes in a sense that Nico does not do anything with their approach                     |

### Reflection

These four emotional events all happened in the early stages of project PCP. There were many more during the project, most, but not all, with negative affect. The reader might think PCP is an extreme case, but as consultant and facilitator we have seen worse. The reader will also have realised that PCP is not a case study of an SD or GMB intervention, which is true. It is a fine-grained study of the interactional and emotional dimensions of strategic management in general. However, this study certainly indicates that the implicit assumption often made that teams in system dynamics and group model building interventions (e.g. Rouwette and Franco, 2024) are 'a blank slate' is naive. The participants in a system dynamics or group model building intervention also bring with them their personal history and traits, their good and bad experiences with other participants in the past, and their views on the usefulness and necessity of the intervention. And system dynamics and group model building interventions also involve personal interests that easily can give rise to overt or covert conflict. In practice, interventions in organizations that matter usually involve the kind of social complexity that emerged in the PCP project. Therefore, if we want to further increase the effectiveness of system dynamics or group model building interventions, we should explicitly assume that the group of participants involved is not a blank slate. We should problematize not just the substantive dimension of such processes, but also their social dimension. This means paying attention to emotion - not only negative but also positive affect, and to power - not only as a repressive force (one's ability to dominate others), but also as a positive force, a force that counters dominance for the benefit of the group (Rouwette, 2022; Schwarz, 2022).

#### Implications for team leaders and facilitators

Attention to the social dimension is necessary in all stages of the intervention: the initial, model building, and implementation stage.

### Initial stage

Practitioners and researchers should delve (deeper) into the social process that preceded the first group session. Where did the initiative for the intervention come from? How was the decision made to implement a system dynamics or group model building intervention? How was the decision made about who will be involved and play what role in the process? Have these decisions led to tensions? What interests are at stake? The facilitator and team leader should also somehow get an impression of the motivational orientation of the participants, as evoked by what happened in the initial phase. To what extent do they endorse the usefulness and necessity of the intervention? How do they feel about it? Does the idea of the intervention inspire active participation? Rouwette and Franco (2024) point to four choices that determine the design of an intervention: 1. The agreement between client and analyst on the scope of the problem, and the roles that either will play in the intervention process; 2. the membership of the team tasked with developing a response to the problem; 3. the environment in which team discussions will take place in terms of principles and norms that regulate interactions; 4. the choice about how team members will think and talk about the problem should be considered, or in other words the approach they use to share and exchange issues, assumptions, facts and opinions about the problem. It seems that only the third factor, principles, and norms of interactions, has some bearing on the motivation with which participants engage in the modelling intervention.

#### Model building stage

Practitioners and researchers should delve (deeper) into what happens socially while building models. Are there significant power differences within the group? Large power differences within a model building group can lead to highly biased results, even without the intention or awareness of the person or persons holding power (De Dreu et al., 2008). How do the participants interact? How do they feel? What about their activation and energy level? To what extent is there tension or conflict, is it task conflict and/or relationship conflict? How do the participants feel about the model as it unfolds? Edmondson and Smith (2006) and Rouwette and Franco (2024) offer advice on how to work with task and interpersonal conflict. However, there exists a level of conflict above which facilitated interventions are no longer effective (Prein, 1987). Questions such as the ones raised above can help an analyst to determine the likely level of conflict before the intervention, enabling them to make a better-informed choice on whether to engage with the client or not.

#### Implementation stage

Practitioners and researchers should delve (deeper) into what participants think and feel about the constructed model and the conclusions that have emerged from it. They should somehow get an impression of the motivational orientation of the participants towards implementation. Did building the model and anticipating the behavioural changes that its implementation will require result in positive or negative affect, did it activate or deactivate them? This relates to one of the arguments raised by Schein (1990). In a complex problem, the client is in the best position to say which intervention will work in their context. This is in part because a new strategy needs to both fit to the problem at hand and be acceptable to senior management - and political activity may be needed to help create the latter (Quinn, 1981).

However, we need to be honest and recognize that we currently have limited guidance and tools to offer team leaders and facilitators. Looking at the PCP case that started with a combination of task and relationship conflicts as an example: Given Ed's behaviour, should Nico have confronted Ed instead of swallowing his feelings? Should he have brought the problem to the director? And what should the director have done? Tell Nico that as project leader he should solve this problem himself? Have a three-way conversation and engage their relationship conflict directly, as Edmondson and Smith (2006) propose? Address Ed himself directly about his behaviour? Remove Ed as a participant in PCP? Reconsider the appointment of Nico as project leader? What course of action would have been best to address both Ed and Nico's concerns that fuelled their emotions? Which course of action would have created the best conditions for the project team to build an adequate understanding of the problem and for the organization to actively implement the strategy chosen on that basis?

## Conclusion

We need to pay more attention to the impact of human behaviour in system dynamics and group model building interventions. Naturally, we can make good use of the results of extensive research into the behavioural consequences of fallacies that hinder rationality (Lane & Rouwette, 2023). But now we need to reach further, and investigate the impact of emotion on motivation, cognition, and behaviour, as system dynamics and group model building interventions in organizations inevitably evoke emotions among those involved. We need to learn how to better deal with the concerns that emotions evoke, and the power dynamics that often arise from them. To do this, we must connect with the research fields that focus on emotion and cognition, and on emotion and decision-making. We consider this article as a first step towards a research agenda and invite researchers who share our interest to contribute to its development. The goal is to provide practitioners – facilitators and team leaders – with better guidelines and tools for dealing with the behavioural aspects of interventions.

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