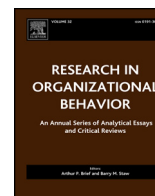




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# Worry at work: How organizational culture promotes anxiety

Jeremy A. Yip<sup>a,\*</sup>, Emma E. Levine<sup>b</sup>, Alison Wood Brooks<sup>c</sup>, Maurice E. Schweitzer<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Georgetown University, United States

<sup>b</sup> University of Chicago, United States

<sup>c</sup> Harvard University, United States

<sup>d</sup> University of Pennsylvania, United States

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### ABSTRACT

Organizational culture profoundly influences how employees think and behave. Established research suggests that the content, intensity, consensus, and fit of cultural norms act as a social control system for attitudes and behavior. We adopt the norms model of organizational culture to elucidate whether organizational culture can influence how employees experience emotions. We focus on a pervasive emotion, anxiety. We propose four important pathways that link organizational culture with anxiety. First, we propose that when norm content is result-oriented, employees must strive for challenging goals with specific targets under time pressure, and are more likely to experience anxiety. Second, when norm intensity is weak, employees do not internalize norms and they engage in deviant behaviors that increase uncertainty and promote anxiety. Third, a lack of consensus about norms commonly creates conflict between factions within an organization and increases anxiety. Fourth, when there is a mismatch between employees' values and organizational norms and values, the misfit engenders anxiety. Taken together, different features of organizational cultural norms can independently and multiplicatively influence the magnitude of anxiety, which has constructive or destructive effects on performance.

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Organizational culture exerts profound influence over individual and organizational behavior (Denison, 1990; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996; Schein, 1985). Organizational culture can promote positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991), productivity and creativity (Chatman et al., 1998), and financial performance (Chatman, Caldwell, O'Reilly, & Doerr, 2014).

According to the norms model of organizational culture, the content, intensity, and consensus of cultural norms act as a social control system for attitudes and behavior (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). We build on the norms framework to expand our understanding of whether and how organizational culture influences emotion. In particular, we focus on a commonly experienced emotion in organizations – anxiety.

Anxiety is a negative-valence emotion that is characterized by appraisals of uncertainty (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Spielberger, 1966). Considerable work has concentrated on how dispositional differences and situational characteristics can trigger anxiety (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Brooks & Schweitzer, 2011; Cheng & McCarthy, 2018; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Yip & Côté, 2013). However, no

prior work has directly investigated the relationship between organizational culture and anxiety. This is a surprising omission, because the interplay between individual differences and situational triggers of anxiety typically occurs against the broader context of organizational culture. We assert that social norms associated with organizational culture systematically trigger anxiety at different magnitudes, which in turn, promote either constructive or destructive organizational behavior.

Building on prior work (Chatman et al., 2014; Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016), we postulate multiple paths for organizational culture to increase anxiety. First, we propose that when the content of the cultural norm focuses on challenging goals and specific results, organizational members may perceive the achievement of aggressive goals to be unpredictable and are likely to experience greater anxiety. Second, when organizational members do not internalize the organizational values and norms, they exhibit low norm intensity (Gelfand et al., 2006). We expect that low norm intensity creates uncertainty about the appropriateness of different behaviors, and this uncertainty elevates anxiety, especially for low power members. Third, a lack of consensus about norms can create factions within an organization that uphold different organizational values (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). Warring factions about different priorities and standards of conduct generate conflict and uncertainty, which increases

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [jeremy.yip@georgetown.edu](mailto:jeremy.yip@georgetown.edu) (J.A. Yip).

anxiety. Finally, a misfit between an employee's values and organizational cultural norms and values is likely to derail a promising career, which evokes anxiety (Chatman & Barsade, 1995).

Taken together, our work highlights an important relationship between organizational culture and emotion. We identify different pathways through which organizational culture promotes anxiety. We also consider how these different pathways interact to trigger different levels of anxiety. Drawing on existing models of stress (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908), we elucidate how anxiety at different magnitudes can have different effects on performance.

Importantly, our work advances our understanding about the relationship between organizational culture and emotions. Existing research on the relationship between organizational culture and emotions examines how organizations may mandate different emotions and display rules as part of their norm content. For example, organizations may intentionally foster norms around displays of happiness (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988) or the experience of companionate love (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). In contrast, we explore how cognitive norm content, which does not directly relate to the expression and experience of emotion, can trigger specific emotions. For example, a results-oriented organizational culture, combined with other components of cultural norms, may lead to anxiety that produces poorer results. Consequentially, we highlight how such norm content can trigger negative emotions, such as anxiety, thereby undermining the intended purpose of the norm.

## Organizational culture

Organizational culture is a social system that guides collective meaning and purpose, and coordinates individuals in a group (Pettigrew, 1979). Scholars have published over 4,600 research articles about organizational culture (Hartnell et al., 2011). Considerable research has carefully defined organizational culture as a unique and important construct, and highlights the utility of organizational culture in predicting organizational outcomes. In this section, we review research on the construct of "organizational culture" and discuss the surprising lack of research investigating the link between organizational culture and emotion.

### Defining organizational culture

Organizational culture is characterized by a shared set of values, attitudes, beliefs, and expected behaviors between members of an organization (Martin & Siehl, 1983; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 1985). The prevailing theoretical framework of organizational culture suggests a hierarchy of three interrelated levels of cultural indicators, which include (1) fundamental assumptions, (2) norms and values that signal appropriate attitudes and behaviors, and (3) visible artifacts, language, and practices (Schein, 1985, 2010).

Drawing on the hierarchical model of culture (Schein, 1985), organizational culture is primarily defined by shared norms (i.e. what attitudes and behaviors are appropriate at the organization?) and shared values (i.e. what is important in the organization?) (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). Norms are closely associated with values because norms provide expectations about appropriateness and values provide a rationale for those expectations (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016; Miller & Prentice, 2016; Parks & Guay, 2009). O'Reilly et al. (1991) suggested that norms are the key cultural indicator because norms serve as a social control system to shape organizational behavior. Cultural norms influence how employees think and behave (Dannals & Miller, 2017a; Harrison & Carroll, 1991; Hong et al., 2000; Morris & Peng, 1994; Morris et al., 1998).

We advance our understanding about whether cognitive norms influence how employees feel.

According to the norms model of organizational culture, organizational culture is an informal means of controlling and coordinating group behavior in organizations (Chatman, 2010; Chatman & Cha, 2003; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Social norms provide information about standards for appropriate behaviors (Dannals & Miller, 2017b; Harrison & Carroll, 1991). For example, employees often pay attention to their peers' behaviors as a source of information about correct behaviors, and become more likely to mimic these behaviors (Cialdini, 1985). Within an organization, social norms can be enforced through approval, sanctions, or exclusion to gain and maintain membership in a particular group. In fact, employees often conform to norms in order to gain acceptance of a group and avoid ostracism (Roos et al., 2015).

In our investigation, we consider each of the constituent components of norms in turn: content, intensity, consensus, and fit (Chatman et al., 2014). First, the content of norms reflects the strategically relevant standards for performing interdependent work (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). For example, organizations may develop norms that promote adaptability, integrity, collaboration, results-orientation, customer-centricity, or detail-orientation (Chatman et al., 2014; O'Reilly et al., 1991). Second, the intensity of norms refers to the strength with which organizational members embrace and enforce norms (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). For example, strong and tight organizational cultures have employees who dutifully adhere to social norms and punish deviant behavior (Gelfand et al., 2011). Third, consensus of norms pertains to how widely shared the norms are across organizational members (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). For example, in an organization with low norm consensus, employees in one department may adopt norms about integrity, whereas employees in another department may focus on norms about customer-centricity (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). Fourth, norm fit refers to the congruence between organizational norms and values and individuals' values (Chatman, 1989; Srivastava et al., 2018). For example, when values are incompatible, top management may espouse a value of collaboration, but an employee may believe that individual competition and achievement is more important.

To summarize the norms model of organizational culture, organizational culture can predictably influence employees' behavior through the adherence to social norms. Content, intensity, consensus, and fit represent the constituent components of the norms that distinguish organizational cultures, and promote social control to coordinate employees' behaviors.

Organizational culture is likely to influence firm performance (Hartnell et al., 2019). However, the findings about the link between organizational culture and performance has been inconsistent, in part, because of disagreement over the conceptual definition and measurement (Hartnell et al., 2011). The norms model of organizational culture offers the most robust approach to explore the consequences of organizational culture. Organizational culture characterized by norms of adaptability boosts firm performance such as revenue growth, stock market value, corporate reputation, Glassdoor ratings, and analysts' stock recommendations for "buy" (O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, & Doerr, 2014). In addition, existing work has found that organizational culture influences job satisfaction and organizational commitment (O'Reilly et al., 1991), productivity and creativity (Chatman et al., 1998), and financial performance (Chatman et al., 2014).

### Organizational culture and emotion

The field of organizational behavior is experiencing an "affective revolution" (Barsade et al., 2003). To understand why

employees behave the way they do in organizations, we need to understand how employees feel emotionally in organizational settings (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Forgas, 1995; George, 1990; Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Though prior work has highlighted how various features of the organization context influences emotion (Ashkanasy et al., 2017; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Côté, 2014; Elfenbein, 2007; Mayer et al., 2008; Van Kleef et al., 2012), the link between organizational culture and emotion needs to be elucidated. A substantial literature documents the effects of national culture on display rules, emotional expressions, emotion regulation, and emotional experience (Elfenbein, 2006; Gelfand & Brett, 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Morris & Keltner, 2000; Yang et al., 2019), but the relationship between organizational culture and emotions has received limited attention.

Emerging research has concentrated on establishing emotional culture as a unique construct in relation to the broader construct of organizational culture (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). According to this conceptualization, organizations may mandate display rules or foster contagion of specific emotions among employees, which collectively forms the content of organizational culture. For example, healthcare workers belonging to an organization with a strong culture of companionate love are more likely to collaborate and stand side-by-side, express compassion and tenderness, and support each other with work and non-work issues (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). Furthermore, firefighters operating in emotional cultures of joviality and companionate love are less likely to engage in risky behavior (O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017).

Emotional culture distinguishes emotional content from cognitive content to form the basis of emotional culture and cognitive culture, respectively (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). However, the distinction between emotional culture and cognitive culture pertains to the norm content of organizational culture, but not other components of organizational culture such as norm intensity, norm consensus, and norm fit. Therefore, emotional culture is an antecedent to organizational culture, because emotional content influences and defines the organizational culture (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017).

However, the relationship between organizational culture and emotion is likely bidirectional. Surprisingly, no prior research has directly examined emotion as a consequence of organizational culture. That is, organizational culture has traditionally been defined according to cognitive norm content, and it is unclear as to whether organizational culture (which more broadly includes norm intensity, norm consensus, and norm fit) predictably influences emotions. Furthermore, it is important to understand whether organizational culture may unintentionally engender emotions. In this work, we explore how and why organizational culture influences emotion.

To build our understanding about how organizational culture affects emotions, we adopt the prevailing view that organizational culture is composed of social norms, and we predict that organizational cultural norms profoundly influence emotions. Specifically, we expect that each of the constituent components of norms that characterize organizational culture (i.e. content, intensity, consensus, and fit) to have emotional consequences. By establishing emotion as a consequence of organizational culture, we consider how different norm content trigger emotions and, in some cases, may undermine the intention of the norm when combined with suboptimal levels of intensity, consensus, and fit. In the present article, we focus on the relationship between organizational culture and anxiety.

## Anxiety

Emotions vary along particular dimensions, which enables people to distinguish one emotion from another (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Roseman et al., 1990; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Yip & Schweitzer, 2019). According to the affective circumplex model, discrete emotions can be differentiated along dimensions of valence and arousal (Barrett & Russell, 1998; Larsen & Diener, 1992; Russell, 1980; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Valence refers to the pleasantness associated with an emotional experience, whereas arousal refers to the level of energy associated with an emotional experience. For example, happiness is a positive valence, high arousal emotion, whereas anger and anxiety are negative valence, high arousal emotions (Russell & Barrett, 1999; Yip & Schweitzer, 2019).

Beyond valence and arousal, conceptual frameworks of emotion categorize discrete emotions based on patterns of various cognitive appraisals. Cognitive appraisals correspond to the different tendencies to evaluate and interpret events and the environment (Arnold, 1960; Roseman, 1984; Schachter & Singer, 1962; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). According to appraisal tendency frameworks of emotion, individuals not only assess whether a situation is positive or negative, but also form secondary appraisals related to certainty (e.g., How certain did you feel about the current situation?) and lack of control (e.g., To what extent did you feel the current situation was beyond anyone's control?) (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Lazarus, 1991; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Drawing on the appraisal tendency framework, we provide a conceptual definition of anxiety, identify the primary triggers of anxiety, and discuss some common consequences of anxiety.

### Defining anxiety

We build on prior research to define anxiety as a negative valence, high arousal emotion that involves cognitive appraisals of uncertainty and low control. Early definitions of anxiety highlight negative valence and high arousal as key features of anxiety. For example, anxiety concerns "subjective, consciously perceived feelings of apprehension and tension, which are accompanied by or associated with activation (arousal) of the autonomic nervous system" (Spielberger, 1966, p. 363). That is, anxious individuals evaluate situations negatively, and are energized to respond to threats.

We gain a deeper understanding about how anxiety is distinct from other negative emotions by considering cognitive appraisals of uncertainty and low control. People feel anxiety when they perceive that the world is uncertain and believe that they have low control over the situation (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Anxiety is triggered by events and situations, which have potential for undesirable, self-relevant outcomes (Brooks & Schweitzer, 2011; Gray, 1991; Kray & Gelfand, 2009; Raghunathan & Pham, 1999; Yip & Côté, 2013). For example, performing construction work on a treacherous bridge elicits anxiety because of the potential for physical harm, whereas delivering a presentation in front of critical board members elicits anxiety because of the potential for psychological harm. Thus, anxiety is not only elicited by appraisals of the variance in outcomes (i.e. uncertainty) and inability to change the situation (i.e. low control), but also by the possibility of danger (i.e. harm) in any given situation.

Anxiety is distinct from stress and burnout. Anxiety is short in duration, intense, and triggered by a specific event (Brief & Weiss, 2002). However, stress is defined as the difference between the perceptions and desires in a domain that is considered important to the person (Edwards, 1992). Although stress and anxiety are related, stress and anxiety are distinct constructs. Stress tends to be an enduring and diffuse, generalized response to a gap between a

perceived state and desired state. Whereas, anxiety is a transient emotional response that is directly triggered by specific events in the environment that signal uncertainty.

Separately, burnout is defined as a prolonged response to chronic emotional and social stressors that is characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and a self-perception of inefficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Anxiety and burnout are distinct constructs because anxiety is an immediate emotional response, whereas burnout is a prolonged cognitive and physiological response of exhaustion. Consequently, anxiety is a related, but separate construct from stress and burnout.

*Triggers of anxiety*

The interplay between trait anxiety and state anxiety influences the magnitude of anxiety. Trait anxiety is a relatively stable tendency to experience anxiety in anticipation of threatening situations (Endler, 1980; Eysenck & Calvo, 1992; Spielberger, 1985; Watson & Clark, 1984). Neuroscience research offers support for individual differences in trait anxiety by showing that frequent episodes of anxiety potentiate in the amygdala and create habitual anxiety (Davis, 1992). When individuals with high trait anxiety encounter threatening situations, they experience more intense anxiety than individuals with low trait anxiety who encounter the same threatening situation. Employees who are predisposed to feel anxiety may perceive situations as more threatening, exhibit an attentional bias to negative information, experience stronger physiological responses, have a heightened sensitivity to their physiological sensations, and ruminate about the cause and symptoms of anxiety (Gross & John, 2003; MacLeod & Mathews, 2012; Mathews & MacLeod, 1994).

State anxiety is a transient episode of anxiety that is triggered by a threatening situation (Spielberger, 1985). Unlike negative mood, state anxiety is triggered by specific events and tends to be intense and short in duration (Frijda, 1993; Lazarus, 1991). Individuals often experience anxiety in contexts that typically involve uncertainty, an inability to exert control over a situation, and potential harm to themselves in a personally relevant domain.

State anxiety can vary in terms of frequency and magnitude. When individuals experience state anxiety repeatedly over time, they experience chronic anxiety. Chronic anxiety can lead to exaggerated worry and tension. However, the magnitude of anxiety is commonly associated with the level of threat. Uncertainty and potential harm in an arena that is less personally relevant is likely to be less threatening and trigger less anxiety. Whereas, uncertainty and potential harm in a domain that is highly personally relevant is likely to be perceived as more threatening and trigger intense anxiety. For example, an ice-breaker exercise during a professional development workshop might engender low levels of anxiety, whereas a negative performance evaluation from your boss might generate high levels of anxiety.

To recapitulate, anxiety is a negative emotion that is characterized by high arousal, uncertainty, lack of control, and perception of potential harm. People often experience anxiety in psychologically or physically threatening situations, and become inclined to engage in protective behaviors such as vigilance and avoidance. Anxiety often varies in frequency and magnitude, which can lead to different behavioral outcomes. The intrapersonal effects of anxiety need to be considered in organizational research.

*Consequences of anxiety*

Anxiety enables people to adapt to environmental demands that are dangerous and threatening. Anxiety is associated with action tendencies related to avoidance or “flight”. Anxiety is functional and can facilitate constructive behavior. When people

are anxious, they pay greater attention to potential threats in the environment (Eysenck, 1997), protect themselves (Frijda et al., 1989), and are more vigilant to preserve themselves or their resources (Pacheco-Unguetti et al., 2010). Collectively, anxiety promotes greater situational awareness and engages a basic instinct for self-preservation.

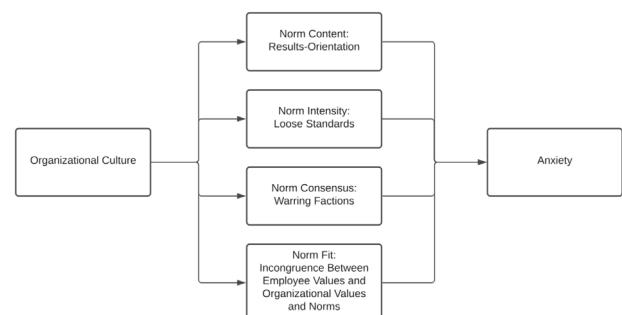
Anxiety can also have destructive consequences. At high levels of anxiety, individuals experience cognitive interference, which hampers task performance (Beilock & Carr, 2001; Beilock et al., 2004). In addition, anxiety tends to deplete self-regulation and promote emotional exhaustion (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018; McCarthy et al., 2016). Furthermore, anxious individuals become more likely to seek advice, but become less discerning and are more willing to take advice that might not be beneficial (Gino et al., 2012). When anxiety becomes extreme, individuals may even become immobilized (Lazarus, 1991).

Beyond the intrapsychic consequences, the emotions as social information model suggests that individuals extract information about expressers and use that information to inform their decision-making and behavior in social contexts (Van Kleef, 2009; Van Kleef, Homan, & Cheshin, 2012; Yip & Schweinsberg, 2017). Prior research has found that anxiety expressions signal the need for assistance, and can trigger help from observers in cooperative situations (Clark et al., 1996; Eisenberg, 2000). Relatedly, Van Kleef, De Dreu, and Manstead (2010) suggest the social function of anxiety is supplication.

In summary, anxiety influences intrapsychic and interpersonal behavior. Anxiety can be functional when it guides attention to the threat and triggers conservatism and a tendency to seek safety. However, anxiety can also be dysfunctional when it distracts attention to irrelevant cues, and depletes the ability to self-regulate. From a social perspective, anxiety signals the need for help and advice.

**How organizational culture promotes anxiety**

In this section, we establish the link between organizational culture and anxiety. In contrast to prior work that conflates emotion and culture, we suggest four specific ways that organizational culture promotes anxiety. Drawing on the norms model of organizational culture, we propose four primary mechanisms through which organizational culture triggers anxiety: (1) the content of organizational culture focuses on results orientation; (2) low intensity about norms engenders loose standards of attitudes and conduct; (3) a lack of consensus about norms produces warring factions; and (4) misfit between employees' values and the organizational cultural norms and values. We present the channels through which organizational culture influence anxiety in Fig. 1. In this section, we take a “main



**Fig. 1.** Four pathways through which organizational cultural norms influence anxiety.

effects” approach and discuss how each of these pathways independently influences anxiety.

Importantly, our work delineates how organizational culture can influence emotion, and how functional norms can have dysfunctional emotional effects, leading to emotional consequences that undermine the intention of the norms. Our work also helps to consolidate the research on organizational culture, and distinguish what organizational culture is and what organizational culture is not.

#### *Norm content: result-orientation*

Norms are shared standards of appropriate attitudes and behaviors that promote conformity and sanction deviant behavior (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Values reflect what is important and provide a rationale for the norms (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Together, norms and values exert social control and coordination over individuals to achieve superordinate goals. To differentiate the content of organizational culture, prior work has identified six generic types of norm content (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990; O'Reilly et al., 1991). We propose that organizational cultures focusing on the norm of results-orientation are likely to promote anxiety.

When the content of an organizational culture is defined by results, leaders typically set challenging goals with specific targets and deadlines (e.g., sell 100,000 units of product by the end of first quarter), instead of setting vague goals (e.g., do your best) (Locke & Latham, 1990). Although specific, challenging goals can facilitate performance, prior work has demonstrated that goal-setting can have negative consequences such as promoting unethical behavior (Schweitzer et al., 2004), focusing on “making the numbers” (Kerr, 1975), diminishing productivity and experimentation (Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987), and reducing joint profit in negotiations (Neale et al., 1987). We identify an important, unintended consequence of cultivating a results-oriented culture and setting challenging goals – anxiety.

The literature on goal-setting and results-orientation has not been directly linked with anxiety, yet related research on job demands provides some indirect evidence for why an organizational culture defined by a norm of results-orientation would increase anxiety. Job demands refers to psychological stressors associated with workload such as completing tasks under time pressure, overloaded with project assignments, working at hectic pace, and dealing with conflicting requests (Karasek, 1979). Although job demands may involve physical exertion that lead to fatigue, the psychological effects of difficult job demands is consequential, and has demonstrated that employees feel anxiety when performing under time pressure and employees become preoccupied about failing to complete their work when they perceive uncertainty (Fox et al., 1993; Margolis et al., 1974; Parker & DeCotiis, 1983). That is, difficult job demands often elicit work strain, stress, and anxiety (Demerouti et al., 2001; Karasek, 1979).

With result-oriented cultural norms, job demands not only trigger anxiety, but the lack of job resources also likely promotes anxiety. Job resources refer to assets to which employees have access for completing their work effectively such as money, staff, software, materials, or collective knowledge (Richter & Hacker, 1998). When employees face constraints on job resources, employees experience elevated levels of anxiety (Demerouti et al., 2001; Fox et al., 1993; Karasek, 1979).

Result-oriented cultures are marked by difficult job demands and challenging goals. Typically, results-oriented cultures are not focused on the process, but on the outcome. For example, at Amazon, employees are evaluated in relation to standards that the company boasts are “unreasonably high” (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015). One of Amazon's top recruiters said, “This is a company that strives to do really big, innovative, groundbreaking things, and

those things aren't easy. When you're shooting for the moon, the nature of the work is really challenging. For some people it doesn't work.” While result-oriented cultural norms can be constructive in boosting motivation, productivity, and innovation, employees who face challenging goals, difficult job demands, and scarce job resources become likely to experience intense anxiety.

To summarize, when firms emphasize a results-orientation in their organizational culture, employees are uncertain about whether they will achieve challenging targets under time pressure and are likely to experience higher levels of anxiety.

#### *Norm intensity: failure to internalize norms*

Organizational cultural norms vary in their intensity (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). In the context of organizational culture, intensity refers to how deeply held the norms and values are by employees (O'Reilly, 1989). In strong cultures, employees tightly adhere to norms and express approval about appropriate attitudes and behaviors (Chatman et al., 2014; Schein, 1990). For example, when employees approve appropriate conduct and witness norm compliance, they often exhibit praise, followership, and endowment of status or power to socialize organizational members. In addition, employees in strong organizational cultures express disapproval about or sanction inappropriate attitudes and behaviors (Chatman et al., 2014; Schein, 1990). For example, employees express disapproval about inappropriate attitudes and behaviors through the use of sanctions such as condemnation, social exclusion, and contraction of status or power. Collectively, strong organizational cultures are defined by intense norms, homogeneity, stability, and cohesiveness (Ouchi & Price, 1978; Saffold III, 1988; Schein, 1984).

In weak cultures, employees are less likely to accept and adhere to norms, and exhibit a higher tolerance for deviant behavior. In particular, employees are indifferent about judging whether attitudes and behavior are appropriate or inappropriate. For example, employees may be inattentive, disinterested, or noncommittal when evaluating appropriate conduct. Furthermore, employees in weak cultures do not express disapproval or dissent about inappropriate behavior because they do not internalize any organizational norms and values in the form of assumptions or beliefs. For example, employees are likely to be oblivious, apathetic, or reticent in response to inappropriate behaviors. Altogether, weak organizational cultures are marked by mild norms, heterogeneity, instability, and discord (Saffold III, 1988).

The conceptualization of norm intensity and the distinction between strong and weak cultures is aligned with the construct of cultural tightness and the distinction between tight and loose cultures (Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand et al., 2011; Harrington & Gelfand, 2014). Weak organizational cultural norms are associated with loose organizational cultures. We gain insight into some of the psychological tendencies of weak organizational cultures when we examine findings about cultural differences along the dimension of tightness-looseness. Relative to tight cultures, loose cultures are associated with less prevention focus, less impulse control, low need for order, and low self-monitoring (Gelfand et al., 2011). In a study of the United States, states with cultural looseness were associated with lower trait conscientiousness and higher trait openness, compared to states with cultural tightness (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014).

We propose that a weak organizational culture characterized by low norm intensity promotes anxiety. In weak organizational cultures, the deviant behavior is normatively expected, which introduces variance in behaviors and greater uncertainty. That is, normative social norms in weak cultures are ambiguous and lack clarity. Furthermore, accountability is low in weak and loose

cultures (Gelfand & Realo, 1999). Chatman and Cha (2003) identify weak cultures as “vacuous cultures”, which pay lip service to norms and values, but do not provide any clarity, coherence, or comprehensiveness for norms. As a result, the uncertainty about what is important and appropriate, and the lack of control over norm violation is likely to promote anxiety.

#### *Norm consensus: warring factions about norms*

In addition to norm intensity increasing organizational cultural strength, norm consensus promotes organizational cultural strength. Drawing on the distinction between strong and weak situations in lab settings, we advance our understanding of the link between consensus and organizational cultural strength in organizational settings. Mischel (1977) defined a strong situation in which everyone interprets situations similarly, has uniform expectancies, and has the knowledge and skills to perform tasks relevant to that situation. Weak situations are characterized by people diverging in their interpretation, holding different expectations, and lacking the knowledge and skills to perform tasks relevant to that situation (Mischel, 1977).

The consensus of norms captures how widely shared norms are held across organizational members (O'Reilly, 1989; O'Reilly et al., 1991). That is, when employees express high levels of agreement about what is important, they perceive standards of appropriate attitudes and behaviors similarly. Consensus is distinct from intensity because consensus reflects between-person differences about categorizing which norms and values are important, and employees must prioritize particular norms and values over others. Intensity, in contrast, reflects between-person differences about the magnitude of preferences about norms and values and the willingness to enforce them (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Although there are instances where consensus and intensity co-occur (e.g., high consensus and high intensity or low consensus and low intensity), scholars conceptualize consensus and intensity as orthogonal dimensions of organizational culture.

When employees exhibit high norm intensity but low norm consensus, “warring factions” can emerge in the organizational culture (Chatman & Cha, 2003). Warring factions reflect different interpretations, tribalism, and micro-cultures that develop across an organization. For example, the marketing department may be passionately focused on customer orientation, yet the accounting department intensely adheres to norms of detail orientation. Warring factions generate stronger fault lines between an in-group and out-group, which may trigger aggressive communication about competing ideas and promote conflict (Yip, Schweitzer, & Nurmohamed, 2018).

Prior work suggests a potential link between conflict and anxiety. When people perceive angry expressions from others, they are more likely to feel anxiety (Van Kleef et al., 2004). When feeling anxious, people often infer that the environment is dangerous (Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Van Kleef, 2009; Yip & Côté, 2013; Yip et al., 2020). We suggest that warring factions engender conflict, which promotes anxiety. Employees who belong to the warring factions about cultural norms and values are likely to worry about uncertainty of how to achieve interdependent work goals, uncertainty of the relationship quality with employees across the firm, and uncertainty of the strategic direction of the firm. Similarly, employees who merely witness warring factions, but do not belong to one of the factions, are likely to experience anxiety about uncertainty of the normative order of acceptable norms, uncertainty of the social network structure, and uncertainty of the strategic direction of the firm.

#### *Norm fit: mismatch between employees and culture*

Both individual differences and situational characteristics are critical to understanding and predicting employees' behavior in organizations (Chatman, 1989). When determining the fit, similarity, and congruence between employees and organizational culture, person-organization fit is defined as the overlap between individual values and organizational norms and values (Chatman, 1989). Values give meaning to work and life (Lewin, 1951). In particular, values can be terminal, which represents preferred end states such as a sense of achievement, or instrumental, which represents guiding principles for behavior such as honesty (Perrewé & Hochwarter, 2001). Individual values represent enduring beliefs and evaluative standards about appropriate and right behaviors (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In contrast, organizational values represent justification for shared evaluative standards of appropriate and right behaviors within an organizational system (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Previous work has demonstrated that when individuals have values that are compatible with the organizational values, they are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Yet, when there is a discrepancy between individual values and organizational values, employees become more likely to involuntarily leave the organization (Goldberg et al., 2016; Srivastava & Goldberg, 2017). Our current understanding about the emotional consequences of value incongruence is limited. We propose that a mismatch between individual values and organizational values promotes anxiety. Value incongruence produces a social system that impedes interactions necessary for accomplishing common goals (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). When individual values deviate from organizational values, the incongruity in values hinders employees' ability to predict and understand others' behaviors (Perrewé & Hochwarter, 2001). When others appear less predictable, employees perceive greater uncertainty and experience higher levels of anxiety.

Some studies suggest that value incongruence leads to negative outcomes, which may provoke anxiety. When values of the employee are different from norms and values of the organization, employees report lower engagement, less satisfaction, and higher intentions to quit (Cable & Judge, 1996). Relatedly, a lack of employee-organizational culture fit is associated with more conflict between the organization and employees, and less job satisfaction (Chatman, 1991). Collectively, these findings demonstrate the incompatible values lower satisfaction, and lower satisfaction is associated with higher amounts of stress. Building on this literature, we expect that a greater discrepancy between individual values and organizations values to elicit greater anxiety.

#### **The curvilinear effect of different magnitudes of anxiety**

A substantial literature has documented a link between anxiety and performance, and uncovered a complex relationship between anxiety and performance (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992; Hanin, 1978; Mandler & Sarason, 1952; Mueller, 1992). For example, anxiety is positively associated with performance in insurance sales (Mughal et al., 1996), pharmaceutical orders (Schell & Grasha, 2000), office work (Rego & Cunha, 2008), academic tests (Alpert & Haber, 1960), and sports (Hardy & Parfitt, 1991; Jones et al., 1993). Yet, other research has revealed that anxiety is negatively associated with performance in sports (Kleine, 1990), academic test-taking (Seipp, 1991), creativity (Byron & Khazanchi, 2011), police work (McCarthy et al., 2016), car sales (Pitt et al., 2000), nursing (Pyc et al., 2017), and retail management (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002).

This pattern of supposedly contradictory results is resolved by recognizing that anxiety varies in magnitude, and conceptualizing the relationship between anxiety and performance as curvilinear

(Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). Although anxiety is generally considered to be a high-arousal emotion, anxiety often varies according to the magnitude of intensity (Russell & Barrett, 1999), ranging from low anxiety to high anxiety. According to the inverted-U model of anxiety and performance (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908), anxiety is a continuum, and different points along that continuum have beneficial or harmful consequences. That is, when individuals experience moderate anxiety, they are more likely to perform better than when individuals experience low or high anxiety. In the next section, we explore how different dimensions of organizational culture can independently and multiplicatively influence the magnitude of anxiety.

#### *Organizational culture influences the magnitude of anxiety*

We propose that the content, intensity, and consensus of norms trigger different magnitudes of anxiety, either independently or concomitantly.

#### *Main effects of organizational culture on anxiety*

First, when the content of cultural norms prioritizes results-orientation, which is characterized by challenging goals with specific targets and deadlines, employees are particularly likely to experience anxiety. The magnitude of anxiety depends on a number of factors. For example, job demands and goal difficulty influence the level of anxiety. Stretch goals and tight deadlines promote high levels of anxiety, whereas challenging goals and specific deadlines trigger moderate anxiety. Furthermore, job resources impact anxiety. When employees lack job resources such as money, staff, software, materials, or collective knowledge, they become more likely to experience high anxiety in response to high job demands. Altogether, in organizations with results-oriented norms, we expect high job demands and low job resources to heighten anxiety.

Second, when the intensity of culture is defined by weak norms, employees will feel anxiety. Weak norms and values provide less clarity about what is important and appropriate. As a result, weak cultures are associated with employees less likely to follow shared standards of appropriate behavior, and to tolerate various forms of deviant behavior. We expect newcomers to organizations with weak norms to experience high anxiety, because they struggle to decode what attitudes and behaviors are valued and expected. In comparison, incumbent employees are habituated to engage in less coordinated and loose behaviors, which likely generates moderate anxiety, since they need to cope with uncertainty when completing interdependent work.

Third, when organizational members lack consensus about norms and values, employees are likely to perceive uncertainty about how they get their tasks done and feel moderately anxious. Disagreement about norms can engender warring factions, which reflects different groups within the organization prioritizing different norms and values, and believing in different norms and values intensely. In situations where warring factions are established, the conflict increases uncertainty about task completion, relationship quality, social network structure, and strategic direction. Since warring factions foster high levels of uncertainty, we expect employees to experience high anxiety.

Fourth, when employees' values do not correspond to organizational norms and values, the person-environment misfit typically generates anxiety. Employees who perceive an incongruence of values with their organization may find that their work lacks meaning, which signals uncertainty about prospects for job performance, quality of leader-member exchange, and job satisfaction. We expect for incompatible values and norms to generate high levels of anxiety. Because values are often not explicit and norms need to be observed, employees will need time

to conclusively determine misfit, so their anxiety may fluctuate as they assess fit over time.

#### *Multiplicative effects of organizational culture on anxiety*

Drawing on the norms model of organizational culture, we propose four pathways that explain the link between organizational culture and anxiety. In addition to the main effects of organizational culture on anxiety, it is important to consider the interplay between the four components of organizational culture to influence the magnitude of anxiety. By exploring the multiplicative effects of organizational culture on anxiety, we suggest how interactions between the different dimensions of organizational culture might boost or reduce anxiety. That is, organizational cultural components can offset one another, cancel each other, or collectively amplify anxiety.

When an organization has a results-oriented culture with high job demands and high job resources, employees experience moderate levels of anxiety. In combination with weak norm intensity about appropriate conduct and values, employees are likely to experience high levels of anxiety, because apathetic employees do not have any clear principles to guide their pursuit of results-orientation. However, a results-oriented culture in combination with strong norm intensity likely engenders moderate levels of anxiety, because employees are passionate about appropriate conduct and values to achieve result-orientation.

Furthermore, when employees lack consensus about norms and values, the disagreement and lack of clarity about what is appropriate and significant triggers high levels of anxiety in a result-oriented culture. In contrast, when employees reach consensus about norms and values, the agreement about appropriate standards can produce moderate anxiety in a results-oriented culture.

Finally, we can consider a situation where the organization instills a results-orientation in employees, but there is an incongruence between the values held by the individual employee and the values and norms ingrained in the organization. We expect that the combination of results-orientation with incongruent values produces high levels of anxiety, whereas results-orientation with congruent values produces moderate levels of anxiety.

#### *Consequences of different magnitudes of anxiety*

To build the theoretical logic for the anxiety-performance link, we consider the curvilinear relationship between anxiety and performance. Performance refers to the extent to which people achieve their personal or organizational objectives (Beal et al., 2003; Campbell, 1990; Grant, 2008). More precisely, performance is a product of motivation and ability (Heider, 1958; Vroom, 1964). Motivation refers to the psychological state that directs, energizes, and prolongs work (Grant et al., 2007; Mitchell & Daniels, 2003), whereas ability commonly refers to the mental capacity to process information for cognitive tasks or the physical ability to perform work (Seijts & Latham, 2005).

We merge these two components of performance into a curvilinear model, and consider how different levels of anxiety influence different levels of performance. Interestingly, Yerkes and Dodson (1908) did not explain why different levels of anxiety influence performance. In fact, empirical studies exploring the link between anxiety and performance often focus on testing linear effects rather than the curvilinear effects (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018). To reconcile the negative and positive effects of anxiety on performance, we suggest how anxiety can diminish one component of performance (i.e. cognitive processing), while boosting another component of performance (i.e. motivation), and therefore, anxiety influences organizational performance at different levels of intensity.

Prior research suggests that anxiety increases motivation (Geen, 1991; Hardy et al., 1996). When people are in the presence of others, they experience apprehension, which can facilitate effort on well-rehearsed, familiar tasks (Geen & Gange, 1977; Zajonc, 1980). However, anxiety interferes with cognitive processing (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018; Eysenck, 1997; Lazarus, 1991). That is, individuals who experience anxiety often become distracted and perform worse on mathematical problems (Beilock & Carr, 2001; Beilock et al., 2004).

Anxiety varies in magnitude from low to moderate to high (Russell, 1980; Russell & Barrett, 1999), and that anxiety has a curvilinear effect on performance (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). We theorize that anxiety involves trade-offs in performance between higher effort and lower cognitive processing. At low levels of anxiety, individuals chronically suffer from a lack of motivation, which leads to lower performance (Geen, 1991; Hardy et al., 1996). At high levels of anxiety, individuals struggle with cognitive interference, which hampers performance (Beilock & Carr, 2001; Beilock et al., 2004). Relative to low levels and high levels of anxiety, moderate anxiety boosts motivation and cognitive information processing to facilitate performance. Therefore, the magnitude of anxiety plays a critical role in determining the link between anxiety and performance.

Taken together, anxiety is positively linked with motivation, and negatively linked with cognitive processing. Specifically, at low levels of anxiety or high levels of anxiety, the costs of cognitive processing outweigh the motivational benefits. At moderate levels of anxiety, the motivational benefits outweigh the costs of cognitive processing. The motivational and cognitive processing outcomes aggregate to a curvilinear relationship between anxiety and performance.

### **An agenda for future research about organizational culture and emotion**

In this work, we elucidate the relationship between organizational culture and emotion as distinct constructs. Prior research has demonstrated a link between organizational culture and satisfaction (O'Reilly et al., 1991), but has not examined how organizational culture influences emotion. Recent work has conceptualized emotional culture as a construct that distinguishes emotional culture from cognitive culture (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). However, this important work on emotional culture focuses on emotion as the content of organizational culture, which represents one component of organizational culture. That is, some organizations develop norms about display rules, emotion regulation, and emotional support (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Sutton, 1991).

Although the role of emotion in organizational culture has received growing interest, no research has directly investigated the effect of organizational culture on emotion. Drawing on the norms model of organizational culture, we theorize how four dimensions of organizational culture can collectively influence emotion: content of norms, intensity of norms, consensus of norms, and congruence of values and norms. It is important to understand how organizational culture as an established and distinct construct can yield emotional consequences. In particular, we concentrate on how these four dimensions of organizational culture trigger anxiety.

#### *Future research exploring organizational culture and anxiety*

Different definitions, conceptualizations, and measures of organizational culture have diminished the construct validity of organizational culture. The lack of construct validity reflects the jingle fallacy, which suggests that conflicting conceptual models

and psychometric measures are encompassed under a single construct. To address the jingle fallacy, we adopt and endorse the norms model of organizational culture because it reflects the constituent components of norms (Chatman, 1989). In addition to identifying important features about social norms for organizational culture, the norms model of organizational culture is consistent with Schein's (1985) hierarchical model of culture. The pioneering theoretical framework of Schein (1985) is widely accepted and well established, which conceptualizes the hierarchy of cultural indicators such as assumptions, norms and values, and artifacts and practices. Thus, we encourage future research to be explicit and precise in how they define and measure organizational culture, and we view the norms model (O'Reilly et al., 1991) as the most scientifically valid construct for organizational culture compared to the trait model (Denison, 1990), the competing values model (Cameron & Quinn, 2011), and the styles model (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988).

We cast a spotlight on the conceptual pathways that link organizational culture to anxiety. Our aim is to provide a foundation for future research to examine the relationship between organizational culture and emotion, using qualitative or quantitative methodologies. Prior research has integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches when studying the role of emotion in organizational culture (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). Yet, more qualitative and quantitative research is needed to understand whether organizational culture acts as a social control system that normalizes anxiety.

First, qualitative methods could help develop a nuanced understanding about norm content that centers on results-orientation. A results-orientation norm serves the function to hold employees accountable for adhering to a principle of achieving ambitious goals with a specified target within a particular deadline. Qualitative research could be an effective way of understanding how results-oriented norms are established and may evolve. When norms are closely followed and values are intensely held, result-oriented norms may be functional by promoting more transparency and accountability in meeting strategically relevant standards, but may create dysfunction by putting employees in positions of criticizing and blaming particular employees for their attitudes and conduct. Furthermore, it would be valuable to examine how social meaning is constructed from adopting and enforcing appropriate expectations and norms. Case interviews might uncover the functional process of forming a sense of shared identity that is results-oriented.

Second, to advance our understanding of organizational culture and emotions in a field setting, future research should use the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) to assess the content, intensity, consensus, and congruence of the norms and values (Chatman, 1989; Chatman et al., 2014; O'Reilly et al., 1991). Using a Q-sort methodology, informants rank 54 norm statements into nine separate categories to construct a profile of norms that represents organizational culture. Future research should test the link between the four dimensions of organizational cultural norms and anxiety, both independently and collectively. To assess anxiety, the most common and well established measure of anxiety is self-report of anxiety adjectives such as nervous, worried, anxious (Brooks & Schweitzer, 2011; Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Yip & Côté, 2013). Because people can exhibit social desirability or interpret their subjective feeling of anxiety inaccurately when providing a self-reported anxiety (Bechara et al., 1994; Damasio, 1994; Yip et al., 2020), anxiety may also be assessed using portable physiological devices that record skin conductance responses. Another useful approach to measure anxiety that can be less invasive in future research would be to access email communications between employees and use a natural language algorithm to discern expressions and feelings of anxiety. In field studies, it



would be interesting to contrast the main effects with the multiplicative effects of organizational culture on anxiety.

Third, future research should examine the relationship between organizational culture and anxiety using experimental designs to make causal inferences. Cultural norms are difficult to experimentally manipulate. However, earlier work has randomly assigned participants to experimental conditions of collectivistic and individualistic culture using a business simulation (Chatman & Barsade, 1995). Future research could adapt the business simulation and use an experimental manipulation that reflects a set of norms that correspond to the content categories. In a lab setting, anxiety could be measured using self-reported items, physiological assessments, or open-ended responses that can be analyzed using a natural language algorithm.

Collectively, both qualitative and quantitative research could offer important insight into how organizational cultural norms influence anxiety. Anxiety is unlikely to be the content of an organizational norm because employees are likely encouraged to suppress the expression of anxiety. Furthermore, the absence of explicit discussion about anxiety would negate anxiety as the content of a norm. However, cultural norms such as results-orientation likely have an effect on anxiety, and further investigation is needed to discern the various features of norms that trigger anxiety.

#### *Toward a general framework of organizational culture and emotion*

Our work focused on anxiety as a consequence of organizational culture for three reasons. First, anxiety is a pervasive emotion that has contradictory effects based on the magnitude of anxiety. Second, indirect evidence from the literatures on goal setting and job demands provide clues about the link between cognitive norm content of result-oriented cultures and anxiety. Third, norms have intentional consequences on anxiety, but may also have unintended consequences on anxiety.

Although we concentrate our theoretical analysis on the organizational culture – anxiety link, there are various emotions that may be triggered by organizational culture. Future research is needed to provide a more comprehensive picture about the different emotional consequences emerging from the constituent components of organizational culture. We take a main-effects approach and propose how each of the components of organizational culture may primarily influence certain emotions.

First, when employees intensely adopt the norms and values, anger may be particularly prevalent for correcting norm violations. Anger is a discrete discrete emotion that is characterized by negative-valence (Lerner & Keltner, 2000), high-arousal (Yip & Schweitzer, 2019), an appraisal of certainty (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), and an appraisal of other-person control (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Employees often experience anger when they observe a violation of social norms (Van Kleef, Gelfand, & Jetten, 2019). When people feel angry, they become more likely to punish the offender (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006; Yip & Schweinsberg, 2017), engage in unethical behavior (Yip & Schweitzer, 2016), be less receptive to advice (Gino & Schweitzer, 2008), struggle with perspective-taking (Yip & Schweitzer, 2019), and critically evaluate others' ideas (Wiltermuth & Tiedens, 2011). Altogether, anger is a social emotion and is triggered by another person who violates norms. Future research should explore how the norm intensity of organizational culture can promote anger.

Second, norm consensus often draws a clear distinction between right and wrong. High norm consensus may trigger a self-conscious emotion of guilt when employees deviate from established norms. Guilt is a negative-valence emotion that is attributed to a specific behavior that violates expectations of appropriateness and motivates individuals to repair the violation

(Cohen et al., 2011; Tangney et al., 2007; Tracy & Weidman, 2019). Existing research has demonstrated that, relative to less guilt-prone individuals, more guilt-prone individuals engage in more leadership behaviors (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012) and engage in more trustworthy behaviors (Levine, Bitterly, Cohen, & Schweitzer, 2018) because they feel a sense of responsibility for others. Furthermore, guilt-prone individuals exhibit higher levels of affective commitment (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012). Building on these findings, we suggest that organizations with broad agreement about appropriate norms and values may trigger guilt if employees deviate from normative standards.

Third, organizational culture defined by a norm content of customer centrality is likely to increase the prevalence of gratitude. Gratitude is a positive-valence emotion commonly expressed in social exchanges that is triggered by another person's benevolence, arises from a direct benefit to the self, and promotes prosocial tendencies (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons, 2013; Fehr et al., 2016; Grant & Gino, 2010; Hu & Kaplan, 2015). In terms of appraisal tendencies, gratitude is characterized by positive valence and other-person control (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). When organizations cultivate a culture of customer obsession, employees become more likely to be grateful to customers for their business.

Finally, when an employee's values match an organization's values and norms, the good norm fit is likely to build in-group identity and induce pride. Pride is a positive valence emotion that is typically associated with an appraisal of personal control (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Authentic pride consists of achievement, whereas hubristic pride consists of conceit (Tracy & Weidman, 2019). When values and norms are congruent between employees and the organization, employees may feel authentic pride in response to belonging to an in-group, which they construe as successful.

#### **Conclusion**

Anxiety is commonly experienced in organizations. We identify organizational culture as an important antecedent of anxiety. Drawing on the norms model of organizational culture, we discuss how organizational culture through norm content, norm intensity, norm consensus, and fit of norms and values influence anxiety. More precisely, we suggest that result-oriented norm content, low norm intensity, low norm consensus, and poor norm fit promote anxiety. These four components of organizational culture can operate independently as main effects or collectively as multiplicative effects to influence anxiety.

The primary contributions of our work are threefold. First, we identify anxiety as an important consequence of organizational culture. We shed new light on how organizational culture triggers different magnitudes of anxiety. Although the effects of organizational culture on anxiety are variable, we suggest these effects are predictable. Second, we suggest four critical channels that link organizational culture to anxiety and emotions more broadly. Norms have different components that can influence emotions intentionally or unintentionally. Third, we demonstrate how organizational cultures with an intense focus on results may unintentionally trigger higher levels of anxiety that undermine the purpose of the result-oriented norm. Importantly, we draw on previous research suggesting that the magnitude of anxiety can have constructive or destructive effects on performance. We suggest that anxiety involves trade-offs in performance between higher motivation and lower cognitive processing. Relative to low and moderate levels of anxiety, high levels of anxiety boost motivation, but increase cognitive interference to impede performance.

We urge leaders and managers to not eliminate anxiety from the workplace, but to understand how to use organizational

cultures to influence anxiety in a beneficial way. We call for future empirical research to build on the norms model of organizational culture to broaden our understanding about the link between organizational culture and emotion as distinct constructs and empirically test the emotional consequences of organizational culture.

### Postscript

In our work, we highlight how organizational culture, such as a results-oriented culture, can induce high levels of anxiety. For many tasks, high levels of anxiety harm performance, and managers need to both assess baseline levels of anxiety of members of their team and recognize the actions they can take to either boost or curb anxiety.

To assess baseline levels of anxiety, managers should recognize how broader social and economic forces influence the anxiety that individuals experience. Many broad factors, such as economic recessions, political instability, pandemics, terrorism, and social unrest, as well as local factors, such as family illness, caregiving responsibilities, and divorce, can significantly influence the anxiety that individuals experience. In this postscript, we identify some of these moderating factors.

First, perceived health risks that trigger anxiety are likely to moderate the relationship between organizational culture and anxiety. This is particularly likely when the health risks are severe and uncertain, such as the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021. Within organizations, employees may feel vulnerable to contracting an illness from their interactions with customers, coworkers, and fellow commuters. Organizations need to consider not only the physical safety of their employees, but their psychological safety as well.

Second, political uncertainty is likely to exacerbate the association between organizational culture and anxiety. For example, a divisive election not only introduces uncertainty about who will win an election and what types of policies governments will enact, but it can also trigger workplace conflict. This is especially likely to be true if people develop strong partisan views and perceive political preferences in moral terms.

Third, economic uncertainty often harbors the danger of a recession, job insecurity, and a reduction in household savings and net worth. Economic uncertainty commonly increases job demands and reduces job resources in organizations, which can make a results-oriented culture seem overwhelming. Coupled with the possibility of furloughs, reassignments, or involuntary turnover, employees are likely to experience intense and chronic anxiety. When individuals are concerned about their household finances, they may refuse to adhere to established organizational cultural norms, fail to collaborate as effectively as they would otherwise, and ultimately experience heightened levels of anxiety.

Taken together, macro environmental factors related to health, politics, and economics can substantially influence the experience of anxiety and moderate the relationship between organizational culture and workplace anxiety. As we experienced in 2020, it is important to recognize that many anxiety triggers can co-occur. For example, a health or political crisis may trigger an economic crisis. We call for future research to explore how macro factors moderate the influence of organizational culture on anxiety.

### Declaration of interest

This work is original, has not been previously published and is not under concurrent review elsewhere. We do not have any interests that would inappropriately influence our work.

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