THE ROLE OF AFFECT IN INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAMS

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Why study affect in the workplace?
- We are holistic beings with our thoughts, feelings, imagination, beliefs systems and actions interconnected.
- Work places many people under enormous amounts of pressure especially in high reliability organisations (e.g. fire and emergency management, aviation, emergency medicine) where people have become susceptible to stress, fatigue and job burnout.
- Emotions are an important factor within organisations because they are embedded in work activity and cannot be separated from our thinking.
- Positive emotions enhances problem solving and decision making.
- Self doubt can easily over ride the best skills and this can have a cascading effect within the team.
- Affect research has had minimal attention in fire and emergency management.

Research Questions
1) What are the lived experiences of people who work in IMTS?
2) How do emotions give meaning to IMT work activity?
3) What enables and constrains IMT teamwork?
4) How might IMT work activity be improved to create higher performing teams?

Data Collection
Interviews (n=65) conducted with IMT personnel from four states (i.e. TAS, VIC, QLD, NSW) across Australia.

Data Analysis
Interviews were transcribed, coded and organised manually according to the Participants’ responses and literature reviewed. The data was then entered into NVIVO, a software qualitative analysis program.

Findings
People were asked to talk about their experiences of working in IMTs: (e.g.) Can you tell me about an IMT that worked really well, and one that didn’t go so well? The data showed that people’s felt emotions were grouped into unpleasant feelings (i.e. anger/frustration, fear and surprised—not anticipating the future), pleasant feelings (i.e. joy, amazed and not surprised-anticipating the future), and potential to develop stress where fatigue was the common theme. Figure 1 illustrates that 70% of IMT members experience negative emotions with 20% of them having potential to develop stress.

In terms of self identity 82% of participants conveyed that being confident and in control are important aspects of working in IMTs. 18% of participants felt at times they were not in control of the situation at hand, illustrated in Figure 2.