

ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

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1. Core Definition

The Organizational Approach is a comprehensive conceptual construct applied primarily within the study of feelings and emotional states. Fundamentally rooted in the tenets of **General Systems Theory**, this approach views the individual--and their emotional landscape--not as a collection of isolated mental processes, but as a complex, dynamic system characterized by interconnected components and feedback loops. Its central tenet is that feelings serve crucial functional roles as both regulators and determinants of behavior, operating across both **intrapersonal** (within the self) and **interpersonal** (between individuals) domains.

In this framework, emotional responses are understood as necessary outputs of the system striving for equilibrium or adaptation in response to internal or external stimuli. The organizational perspective moves beyond descriptive models of emotion to focus on the active, managerial role that affect plays in directing human activity. It systematically outlines how various cognitive, volitional, and behavioral inputs converge to orchestrate significant and often imperative emotional alterations, thereby defining the functional architecture of emotional life.

2. Foundation in General Systems Theory

The intellectual strength of the Organizational Approach derives directly from its adoption of principles established by **General Systems Theory (GST)**. GST, as conceptualized by figures like Ludwig von Bertalanffy, posits that systems, regardless of their nature (biological, psychological, or organizational), share fundamental properties and principles, such as holism, feedback, and boundary maintenance. Applying this to human emotion, the Organizational Approach treats the individual psyche as an open system continually engaging in transactions with its environment.

Specifically, feelings are conceptualized as essential **feedback mechanisms**. When the system detects a deviation from a desired state (a state of equilibrium or goal attainment), feelings (e.g., anxiety, joy, frustration) are generated. These feelings then signal the need for corrective action, serving to maintain system viability or to drive adaptive changes. This systemic view contrasts sharply with reductionist models that might isolate emotions purely to neurochemical events, emphasizing instead the emergent properties of the interconnected psychological structure.

The reliance on GST also mandates a focus on **interdependence**. Since all components--cognition, behavior, motivation, and emotion--are interconnected subsystems, a change in one necessarily influences the others. For instance, a change in cognitive interpretation (a subsystem)

immediately impacts the emotional state and subsequent behavior. This holistic lens is critical for understanding complex human reactions that cannot be attributed to a single cause or reaction.

3. Feelings as Regulators and Determinants

A primary assertion of the Organizational Approach is the dual managerial function of feelings: regulation and determination. As **regulators**, feelings maintain psychological homeostasis and guide internal processes. Intrapersonally, they regulate cognitive resource allocation (e.g., strong negative emotions focusing attention on threat) and decision-making processes (e.g., the role of fear in risk aversion). This internal regulation ensures the mental system functions efficiently in pursuit of goals and the avoidance of harm.

As **determinants**, feelings actively shape and drive overt behavior and interaction. Interpersonally, emotions act as powerful social signals, organizing and structuring relational dynamics. A display of anger, for example, determines the subsequent approach or avoidance behavior of others. In an organizational context, the collective emotional climate can determine group cohesion, conflict resolution styles, and productivity levels. Thus, feelings are not merely passive reactions but **active forces** that set the course for both individual action and social outcomes.

4. The Adaptive Role of Affect

The Organizational Approach places significant emphasis on the **adaptive part of feelings**. Consistent with evolutionary psychology, this perspective holds that emotions are highly functional tools that have evolved to solve recurrent problems faced by the organism. Every core emotion possesses an inherent organizing function that prepares the system for rapid, appropriate responses to environmental challenges.

For example, **fear** organizes the system for flight or freezing, prioritizing physiological resources and cognitive vigilance, thereby increasing the chance of survival. Similarly, **joy** serves an adaptive role by reinforcing behaviors that lead to positive outcomes, promoting social bonding and exploration. By highlighting this adaptive functionality, the Organizational Approach provides a rationale for why emotion is so deeply embedded in the regulatory structures of behavior, reinforcing the idea that feelings are essential for effective functioning rather than disruptive noise.

5. Integrative Components of Emotional Alteration

A crucial element of this approach is its detailed mechanism for how **imperative emotional alterations** are generated. The model explicitly stresses the unity and interplay of four key components: comprehension, willingness, mental abilities, and behaviors.

Comprehension (Cognition): This refers to how an individual perceives, interprets, and appraises

internal and external events. Cognitive restructuring or reappraisal is a fundamental pathway through which the system alters its emotional output. Changing one's understanding of a threat, for example, alters the subsequent affective state.

Willingness (Volition/Motivation): This component relates to the intentional desire and effort to engage in emotion regulation or change. It involves motivational states that determine whether the individual attempts to suppress, enhance, or redirect an emotional experience.

Mental Abilities: This encompasses the broad range of cognitive resources and skills (e.g., executive function, memory, working attention) necessary to process emotional information and execute regulatory strategies effectively.

Behaviors: Overt actions taken in response to or anticipation of an emotional state. Behavior modification can directly impact the feeling state (e.g., avoiding a stressful situation alleviates anxiety, or engaging in exercise reduces stress hormones).

The synergy of these components determines the system's capacity for emotion regulation and its resilience in the face of psychological disturbance. Effective emotional change requires alignment and coordination among all four subsystems.

6. Key Characteristics

The Organizational Approach is defined by several core operational characteristics that differentiate it from purely cognitive or purely behavioral models of affect:

Systemic Holism: It mandates that feelings must be studied in the context of the entire psychological system, rejecting the study of isolated emotional variables.

Functional Emphasis: It focuses on the purpose (adaptive and regulatory) of emotion rather than merely its phenomenology (the subjective experience).

Interdependence of Subsystems: It highlights the necessary linkage between affective states, cognition, motivation, and behavior, treating them as mutually influencing subsystems.

Emphasis on Feedback Loops: Emotional output serves as input for subsequent cognitive and behavioral adjustments, creating continuous cycles of adaptation and learning.

Contextual Sensitivity: The regulation and determinant role of feelings are understood to vary based on the specific intrapersonal or interpersonal environment in which the system is operating.

7. Criticisms and Limitations

While offering a powerful integrative framework, the Organizational Approach, like all systems-based models, faces specific criticisms regarding its practical application and empirical validation. One common limitation is the challenge of **operationalizing systemic variables**. The complexity inherent in modeling dozens of interdependent feedback loops makes empirical testing difficult, often leading researchers to rely on simplified, partial models that may lose the richness of the

holistic perspective.

Furthermore, critics sometimes argue that by viewing emotions primarily through a functional, managerial lens, the approach may potentially **de-emphasize the subjective, lived experience** of feeling. If feelings are reduced strictly to system regulators, the unique qualitative aspects of human consciousness and suffering might be overshadowed by technical descriptions of system failures or successes. There is also a continuous debate regarding how much agency (willingness/volition) a systems approach truly allows, given that behavior is seen largely as determined by system parameters and feedback mechanisms.

Further Reading

[Systems theory - Wikipedia](#)

[Emotion regulation - Wikipedia](#)

[Feeling - Wikipedia](#)

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