To Express or Suppress? How A Climate of Authenticity Shapes the Affective and Behavioral Consequences of Loneliness at Work

Workplace loneliness is deleterious and on the rise. This phenomenon has recently captured the attention of scholars and managers due to its effects not just on the lonely, but potentially those around them. Yet this emergence has occurred over time and may have gone relatively unnoticed in organizations. To advance our understanding of how workplace loneliness manifests itself, we draw on the evolutionary theory of loneliness and the literature on emotion regulation to develop a model of how employees manage their emotions when they feel lonely. We examine how both expressing positive emotions and suppressing negative emotions in response to workplace loneliness yields negative consequences for discretionary behaviors at work. We also suggest that a climate of authenticity—a work environment where employees feel they can display emotions authentically to others—may attenuate the maladaptive effects of workplace loneliness. Four complementary studies—an archival field study (Study 1), a critical incident experiment (Study 2), a vignette-based experiment (Study 3), and an experience sampling field study (Study 4)—largely support our model, highlighting the affective and behavioral responses employees have to feeling lonely at work.

Short Bio

Dorian Boncoeur is an assistant professor of Management & Organizations at the Mendoza College of Business. His research examines human sustainability in the workplace; how employees can contribute to their organizations without subverting their own well-being. His research has appeared in peer-reviewed outlets such as Personnel Psychology, Journal of Business Ethics, and Journal of Business Research. Dr. Boncoeur received his Ph.D. in International Management Studies (Organizational Behavior) from the University of Texas at Dallas’s Jindal School of Management where he was the recipient of the ExpliWell Dissertation Award.