


**Beyond Positivity: A Review of the Functional Outcomes of Negative Emotions at Work**R. David Lebel<sup>1</sup>, Jordan Sanders<sup>1</sup>, Jochen Menges<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>University of Pittsburgh School of Business<sup>2</sup>University of Zurich**Author Note**R. David Lebel  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2272-0167>Jochen Menges  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8689-409X>

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### **Abstract**

Organizational scholars examining the effects of emotions on employees generally assume that negative emotions produce negative outcomes. However, a nascent body of research challenges this view, suggesting that negative emotions can help employees navigate work demands arising from disruptive external events. We draw on the COVID-19 pandemic—a salient, prolonged event that stimulated widespread negative emotions—as a theoretically meaningful context to explore when and why negative emotions may yield beneficial outcomes. Specifically, we provide an integrative conceptual review synthesizing research from applied and social psychology conducted during the pandemic that identifies two pathways through which negative emotions produce functional individual-level outcomes at work. The first pathway captures direct effects driven by the unique action tendencies associated with discrete negative emotions. The second pathway, informed by Personality Systems Interaction (PSI) theory, highlights contingent effects shaped by self-regulatory factors and external support from leaders, teams, or organizational policies. Our findings challenge and extend discrete emotion and affective shift theories by detailing how and under what conditions negative emotions from disruptive events can have functional outcomes. We bring necessary nuance to prevailing emotion theories and offer practical implications for leaders and organizations seeking to manage negative emotions during times of hardship.

Keywords: emotions; emotion regulation; well-being; burnout; COVID-19; anxiety

**Beyond Positivity: A Review of the Functional Outcomes of Negative Emotions at Work**

Negative emotions are increasingly prevalent, with global reports of worry, anger, and sadness rising steadily over the past decade (Gallup, 2023). Amidst widespread crises ranging from financial downturns to a pandemic to political turbulence, employees report heightened negative emotions at work (Grandey et al., 2021; Granger et al., 2022). The effects of such an increase are seemingly well understood with research indicating that negative emotions tend to have adverse effects at work (Fox & Spector, 1999; Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). A “symmetrical assumption” dominates the theorizing on this topic, whereby negative emotions are associated with negative outcomes such as decreased engagement, decreased well-being, and increased counterproductive work behavior (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012). Yet, during a hardship as widespread and prolonged as the COVID-19 pandemic, some studies found complex, beneficial effects of negative emotions (e.g., Gabriel et al., 2021; Min et al., 2021). These divergent findings prompted us to wonder whether research from this period could be leveraged to develop a more refined understanding of the effects of negative emotions at work.

Recent research has taken a more nuanced view of negative emotions, adopting a *functional* perspective that highlights their potential to produce positive work-related outcomes. From this standpoint, emotions—whether positive or negative—can provide adaptive value by helping individuals respond effectively to their environment (Elfenbein, 2007). Discrete emotion theories, for example, examine short-lived, specific emotions such as fear and anger and how they can motivate action to address situational demands (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). Empirical evidence supports this view: frustration can spur proactive behavior (Barclay et al., 2022; Bindl, 2019), anger can drive action against injustice (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012), and guilt can reduce turnover intentions (Conroy et al., 2017). Complementing this, affective shift theory suggests

that a *downshift* in negative affect followed by an *upshift* in positive affect facilitates integrative thinking and intuitive behavioral regulation, and when these shifts occur within a similar time frame, employees are more likely to generate creative ideas and engage in extra-role behavior (Yang et al., 2016). Evidence from both perspectives indicates that, although negative emotions are unpleasant, they can serve important functions at work, such as signaling the need to address and improve a problematic situation (e.g., George, 2011).

While this research provides a silver lining in these troubled times, prominent perspectives remain largely limited in their ability to explain *when* negative emotions may have potentially beneficial effects. For example, affective shift theory focuses on one primary moderator, upticks in positive affect, to explain when such functional effects may occur (Bledow et al., 2011). Similarly, scholars applying discrete emotion theories often focus on a single negative emotion or a small subset, lacking a comprehensive framework to explain the potential positive effects of various negative emotions at work (e.g., Conroy et al., 2017; Lebel, 2017). Other prominent theories are also limited in explaining when and how beneficial work-related outcomes arise from negative emotions. For example, the threat-rigidity hypothesis suggests that people respond to uncertain events with negative emotions and well-learned responses but does not account for how employees adapt to challenging situations with novel behaviors (Staw et al., 1981). Moreover, the challenge-hindrance stressor framework argues that the beneficial effects of emotional experience arise from positive, but not negative, emotions (Rosen et al., 2020).

Given that prominent theories provide incomplete conceptual explanations of the effects of negative emotions, we conducted an integrated review of applied and social psychology literature—a method well-suited to redirect future research and chart new directions (Cronin & George, 2023). This review is grounded in the aforementioned functional theories (Elfenbein,

2007) as well as Personality Systems Interaction (PSI) theory. PSI theory describes how individuals regulate motivation, emotion, and behavior across varying situational demands (Kuhl, 2000a). Like functional theories of emotion, PSI theory suggests that people can realize their full potential by successfully adapting to challenging situations via the flexible activation of multiple self-regulatory processes, including those that support goal pursuit (e.g., self-control) and those that promote emotional reflection and integration (e.g., meaning-making systems) (Koole et al., 2019; Kuhl & Koole, 2008). As such, PSI theory provides a theoretical framework to organize the factors that help foster functional outcomes from negative emotions.

Our review offers several contributions to theory and practice. First, although functional perspectives suggest that negative emotions can be useful (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), less is known about when and why such effects occur. By identifying multilevel boundary conditions we offer a more holistic view of the factors that can shape a range of negative emotions, extending prior research that has typically focused on single discrete emotions in isolation. Second, our review and theoretical model clarify how functional outcomes from negative emotions can emerge—either through self-regulatory skills or through external support from leaders, teams, and organizational practices. In doing so, we extend affective shift theory by considering a broader set of contingencies beyond increases in positive affect that can enable functional outcomes. Third, we extend PSI theory, which broadly suggests that external support for employees' psychological needs is a primary source of affect regulation (Koole et al., 2019), by specifying concrete leader, team, and organizational factors that provide such support. Finally, our review highlights the crucial, but often neglected, role of emotion regulation for people facing challenging external events. Accordingly, our integrative review provides practical guidance for leaders to channel negative emotions functionally while minimizing potential

negative effects during times of crisis.

## **Method**

### **Integrative Review**

Integrative reviews gather and synthesize what is known about a topic across research communities, enabling readers to view the topic from a different perspective (Cronin & George, 2023). They redirect research through critical analysis and synthesis of literature from different disciplines and are particularly appropriate when a body of work requires reconceptualization. In this review, we bring together research on emotions from management and psychology to delineate the boundaries of existing emotion theories and advance new directions for studying negative emotions. Drawing on findings from the COVID-19 context, we illustrate how negative emotions can yield functional outcomes, thereby extending emotion theories beyond the symmetrical assumption and offering a nuanced perspective that can guide future research.

Rather than bound our review to an arbitrary 5- or 10-year period, we identified the COVID-19 pandemic, a period rife with negative emotions, as a theoretically relevant period for several reasons. First, the pandemic was a novel, salient, and disruptive event that forced people to adapt to changing work demands (Morgeson et al., 2015). As such, the pandemic provides a context where functional theories predict that negative emotions could have positive outcomes (Lazarus, 1991). Second, scholars argue that events producing emotions of prolonged duration may challenge existing theories in important ways (Elfenbein, 2023). Thus, the protracted nature of the pandemic as an eliciting stimulus provides a unique opportunity to examine the individual-level effects of emotions at work across time and varied groups. Third, during the pandemic, the everyday emotional experience was flipped with people experiencing more negative than positive emotions (e.g., Whiston et al., 2022). Fourth, a significant quantity of empirical research

published in organizational behavior and social psychology during the pandemic focused on negative emotions (Newman et al., 2022). For these reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic provides a relevant theoretical context with ample research to re-examine the symmetrical assumption driving this integrative review.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

Because the pandemic started in different countries at different times, we relied on the authors' description of the timing of their data collection. Specifically, we included studies in which the authors (a) explicitly mentioned the COVID-19 time period as the date for data collection, (b) measured a variable specifically related to the pandemic (e.g., COVID-19 worry), and/or (c) mentioned COVID-19 as the temporal backdrop for the study.

We include studies examining several affectively related constructs in our model, including discrete emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), mood, dispositional traits (e.g., trait affect), and emotion regulation. We use standard definitions for these constructs (e.g., Barsade & Gibson, 2007). We treat negative affect as an umbrella term reflecting a broad range of feeling states, including negative mood, discrete negative emotional states, and dispositional traits. Discrete negative emotions, such as fear and anger, are relatively intense, short-lived affective states triggered by specific events, each with distinct appraisals, action tendencies, and physiological responses (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 2011). Negative mood refers to more diffuse, relatively lower-intensity affective states that are typically longer in duration and less tied to specific events than discrete emotions. Trait negative affect (hereafter trait NA) reflects a dispositional tendency to experience pervasive negative emotional states and maintain a negative view of oneself across time and situations (Barsade & Gibson, 2007).

We conceptualize negative affect as distinct from the interrelated constructs of stress and

strain. Stress involves a psychological and physiological response occurring when the perceived situational demands exceed personal coping responses (Lazarus, 1991), whereas strain refers to the outcomes resulting from prolonged exposure to stressors or chronic perceptions that stress consistently exceeds one's coping abilities (Boswell et al., 2004). From this perspective, emotions can be modeled as either predictors or outcomes of stress. For example, repeated feelings of anxiety (a discrete emotion) can lead to stress when those feelings overwhelm a person's coping capacity, while perceiving ongoing stress due to insufficient coping resources can, in turn, produce discrete emotions such as sadness. Consistent with our research question, we model discrete emotions as a predictor variable and stress and strain as criterion variables.

### **Information Sources and Search Strategy**

We identified research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic that examined emotional experience, targeting relevant, high-impact journals in management, applied psychology, and social psychology<sup>1</sup>. Using keywords related to the COVID-19 pandemic and emotions (e.g., "COVID" AND "emotions") returned 871 references (see Fig. 1). Our selection criteria included empirical articles in work-related samples that described COVID-19 as an important part of the research design and also measured an emotional variable. We retained 76 articles based on these definitions and criteria. Consistent with previous reviews (e.g., Smith et al., 2022), we then used Google Scholar and other search engines (ResearchGate) to capture articles that may have fallen outside our primary searches, resulting in 18 additional articles. Finally, we conducted a broad search on the Web of Science using similar keywords which yielded 1343 references. We then removed duplicate articles from previous searches and non-English articles. Skimming the abstracts of the remaining articles revealed that the vast majority

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of the journals included in our search can be found in an online repository: [https://osf.io/enzcx/?view\\_only=155e99c1c7174502bbd5d35ecc996bc8](https://osf.io/enzcx/?view_only=155e99c1c7174502bbd5d35ecc996bc8)

were either (a) topically irrelevant for this review (e.g., non-work settings) or (b) of insufficient methodological quality (e.g., single-source, single-time studies). We retained seven additional articles in this step. Taken together, this provided a starting sample of 101 articles examining emotional experiences during the pandemic.

### **Study Selection and Sample**

As a final step, we reviewed each of the articles along three criteria to ensure their appropriateness for inclusion in our sample. First, as described above, we screened each article for the dates of data collection that occurred during the pandemic. Second, we retained studies that included negative emotional variables (e.g., discrete emotions, mood, etc.) in the empirical or theoretical model. See Table 1 for the frequencies of each category of emotion. Negative emotions were defined and coded as intense, unpleasant feelings, both experienced and expressed, such as fear, shame, and anger (Diener et al., 1995). Positive emotions were defined and coded as pleasant feelings, including joy, interest, and compassion (Fredrickson, 2001). Third, we ensured that each article had a work or worker-related outcome. This includes a range of variables, such as task performance, employee well-being (e.g., somatic complaints, burnout), proactivity (e.g., voice, job crafting), motivation (e.g., engagement, resilience), and counterproductive behavior (e.g., withdrawal, absenteeism). This resulted in a final sample of 73 articles (see online Appendix A for a full list of references).

Of these 73 articles, thirty-five (48%) came from management and applied psychology journals, 30 (41%) from psychology, and eight (11%) from other disciplines, including social work, engineering, and medicine. Collectively, these articles reported 100 individual studies utilizing samples from 20 countries around the world. Most studies analyzed data at the individual level, though four studies examined dyadic relationships, and another four employed

multilevel team analyses.

### **Coding**

Once we constructed our database of articles, we began coding their studies along a variety of dimensions. For each study, we first coded the research method, sample size, sample country, and data source (e.g., field, online). We also coded the design of each study as “cross-sectional”, “lagged/longitudinal”, “experimental”, or “qualitative”. For studies that modeled or measured emotions as an independent or mediating variable predicting work-related outcomes, we coded the emotion type (“discrete”, “mood”, “trait”), and corresponding criterion variable. We also coded the measured duration of emotion as “right now” or “daily”, “weekly”, “monthly”, “in general”, or “trait”.<sup>2</sup>

We coded outcomes as being either functional (“positive”) or dysfunctional (“negative”). Here we were guided by functional theoretical perspectives which argue that all emotions, whether positive or negative, can provide adaptive value for people (Elfenbein, 2007; George, 2011). Functional theorists suggest that emotions signal potential threats and opportunities, preparing and motivating people to respond (Frijda, 1986; Parrott, 2002; Roseman, 2011). From this perspective, a response is deemed as “functional” if it helps an individual person to adapt to a challenging situation (Elfenbein, 2023; Lazarus, 1991). As such, “positive” outcomes were coded as those that were beneficial for employees (e.g., increased engagement or helping behavior), whereas “negative” outcomes were seen as detrimental for employees (e.g., increased withdrawal, lower job satisfaction, counterproductive work behavior) (Thatcher et al., 2023). Next, we coded for the presence of moderators in the theoretical or empirical model. We then

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<sup>2</sup> We were only able to code those articles for which this information was available, as several provided insufficient information to assess the measured duration.

developed categories for the type of moderator. To facilitate this process, we used a qualitative process to group moderators into similar categories, which we describe in more detail below.

## **Results**

Our review unearths two main processes explaining the effects of negative emotions during the pandemic. First, we find that negative emotions can have direct effects in the form of functional and dysfunctional outcomes. Although many studies demonstrated the negative effects of negative emotions, we were struck by the variance in observed outcomes with several studies demonstrating positive effects. Indeed, only half of the coded relationships between negative emotions and outcomes in our sample indicated a harmful effect of a negative emotion (i.e., a negative outcome or a reduction of a beneficial outcome), whereas 35% of coded relationships indicated no effect of a negative emotion, and even 11% indicated a positive effect of a negative emotion (either a beneficial outcome or a reduction in a harmful outcome). Second, given the substantial variance in these findings, we found contingent effects whereby moderating factors either (a) channel negative emotions into functional outcomes, (b) buffer against the negative effects of negative emotions, or (c) enhance the negative effects of negative emotions. We provide an overview of our theoretical model in Figure 2 and briefly summarize these findings below. More details and exemplar articles are provided in Table 2.

### **Direct Effects**

#### ***Dysfunctional Effects of Negative Emotions***

Negative emotions experienced during the pandemic were problematic for employees in terms of employee health, well-being, and work engagement. Because these findings are consistent with the notion that unregulated negative emotions are stressors with deleterious effects for individuals (Lazarus, 1991), we only briefly note them here, directing the reader

toward previous theory and reviews (e.g., Fox & Spector, 1999; Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Pustovit et al., 2024).

First, studies demonstrated that negative emotions had harmful effects on individual productivity and well-being at work. For example, Trougakos and colleagues (2020) surveyed 503 employees across the first four weeks of stay-at-home orders in Canada, finding that anxiety about contracting COVID-19 was negatively associated with goal progress and positively associated with somatic complaints (e.g., headache, nausea, and fatigue). Several other studies found a negative association between anxiety and work engagement. Results from an 8-week diary study of 281 employees during the pandemic show that anxiety resulting from consuming COVID-19 related news reduced employees' work engagement (Andel, Arvan, et al., 2021). Similarly, Hu and colleagues (2020) found that daily anxiety triggered by thoughts of COVID-19 mortality was negatively associated with daily job engagement. Fu and colleagues (2021) found that daily anxiety reported at work during the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative effect on next-day functioning, reducing engagement and increasing emotional exhaustion. Second, researchers also found negative effects of feeling lonely at work. Feeling loneliness at work during COVID-19 was positively associated with higher exhaustion and depression (Andel, Shen, et al., 2021; Becker et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Third, feeling angry and frustrated during the pandemic was found to be positively associated with turnover intentions (Popa et al., 2023) and negatively associated with perceptions of meaningful work (Aleksić et al., 2024).

In summary, we found evidence of the negative effects of feeling the negative emotions of anxiety, anger, frustration, and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this does not tell the whole story as we uncovered substantial variance in the effects of negative emotions at work during the pandemic.

### *Functional Effects of Negative Emotions*

Negative emotions experienced during COVID-19 produced a variety of functional outcomes in terms of work-related effort, proactivity, helping/OCB, and health-related compliance behaviors. Interestingly, the duration of emotion, as measured in each study, played a significant role in whether a positive outcome was observed. Please see Table 3 for a summary of these results. Specifically, the shorter the measured duration of emotion, the greater the likelihood of a positive effect of a negative emotion. Emotions measured in terms of “daily” or “right now” had the highest ratio of positive effects (23.64%), followed by emotions measured “weekly” (12.98%), “monthly” (8.11%), as a trait (5.71%), or “in general” (1.72%). Thus, more immediate or momentary negative emotions were more likely to be associated with positive outcomes than emotions experienced more frequently or over longer periods.

We interpret this finding to be in line with discrete emotional theories that take a functional perspective, suggesting that brief negative emotions can help people adapt to challenges (Lazarus, 1991). There are currently two dominant explanations for the functional effects of negative emotions. First, each discrete emotion has a unique action tendency that produces a state of action readiness and guides behavior (Frijda, 1986; Scherer & Walbott, 1994). For example, fear's action tendency to protect the self can be helpful if it is activated in ways that minimize harm (LeDoux, 2016). Second, negative emotions provide a signaling function, highlighting discrepancies between the current situations and one's values, desires, goals, or needs (Frijda, 1986; George, 2011). For example, feeling guilty after missing a deadline may make a person realize they disappointed their team. Thus, negative emotions can also function by motivating action to reduce gaps between actual and desired states.

Supporting the contention that negative emotions can have functional effects, our review

revealed several studies finding that fear and anxiety produced functional outcomes. Fear's action tendency and function is to protect people against harm, however the range of behaviors that people can take to protect themselves can vary widely from flight, freezing, to vigilance and increased defensive effort (Lebel, 2016). Indeed, we found evidence for a range of protective behaviors motivated by fear during the pandemic, including less obvious fear-induced behaviors such as learning new skills, engaging in extra effort, and adapting to changed circumstances while continuing to work. Specifically, Gabriel and colleagues (2021) found that job seekers' COVID-19 induced job search anxiety was positively associated with job search effort. The authors also found that job seekers anxious about their prospects of landing a job during COVID-19 increased their efforts when they proactively pondered ways to improve their job search. Similarly, Lebel and colleagues (2023) found that employees feeling fearful about their day-to-day finances proactively developed job-related skills. Another study found evidence that fears of contracting COVID-19 were positively associated with proactive job crafting (Zampetakis, 2022). In this case, fear motivated people to seek job-related resources and challenges, which in turn was positively associated with work engagement.

Moreover, two separate studies found positive correlations between feeling fear during COVID-19 and health-related preventative behaviors at work (e.g., hand washing, complying with health regulations). In a lagged study of 319 employees in the United States, there was a positive association between feeling afraid and COVID-19 preventative behaviors one month later (Slaughter et al., 2021). Similarly, Russell and colleagues (2023) found a positive association between fear and COVID-19 preventative behaviors in both a year-long longitudinal study and an experimental recall task. Taken together, there is strong evidence that feeling afraid made employees more likely to wear masks, wash hands, and social distance at work, all of

which are protective behaviors that benefit people's health and safety both at home and at work.

There is also some, albeit weaker, evidence supporting the functional view of other discrete negative emotions. For example, the function of feeling frustrated is to motivate action to change the situation (Roseman, 2011). Supporting this perspective, Barclay and colleagues (2022) found that employees' frustration with COVID-induced job changes was positively associated with proactive job crafting. They also found that frustration helped employees adapt on the job to the extent that they proactively minimized obstacles and worked to prevent negative outcomes at work. Thus, there is support for the notion that frustration can motivate employees to proactively make changes on the job (e.g., Bindl, 2019). Moreover, in separate studies of French and American citizens recruited via online panels, Díaz and Cova (2022) found that disgust towards pathogens was associated with an increased frequency of health behaviors such as staying at home as much as possible, keeping social distances, washing one's hands, and wearing a mask in public. As another example, anger, whose function is to motivate individuals to resolve problems, was positively associated with the detection of misinformation related to COVID-19. Bago and colleagues (2022) found correlational evidence that anger helped people detect fake articles written about the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, they also found that other negative emotions, such as disgust, fear, and sadness, either decreased or had no effect on truth discernment. Thus, there is some evidence that anger could play a unique role in helping employees detect false information. Given the prevalence of misinformation, particularly in social media, this preliminary finding should hopefully spur more research on the topic.

In summary, two main themes emerged from studies reporting main effects. First, negative emotions have negative effects on employee well-being. The second set of findings broadly suggests that certain discrete negative emotions, even if unpleasant, can be functional

based on the specific behavioral response they produce. More specifically, negative emotions provide a signaling function and motivate behaviors that help a person adapt to the situation (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). These findings demonstrate support for a functional view of discrete emotions based on each emotion's respective action tendency. An important theoretical implication of these direct effects lies in challenging the widespread symmetrical assumption that negative emotions "always" have negative effects.

### **Contingent Effects**

Our review highlights that the effects of negative emotions at work are highly contingent. In some cases, they can be harnessed to promote functional outcomes; in others, they contribute to strain or dysfunction. Nearly half of the relationships reviewed showed null effects, underscoring the importance of moderators. We identify three types of moderating factors—those that enable functional use, buffer harm, or amplify harm. Drawing on PSI theory (Kuhl, 2000b) provides a structure for organizing these moderating factors, suggesting two primary categories of resources that enable individuals to cope effectively with negative emotions: (1) self-regulatory skills and traits that support internal emotion and motivation regulation, and (2) external support that buffers stress and enhances access to adaptive processing systems (Kuhl & Koole, 2008; Koole et al., 2019). Below, we define and describe these two categories of moderators and illustrate each with exemplar findings from our integrative review.

### ***Self-Regulation Skills***

The first category of moderators includes self-regulatory skills. These skills consist of *self-relaxation*, or the ability to down-regulate negative affect in response to challenging situations (e.g., taking deep breaths so as to not act impulsively based on anger); *self-motivation*—the ability to up-regulate positive affect to translate motivation into action (e.g.,

reappraising one's anxiety into a state of excitement); and *system switching*— the ability to flexibly switch between both affective- and cognitive-based thinking (Kuhl & Baumann, 2021).

Several papers provided evidence that self-relaxation helped people downregulate their anxiety in ways that benefited them or others. For instance, reflecting on the health risks of the pandemic, or death reflection, helped turn employees' feelings of death anxiety into higher levels of citizenship behavior (Zhong et al., 2021). As another example, perceiving one's work as having purpose and meaning helped to weaken the negative effects of felt anxiety during COVID-19 (Anzel, Arvan, et al., 2021). Additionally, Schlaegel and colleagues (2023) argued and found that self-regulatory skills, such as remaining calm, helped individuals downregulate negative emotions to buffer the negative effects of COVID-19 on individual work performance. Finally, Anzel, Shen, and Arvan (2021) found that employees who were self-compassionate, mindful and forgiving rather than self-judging, experienced reduced depression from work loneliness during the pandemic. This study also found that self-compassion suffered the negative effect of loneliness on citizenship behavior. In short, their findings suggest that being self-compassionate helps down-regulate one's loneliness, allowing them more space to recover.

Self-motivation, being able to generate positive emotion or energy to act despite negative emotion (Kuhl, 2000a), also helped people to regulate during the pandemic. For example, in the paper by Schlaegel and colleagues (2023) mentioned above, the authors also argued and found that self-regulatory skills, like focusing on goals and performance, helped individuals upregulate positive emotions to remain focused on work tasks, thus weakening the detrimental effects of COVID-19 on individual work performance. As another example, having self-control helped buffer against the negative effects of loneliness on emotional exhaustion and life satisfaction during the pandemic (Wang et al., 2021). These authors speculated that having higher levels of

personal control (e.g., having higher self-motivation ability) helped people resist distractions, stay focused, and maintain their performance while working remotely during the pandemic. Taken together, acting in a more controlled manner helped people maintain their energy by upregulating positive energy to focus in the presence of negative emotions.

There was also one example of flexible switching—the ability to switch from “hot” emotional systems to “cool” cognitive systems. Li and colleagues (2022) found that cognitive reflection could buffer the negative relationship between crisis-induced emotion and information accuracy judgments. That is, people with high levels of analytic thinking ability were better able to detect false information about COVID-19 even when they were feeling strong emotions. Though only one article fit into this category, several others hinted at the role of flexible switching. For example, death reflection likely helped people switch to more deliberate thinking rather than reacting to the “hot” thinking activated by death anxiety (Zhong et al., 2021). Taken together, these authors’ findings provided evidence that a combination of *both* cognitive (death reflection) and emotional (death anxiety) states could produce functional outcomes.

Across the studies reviewed, self-regulation—including self-relaxation, self-motivation, and system switching—helped transform negative emotions into more functional work outcomes. Self-regulatory skills thus appear central to adaptive coping with workplace distress. Among the three forms, self-relaxation was most frequently observed, followed by self-motivation (e.g., focusing on goals), and finally, flexible switching between cognitive and affective modes of processing.

### ***Other Individual-Level Moderating Factors***

We also found evidence that certain individual-level factors made the effects of negative emotions *worse* during the pandemic. PSI theory again provides a compelling explanation for the

effects of these differences, as people who remain “stuck” in one personality system, such as being too self-disciplined (referred to as intention memory) are unable to access other parts of themselves that are needed for effective adaptation (Kuhl, 2000a). For example, highly conscientious employees consistently reported higher levels of anxiety from perceived setbacks at work due to COVID-19 relative to employees lower in conscientiousness (Seo et al., 2023). This finding suggests that highly conscientious people may have been too rigid during the pandemic, limiting their ability to cope. In another example, the negative relationship between anxiety and work engagement was stronger for employees with high prosocial orientation (Andel, Arvan, et al., 2021). The authors speculate that being motivated by others’ needs made people more, not less, reactive to a pandemic impacting so many around the world. Taken together, being highly conscientious or prosocially motivated may be “too much of a good thing” (Grant & Schwartz, 2011) as these traits were associated with negative outcomes during the pandemic. As we discuss below, future research should further examine and delineate when these and other traits have positive and/or negative outcomes during times of crisis.

As another example of how being too fixed in one’s thinking can harm adaptability, Howe and Menges (2022) found that knowledge workers with a fixed mindset about remote work tended to feel more negative and less positive emotions when working from home during the pandemic. Conversely, these authors found that knowledge workers with a growth mindset who believed that remote work is a skill that can be developed fared better and had higher productivity relative to those with a fixed mindset. Moreover, Lebel and colleagues (2023) found that impression management motives strengthened the relationship between perceptions of financial insecurity and burnout. According to PSI theory, individuals with impression management motives were likely too focused on “ought” goals, such as being recognized by

one's supervisor for being proactive, which likely made them feel more burnt out when feeling fearful at work. Finally, Gabriel and colleagues (2021) found that a belief in conspiracy theories strengthened the relationship between COVID-19 induced job search anxiety and affective rumination. Per PSI theory, a belief in conspiracy theories activated a chronic need to scan for threats, leaving them stuck in a negative state and thus likely to experience worse effects from feeling nervous about searching for jobs during the pandemic.

### ***External Support from Leader or Team***

**Leader Support, Concern for Others, and Regulation Strategies.** According to PSI theory, a second form of emotion regulation enabling functional outcomes is social support (Koole et al., 2019). Having leaders or teammates who are sensitive to the individual's psychological needs can help the person cope with challenging situations (Koole & Jostmann, 2004). Along these lines, we found evidence that leaders and teams who provided support helped employees cope with the negative emotions during the pandemic.

For example, leaders' expressions of positive emotions influenced employee perceptions and behaviors at work during the pandemic. Specifically, Belkin and Kong (2022) found a positive relationship between uncertainty and felt gratitude when employees perceived that their leaders demonstrated a high level of compassion, care, and affection during the pandemic, and no relationship when leaders demonstrated low levels of these emotions. Employee felt gratitude, in turn, was positively related to employees' willingness to speak up at work. In another study, leaders who expressed hope during the pandemic were perceived as providing more support to their employees (Shen et al., 2023). Similarly, leaders expressing positive affect moderated the relationship between leaders' fear of COVID-19 and the extent to which leaders were perceived by team members as encouraging collaboration and teamwork (Montani & Vandenberghe,

2023). Being more collaborative, in turn, enhanced team commitment. Specifically, leaders who felt both high fear of COVID-19 and high positive emotions were significantly more effective at promoting team goals compared to those with high fear but low positive emotions. This finding supports recent research suggesting that leaders expressing a combination of positive and negative emotions at different times can aid team performance (Levitt et al., 2024).

Finally, leaders who used appropriate emotion regulation strategies during the pandemic helped their employees cope with their emotions by transforming negative emotions into functional outcomes. Problem-focused coping, defined as leaders' attempts to directly manipulate external situations or employees (Little et al., 2013), is generally viewed as an effective emotion regulation strategy compared to emotion-focused strategies (Gross, 1998). Indeed, leaders who engaged in a problem-focused coping strategy during the pandemic buffered against the negative effects of hopelessness on a group's belief in their ability to get work done (F. Wang et al., 2023). In contrast, when leaders attempted to minimize or diminish employee feelings (an emotion-focused strategy), the negative effects of perceived team hopelessness strengthened, reducing the team's collective efficacy. In yet another example, leaders who were focused on the well-being of their employees during the pandemic helped redirect employees' energy towards productive work behaviors, focusing them on helping others (e.g., Hu et al., 2020). Interestingly, this study also found that engaging in servant leadership transformed employees' state anxiety into higher levels of job engagement.

While our review generally focused on individual-level outcomes, two studies examined the effects of leader support on more macro-level outcomes. Howe and colleagues (2024) found that companies whose CEO expressed statements of concern and care for employees had stronger stock price performance during the volatile period between February – March 2020.

Exploratory analyses suggested that having CEOs express concern and humanity towards their employees during public conference calls may have longer-term *positive* effects on stock price. Similarly, in a fascinating study, Sergent and Stajkovic (2020) used text analysis to examine transcripts of governmental briefings and found that female governors in the United States expressed more empathy and confidence than male governors in their public statements during COVID-19. The authors argue that increased leader empathy and confidence helps explain why states with female governors had fewer COVID-19 related deaths compared to states with male governors. The authors further speculate that these findings align with a “female leadership advantage” in which female leaders are able to utilize more charisma and individualized consideration during times of crisis (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Collectively, these studies suggest that employees appreciated their supervisor’s expressions of positive emotions during the pandemic, resulting in increased job engagement and commitment. Moreover, the expression of positive emotions (empathy, care, and confidence) by leaders seemingly had much larger, broader, positive effects on organizational performance (Howe et al., 2024; Sergent & Stajkovic, 2020). This supports PSI theory in identifying leader support as an important source of affect regulation for employees during times of crisis.

**Dangers of Leader’s Lack of Concern and Communication of Negative Emotions.** In contrast to leaders who express positive emotions, those who express negative emotions may exacerbate stress and harm employee outcomes. Leader anxiety had a particularly strong negative effect on employees. Leaders’ felt anxiety from financial insecurity during the pandemic was associated with lower levels of perceived ethical leadership by their employees (Qu et al., 2024). Additionally, leader-reported anxiety during the pandemic was positively associated with subordinate-reported abusive supervision (Shen et al., 2023). This study also

found that leader gender played a moderating role such that there was a positive relationship between leader anxiety and abusive supervision only for male, but not female, leaders. This difference by gender suggests that men in leadership roles were *less* able to effectively regulate or express their anxiety, displacing their emotions on others in the form of abusive supervision (Oh & Farh, 2017). These findings do not imply that leaders should avoid feeling anxious during a crisis; rather, leaders should be mindful of how they express this emotion at work. There seems to be preliminary evidence that if leaders share negative emotions with team members who have similar feelings, which in the pandemic was often the case, then such sharing may help the team collectively to better cope with the negative emotions and even channel the energy inherent in such emotions towards some positive outcomes (Howe et al., 2021).

Seo and colleagues provide another example of leaders who made things worse for employees experiencing negative emotions during COVID-19. Leaders who were highly focused on organizational finances during the pandemic, or who had a “bottom-line mentality,” were found to strengthen the effects of employees’ work-related anxiety on impeding progress towards daily goals (Seo et al., 2023). In contrast, leaders who did not exhibit a bottom-line mentality helped re-direct employees’ task-related anxiety to make progress on their work-related goals. Interestingly, this finding suggests that leaders should focus relatively more on their employees’ well-being and relatively less on emphasizing organizational goals and finances during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic—a finding that resonates with the study on CEOs reported above (Howe et al., 2024).

**Team-level Support.** While there was substantial evidence that leaders shaped how employees coped with their negative emotions during the pandemic, there were significantly fewer studies examining the effects of teams. In an impressive, six-wave, multisource study of

hotel employees, Wee and Fehr (2021) found that team-level compassionate behavior buffered against the relationship between perceiving disruptions at work resulting from COVID-19 and individual suffering. They also found that compassionate behavior, which involves caring for and comforting one's team members, mitigated the downstream negative effects of felt suffering on one's propensity to speak up at work. The conclusion from this research is that teams can help employees cope with strong negative emotions by being compassionate, reinforcing the findings reported above for leaders who acted compassionately.

### ***External Support from Organizational Human Resource Management Practices***

The third category of moderators involved support for employees via human resource management (HRM) practices, particularly socially responsible human resource (CSR) practices. For example, perceiving that one's organization focused on employee needs and flexible work helped buffer the negative effects of anxiety from news about COVID-19 on work withdrawal (Shao et al., 2021). Additionally, Aleksić and colleagues (2024) found that perceiving that one's organization took action to help the community weakened the negative effects of frustration at work during COVID-19. The findings from this study also suggest that when organizations engaged in CSR practices, employees were able to re-interpret their work, maintaining a sense of purpose even when frustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Hillebrandt and Barclay (2022) found that organizations providing prosocial messages highlighting meaning and positive impact at work reduced the negative effects of feeling anxious during the pandemic. These authors argue that employees receiving prosocial messages were able to reappraise the situation, focusing their attention on the needs of others. Finally, researchers found that sustainable human resources practices, such as recruiting socially responsible employees, providing CSR training, and taking account of employees' social contributions in performance appraisal, buffered the

negative effect of perceived threat on hope and attenuated the positive effect of threat on anxiety, both of which in turn impacted employee insomnia (J. Wang et al., 2023). In summary, the HRM practices related to corporate social responsibility and meaning at work played a buffering role during the pandemic by demonstrating support for employees and attending to their needs.

Additionally, one other study found that providing fair pay practices during the pandemic helped supervisors who felt financially insecure during the pandemic feel less anxiety at work (Qu et al., 2024). These results suggest the importance of justice perceptions for emotional responses in times of uncertainty.

### **Discussion**

We set out to examine the effects of feeling negative emotions at work during the COVID-19 pandemic and challenge the tendency in “the management literature to argue for the inherent goodness of positive emotion and the inherent badness of negative emotion” (Elfenbein, 2007, p. 325). We found that negative emotions had a range of outcomes, both functional and dysfunctional, for employees. For example, negative emotions led to increased withdrawal and turnover intentions and decreased engagement and productivity. These findings are consistent with a large body of research suggesting that negative emotions have negative effects for employees at work. However, we also found that, at times, negative emotions had functional effects, such as motivating health-focused behaviors, increased proactivity, and helping behavior. Perhaps most importantly, we identified contingent factors in terms of self-regulatory skills or external support that either buffered against the dysfunctional effects of negative emotions or enabled functional effects of these emotions. Overall, this review supports the notion that negative emotions can be functional based on (a) their action tendency and signaling function in combination with (b) self-regulation skills or external support. These contingent factors provide

a roadmap for scholars and practitioners alike wishing to understand how to regulate negative emotions effectively during challenging times.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

The effects of negative emotions on individual outcomes are not uniform. We observed a range of functional effects stemming from negative emotions. While our findings support a discrete emotions perspective in that each unique emotion can have functional outcomes based on its distinct action tendency, we extend prior research by linking discrete emotions to a wider range of outcomes than previously explored in traditional organizational behavior research. For example, feeling afraid or anxious during the pandemic helped spark increased work effort (e.g., job search effort, proactive skill building) and promoted health-related behaviors (e.g., following COVID-19 protocols). Another theoretical contribution lies in utilizing PSI theory to explain factors that help buffer the deleterious effects of negative emotions at work during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to PSI theory, self-regulation and sources of external support are crucial for unlocking functional outcomes and mitigating the detrimental effects of negative emotions (Koole et al., 2019). Utilizing this framework extends discrete emotional theories by providing a more holistic framework for understanding *when* negative emotions might be functional, rather than examining isolated contingent factors (e.g., Conroy et al., 2017; Lebel, 2017). Thus, in tandem, we extend discrete emotional theories by more clearly delineating a range of moderators that can operate on a range of negative emotions (rather than a single emotion) and over a wider range of outcomes.

We also extend PSI theory, which describes sources of external support in broad terms, such as close interpersonal sources of support or as an environment that is sensitive to individual needs. Here, we clarify and better delineate what a work environment that is “supportive to the

person's psychological needs" looks like (Koole et al., 2019, p. 30). Organizations that provide flexible work arrangements, sources of mental support, and career development programs all help employees cope during times of crisis. Furthermore, organizations that provide open communication and prosocial messaging that reinforces how employee efforts can impact others help form the basis for a work environment that may be seen as being sensitive to individuals' psychological needs. Identification of these practices adds necessary detail to PSI theory and helps to specify practical implications, which are discussed more below.

We also extend previous research by answering calls to examine *multilevel* factors that influence the effects of emotions at work (Menges & Kilduff, 2015). Specifically, we provide a theoretical roadmap for identifying moderators at the individual, leader/team, and organizational levels of analysis. Intriguingly, the moderators at each level of analysis highlight the role of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and organizational forms of emotion regulation that can help employees cope with negative emotions during times of crisis. Organizational behavior research has predominantly focused on intrapersonal (e.g., reappraisal or suppression) or interpersonal (e.g., social support) forms of regulation. Less is known about what *organizations* can do to help regulate their emotions (Menges, 2012). Thus, we contribute by pointing scholars toward examining human resource practices that show compassion and care for employees while also helping them see meaning and purpose in what they do. In summary, our review pushes theory on emotions at work forward by highlighting the need to focus on regulating negative emotions rather than avoiding them (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

We opted to review research on negative emotions during COVID-19 because the pandemic was a theoretically relevant context as a novel, salient, and disruptive event (Morgeson

et al., 2015). At the same time, it is an open question as to whether our findings and model will generalize to other disruptive events or even more mundane work events. We believe the model has generalizability because it includes key variables such as emotion regulation and contextual moderators as suggested by other emotion scholars (e.g., Ashkanasy et al., 2017). Moreover, our results are similar to those found in related literatures, such as job insecurity, which find that negative emotions can motivate people to take action to secure their job (Shoss & Vancouver, 2024). We also believe that the model holds promise as a roadmap for scholars examining potential moderators of the effects of negative emotions at work, and we hope that future research tests for contingencies in a wider range of contexts and time periods.

Additionally, the papers in our sample do not directly measure physiological variables (e.g., stress hormones, blood pressure, cardiovascular disease). As such, there may be alternative potential theoretical framing taking a physiological perspective to understand the functional effects of negative emotions at work. For example, the allostatic model of stress suggests that initial responses to stressors can help people adapt to change; however, when the stress response becomes chronic people respond with allostatic overload meaning that environmental challenges exceed an individual's ability to cope (McEwen, 1998). As such, we join in the call of recent reviews (Ganster & Rosen, 2013) for scholars to take a physiological approach to understanding the effects of negative emotions at work.

We also want to note that some research provided what appears to be paradoxical findings. For example, one study found that conscientious employees struggled to cope during the pandemic, with higher levels of anxiety and reported setbacks at work (Seo et al., 2023), while another found that being disciplined, a key facet of this personality trait, helped employees to effectively regulate their emotions (Wang et al., 2021). As another example, Andel, Arvan,

and colleagues (2021) found that prosocial orientation, being oriented toward others, strengthened the negative effects of anxiety on work engagement during the pandemic, while other studies found beneficial effects of having a prosocial focus during the pandemic (Hillebrandt & Barclay, 2022). The preponderance of these studies suggests that having a prosocial focus likely helped employees to cope during the pandemic. Time may be a potentially overlooked factor in explaining these seemingly paradoxical findings, such that perhaps being prosocial at the onset of a disruptive event comes with higher anxiety but may, over time, help ease such anxiety. Alternatively, being prosocial might create burnout over time when not being able to see progress during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we can only speculate that time may be a factor, doing so once more underscores the role of emotion regulation, which, as a process, plays out over time and likely has different outcomes depending on when in that process a study is conducted. In addition, further as of now unstudied factors may influence the findings. For example, future research should investigate how leaders' and employees' implicit theories about the functionality of negative emotions influence the ways in which such emotions are experienced, expressed, and ultimately affect individual and collective outcomes. We thus hope that future research will further examine these potential paradoxes.

### **Towards a Better Understanding of Negative Emotions at Work**

The findings of our review lead us to suggest an agenda for the further study of negative emotions at work that identifies three focal areas.

#### ***Importance of Emotion Regulation and Multi-level Contingencies***

Several papers in our review primarily examined main effects and individual-level contingencies. However, emotions, including negative ones, are inherently social and often influenced by the group or organization to which people belong (e.g., Knight, Menges, & Bruch,

2018). For organization science in particular, a primary starting point for future research should be higher-level contextual moderators that shape the relationship between negative emotions and work-related outcomes. We believe that organizational behavior scholars are particularly well-suited to extend theories of emotions by examining multilevel influences on individual behavior during times of hardship.

For example, leadership behavior emerged as an important contingency in our model. In contrast to prominent reviews on crisis management which generally advise leaders to minimize their employees' negative emotions (e.g., Bundy et al., 2017), our review suggests that leaders should allow their employees to feel their emotions rather than avoid them. Thus, future research should examine what leaders can do to help employees regulate negative emotional experiences. Additionally, an intriguing finding from our review suggests that male and female leaders regulate their emotions differently, with women demonstrating more skill in this area (e.g., Shen et al., 2023). Future research would thus benefit from examining the specific actions leaders take to manage their own emotions while simultaneously regulating others' emotions. The neglected notion of emotion regulation has enormous potential to extend theory on crisis management and leadership in general. As such, this review will help forge a promising path to better understand the contextual leadership factors that produce functional outcomes from negative emotions.

### ***Examine Organizational-Level Sources of Support and Emotion Regulation***

Our review also produced a clear theme about what organizations can do to help buffer against the negative effects of negative emotions via employee-focused HR and CSR-related practices. However, the studies in this review did not shed light on factors enabling functional effects to occur. Thus, a promising next step is to explore how organizations can support employees in ways that make negative emotions functional. One promising direction is for

researchers to build on PSI theory to better articulate what an organizational culture of support looks like. As another suggestion, researchers could examine the role of organizations in creating an affective climate conducive to regulating, rather than avoiding, negative emotions during times of crisis (Parke & Seo, 2017). Our review suggests more research is needed on how organizational-level context shapes the individual-level outcomes of negative emotions.

### ***Focus on Discrete Emotions***

Our review suggests that a discrete emotions perspective provides a theoretical lens to better understand how emotions can produce functional outcomes, moving away from the rather blunt symmetrical assumption that negative emotional experiences are linked to negative outcomes. Simultaneously, research needs to move beyond focusing on specific discrete emotions and toward an understanding of the effects of feeling a combination of negative emotions. For example, future research could examine the interaction of distinct negative emotions to see whether they compete or combine to drive individual behavior. Further, scholars should explore how the sequencing of multiple emotions influences people's responses to challenging events. Examining this complexity will add nuance to future research by moving beyond each emotion's unique action tendency to examine interactive effects between emotions.

### **Practical Implications**

A major contribution of this review is identifying what leaders and organizations can do during the next disruptive event, be it a pandemic or economic shock, to help employees harness negative emotions in functional ways. While our review provided some evidence that negative emotions can be functional when regulated appropriately, we found *no* evidence of functional outcomes when leaders or organizations tried to increase the level of negative emotions felt by their employees. As such, we urge caution in interpreting our findings, which suggest

recommendations to *support* employees in their attempts to regulate negative emotions and *not* recommendations for creating negative emotions in employees.

To structure our practical recommendations, we begin with insights from emotional intelligence (EI) theory (Joseph & Newman, 2010; Menges, 2012), which suggests that effective emotion perception, particularly by those in positions of authority, can shape how employees experience and cope with negative emotions at work. Without the early recognition of negative emotions, employees may become “stuck” in reactive, stimulus-response spirals where behavior becomes rigid and maladaptive (Kuhl & Koole, 2008; Staw et al., 1981). Leaders who recognize and acknowledge employees’ emotions early can interrupt this spiral by redirecting attention and facilitating access to more adaptive motivational systems. We recognize that many leaders may not naturally excel at perceiving emotions and therefore encourage organizations to support leaders in developing these foundational emotional skills. In practice, expressing care and empathy might involve checking in regularly with team members about how they are feeling, acknowledging emotional challenges without immediately problem-solving, or publicly recognizing the emotional burden employees are undertaking. These simple but intentional behaviors communicate psychological availability and concern—creating the conditions for employees to feel safe expressing their emotions and engaging in adaptive coping.

Next, according to PSI theory, leaders can support employees in managing emotional states in ways that enable goal-directed behavior. First, organizations can promote self-relaxation by normalizing self-compassion and helping employees reframe challenges through meaningful work. For example, self-compassion helped to lower employee depression and burnout during the pandemic (Andel et al., 2021). Leaders who remain calm and provide space for employees to process emotions signal that distress is manageable, not something to suppress. Second, to foster

self-motivation, leaders should reinforce goal clarity, provide job autonomy, and link daily tasks to a larger purpose. For example, employees who maintained a sense of direction and personal control were more resilient under stress (Schlaegel et al., 2023). Recognizing progress and encouraging forward movement, even amid uncertainty, can help sustain energy in challenging times. Third, leaders can build capacity for flexible system switching by creating space for pause and reflection through debriefs or open dialogue. This helps employees shift out of emotionally reactive states and think more clearly under pressure.

In developing these practical implications, we carefully considered the ethical implications of our findings. Specifically, leaders might interpret the findings as suggesting the need to *increase* employees' negative affect at work. We feel that such a conclusion would be misguided and in contradiction to the theory and findings in this paper. For example, PSI theory suggests that frequent up-regulation of negative affect would *harm*, rather than foster, employees' ability to regulate during times of crisis. Furthermore, functional theories conceptualize a "functional" response as one that helps the *individual* meet the current challenges of the environment (Elfenbein, 2007; Lazarus, 1991). We use this definition of "functional," noting that it does not reflect functioning to improve organizational performance or the financial bottom line. Additionally, our results suggest that fleeting, rather than recurring, feelings of negative emotions can have functional individual outcomes. Importantly, this finding aligns with the literature on financial precarity which clearly demonstrates the negative effects of chronic negative emotions on employee well-being and productivity (Meuris & Leana, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

We reviewed the effects of negative emotions at work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the negative emotions often produced negative outcomes for employees, the research

suggests that there are many steps leaders and organizations can take to reduce such negative effects. Furthermore, our research also revealed the circumstances under which negative emotions produced positive outcomes for employees, such as health-related compliance behaviors, prosocial behavior, or increased effort on the job. The key to both buffering against the negative effects or unlocking the functional effects was emotion regulation. When employees have high regulation skills, have support from their leaders or teams, and/or work in organizations that have socially responsible HR practices, they are better able to regulate their emotions and direct their emotional energy productively—or at least not negatively. Through a better understanding of emotion regulation employees, leaders, teams, and organizations can better adapt to crises.

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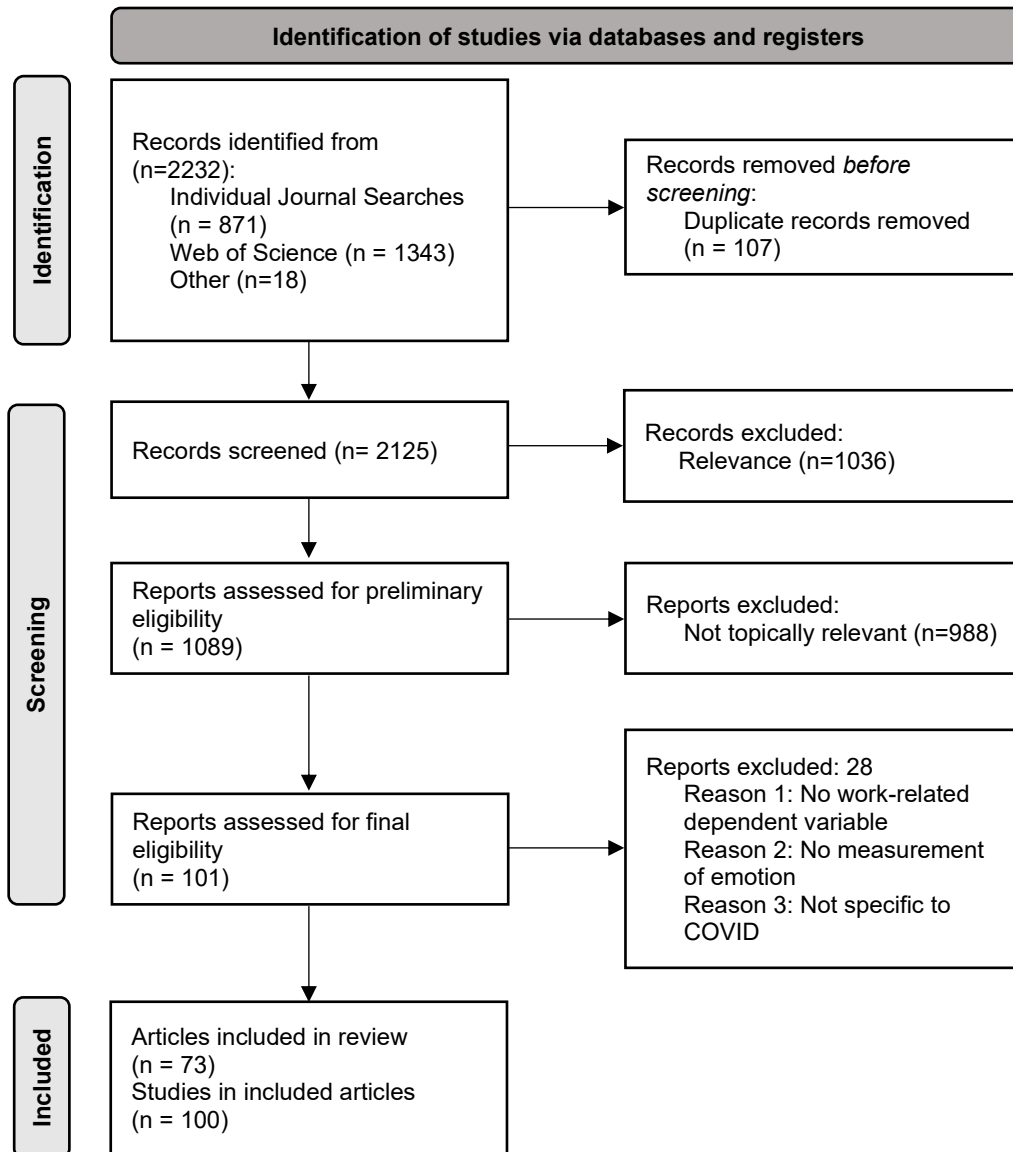
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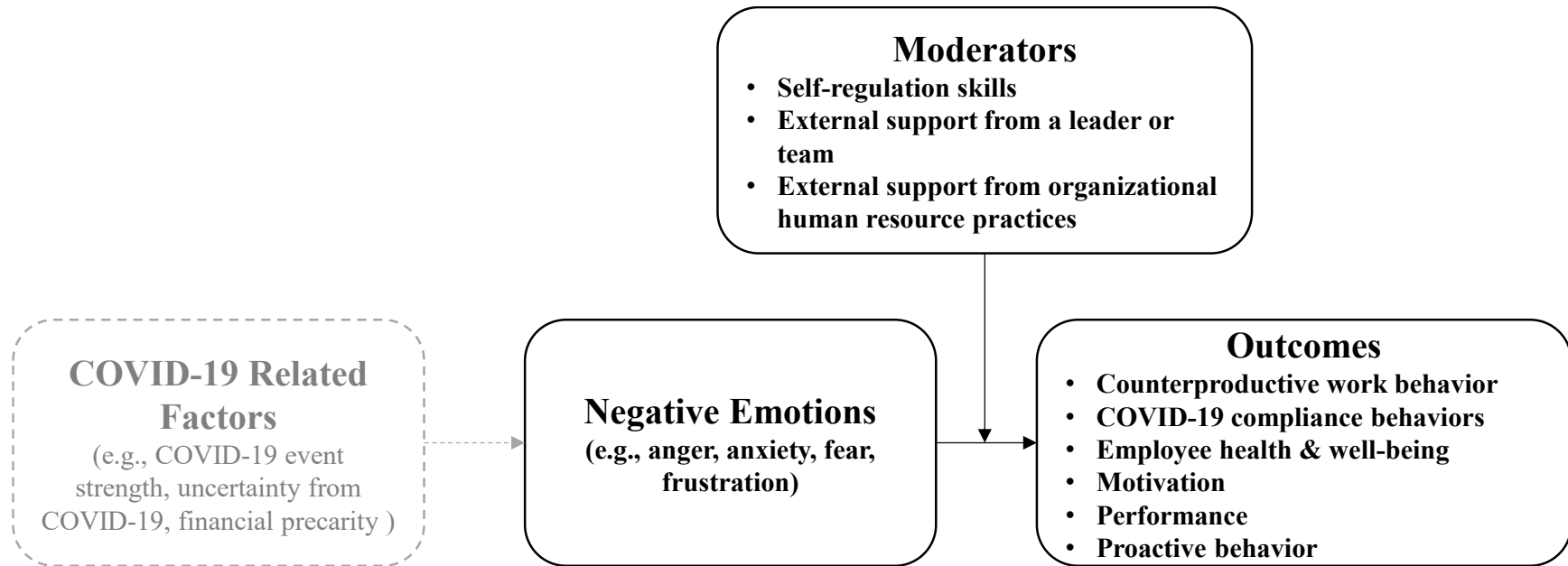
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**Figure 1: Literature Review Method**



**Figure 2: Conceptual Model**

*Note.* Dotted box and lines represent implied relationships that are not the focus of this review.

**Table 1***Negative Emotion Types Across Papers*

Category and Subcategory		Paper Count
Emotional Regulation		14
Discrete Emotion (57)	Anger	4
	Anxiety/Fear	37
	Disgust	3
	Frustration	3
	Sadness/Loneliness	10
Mood		13
Trait Negative Affect		8

*Note. Counts do not sum to number of articles reported in review due to double counting of articles that fit more than one category.*

**Table 2**

*Summary of Key Findings and Future Directions*

Process	Summary of key findings	Exemplar articles	Future research directions
Direct effects	Discrete emotions such as anxiety/fear, frustration, and discomfort have functional effects on specific outcomes based on the unique action tendency of each emotion.	Barclay et al., 2021: Frustration positively associated with job crafting.  Gabriel et al., 2021 & Lebel et al., 2023: Anxiety and fear positively associated with proactive behaviors such as problem solving and skill-building.	(A) Are there combinations of discrete emotions that produce functional outcomes?  (B) Are some negative discrete emotions more functional than others in work contexts?
Contingent: Self-regulatory skills	Three sets of self-regulatory skills emerged: self-relaxation, self-motivation, and system-switching. These skills either (a) strengthen the link between negative emotions and functional outcomes, or (b) weaken the link between negative emotions and dysfunctional outcomes.	Schlaegel et al., 2023: Self-regulation buffered the negative relationship between COVID-19 threat severity and individual performance at work.  Zhong et al., 2021: Death reflection activates the positive effect of death anxiety on OCB and pro-diversity behavior.	Understanding the dynamic interplay of negative emotions and emotion regulation resulting from challenging events.
Contingent: External support from leaders & teams	Two forms of contingencies emerged: (1) leader or team behaviors that strengthen the link between negative emotions and functional outcomes, and (2) leader or team behaviors that weaken the link between negative emotions and dysfunctional outcomes.	Hu et al., 2021: Servant leadership moderates the relationship between anxiety and prosocial behavior (helping others), such that the relationship is positive when servant leadership is high and there is no relationship when it is low.  Wee & Fehr, 2021: Team-level compassionate behavior buffers the negative effect of perceived uncertainty on individual suffering, and also buffers downstream negative effects of suffering on employee voice.	(A) How do leaders simultaneously regulate their own and others' emotions during a crisis?  (B) How do leaders and teams help to regulate their employees' emotions during prolonged periods of negative emotions?
Contingent: External support from organizational human resource practices	One form of contingency emerged: Organizational practices related to corporate social responsibility or meaning at work that weaken the relationship between negative emotion and negative outcomes.	Shao et al., 2021: The contingent indirect effect of COVID-19 information exposure via death anxiety on withdrawal is weaker when internal Corporate Social Responsibility practices are perceived to be high (vs. low).  Hillebrandt & Barclay, 2022: Prosocial messages from the organization weaken the positive relationship between state anxiety and workplace cheating behavior.	How can organizations enable functional outcomes to arise from negative emotions?

**Table 3***Influence of Emotion Duration on Rate of Positive Outcomes*

<b>Duration of Emotion</b>	<b>Count of Coded Relationships</b>	<b>% of Relationships with Positive Effects</b>	<b>% of Relationships with Negative Effects</b>	<b>% of Relationships with Null Effects</b>
Daily/Right Now	55	<i>23.64%</i>	45.46%	30.90%
Weekly	131	<i>12.98%</i>	54.20%	32.82%
Monthly	37	<i>8.11%</i>	43.24%	48.65%
In General	58	<i>1.72%</i>	72.41%	25.86%
Trait	35	<i>5.71%</i>	42.86%	51.43%

*Note.* This table includes coding of correlational relationships between a negative emotion and an individual outcome from empirical articles in our sample. It is sorted by duration of emotion. Italics are used to highlight the prevalence of positive effects based on measured duration. See the Methods section for more details of the coding.