

# Workplace Spirituality from Emotions

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## Abstract

This paper explores our emotions and their relevance in the workplace. It then puts the argument that addressing emotional state is an imperative for workplace well-being and goal achievement. Further, it contends that, because emotions trigger a spiritual journey in the form of a search for meaning, it is imperative to respond to emotions in a way that responds to that search. Hence, this paper contends that an appropriate response to emotions in the workplace is spiritual. Further, the paper proposes emotions response strategies and techniques that are spiritual in that they enable that search for meaning – a spiritual journey.

## **Introduction**

Spirituality evolves from our natural inclinations as human beings and so are inevitably connected to the workplace when those natural inclinations are expressed in the workplace. This is no ambit claim. Human beings have a psychology that comprises both affect and cognition. Additionally, we do not hang our emotional selves on the coat hanger in the locker room when coming into the office. Nor should we because emotions are natural and normal parts of our lives. Yet, we know that emotions, when not managed can be disruptive in the workplace and can impede work goal achievement as well as debilitating us as people. We also know that emotions generate a search for meaning. Lives without meaning suffer existential angst and so our emotional selves, and that spiritual search for meaning that accompanies emotions, ought also be as integral a part of the workplace as a our rational minds. The key then is to find a way to enable the expression of our emotions so that our emotions, and thoughts, enable work performance and facilitate the natural existential search for meaning. This spiritual journey of discovery is both natural and essential for all human beings and therefore also natural and essential to workplaces.

## **Emotions, Well-being and the Workplace**

Emotions management is essential to the well-being of individuals. Lazarus (1991, p.168) stated, “Well-functioning people generally are good at reality testing yet manage at the same time to minimise emotional distress and maximise positive outlook”. Brown (1976) proposes significant benefits from integrating affect and cognition. Brown’s (1976) argument is supported by research into the benefits of sharing and

cognitively processing emotions and associated events (Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead & Rimé, 2000; Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser & Glaser, 1988; Pennebaker, Zeck & Rimé, 2003; Rimé et al., 1998; Spiegel, 1999). On the other hand, research into alexithymia shows the detrimental impact on physical and mental well-being due to poor emotions management abilities (Elzinga, Bermond & von Dyck, 2002; Valera & Berenbaum, 2001) and performance (Lam & Kirby, 2002). Performance and decision making can also be diminished by what this author calls ‘emotional volume’ where the volume equates with intensity. As Stein and Devine (1991) suggest, “..the intensity of an emotion reaction restricts the amount of attention that can be given to subsequent thinking activities” (Stein & Devine, 1991, p.320)

With respect to workplaces, Abraham (1999) and Williams et al. (1999) indicate the importance of emotions. Likewise, Mumby and Putnam (1992) likewise indicate that emotion is one aspect of organisational life. Martin, Knopoff and Beckman’s (1998) contend that emotions in organisations ought to be displayed, yet at the same time controlled.

Emotions also have an impact on organisational goal realisation as proposed by Abraham (1999), Kahn (1992, 1995, 1998), Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) and Affective Events Theory (Fisher, Ashkanasy & Härtel, 2001; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). There is also evidence indicating that emotional dissonance increases intentions to leave an organisation (Abraham, 1999). Similarly, the intention to enact behaviours that can build corporate social capital (i.e. corporate cohesion, relationships and interconnection) reduce in line with the reduction of positive affect (Williams & Shiaw, 1999).

In summary then, emotions will have a significant impact on the well-being of people at work and also on their ability to achieve work goals. Hence, emotions

management is a workplace imperative for health reasons alone if not in terms of occupational health and safety. Additionally though, it is apparent from the above that emotions management is crucial in order to achieve workplace outcomes.

Whilst extolling the importance and value of emotions, these researchers fail to explain how that emotion should be expressed or managed within a workplace setting.

There is evidence that emotions sharing can build relationships and serve an essential social function (Luminet et al., 2000; Pennebaker et al., 2003; Rimé et al., 1998) and that sharing emotions can produce physical health benefits (Pennebaker, 1997, 1989; Pennebaker et al., 1988, 1987; Rimé, 1998). Yet Martin proposes a bounded emotionality model (Martin et al., 1998).

So, how are emotions to be managed? The key is to better understand emotions and then examine emotions management consistent with that understanding.

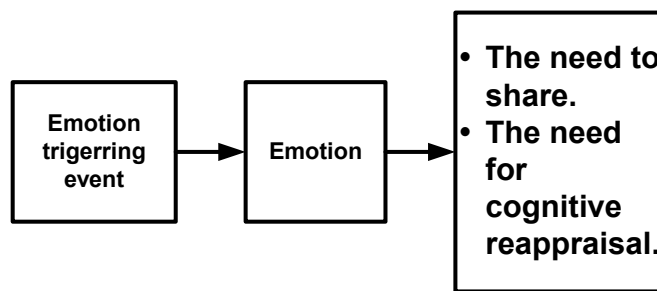
## **Emotions**

Emotions theory (Frijda, 1986; Scherer, 1984) and Frijda and Mesquita's (1994, p.51) define emotions as "...complex, structured phenomena...They are affective responses to what happens in the environment and cognitive representations of the event's meaning for the individual". Hence, emotions are affect-based responses to a situation/event. With respect to the situational/event aspect of emotions, an emotions triggering event drives the need to seek out company (Schachter, 1959) and the need to share information about the emotion triggering event (Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot & Boca, 1991; Rimé, Noël & Philippot, 1991; Rimé, Philippot, Mesquita & Boca, 1992; Rimé & Zech, 2001). Likewise, emotions stimulate a need to share the emotion so that

there is cognitive reappraisal (Rimè, 1992). These needs exist across cultures and across divergent groups within cultures (Rimé & Zech, 2001).

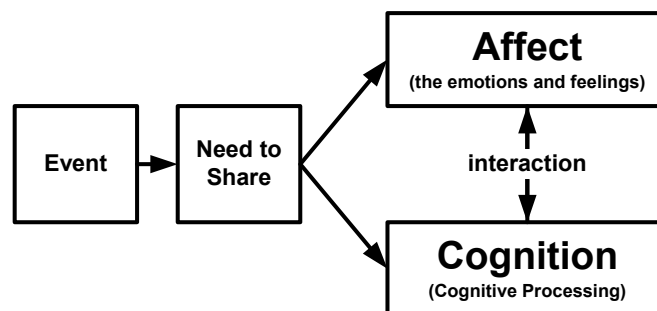
Figure 1 below represents this notion of emotions with respect to events and subsequent responses in terms of needs that emerge from the event and as an aspect of the emotions.

**Figure 1. Emotions triggering Events and the need to Share**



This picture can be expanded to separate affect from cognition, in line with Brown (1976) and include the sharing aspect that is a phenomenon that accompanies emotions. Figure 2 below depicts this expanded model.

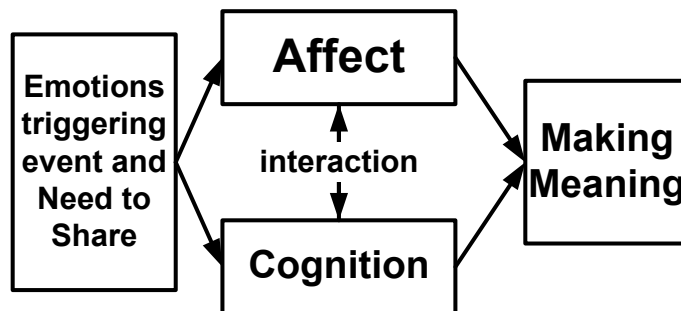
**Figure 2 – Emotion triggering event and affective-cognitive components.**



As discussed and also depicted above, emotions generate cognitive activity (Luminet et al., 2000; Martin & Tesser, 1989; Rimè, 1999) and “...should elicit a mental ‘working through’ process aimed at either the restoration of beliefs or at finding meaning in the event” (Rimè et al., 1998, p.177) as is the need to share itself (Rimé et al 1998). In summary then, emotions trigger a need to share so that the sharing facilitates expression, cognitive review (Luminet et al 2000) and the formation of meaning (Rimé et al 1998).

The inclusion of the need to make meaning is depicted in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3 – Depiction of Emotions Triggering event, Need to share, Affect, Cognition and Making Meaning**

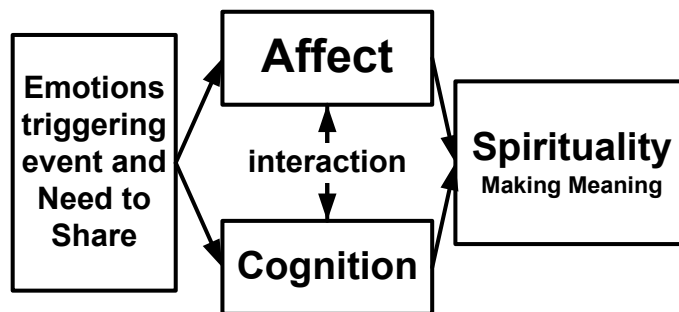


This “making meaning” aspect of emotions is oft overlooked but, based on the work of Frankl with respect to the importance of meaning (see Frankl, 1955, 1963, 1969,

1992) is integral to any consideration of emotions. Thus, this need to make meaning is an intrinsic and inextricable aspect of emotions and, based on Frankl's (1955, 1963, 1969, 1992) work, essentially spiritual in nature.

Figure 4 below depicts this modified model of a relationship between emotions triggering event, affect, cognition and spirituality.

**Figure 4 – Depiction of Emotions Triggering event, Need to share, Affect, Cognition and Spirituality**



This model asserts that a spiritual component of life and living can result from facilitating and the sharing of emotions in a way that enables cognitive processing the fulfillment of the search for meaning. The question then becomes, what techniques or approaches will facilitate this process in order to enable the formation of meaning and hence enact the spiritual search which is stimulated through an emotions triggering event.

### **Enabling Spirituality – Techniques for Responding to Emotions**

Yarlott (1976) proposes that Perls' (1969a, 1969b, 1971) approach of integrating emotion thought, language and behaviour and Assiogoli's (1971, 1973) psychosynthesis as indications of ways in which affect and cognition can be integrated, yet no models are provided nor are specific emotions response techniques proffered.

Humanistic psychology and counseling enables the exploration of experience in order to create meaning within the context of the phenomena of that existence (May, 1961, 1983). Furthermore, three humanistic psychologists offer separate, but related, aspects that lead to a solution. Rogers (1961, 1966, 1969) developed person-centred counseling which focused on empathic, affect related, listening and responses. Ellis (1973, 1977, 1996) focused on cognitive reappraisal. Frankl (1963, 1967) was a leader in meaning centred therapy expressing the importance of discussing values to form the purpose behind, or adding meaning to, action through which the spiritual dimension is explored and expressed Frankl (1955, 1963, 1969, 1992).

Having concluded that the approaches of Rogers (1961, 1966), Ellis (1973, 1977, 1996) and Frankl (1955, 1963, 1969, 1992) can combine to enable spirituality through an appropriate response to emotions, this paper now offers practical techniques that enact, and combine, principles and approaches from each of these psychologists.

### **Emotions Response Techniques for Spirituality**

The key to enabling spirituality in response to emotions is to respond so that cognitive reappraisal includes, and leads to, values based action. The five response patterns listed below grew from my counseling practice and are based on the use of language as the response medium. This use of language is consistent with language

theories and thought word connections proposed by both Vygotsky (1971), Freire (1972 & 1985) and Kibby, L. & Härtel, C. E. J. (2002). The response models are:

- Empathic-Reflective-Action Based (ERA, see also Kibby, L. 2002; Kibby, L. & Härtel, C. E. J. 2002; Kibby, L. & Härtel, C. E. J. 2003; Kibby, L., Härtel, C.E.J. & Hsu, A. 2004a & Kibby, L. & Härtel, C.E.J. 2004b)
- Emotions, Belief, Behavior (EBB)
- Affect, Perception, Testing (APT)
- Emotion, Thought, Action (ETA)
- Emotion, Values, Action (EVA).

The first stage is Rogerian (see Rogers 1961, 1966) in nature in that it involves identifying the emotion being expressed. The second stage is to facilitate cognitive reappraisal so that beliefs, desires and goals are reviewed, akin but different to Ellis's (see Ellis 1973, 1977, 1996) approach at challenging belief systems only in this model the person experiencing the emotion challenges the belief for him/herself. The third step is to facilitate a review of the cognitions and action adduced in terms of personal values in concord with Frankl's (1955, 1963 & 1969) notions regarding values and the concept of making meaning,

“In each phase of the interaction, word selection utilized by the person responding to the emotional expression of another, is based on the notion that language contained affective and cognitive components and therefore should be kept to a minimum to avoid applying any affective or cognitive connotations external to that of the speaker. In this regard, word usage in the response techniques was deemed as:

- the minimum needed in order to facilitate the relevant phase of the narrative
- the minimum needed in order to ensure that the narrative continued

- the maximum that ought be used in order to avoid affective or cognitive connotations external to the speaker
- the maximum that ought to be used in order to ensure that the speaker controlled the narrative.” (Kibby 2004, p 156).

The following word structures evolved:

- “Empathic-Reflective-Action Based (ERA) using the words “You feel.....because you want to....”
- Emotions, Belief, Behavior (EBB) using the words “You feel.....because you believe that....”
- Affect, Perception, Testing (APT) using the words “You feel.....because you perceive that....”
- Emotion, Thought, Action (ETA) using the words “You feel.....because you believe that you should...”
- Emotion, Values, Action (EVA) using the words “You feel.....because you value....” (Kiby, 2004, pp 157)

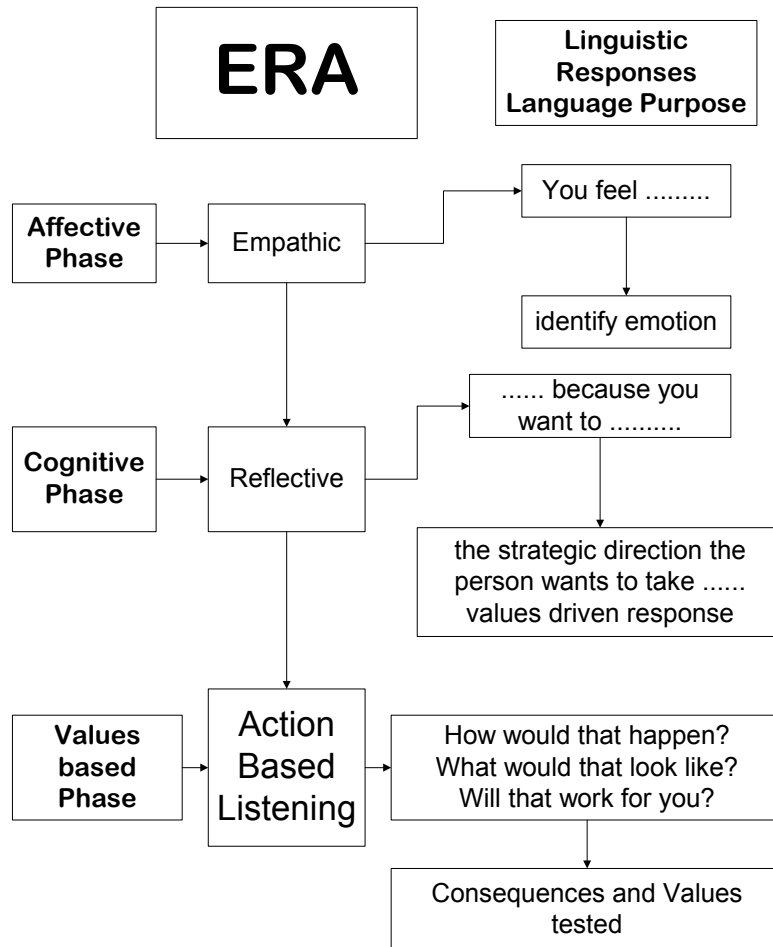
These interaction techniques are depicted in the figures below modified from Kibby (Kibby 2004, pp159-164).

Figure 5a: The ERA model depicting the Affective-Cognitive- Values Phases

Affective Phase called Empathic

Cognitive Phase called Reflective

Values based Phase called Action Based Listening



**Figure 5b: The EBB model depicting the Affective-Cognitive-Values based Phases**

**Affective Phase called Empathic**

**Cognitive Phase called Belief**

**Values based Phase called Behavior**

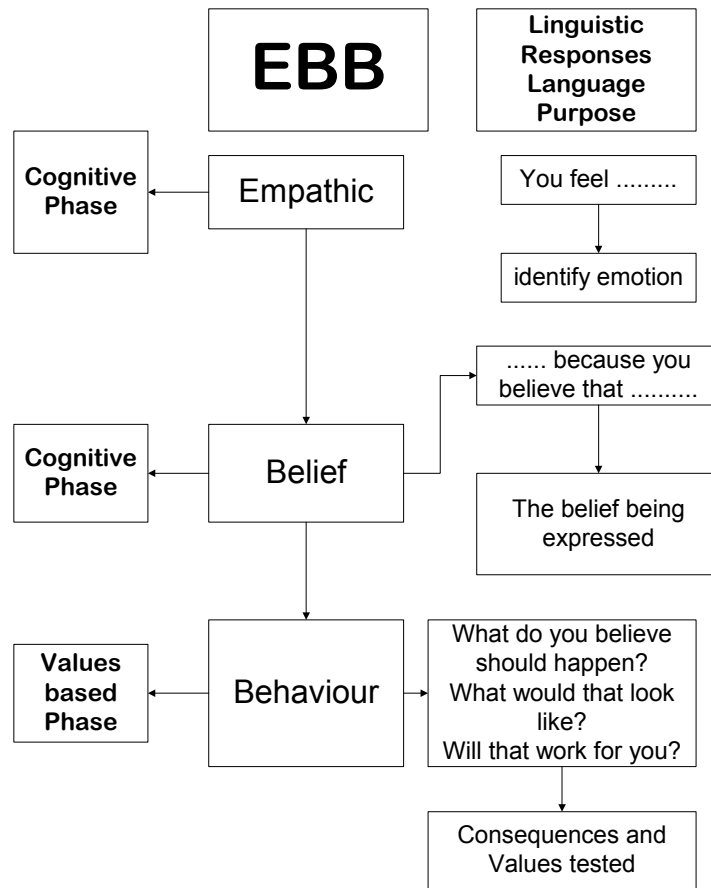


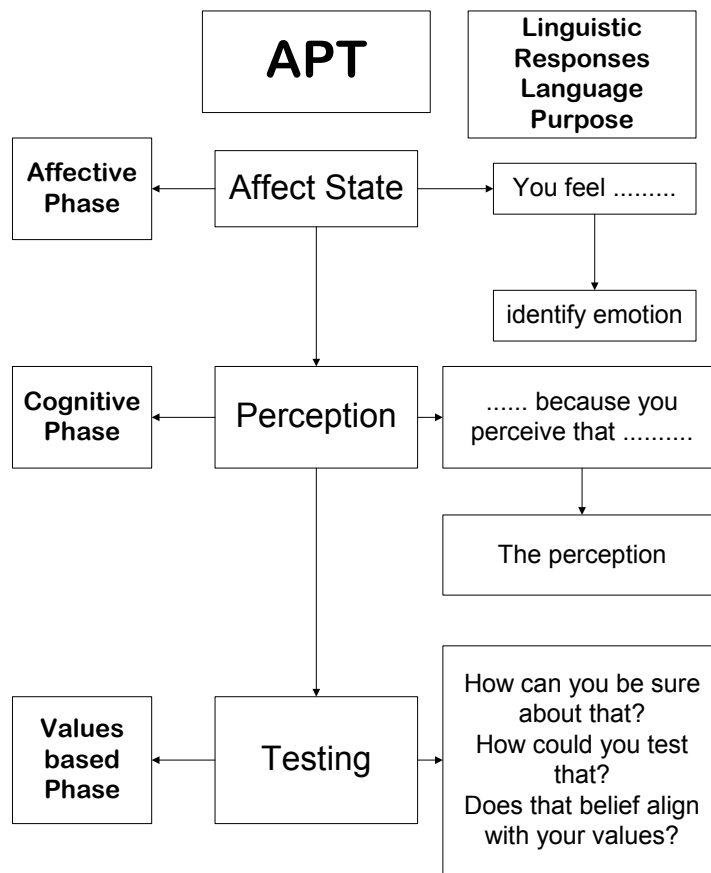
Figure 5c: The APT model depicting the Affective-Cognitive-Values based

**Phases**

**Affective Phase called Affect State**

**Cognitive Phase called Perception**

**Values based Phase called Testing**



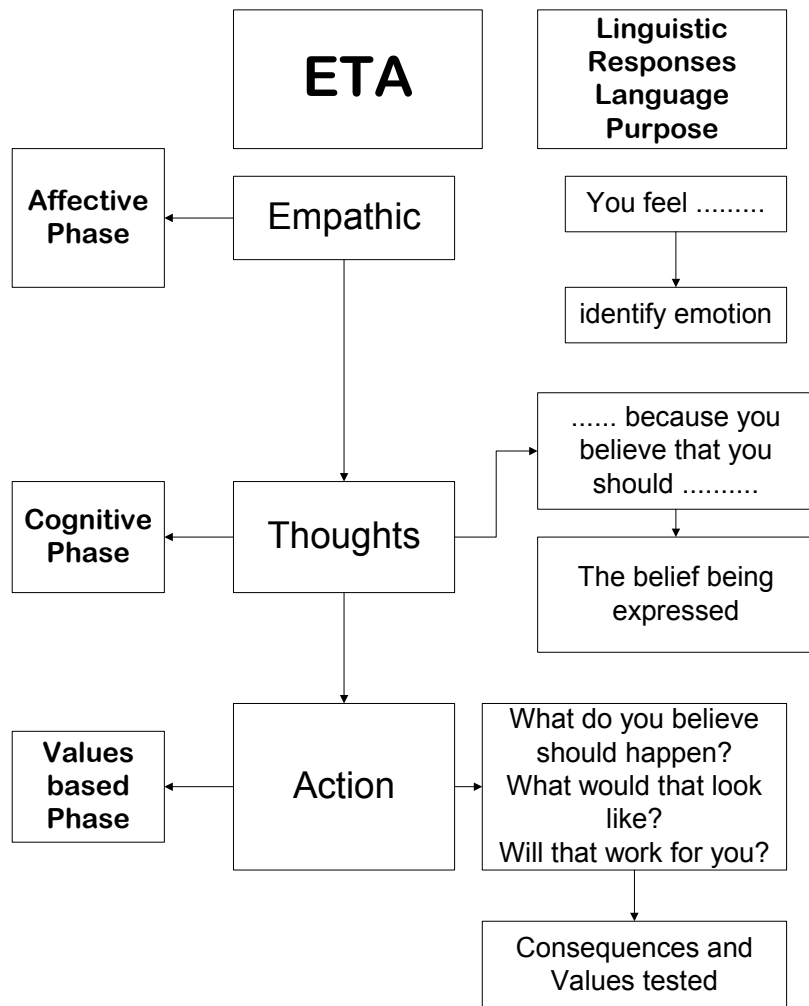
**Figure 5d: The ETA model depicting the Affective-Cognitive-Values based**

**Phases**

**Affective Phase called Empathic**

**Cognitive Phase called Thoughts**

**Values based Phase called Action**

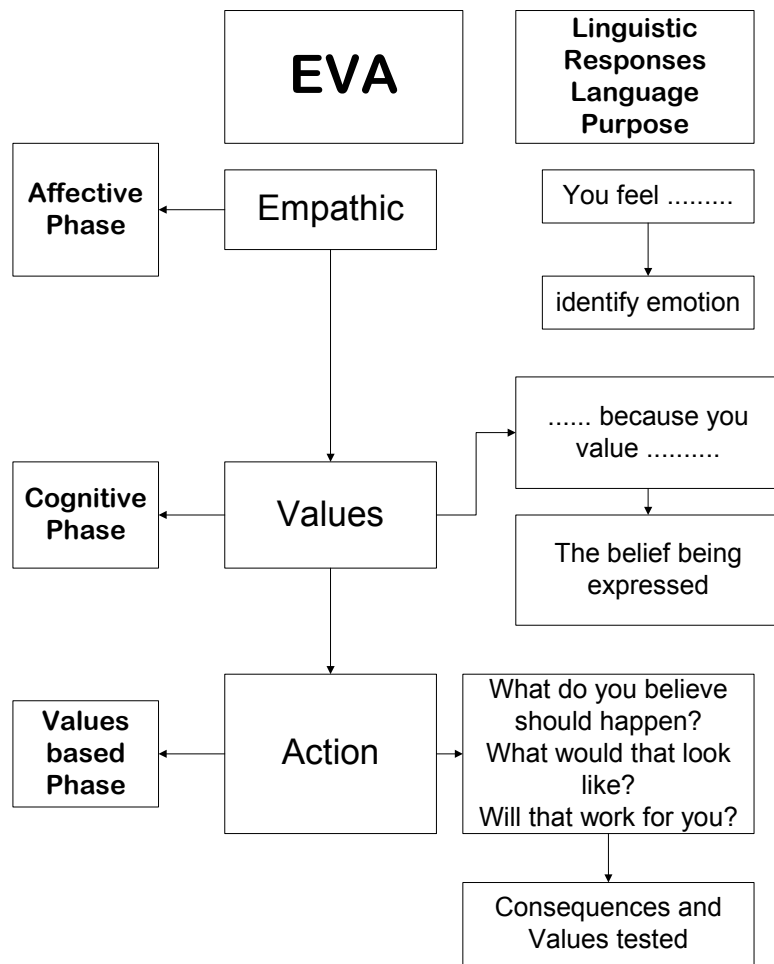


**Figure 5e: The EVA model depicting the Affective-Cognitive-Values based Phases**

**Affective Phase called Empathic**

**Cognitive Phase called Values**

**Values based Phase called Action**



**Summary - Workplace Spirituality from Emotions**

By beginning with the emotional state, the need to share and the natural expression of emotions, and then moving through cognitive reappraisal towards meaning based on values, these techniques will diminish the impact emotions can have in the workplace with respect to impeding goal focus and work outcomes whilst at the same time building social relationships and social cohesion. They also fulfill a spiritual necessity by responding so that those experiencing emotions can conduct their own spiritual journey by creating personal meaning. Therefore, these techniques can create workplace spirituality from emotions, a health requirement, human obligation and spiritual imperative.

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