

**Interview with Neal Ashkanasy
MOC Distinguished Scholar 2019**

Interviewer: Ludvig Levasseur, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at Indian Institute of Management
Bangalore
(includes questions from former Ashkanasy students)



Dr. Neal M. Ashkanasy, Professor of Management at the UQ Business School at the University of Queensland, won the MOC Distinguished Scholar Award in 2019. Ludvig Levasseur interviewed him about his involvement with the MOC division, his academic career, and his hobbies.

I. Topic: MOC Division

Ludvig: You have been a member of the MOC Interest Group for almost 20 years. How did you first get involved?

Neal: I was in touch with MOC for the first time when it was still an interest group at the AOM Annual Meeting in Dallas in 1994. I submitted a paper on LMX theory that I presented on Wednesday morning, the last day. The session consisted of the Chair, the discussants, the presenters, and just one attendee. So, that was more a table discussion and I said to myself: “this is a nice and friendly group”. I also met many great people such as Blake Ashforth, Dennis Gioia, Rhonda Reger, Sim Sitkin, Martin Kilduff, Bill Starbuck, Colin Eden, and Gerard Hodgkinson. So, that was also a major network opportunity. It was very different from other divisions such as the OB division. The OB division was more impersonal, bigger, and more hierarchical. Then, I started to be more involved and worked with Sim Sitkin to upgrade that Interest Group into a Division.

Ludvig: From what I understand, MOC started as an interest group because people thought cognition was left out. This coincided with the “cognitive revolution.” Well, the cognitive revolution has happened and cognition today is everywhere. In your opinion, is that revolution complete? Why or why not?

Neal: Let me start by saying that, in the early days of psychology, the key idea was that stimulus influenced behavior. But I kept thinking that there was also a human behind the stimulus. Hence, my interest in the MOC division. I started to be interested in emotions in 1991 during my sabbatical in Calgary. I was also reading great works by scholars such as Sigal Barsade and Russell Cropanzano and his Affective Emotion Theory (with Howard Weiss). Thus, I thought about the stimulus-organism-behavior model in which the stimulus could also be emotion-related. I was also interested in the debate as to whether affect influences cognition or does cognition influence affect?

Ludvig: The Zajonc versus Lazarus debate?

Neal: Yes. To me, the two are inseparable. Emotions are an important part of cognition, but cognition also plays an important part in the way we respond emotionally. To answer the question more directly, the cognitive revolution is settled now, but there are still some outstanding issues regarding the affective revolution.

Ludvig: Like emotional intelligence?

Neal: Yes. Emotional intelligence definitely represents an intersection of cognition and emotion. You can see that in Mayer and Salovey’s works. To me, MOC is about how cognitive concepts connect to perception, use, understanding, and regulation of emotion.

Ludvig: Many of the core topics in MOC are now covered in other divisions. What is central, distinctive, and enduring about MOC?

Neal: MOC remains focused on cognitive phenomena. This is different from other divisions such as BPS, OB etc. These divisions cover a broad swathe of topics.

Ludvig: In your opinion, what can scholars gain from being members of the MOC division that might be difficult for them to gain in other divisions?

Neal: MOC scholars are collegial and, compared to the other larger divisions of the Academy, the MOC Division is not so hierarchical. There are also more direct interactions between young and senior scholars and *vice versa*. There is also a sense of purpose.

Ludvig: If you had to describe what MOC’s identity is in a few words, what would they be? What do you see core and distinctive about MOC?

Neal: As we just discussed, I would say “focused, collegial, and developmental.”

Ludvig: I frequently hear people say that they see the MOC division as very developmental. What do you think attracts very developmental scholars and reviewers to MOC?

Neal: So, I would say direct interactions between young and old scholars, collegiality, and developmental feedback.

II. *Topic: Your Academic Career*

Ludvig: You have been on the forefront of affect and emotions research. Why did you choose to investigate affect and emotions?

Neal: Before entering academia, I was a civil engineer working in water resources. The company I was working for was building dams and run by engineers in the old school. One project we were working on was a major failure because of gravel under the dam and, with pressure, the water began to flow out under the dam. It turned out that the failure was because the Chief Designing Engineer and the Chief Geologist despised each other and would not talk. Colleagues and I subsequently identified numerous examples where engineering failures were attributable to management and communication problems. Following that, I took undergraduate evening classes and studied psychology between 1974 and 1982, majoring in IO psychology. I did well, and the Psych. School invited me to join their PhD program.

Ludvig: Wow, congratulations!

Neal: Thank you. But, to study leadership for my PhD dissertation, I needed a theory. Then I came across a copy of the AOM Best Paper Proceedings that I found in our library, which included a paper by Terence Mitchell and his student on how attribution theory applies to leadership. I then found Green and Mitchell's 1989 OBHDP, which became the focus of my PhD dissertation. I was lucky to publish in JPSP and JASP during my candidature and soon landed an OBHDP and JPSP that got me my first job as a lecturer (Assistant Professor) – teaching OB to accounting students! But I really wanted to know more about OB/psychology and emotions. To me, cognition still did not fully explain what was going on in organizational leadership. That all changed in 1991 while I was on Sabbatical leave at the University of Calgary, where I attended a talk by the late Peter Frost, who spoke about research on emotions in the workplace. I asked my Calgary colleague and eventual collaborator Wilf Zerbe if he knew anything about it and he told me he had been Frost's student. On my second Sabbatical leave, at Penn State, I was lucky to work with many wonderful colleagues, and it is where I did all my early reading on the psychology of emotion. The following year, I organized an AOM symposium on emotions with colleagues Sigal Barsade and Anat Rafaeli and launched the Emonet Listserv. The next year we held the first Emonet Conference (in San Diego). Then in 2003, I published my book chapter entitled "Emotions in Organizations: A Multilevel Perspective" in Dansereau and Yammarino's book series, Research in Multi-level Issues.

Ludvig: Academics are often defined by their expertise. Can you offer lessons or rules about how to manage one's scholarly identity as an affect and emotion researcher?

Neal: I can offer three rules: Rule #1: network

Rule #2: network

Rule #3: see rules #1 and #2

More seriously, some scholars think that they are wasting their time at conferences. On the contrary, I think conferences are very important means to network and to find new research opportunities.

Ludvig: What is the paper you are most proud/happiest to have written and why? Has that paper also contributed to your success (e.g., in terms of citations) or this is a different paper?

Neal: In addition to my work on emotions, I also have an interest in organizational culture and climate, especially international culture. One of my most cited papers is with the GLOBE project (around 1,300 citations). I am still on the GLOBE board. And the Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate that I co-edited with Celeste Wilderom and Mark Peterson as also well-cited (around 1,300 citations as well). I think people working on organizational culture get more cited because the topic is broader. My most cited articles in the field of emotions are the ones I published in 2002 with Catherine Daus on emotions in AMP (around 900 citations) and Catherine and Charmine Härtel in JOM (around 900 citations as well). The AMP article was more practically oriented, while the JOM one was more academically focused, and addressed diversity issues as well.

Ludvig: Next question: Now that you have been recognized as a MOC Distinguished Scholar, what are your goals and ambitions for the future? And why?

Neal: You know, I am 75 years old. I am still an academic but I have a half-time academic position with no teaching now. I will become Emeritus at the end of 2022. Until then, however, my five students remain a priority for me. I have achieved most of the things I wanted to in my career, but I plan to contribute as long as I can. I am still very mentally and physically active and cycle and walk every day.

Ludvig: What, if anything, would you change about the field if you could simply wave a magic wand?

Neal: I would like scholars consider and focus on emotions more seriously. This applies especially to the idea of Emotional Intelligence (EI), about which many colleagues still hold negative views. In 2009 I co-authors an LQ piece where my former student Marie Dasborough and I put the case in favor of EI, while John Antonakis put the case against. This year, Marie and I (together with Ron Humphrey) are involved in a reprise of the debate. I consider EI to be a valid individual difference at the intersection of cognition and emotion but, sadly, many of my colleagues are yet to “see the light.”

Ludvig: Is there a job you would be inclined to pursue if academia simply disappeared?

Neal: There is no point in living if there is no academia. As I mentioned in the dam example from my former life, there is a need to better understand how people communicate and manage. The example of how these two chiefs’ personal hang-ups led to such a disastrous outcome also

opens future directions on miscommunication, narcissistic persons taking autocratic decisions, etc.

Ludvig: I know that you spend a significant amount of time mentoring students and others. How important is mentoring to building a successful academic career?

Neal: Mentoring is everything. When you help people develop their abilities, you also develop your own abilities. An academic career is much about being developmental. Also, one good thing in academia is that you can get and work with so many brilliant and exciting young scholars.

Ludvig: Another role you invest a lot in is editing. For example, you have been the JOB Editor-in-Chief. What did you like best about being the JOB Editor-in-Chief? Who would you recommend this role to?

Neal: I am still editing today. A good thing about editing is that you have the opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the field. When I was an Editor-in-Chief at JOB, I was given no time-off at work and I was doing the job on weekends. But never mind, the good thing about editing is that it also gives a purpose and self-esteem.

Ludvig: How do you maintain your passion for research despite a significant workload (serving as an Editor-in-Chief, advising students, teaching, administrative work, etc.)?

Neal: I would say four letters: A-D-H-D. I cannot stop working. For instance, I spent a day recording lectures without having any teaching assignments. Then, colleagues told me: “Why did you do that?” I replied, “It was fun. It was a fun exercise”. At the same time, I still find time to pursue a lighter side of life.

Ludvig: In your opinion, what are the current hot and most promising topics in affect and emotion research?

Neal: Affect is at the core of individual reactions. We definitely need to spend more time researching irrationality and why people do stuff, even when it is illogical to do so. For example, why do so many women vote for Donald Trump who is on tape saying he sexually assaults women? Why did people vote for Brexit when it was so abundantly clear they would suffer economically under Brexit? If people were rational, Donald Trump would not be elected and people would not vote for Brexit. As I tell my students, “The most irrational thought anybody can have is that people are rational!” We need try harder to understand why people behave like this, and MOC lies at the center of this quest.

III. Topic: Personal Fun Facts

Ludvig: What is your favorite activity to do during the weekend/holiday to relax and rejuvenate?

Neal: I ride my bicycle, mainly for commuting. I also exercise and walk every day. I also attend the ballet, watch movies, and am an avid fan of both Australian and European Football.

Ludvig: Across your career, how have you carved out some time for yourself and family?

Neal: I have always done that. For instance, in 1981 I was the Australian intercollegiate water ski champion, and I once managed the local junior track and field club (and even ended up as the State Finance Director of the Association).

Ludvig: I heard that you like to ride your bicycle. Where is your favorite spot?

Neal: I do not have any in particular. I usually ride my bike to commute from home to work.

Ludvig: I also heard that you like to travel overseas. What were your most exotic trips?

Neal: I once was chased by a bull elephant in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Reserve in South Africa. And I visited (what was then) Leningrad in 1975 during the Brezhnev years, where I sold a carton of cigarettes on the black market. I regularly visit Israel and spent my 2012 Sabbatical leave at the Technion.

Ludvig: I also heard that you are a football fan. Do you support any team?

Neal: Yes, Brisbane Lions Australian Football Club and Brisbane Roar Soccer Club.

Ludvig: What personal accomplishment(s) are you most proud of?

Neal: I received a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2017. The MOC Division Distinguished Scholar Award in 2019.

Ludvig: Wow, congratulations!

Neal: Thank you.

Ludvig: Is there anything else you would like to share?

Neal: Yes, I have a lovely family life: I have been married for 48 years to my beautiful wife, Linda; and I have three wonderful sons and three grandchildren (two girls and a boy). This is what I am most proud of.

Ludvig: Thank you very much Neal for your time, thoughts, and this great interview.

Neal: Thank you.