

# Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship for Research on Human Decision Processes and Risk Management: 2009 Application

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**Nicole M. Verrochi**

Wharton Marketing Department

**Mailing Address:**

Suite 700 Jon M. Huntsman Hall

3730 Walnut Street

Philadelphia, PA 19104

Office Phone: 215-898-4795

Email: [verrochn@wharton.upenn.edu](mailto:verrochn@wharton.upenn.edu)

**Faculty Member:**

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Patti Williams, Marketing Department

## Project Title: Emotion Regulation in Decision Making

### Descriptive Summary of Project

Recent work in decision making has emphasized the role that emotions can play, and their influence upon myriad judgments. The most widely applied theory is the Appraisal Tendency Framework (ATF: Lerner and Keltner 2001), which specifies that specific emotions produce discrete cognitive and motivational tendencies that are carried over from the emotional context onto judgments and decisions. For example, fear (an uncertain, negative emotion) and anger (a certain, negative emotion) lead to different risk estimates when induced in participants. Specifically, fear leads to increased perceptions of risk—reflecting its uncertain appraisal—while anger leads to decreased risk assessments (Lerner and Keltner 2001). Similar effects have been found within a variety of information processing contexts (e.g., Tiedens and Linton 2001). Indeed, judgments of risk have recently been conceptualized as affective evaluations, whereby the risk assessment is derived from feelings of experienced at the decision making moment (Loewenstein et al. 2001).

Without a doubt, emotion and the psychological changes which accompany an emotional experience are emerging as vital to the conceptualization of judgments and the process of decision making. However, the current perspective on emotions is a relatively passive one—individuals experience an emotion, which then leads to changes in their mental processes, coloring future decisions. While it may be true that many emotional experiences occur in such a manner, simply “carrying away” an individual, often this is not the case. People can and do control their emotional experience, managing it and altering the course of feelings—a process known as *emotion regulation* (Gross 1998).

Emotion regulation has been defined as the self-management process by which individuals manipulate either the emotion antecedents or the subjective, physiological and behavioral elements of the emotional response (Gross 1998). Emotion regulation is such a common and everyday experience that most undergraduates report doing it at least once a day, and can easily recall an example of such behavior (Gross, Richards, and John 2006). Indeed, we often only take note of emotion regulation when it fails—such as when a child throws a temper tantrum or a friend is not as excited for our good fortune as we had expected. As greater understanding has been gathered of when emotion regulation is neglected, theories have evolved on a functioning emotion regulation system, and the psychological processes involved in such self-regulatory practices.

The research project that would be supported with the Ackoff Grant proposes to merge these two divergent streams of research: emotion regulation and emotions in decision making. Specifically, understanding when individuals are likely to engage in emotion regulation will provide essential boundary constraints for the ATF; if a person reduces their emotional experience via regulatory processes, the likelihood that appraisals will carry-over to a later decision is reduced. At the same time, emotion dysregulation could amplify the carry-over effects of emotions onto judgments, especially if an individual incorrectly believes they are successfully managing an affective experience.

## References

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