
Crossover of work-related strain and engagement

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The vast majority of studies in managerial psychology have looked at characteristics of the work environment that may influence job strain or employee engagement. These studies largely overlooked an important source of employee well-being: people in the immediate environment with whom employees regularly interact. In the workplace, these people are one's colleagues and clients. At home, these people are family members (spouse, children), with whom employees may discuss what happened during the day at work. During such interactions, the strain or engagement built up at work may cross over from employees to others. This special issue is devoted to theoretical and empirical studies of such crossover.

Introduction to the special issue

Crossover involves transmission across individuals, whereby job demands and their consequent strain, or job resources and consequent engagement cross over between closely related persons (Bakker and Demerouti, 2009; Westman, 2001). Thus, in crossover, stress or strain (engagement) experienced by an individual in the workplace may lead to stress or strain (engagement) being experienced by the individual's partner at home. Previous studies on crossover have identified several mechanisms that may explain crossover, including the quality of the interaction with the partner (e.g., social support, social undermining), individual differences in susceptibility to the emotions of others, and similarity between the employee and the person with whom he/she interacts. Nevertheless, there are still several gaps in the literature on crossover.

These gaps are identified in the position paper by Bakker *et al.* (2009). The paper gives an overview of the literature, and offers a brief research agenda. The other papers in this special issue start to fill the identified gaps in the literature from different angles. Three of the papers are report findings of empirical studies whereas the last paper is a theoretical one. The studies focus both on working couples and on teams. In their study among employees of a Dutch municipality working in 49 teams, van Emmerik and Peeters (2009) investigate crossover specificity of team-level stressors to individual-level work-family conflict. The results indicate the expected crossover specificity of different types of work-family conflicts. Van Emmerik and Peeters' findings suggest that what happens in teams sets the norm and influences individual employees. Westman *et al.* (2009) examine the crossover of positive experiences from business travelers to their spouses. Their findings show that travelers' vigor – that may be the result of the sheer number of business trips, control over the number of business trips and satisfaction with the business trip – crosses over to spouses' vigor.

Bakker and Demerouti (2009) in their study among Dutch working couples test Westman and Vinokur's (1998) hypothesis that empathy moderates the crossover of work engagement. As hypothesized, results show that perspective taking (but not empathic concern) moderates the relationship between women's and men's work engagement. The crossover of engagement is strongest when men are characterized by high (vs low) levels of perspective taking. Finally, Härtel and Page (2009) provide theoretical and practical insight into the process of crossover with the proposition that affect intensity is an important explanatory mechanism of crossover. They propose that individual differences in affect intensity may moderate and/or explain the crossover of discrete emotions such as joy and fear in the workplace.

We hope that this special issue of the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* stimulates future research on crossover in the workplace and from employees' to their partners. Studies like the ones reported in this special issue will facilitate further advancements in crossover theory.

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