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A Day in the Life of a Happy Worker: Introduction

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Positive psychology emerged in the late 1990s with a renewed emphasis on what is right with people in contrast to the preoccupation psychology has had over the years with what is wrong with people (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). This approach rehabilitated the focus on positivity and people's strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychology is an attempt to adopt a more open and appreciate perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities (Sheldon & King, 2001). Positive psychology and organizational theory merge in the new approach of positive organizational behavior (POB) defined as "the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (Luthans, 2002, p.59; see also Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

This book brings together authors who examine positive psychological states employees may experience during work. Among others, the authors focus on positive emotions and mood, work-related flow, work engagement, and job satisfaction. Research conducted in the past two decades has clearly shown that workers scoring relatively high on these positive psychological states demonstrate better job performance. For example, research has consistently shown that happy workers are productive workers (e.g., Cropanzano & Wright, 1999, 2001; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). Typically, these studies found that individuals who are prone to experience positive affect (e.g., optimism) while also tending not to experience negative affect (i.e., feeling calm rather than anxious), received higher performance ratings from their supervisors. Similarly, research on employee work engagement (i.e., a fulfilling state of high energy and dedication to work) has shown that engaged workers are more creative, show higher in-role performance, and are more inclined to help their colleagues if needed – they show organizational citizenship behaviors (Bakker,

2009; Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010). Moreover, engaged workers typically have more satisfied clients (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005).

Taken together, the research evidence shows that happy workers are productive workers. However, it should be noticed that most researchers have not managed to explain a large amount of the variance in job performance. One of the reasons for this is that there are many other variables than happiness that may play a role when it comes to differences between individuals in performance. For example, economic cycles may have an impact on performance as clients may not be willing to spend their budget on your products; or the quality of the overall service the company offers and its image may determine sales to a larger extent than employee work engagement. Perhaps a more worker focused approach is needed?

Daily Changes in Happiness

The central theme of the present book is that we need to look at short-term, within-person fluctuations in happiness and its consequences. Such an approach acknowledges that individuals who are generally happy with their job and engaged in their work may not be equally happy and engaged every day. Indeed, an increasing number of studies has shown that daily fluctuations in job satisfaction and work engagement are considerable, and that these fluctuations can be predicted and be used to predict important employee and organizational outcomes (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2009). Moreover, it is conceivable that short-term indicators (or within-person changes) of occupational well-being are better predictors of performance in organizations than long-term indicators (between-person differences).

The performance episodes model (Beal, Weis, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005) offers an explanatory theoretical framework for these findings. In contrast to traditional performance models that regard within-person differences as error variance, their performance episodes model focuses on an individual's variability in performance over short periods of time. Their

main argument is that individuals perform better when fully concentrated on the task at hand. Specifically, Beal and his colleagues propose that resource allocation to the task is crucial for successful performance. If employees cannot allocate all of their resources to the task at hand, for example because they are constantly interrupted by telephone calls, they cannot perform optimally. Thus, replenishing and conserving (self-regulatory) resources is critical for successful performance during performance episodes and during a day (see Beal et al., 2005). For example, a financial investment manager will perform best when she is energetically engaged with information about the stock market. Similarly, a general practitioner may deliver the best care to patients to whom he listens empathically – a situation that is most likely when he dedicates all his energy to his work. If ongoing task performance is interrupted, for example by a colleague who wants to discuss his weekend experiences, or by the beep of an incoming e-mail message, the focus will shift from the task to the colleague and e-mail message, and the energy is no longer invested in the task.

This book is dedicated to short-term fluctuations in well-being. We titled the book “A day in the life of a happy worker” since we want to emphasize that a focus on short term positive experiences in the workplace is meaningful and extremely useful. During the past two decades, scholars have developed sophisticated designs and methods to capture within-person fluctuations in happiness and work engagement, and statisticians have meanwhile developed software that can be used to take care of the dependency in the data when collecting data over the course of the days and weeks.

For example, simple paper-and-pencil diaries have been replaced with sophisticated electronic recording, with daily or hourly questionnaires administered by personal digital assistants or other electronic technologies (see e.g., Tennen, Affleck, Coyne, Larsen, & Delongis, 2006 for a discussion of electronic data collection methods). The development of multilevel modeling techniques has allowed researchers to tease out variability in how people

usually are, how people are at a given point in time, and how different they are at a given point in time from how they usually are (see e.g., Kenny, Bolger, & Kashy, 2002). Such techniques also enable researchers to study whether stable between-person differences in a workers' personality, attitudes, or work environments moderate relationships between variables with high-levels of daily variability (e.g., Semmer, Grebner, & Elfering, 2004).

Data captured on within-person changes in happiness, well-being, and other, related variables offer a number of strengths over the traditional survey methods. Collecting data in the field in real time gives researchers high ecological validity and minimizes recall bias, as data are captured about current or recently completed activity (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Tennen et al., 2006). Internal validity is also enhanced relative to cross-sectional methods, as prior levels of dependent variables and a range of other controls, such as personality and time of day, can be included in regression models (Bolger et al., 2003). But more importantly, such methodological and statistical advances make theoretical models of short-term, within-person fluctuations in well-being, its consequences, and antecedents amenable to empirical investigation in real world contexts.

The Present book

How does a day in the life of a happy worker unfold? In this book, we have brought together some of most influential researchers currently working on daily well-being in the workplace. We asked the authors to focus more on the happy worker, because we believe that in the past there has been a bias towards negative phenomena. This is not to say that the approaches described in this book cannot be applied to negative psychological phenomena: Indeed the methods described can and have been applied to tackling subjects like stress (Daniels, 2011). The authors of the chapters in this book have used different designs in their research, including experience sampling, day reconstruction, daily diaries and combinations

of these techniques. The book comprises of two parts: theory and methodology, that are integrated in a final chapter by Totterdel et al.

In the next chapter, Daniel Beal and Howard Weiss take up the notion of studying experience within the working day. Their chapter concerns the structure of the working day, and how it is broken up into psychologically meaningful chunks. Beal and Weiss describe episodes through the day and the psychological principles that justify this level of analysis for understanding happiness and related phenomena. Without analyses such as that provided by Beal and Weiss, the study of daily work experience would be merely an exercise in technically sophisticated, dust bowl, empiricism. Beal and Weiss show that there is theoretical meaningfulness in studying the working day.

The next two chapters are concerned with two closely related states associated with well-being and optimal psychological functioning: work engagement and flow. Despoina Xanthopoulou and Arnold Bakker examine within person variations in work engagement – shifting the focus from *who* gets absorbed and engaged in their work to *when* engagement happens. The chapter illustrates some of the conceptual issues in shifting from one level of analysis (the worker) to another (the worker's experiences during the day). Clive Fullagar and Kevin Kelloway examine a concept that is usually conceived of as dynamic, momentary, and closely related to state work engagement – the concept of flow. Fullagar and Kelloway cover some of the methodological issues in researching this dynamic and elusive phenomenon, as well as examining its psychological and psychophysiological components.

The next two chapters focus on factors that might serve to maintain well-being, or even enhance well-being at work in the face of threats to well-being, and examine some of the methodological issues in studying the psychological processes that can be seen as antecedent to well-being. Kevin Daniels considers how workers use job characteristics – specifically job control and social support – to solve problems. The chapter illustrates the importance of

worker agency in shaping the daily experience of work, but also that job characteristics can be conceived of as highly dynamic, goal-directed, and behavioral phenomena, not stable characteristics of immutable organizational structures. Carmen Binnewies and Sabine Sonnentag examine recovery. Recover is necessarily a dynamic concept that involves transitions from a state where personal resources are taxed to replenishment of those resources. Research in this area is often concerned with the frequent and daily transitions between work and non-work environments. This chapter anticipates the following chapters by describing quantitative diary methods and illustrating their application in recovery research.

In the first dedicated methodological chapter, Nikolaos Dimotakis and Remus Ilies discuss the general class of quantitative methods called experience and event sampling methods, and some of the major design decisions to be taken in using such methods. The methods described by Dimotakis and Ilies are the methods of choice for many researchers that look at daily and within-day processes. However, in the chapter that follows, Guido Hertel and Christian Stamov-Roßnagel note that experience and event sampling methods require a lot of effort on the part of researchers and participants, and these methods can miss rare events. Hertel and Stamov-Roßnagel discuss alternatives to experience and event sampling methods – day and event reconstruction methods. Although not a substitute for experience and event sampling methods, day and event reconstruction methods get close to the key advantages of experience and event sampling methods and are useful when experience and event sampling methods are not possible. Hertel and Stamov-Roßnagel discuss not only the application of these methods in organizational research, but also how these methods can be used by practitioners (for example in training evaluation)

For many quantitative researchers interested in daily variations in well-being, data are usually analyzed with variants of multilevel regression to ask research questions that are within-person variants of the kind of questions asked in more traditional survey designs.

However, as patterns of change are integral to many theories in work psychology, examining workers over multiple days does allow the effects of time to be examined empirically. Sven Gross, Laurenz Meier, and Norbert Semmer describe one class of statistical methods – latent growth models – that can be used to investigate how well-being and other variables change over time and to examine inter-individual patterns in these changes.

Although most of the research in the area is quantitative, there are examples of qualitative diary studies in the literature. In her chapter, Kathryn Waddington discusses the issues in conducting qualitative diary studies that are able to capture participants' accounts of their experiences close to when they happen and to capture the richness and detail of those experiences. In citing Allport, Waddington reminds us that researching (working) life and its details as it unfolds should be the focus of (work and organizational) psychology. Waddington also argues that, at least in relation to researching emotion, examining working life as it unfolds can be a focus of integration for various academic disciplines.

Peter Totterdell, David Holman and Karen Niven conclude the book with a retrospective look at the chapters in the book and research in the area, and outline some of the underpinning assumptions of research on daily well-being. Totterdell and colleagues offer also a prospective view on how the field may develop and why researching the daily experience of happiness, well-being, and related phenomena will remain a lively, important, and theoretically fruitful research area. Of course, their considered but optimistic (could one say critical yet happy?) view, is a view we share.

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