Major Life Events in Family Life, Work Engagement, and Performance:
A Test of the Work-Home Resources Model

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This weekly diary study (N = 185 persons, n = 443 occasions) investigates how major life events influence weekly resource use, work engagement, and job performance. On the basis of the work–home resources model, we propose that weekly rumination undermines effective use of personal resources (i.e., self-efficacy), whereas weekly psychological detachment from the major life events facilitates effective use. In addition, we hypothesize that work role centrality acts as a key resource, and amplifies the two-way interaction effects. Results of multilevel analyses were generally in line with predictions, and support the work–home resources model. The findings suggest that detachment may effectively prevent negative spillover from home to work.

Keywords: key resources, psychological detachment, rumination, spillover, work–home resources model

Over the course of their lives, all individuals experience a variety of major life events. These events can take many different forms, including separation and divorce, the death of one’s child, and serious illness of family members. Because major life events have short- and long-term effects on well-being and require considerable readjustment (Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012), they have the potential to interfere with all life domains. Surprisingly, there is a lack of studies on the impact of such events on employee well-being and organizational behavior (Bhagat, 1983; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). Moreover, evidence on the impact of major life events on workers’ well-being is virtually nonexistent (Georgellis, Lange, & Tabvuma, 2012). The available evidence does indicate that stressful life events in private life are associated with job burnout (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017)—nowadays a major societal problem (Leiter, Bakker, & Maslach, 2014)—but little is known about the possible processes involved. In the present study, we follow employees who have faced a major life event over the course of 5 working weeks. We use the work–home resources (W-HR) model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012a) to propose that rumination about the major life event interferes with effective use of psychological resources for job performance and that psychological detachment from the major life event facilitates the use of these resources. We also explore the role of work role centrality as a key resource.

Our research aims to contribute to the literature in the following ways. First, we contribute to the literature on the W-HR model by providing an empirical test of one of the basic propositions in the model. Specifically, we test whether experiences in family life may consume so many personal, energetic, and cognitive resources that it impedes the effective use of psychological resources in working life. Instead of simply using work outcomes to represent the work domain and investigating the direct effect of major life events on these work outcomes, we try to investigate how weekly rumination about the major life event may influence the established positive relationship of psychological resources (self-efficacy) with work engagement and job performance (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Heuven, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2008). That is, we use the moderating effect of rumination on the self-efficacy–work engagement relationship to operationalize the interference of the home domain with the work domain. A second contribution is that we introduce the concept of psychological detachment from the major life event. Using recovery theory (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), we argue that employees who mentally detach from the major life event are more likely to use their psychological resources for work tasks, to be engaged, and to perform well. Evidence for this premise opens the door for work-related training interventions among individuals who have just experienced a major life event. Third, our research integrates the major life events and work–family interface literatures by testing the role of key resources when dealing with a major life event—on a weekly basis. Using the W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012a), we propose that work role centrality is a stable key resource that helps to prevent weekly interference of the major life event with work life. Are individuals who give work a central place in their life better able to use psychological detachment from the event as a strategy...
to effectively mobilize weekly psychological resources and cope with the impact of a major life event (MLE)?

**Theoretical Background**

The W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012a) describes the conflict between work and home roles as a process, whereby demands in one domain deplete personal resources and impede functioning in the other domain. In the present study, we focus on MLEs and investigate the impact of the home domain on the work domain. According to the model, people who are confronted with demands in the home domain (e.g., family problems) lose personal resources such as energy, sleep, and attention. These lacking personal resources subsequently lead to impaired functioning in the work domain. Breevaart and Bakker (2011) conducted an illustrative study among parents of children with behavioral difficulties. Consistent with the WH-R model, they found that parents who were more often confronted with the restless and overactive behaviors of their children reported lower personal resources (less energy), which resulted in lower levels of engagement in the work domain.

The WH-R model further postulates that conflict between the home and work domains is less likely if individuals can mobilize a range of key resources (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012a). Key resources are personal characteristics (e.g., social power and conscientiousness) that help people to solve problems and cope with stress. Individuals with key resources are also more likely to collect new resources and optimally utilize their contextual resources (cf. Bakker, Sanz-Vergel, & Kuntze, 2015; Hobfoll, 2002). For example, individuals high in social power may use their influence to mobilize help to get their work done in time so that they can spend all leisure time with the family. Thus, work–home conflict is less likely among persons with key resources because key resources attenuate the negative relationship between contextual demands and personal resources. We will now discuss the process that takes place when people are confronted with a MLE.

**MLEs and Rumination**

In 2012, there were about one million divorces recorded in the EU-28 (Eurostat, 2014). Focusing on the death of children under 5 years of age, in the United Kingdom alone, 4.9 of every 1,000 children die (Institute for Health Metrics & Evaluation, 2014). Exposure to such negative life events has been associated with a variety of adverse physical and psychological health outcomes, including depression and anxiety (Kessler, Davis, & Kendler, 1997), reduced life satisfaction (Krause, 2004), and chronic physical health problems (Krause, Shaw, & Cairney, 2004; for a meta-analysis, see Luhmann et al., 2012). Surprisingly, Ivancevich (1986) found that life events were largely unrelated to job performance and absenteeism. Although the available evidence shows that MLEs are also associated with job stress and burnout (Mather, Blom, & Svedberg, 2014), very little is known about the possible micro processes involved when the home domain interferes so dramatically with the work domain (Bhagat, 1983; Hobson, Delunas, & Kesic, 2001).

In this study, we argue that rumination and psychological detachment play a key role in dealing with a MLE (Figure 1). When individuals are attentive to the MLE and ruminate about the event, they do not have the personal, energetic, and cognitive resources available that are needed to function well at work (Michl, McLaughlin, Shepherd, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2013). Georgellis and his colleagues (2012) showed that the birth of the first child had a major, and unfavorable impact on job satisfaction, up till five

![Figure 1. Research model.](image-url)
By engaging in activities that appeal to other systems than previously used for the MLE (e.g., attending to the needs of customers and colleagues at work), people will focus on other, more positive experiences and stop using resources that may be responsible for prolongation or reactivation of stress-related physiological activation. As the W-HR model proposes, the use of personal resources (e.g., concentration, mood, and energy) in one domain depletes these resources, making them unavailable for people to function optimally in the other domain. Psychological detachment from the MLE thus implies that no further demands tax people’s psychobiological system, and more resources will become available to deal with work demands.

We agree with Sonnentag and Fritz (2015, p. 75) that psychological detachment is not just the opposite of rumination. Whereas rumination about the MLE fills the brain with unfavorable thoughts that take the place of other cognitions and prevent the employee from focusing on work, psychological detachment from the MLE helps employees to use their psychological resources for work. This means that the two processes instigated by weekly rumination and weekly psychological detachment actually operate in opposite fashion and may even work simultaneously in the same week. Whereas psychological detachment from work helps employees to disengage mentally from work and recover from work-related strain (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), we propose that psychological detachment from the MLE enables employees to mobilize psychological resources at work (i.e., self-efficacy), which fosters work engagement and performance.

Hypothesis 2: Detachment from the MLE moderates the self-efficacy–work engagement relationship (a), and subsequently facilitates job performance (b). The positive relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement is stronger for people with high (vs. low) levels of detachment.

Work Role Centrality as a Key Resource

Although an individual may be engaged in multiple roles and have multiple identities, these identities are not equally salient. Work role salience or centrality is defined as “individual beliefs regarding the degree of importance that work plays in their lives” (Walsh & Gordon, 2008, p. 46). High work centrality means that individuals identify with their work and devote considerable time and energy to the work role (Diefendorff, Brown, Kamin, & Lord, 2002). When work plays a central role in life, work provides individuals with meaning, self-worth, and purpose (Noor, 2004). For example, research has shown that work centrality leads to investment of considerable time and energy in building a good relationship with the employer. This psychological contract, in turn, contributes positively to individuals’ overall attitudes toward work (Bal & Kooij, 2011).

In the context of the W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012a), work role centrality can be positioned as a key resource. Key resources refer to management resources that facilitate the selection, alteration, and implementation of other resources (Thoits, 1994). Work role centrality is a resource in the form of a personal value, which serves as guiding principle about preferred ways of acting in the life of a person (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). It facilitates the mobilization of other resources, and it makes the use of these other resources more effective. Individuals high in work...
role centrality are more likely to invest time and energy in the work domain. This helps them better mobilize resources, such as self-efficacy, to buffer the negative impact of the MLE on work. When work is central to one’s identity and provides purpose and self-esteem, individuals will be better able to prevent or decrease the negative impact of the home domain on the work domain. Put differently, work role centrality and the meaning work provides helps individuals to focus on their daily work and experience work as a distraction from their misery. Thus, people high in work role centrality are more likely to successfully use work as a means to psychologically detach from their MLE. If work role centrality is high, people who have been confronted with a MLE can turn to work to make meaning and mobilize psychological resources, such as feedback, social support, and self-efficacy (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014). This active psychological investment in work will help them to buffer the negative impact of rumination on resource utilization.

In a similar vein, psychological detachment from the MLE will most likely facilitate utilization of resources in the workplace when individuals invest considerable time and energy in their work and identify strongly with it. In contrast, when work does not play a central role in people’s life, it will be much more difficult to use work activities to overrule ruminative thoughts about the MLE to utilize one’s self-efficacy at work. When work is not important to individuals, work lacks the meaning that is needed to detach from the MLE and be engaged at work. Thus, we argue that work role centrality will act as a key resource, and further qualifies the proposed two-way interactions between self-efficacy and rumination/detachment. Stated formally as follows:

Hypothesis 3a: Work role centrality and rumination have a combined impact on the self-efficacy–work engagement relationship. Specifically, the positive relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement is strongest for people with low (vs. high) levels of rumination and high (vs. low) work role centrality.

Hypothesis 3b: Work role centrality and detachment from the MLE have a combined impact on the self-efficacy–work engagement relationship. Specifically, the positive relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement is strongest for people with high (vs. low) levels of detachment and high (vs. low) work role centrality.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 185 Dutch employees who were recruited with network sampling (Demerouti & Rispens, 2014). Network sampling is a data collection method that uses student networks, snowball sampling, and the use of social media. This active psychological investment in work will help them to buffer the negative impact of rumination on resource utilization.

The sample consisted of 185 Dutch employees who were recruited with network sampling (Demerouti & Rispens, 2014). Network sampling is a data collection method that uses student networks, snowball sampling, and the use of social media. This data collection technique often results in heterogeneous samples from various sectors and can be used to stratify people by MLE. Individuals could only participate in the study if they had experienced a MLE in the year before the study started. The majority of the sample was female (69.6%), and the mean age was \( M = 32.22 \) years (\( SD = 11.21 \), age range: 18–59 years). Participants had on average 10.90 years of work experience (\( SD = 10.69 \)), and mean work tenure was 5.24 years (\( SD = 6.69 \)). They worked on average 30.72 hr a week (\( SD = 15.57 \)). In terms of education, 31% finished high school, 14% secondary vocational education, 20% higher professional education, and 35% university. The participants worked in various occupational sectors, including health care (23.4%), education (13.3%), business (12.0%), communication (5.7%), and government (5.1%).

The university research ethics committee approved the study. There were two stages of data collection. First, participants completed a one-time survey that assessed the demographics and individual-level variables (the MLEs, and work role centrality). Then, participants were asked to respond to weekly questionnaires for five subsequent workweeks. All surveys were programmed using a web-based survey platform, and the links to the surveys were sent by e-mail. Participants were asked to fill out the one-time survey during the first week. The questionnaires at the week-level were filled out at the end of every workweek on Thursday or Friday, depending on when the workweek ended. The participants reported their weekly levels of rumination, psychological detachment from the MLE, self-efficacy, social support (control variable), work engagement, and in-role job performance. In total, participants completed 443 weekly surveys, resulting in a weekly response rate of 47.8%.

Measures

Between-person level measures. MLEs were assessed with Norbeck’s (1984) Life Event Questionnaire. The original questionnaire consists of 82 items, but we adapted the questionnaire to avoid response burden. Specifically, we used eight common MLEs in the family domain and added an open-ended answer category so that all participants could indicate their MLE. Here is a list of the MLEs that we included: death of a family member or close friend, major change in health or behavior of a family member or close friend (illness, accidents, drug or disciplinary problems, etc.), breaking up with partner or breaking an engagement, divorce, being a victim of a violent act (rape, assault, etc.), death of a child, being robbed, death of spouse or partner, and other (divorce of parents and abortion). We decided to limit the study to negative life events, although we are aware that MLEs can also be positive (e.g., the birth of a child). Participants were asked to choose which events they had experienced in the last year, for example divorce, death of a family member or a close friend, or being robbed. After that, they filled in how much impact the MLE had on their daily life, rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (no impact) to 5 (very large impact). We labeled this variable “Severity of the MLE.”

Work role centrality was measured by Carr, Boyar, and Gregory’s (2008) five-item scale. Sample items are as follows: “Work should be considered central to life” and “The major satisfaction in my life comes from my work rather than my family.” Participants rated each item along a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Responses to these items were scored such that higher values indicated that individuals viewed work as being more central to their lives. The internal consistency of the scale was good. Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) coefficient was .91.

Within-person level measures. Due to the space constraints that are inherent to diary studies (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), we
used validated short versions of original scales. If not available, original scales were shortened using the items with the highest factor loadings in previous research. All items were adapted to the week level, and participants could respond using a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Self-efficacy was assessed with four items of the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). An example item is, “Last week, I was confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.” Cronbach’s α ranged between .88 and .94 (M = .91).

Rumination was measured with the Rumination subscale of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006). The scale consists of four items that were slightly adapted to refer to the MLE. Examples are as follows: “Last week, I often thought how I felt about the MLE that I experienced” and “Last week, I dwelt upon the feelings the MLE has evoked in me.” In their validation study, Garnefski and Kraaij offer evidence for the reliability and validity of the rumination measure, also vis-à-vis depressive symptoms. Cronbach’s α ranged between .92 and .96 (M = .93).

Psychological detachment from the MLE was measured using four modified items of the Recovery Experience Questionnaire (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). The original items measure psychological detachment from work, during nonjob time. To measure detachment from the MLE, the questions were transformed. An example item is, “Last week, I did not think about the MLE at all, during work time.” Cronbach’s α ranged between .82 and .93 (M = .89).

Work engagement was measured with the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale includes scales for the assessment of vigor, dedication, and absorption (three items each). Here are example items for each indicator of work engagement: “Last week, I felt strong and vigorous at my job” (vigor), “Last week, I was proud of the work that I do” (dedication), and “Last week, I was immersed in my work” (absorption). Cronbach’s α ranged between .90 and .93 (M = .91).

Job performance was assessed using three of the seven items included in Williams and Anderson’s (1991) scale. An example item is: “Last week, I fulfilled responsibilities specified in my job description.” Previous research has shown that this self-report scale correlates positively, r = .46, p < .001, with supervisor-ratings of weekly in-role job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Cronbach’s α ranged between .85 and .93 (M = .89).

Social support. To test the unique effects of rumination, detachment, and work role centrality on the use of self-efficacy, we controlled for social support—an important resource in the work environment (Bakker et al., 2014). We used the three-item social support scale developed by Van Veldhoven, de Jonge, Broersen, Kompier, and Meijman (2002). An example item is “Last week, I was able to ask my peers for help during the work.” Cronbach’s α ranged between .82 and .90 (M = .86).

Strategy of Analysis

Our repeated measures data can be viewed as multilevel data, with weekly measurements nested within individuals. This leads to a two-level model with weeks at the first-level (N = 443 occasions) and individual participants at the second level (N = 185 participants). We conducted multilevel structural equation modeling using Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to analyze the data. To test within-person interaction effects between weekly self-efficacy and weekly rumination/weekly psychological detachment on weekly work engagement and subsequent weekly job performance (Hypothesis 1 and 2), we specified multilevel moderated mediation models with a cross-level direct effect of severity of the MLE on weekly rumination or weekly detachment, and we used the XWITH command to model the within-person interactions, such as “Efficacy × Ruminate | Efficacy XWITH Ruminate.”

To further test the cross-level three-way interaction effect of work role centrality (Hypothesis 3a and 3b), we regressed work role centrality on the random slopes of the within-person interaction effect of weekly self-efficacy and weekly rumination, as well as the interaction between weekly self-efficacy and weekly detachment in separate models at the between-person level on the basis of the previous multilevel moderated mediation models. We first generated the random effect of the within-person interaction of self-efficacy and rumination on work engagement, for example, using command “S | Engagement ON Efficacy × Ruminate,” at the within-person level.

Subsequently, we included the grand-mean centered observed variable work role centrality as a between-person predictor of the random slope of the interaction between self-efficacy and rumination, using the command “S ON Work role centrality,” which indicates the cross-level three-way interaction of work role centrality with self-efficacy and rumination. The two-way interactions, such as the interaction of work role centrality with self-efficacy, and work role centrality with rumination, are also cross-level interactions. Similarly, we first generated the random slope of the within-person relationship using command “S1 | Engagement ON Efficacy,” for example, and then predicted the slope by work role centrality at the between-person level using “S ON Work role centrality,” which indicates the cross-level moderation effect of work role centrality. Weekly work-related social support was modeled as a control variable influencing weekly work engagement.1 Variables at the within-person level (Level 1, weekly self-efficacy, weekly rumination, weekly detachment, weekly work engagement, weekly job performance, and weekly work-related social support) were modeled as latent variables, and the predictors at the between-person level (Level 2, severity of MLE and work role centrality) were modeled as observed variables and centered to the grand mean.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The various MLEs participants were confronted with are presented in Table 1. The majority of the participants lost a family member or close friend (27.1%) or experienced a major change in the health or behavior of a loved one (24.3%). The negative MLE happened on average 9.01 months before the study took place (SD = 10.64). Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and

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1 We also tested whether rumination moderated the weekly social support–work engagement relationship and found that the interaction effect was in the expected direction, but not statistically significant, γ = −.028, p = .9. Similarly, the detachment–social support interaction effect was not significant, γ = −.004, p = .86.
Table 1

Distribution of the Major Life Events Across the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major life events</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member of family or close friend (illness, accidents, drug or disciplinary problems, etc.)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a family member or close friend</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend or breaking an engagement</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being a victim of a violent act (rape, assault, etc.)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being robbed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of spouse or partner</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g., divorce parents or abortion)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17.2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. k = 255 major life events. N = 185 participants.

Hypotheses Testing

According to Hypothesis 1, rumination about the MLE would (a) undermine the self-efficacy-work engagement relationship and (b) subsequently undermine job performance. As shown in Table 3 (Model 1), the severity of the MLE was significantly related to weekly rumination (γ = .656, p < .01), and the moderation effect of weekly rumination on the relationship between weekly self-efficacy and weekly work engagement was weak but significant (γ = –.038, p < .05). Following Aiken and West (1991), we plotted the moderation effect and conducted simple slope tests. Figure 2 indicates that the positive relationship between weekly self-efficacy and work engagement was weaker, r = –.243, p < .05, during the weeks employees ruminated relatively often about the MLE (b = .315, p < .01) than during the weeks employees hardly ruminated (b = .388, p < .01). Thus, Hypothesis 1a was supported: Rumination about the MLE undermined the relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement.

To test Hypothesis 1b, we estimated the indirect effects of weekly self-efficacy on weekly job performance via weekly work engagement at high (indirect effect = .109, SE = .045, p < .05, 95% confidence interval [CI] [.021, .197]) and low (indirect effect = .137, SE = .048, p < .01, 95% CI [.043, .230]) levels of rumination. The results showed that the difference between both conditions was not significant (difference = –.028, SE = .024, p = .246, 95% CI [.019, –.075]). This means Hypothesis 1b was not supported: Rumination about the MLE did not weaken the sequential mediation of self-efficacy, work engagement, and job performance.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that psychological detachment from the MLE would (a) strengthen the self-efficacy-work engagement relationship and (b) subsequently relate to job performance. As shown in Table 4 (Model 1), the severity of the MLE was negatively related to weekly detachment (γ = –.328, p < .01), and the...
mildation effect of weekly detachment on the relationship between weekly self-efficacy and weekly work engagement was significant ($/H_{9253}/H_{11005}.064, p/\textit{H}_{11021}.05$). Simple slope analyses and the plot of the interaction (Figure 3) indicate that the positive relationship between weekly self-efficacy and work engagement was stronger, $t = 3.200, p < .01$, during the weeks employees showed a great deal of psychological detachment from the MLE ($/H_{11005}.376, p < .01$) than during the weeks employees showed little detachment ($/H_{11005}.280, p < .01$). This means that Hypothesis 2a was supported as well.

Table 3
Multilevel Moderated Mediation Model of Ruminati

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1 variables</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly social support</td>
<td>.193**</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>0.166**</td>
<td>.050</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly self-efficacy</td>
<td>.352**</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>0.304**</td>
<td>.074</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly rumination about MLE</td>
<td>−.054*</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>−0.031</td>
<td>.036</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Self-Efficacy × Weekly Ruminati</td>
<td>−.038*</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>−0.058</td>
<td>.052</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly work engagement</td>
<td>.322**</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.206**</td>
<td>.072</td>
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<td><strong>Level 2 variables</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Severity of the MLE</td>
<td>.656**</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.609**</td>
<td>.110</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work role centrality</td>
<td>0.265**</td>
<td>.095</td>
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<td>Cross-level interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work Role Centrality × Weekly Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work Role Centrality × Weekly Ruminati</td>
<td>−0.107</td>
<td>.093</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Role Centrality × Weekly Self-Efficacy × Weekly Ruminati</td>
<td>−0.009</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Variance level 1 (within-person)</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.391</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variance level 2 (between-person)</td>
<td>1.035</td>
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<td>1.002</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Model deviance</td>
<td>1071.710</td>
<td>1066.169</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. MLE = major life event.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Figure 2. Moderating effect of weekly rumination about the major life event on the weekly self-efficacy–weekly work engagement relationship.

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To test Hypothesis 2b, we estimated the indirect effects of weekly self-efficacy on weekly job performance via weekly work engagement at high (indirect effect = .145, SE = .054, \( p < .01 \), 95% CI [.039, .250]) and low (indirect effect = .107, SE = .046, \( p < .05 \), 95% CI [.018, .196]) levels of psychological detachment from the MLE. The test of differences between the indirect effects under the two conditions was significant (difference = .038, SE = .018, \( p < .05 \), 95% CI [.001, .076]). Psychological detachment from the MLE boosted the indirect relationship between weekly self-efficacy and weekly job performance via weekly work engagement. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that work role centrality and rumination (Hypothesis 3a)/detachment (Hypothesis 3b) have a combined impact on the self-efficacy–work engagement relationship. As shown in Table 3 (Model 2), the three-way interaction of self-efficacy, rumination, and work role centrality was not significant.

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### Table 4

**Multilevel Moderated Mediation Model of Detachment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly detachement</td>
<td>Weekly work engagement</td>
<td>Weekly job performance</td>
<td>Weekly detachement</td>
<td>Weekly work engagement</td>
<td>Weekly job performance</td>
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<td>SE</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1 variables</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly social support</td>
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<td>.049</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.198**</td>
<td>.054</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly self-efficacy</td>
<td>0.328**</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.297**</td>
<td>.076</td>
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<td>Weekly detachment from MLE</td>
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<td>.063</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.149†</td>
<td>.082</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Self-Efficacy \times Weekly Detachment</td>
<td>0.064*</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.086*</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly work engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.328**</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td></td>
<td>.196**</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2 variable</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Severity of the MLE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-.328**</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.303**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work role centrality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.259**</td>
<td>.094</td>
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<td>Cross-level interactions</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Role Centrality \times Weekly Self-Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Role Centrality \times Weekly Detachment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Role Centrality \times Weekly Self-Efficacy \times Weekly Detachment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.148*</td>
<td>.072</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variance level 1 (within-person)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variance level 2 (between-person)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Model deviance</td>
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<td>1062.503</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1065.681</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** MLE = major life event.

* \( p < .05 \). ** \( p < .01 \).

To test Hypothesis 2b, we estimated the indirect effects of weekly self-efficacy on weekly job performance via weekly work engagement at high (indirect effect = .145, SE = .054, \( p < .01 \), 95% CI [.039, .250]) and low (indirect effect = .107, SE = .046, \( p < .05 \), 95% CI [.018, .196]) levels of psychological detachment from the MLE. The test of differences between the indirect effects under the two conditions was significant (difference = .038, SE = .018, \( p < .05 \), 95% CI [.001, .076]). Psychological detachment from the MLE boosted the indirect relationship between weekly self-efficacy and weekly job performance via weekly work engagement. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

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high work role centrality could detach well from the MLE. and work engagement was strongest during the weeks people with supported. The positive relationship between weekly self-efficacy detachment, $b_{21005}$detachment, $b_{21005}$detachment, $b_{21005}$detachment, $b_{21005}$detachment, $b_{21005}$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3b was supported. The positive relationship between weekly self-efficacy and work engagement was strongest during the weeks people with high work role centrality could detach well from the MLE.

Discussion

In the present study, we investigated how MLEs interfere with working life and how working life can help individuals detach and feel engaged under stressful circumstances. We used a multilevel approach in which the MLE and work role centrality were treated as stable person-level factors, whereas rumination about/detachment from the MLE, as well as self-efficacy, work engagement, and job performance were assessed with weekly diary surveys. Results showed that rumination undermined the use of self-efficacy for work engagement, whereas psychological detachment facilitated the use of self-efficacy for work engagement and job performance. Consistent with the W-HR model, these findings suggest that an MLE uses up weekly energetic and cognitive resources, thus preventing the full use of psychological resources for work. Moreover, the findings indicate that work role centrality strengthens the moderating impact of psychological detachment (not rumination) on the link between self-efficacy and work engagement. In what follows, we discuss the most important contributions of our study.

Theoretical Contributions

A first contribution of the present study is that it offers support for a central proposition in the W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012a), namely, that experiences in family life may consume so many energetic and cognitive resources that it impedes the effective use of psychological resources in working life. Our study focused on the process triggered by an MLE, a stressor in the family domain that requires considerable adaptation. When individuals are confronted with a divorce, death of a loved one, or family members’ major health problems, it is hard to think of anything else than the major event (Luhmann et al., 2012). The sadness and depressive thoughts may be so overwhelming that people end up in an existential crisis that may have prolonged spillover effects to other life domains. In this study, we investigated a heterogeneous group of employees from various occupations that was confronted with a variety of MLEs. Remarkably, the MLE had happened an average of no less than 9 months before the start of the study. Still, the severity of the MLE correlated substantially with weekly rumination (strong positive relationship) and weekly detachment from the event (moderate negative relationship). Consistent with the WH-R model, weekly rumination undermined the use of weekly self-efficacy, whereas detachment from the MLE facilitated the use of weekly self-efficacy as a personal resource for work engagement and job performance.

Although the rumination–self-efficacy interaction effect was significant, it is important to notice that the effect was actually relatively weak. Nevertheless, Abelson (1985) has argued that small effects can accumulate and eventually yield large effects. Importantly, the findings shed light on the family-to-work role conflict process and expand previous findings by Du and her colleagues (2018a, 2018b). The latter authors found that homesickness undermined the use of performance feedback and support as job resources for performance (work engagement was not studied in Du et al.’s (2018b) research). Similarly, Du, Derks, and Bakker (2018a) found that rumination about small family hassles undermined the positive link between morning job resources (autonomy, task identity, skill variety, etc.) and afternoon flourishing (feeling good and competent, and actively contributing to the happiness and well-being of others). Taken together, these studies reveal that repetitively and compulsively focusing attention on the symptoms, causes and consequences of one’s distress uses up so many attentive resources that people are unable to fully profit from the resources in their work environment or from their personal resources like self-efficacy. Note that our study used the WH-R model to investigate the impact of the home domain on the work domain through rumination, offering support for an understudied effect in spillover research.

A second contribution of this study is that we introduced the concept of detachment from the MLE. Because psychological detachment was only weakly negatively related to rumination (within-person $r = -.29, p < .01$), it is clear that a low score on

Figure 4. Three-way interaction effect of weekly self-efficacy, weekly detachment from the MLE, and work role centrality on weekly work engagement.
detachment does not imply a high score on rumination—the concepts are qualitatively different. Using recovery theory (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Sonnentag et al., 2017), we proposed and found that employees who psychologically detach from the MLE are more likely to use their psychological resources for work tasks, are more engaged, and perform better. Sonnentag and colleagues have argued that psychological detachment from work-related effort during off-job time (usually in the home domain) restores the cognitive and energetic resources lost while dealing with work demands. In addition, they argue that psychological detachment from work may create new volatile resources, for example, when the recovery activity involves listening to inspiring music or podcasts and leads to positive emotions and enthusiasm. Inspired by these ideas, we proposed distancing from the home domain (the MLE) to fully profit from personal resources in the work domain.

The present results are conceptually consistent with the findings of a recent study among prison officers. Kinman, Clements, and Hart (2017) investigated the moderating roles of rumination and psychological detachment in the link between (a) job demands and aggressive behaviors by prisoners and (b) emotional exhaustion. Results suggested that job stressors were only related to exhaustion when rumination about work was high (vs. low) or when psychological detachment from work was low (vs. high). Our results expand these previous findings by showing the role of rumination and detachment in the context of a MLE. Our study suggests that detachment facilitates resource use and eventually contributes to self-reported job performance. These findings contribute to recovery theory and introduce psychological detachment as a coping strategy in the domain of MLEs. Our results are also consistent with Sonnentag and Kühnel’s (2016) proposition that workers need to reattach to work (i.e., rebuild the mental connection with one’s work) when returning to work after a short respite to experience work engagement.

Third, our study provided evidence for the role of key resources in the WH-R model. We focused on work role centrality (Carr et al., 2008) and argued that individuals who give work a central place in their life are better able to use detachment from the MLE as an effective strategy to mobilize weekly psychological resources. Work role centrality means that individuals identify with their work and devote considerable time and energy to the work role (Diefendorff et al., 2002). When work plays a central role in one’s life, it provides the individual with meaning, self-worth, and purpose (Noor, 2004). Our findings suggest that work can be an important domain to facilitate detachment from the MLE and create meaning (Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2013). It is even conceivable that MLEs make people realize that life is too short to waste time, and by realizing that time is limited, people may decide to engage in work and focus more on the things at work that are really important to them, to have impact.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Avenues for Future Research

The present study has some strengths but also some weaknesses. A strength is that we combined two methods of data collection (general survey and weekly diary questionnaires). This means that although we had only one source of information, common method variance was not a major threat to the validity of our findings. Moreover, the relationships between the variables were as predicted but moderate in magnitude; in addition, we focused on statistical interaction effects—relationships that would not have been found if the variables had shown too much overlap. Nevertheless, future research may consider using different sources of information, including physiological indicators for rumination/detachment, and supervisor- or colleague-ratings for job performance. Another strength of this study is that we used a weekly diary design to collect repeated measures of our model variables. However, all variables at the within-person week level were measured at the same time, implying that we cannot make causal inferences. Future research may want to establish lagged effects of self-efficacy on work engagement and performance (Xanthopoulou et al., 2008, 2009).

Whereas the current study focused on negative MLEs, future research may test the W-HR model using positive MLEs. For example, marriage, the birth of a baby, or graduation may spark a positive family to work spillover process that may have rather different effects than negative MLEs. The positive emotions caused by positive MLEs may facilitate work outcomes because of the inspiration and energy that is generated by these events. However, positive MLEs may also undermine the focus on work activities, which may hinder goal achievement. Future research is needed to illuminate how, when, and for whom positive life events influence the work domain.

Another interesting avenue for future research is to test the impact of a major event at work (e.g., death of a colleague or promotion to higher position) on family functioning. Previous work-family research has clearly indicated that what happens at work has important implications for the family domain (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011). It would be interesting to test whether the model proposed in the current study would hold if the direction of the effect is reversed (i.e., from work to family) and whether detachment from work, as well as family role centrality, act as moderators.

Future research may also want to test various other key resources that help people solve problems and cope with stress. According to the WH-R model, people with key resources are more likely to collect new resources and optimally utilize their contextual resources (cf. Bakker et al., 2015; Hobfoll, 2002). It would be interesting to investigate core personality factors as possible key resources, for example, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. Such stable personality traits will theoretically help employees to better deal with MLEs and mobilize the contextual resources needed for work engagement and performance.

Finally, it would be very interesting to develop a training intervention in which people who experienced a MLE may learn how to detach themselves psychologically from thoughts about the negative event. Following the principles of detachment from work-related problems (Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag, & Mojza, 2011), participants could learn various strategies that help to mentally disengage from the MLE, like meditation, sports and exercise, or if wanted, and as suggested by the present findings—engagement in work activities.

Practical Implications

The present findings have some implications for practice. One important implication is that psychological detachment from the MLE seems to be an effective mechanism to stop using cognitive
and energetic resources on the event, attach to work, and use personal resources in the work domain. Building on previous recovery research (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012b), we argue that engagement in social activities with colleagues, sports and exercise, as well as engagement in hobbies may facilitate disengagement from the MLE and have a restoring effect. Moreover, our findings suggest that when individuals manage to detach psychologically from the MLE, they are better able to optimally use psychological resources at work and feel engaged in their work activities. Organizations may help their employees who go through difficult times by offering them access to recovery training programs. Hahn and her colleagues (2011) have shown that psychological detachment—in their study from work-related stressors—can be effectively facilitated by a recovery training program. It is plausible that the same techniques and exercises work to psychologically detach from private stressors induced by a MLE. The program should be tailored to the specific MLE an employee experienced.

Conclusion

The present study shows how MLEs may influence weekly resource use, work engagement, and job performance. Consistent with the W-HR model, we argued and found that weekly rumination about the MLE undermines effective use of personal resources (i.e., self-efficacy), whereas weekly psychological detachment facilitates the mobilization of resources. In addition, we showed that work role centrality acts as a key resource and amplifies the effectiveness of psychological detachment from the MLE. Our findings suggest that detachment may prevent the spillover of negative events in the home domain to the work domain—even if these events represent dramatic changes in people’s lives.

References


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