



Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology

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Happiness and well-being at work: A special issue introduction

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Manuscript received: 19/03/2013

Revision received: 26/06/2013

Accepted: 30/06/2013

Keywords:

Positive organizational psychology

Work

Happiness

Well-being

Palabras clave:

Psicología organizacional positiva

Trabajo

Felicidad

Bienestar

ABSTRACT

Over the last 10 years, research in the area of happiness has exploded, creating a wealth of empirical knowledge about mechanisms and processes that make people happy. One of the most accepted findings in this field is that work contributes quite substantially to well-being and happiness. With the rise of positive psychology in the past decade, there has also been an increased interest in the bright side of organizational life, paying attention to positive phenomena such as engagement, well-being, job satisfaction, or positive affective experiences at work. The ten papers appearing in this special issue of the Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology [Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones] address a variety of issues that may enhance our understanding of happiness and well-being at work. We hope that the positive focus of this special issue may serve to encourage further research in this domain.

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Felicidad y bienestar en el trabajo: introducción al número especial

RESUMEN

Durante los últimos 10 años, la investigación en el área de la felicidad ha sufrido una gran explosión, creando una riqueza de conocimiento empírico sobre los mecanismos y procesos que hacen felices a las personas. Uno de los hallazgos más aceptados en este campo es que el trabajo contribuye de manera sustancial a mejorar el nivel de bienestar de las personas. Con la aparición de la psicología positiva en la pasada década ha surgido también un mayor interés en el lado positivo de la vida organizacional, prestándose más atención a fenómenos como el engagement, el bienestar, la satisfacción laboral, o las experiencias de afecto positivo en el trabajo. Esperamos que el foco positivo que se propone en este número especial ayude a fomentar la investigación en esta temática.

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Some might consider paradoxical to dedicate a special issue to happiness and well-being at work in this turbulent period. At the time of writing, we are living the worst economic crisis the world has seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s, contributing to the change of the work environments, and the increment of unemployment rates in several countries. However, happiness and subjective well-being have become a subject of interest for both researchers (e.g., Easterlin, 2003) and policy makers (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009), and one of the main topics of the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Over the last 10 years, research in the area of happiness has exploded, creating a wealth of empirical knowledge about the mechanisms and processes

that make people happy. One of the most accepted findings in this field is that work contributes quite substantially to well-being and happiness (Fisher, 2010; Warr, 2007). For example, unemployment is related with significant decreases in well-being, from which individuals only recover when they find a job again (Clark, Diener, Georgellis, & Lucas, 2008). Furthermore, it has also been shown that employee well-being is critical for achieving organizational success (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

Thus, in parallel with the rise of positive psychology in the past decade, there has also been an increased interest on the bright side of organizational life (e.g., Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011; Bakker, Rodríguez-Muñoz, & Derks, 2012; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Ilies, 2012), drawing attention to positive phenomena such as engagement, well-being, job satisfaction, or positive affective experiences at work. In this sense, the field of positive organizational behavior (POB) has emerged from the new approach of positive psychology, which is defined as “the study and application of

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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). Typically, POB studies focus on individual positive psychological conditions and human resource strengths that are related to employee well-being or performance improvement (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). POB try to achieve a more integrated perspective of working life, towards an understanding of the entire range of well-being experience, and not solely its negative side. According to Tetrick (2002), it is very unlikely that the same mechanisms that underlie employee ill-health and malfunctioning constitute employee health and optimal functioning. Therefore, POB provided a conceptual framework for studying happiness and subjective well-being in organizations.

Subjective well-being is a very general concept that has different aspects, and refers to how a person evaluates his or her life (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991). In general terms, Bakker and Oerlemans (2011), based on Diener et al.'s (1991) definition, have conceptualized work-related well-being as the situation where an employee is 1) satisfied with his/her job and 2) experiences frequent positive emotions, such as joy and happiness, and infrequent negative emotions, such as sadness and anger (Diener et al., 1991). According to Fisher (2010), happiness is not a term that has been extensively used in the academic world. Instead of this concept, a distinct number of constructs, which reflect some form of happiness or positive affect, have been used in research. Thus, during the past years several so-called positive concepts have gained relevance, including work engagement (Bakker & Leiter, 2010), job satisfaction (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001), flow at work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), positive emotions at work (Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013), and work enjoyment (e.g., Bakker, 2008). While each of these constructs has some distinguishing features, there is also considerable definitional, conceptual, and measurement overlap between them. What they have in common is that all are referred to pleasant judgments (positive attitudes) or pleasant experiences (positive feelings, moods, emotions, flow states) at work (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011; Fisher, 2010). In our special issue this conceptual variety is also reflected in the topics included in the papers, though the most central and frequently used of these forms of work-related well-being is work engagement.

In an attempt to distinguish between different types of work-related well-being, Bakker and Oerlemans (2011) have developed a theoretical model within the context of a more general circumplex model of affect (Russell, 1980). The circumplex model postulates that the underlying structure of affective experiences can be characterized by two fundamental neurophysiological systems, one related to a pleasure-displeasure continuum and the other to arousal or activation. Each emotional state can be defined as a combination of these two dimensions as varying degrees of both pleasure and activation. Accordingly, positive indicators of well-being would be job satisfaction (high levels of pleasure and low levels of activation), and work engagement (high levels of pleasure and activation). Happiness at work would imply to experience high levels of pleasure and moderate levels of activation (Bakker & Daniels, 2012; Xanthopoulou et al., 2012).

Overview of the special issue

The ten papers appearing in this special issue of the *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* [*Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones*], address a variety of issues that may improve our understanding of happiness and well-being at work.

The special issue begins with two theoretical papers. In the first article, Warr (2013) explains his vitamin model applied to the understanding of happiness and unhappiness at work. It is suggested that happiness and unhappiness clearly derive from two main

sources: job characteristics and within-person mental processes. He gives a combined overview of the functioning of both processes. He also emphasizes that, in order to understand and enhance worker happiness and well-being, it is essential to examine non-linear patterns between the two above mentioned kinds of variables and happiness. Finally, the author proposes and discusses pathways for future research.

In the second theoretical piece, Bakker and Demerouti (2013) discuss the development of their JD-R model and how it has matured into a theory. They illustrate the different mechanisms underlying employee ill-health and malfunctioning (health impairment process), as well as employee health and well-being (motivational process). They also provide an overview of both direct and indirect effects of demands and resources on employee well-being. Finally, four types of interventions based on JD-R are reviewed.

Simbula and Guglielmi (2013) used a sample of teachers from five different schools to examine the longitudinal relationships between work engagement, mental health, job satisfaction, and extra-role performance. Grounded on conservation of the Resources theory and the broaden-and-build theory, they hypothesized a reciprocal model between work engagement and outcomes. The findings supported their prediction. Specifically, it was found that work engagement predicted mental health, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviours, and these outcomes, in turn, predicted work engagement.

Quiñones, Van den Broeck, and De Witte (2013) investigate whether psychological empowerment plays a role in mediating the effects of job resources (i.e., task autonomy, skill utilization, and social support) on work engagement. Utilizing a large sample of Chilean public workers, results showed that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between skill utilization, social support, and engagement. Furthermore, empowerment was the most important predictor of work engagement. This study demonstrates the relevance of being empowered at work for employees' well-being in organizations.

In a two-year longitudinal design study among Finnish managers, Mäkikangas, Schaufeli, Tolvanen, and Feldt (2013) examine the intriguing question of whether the levels of work engagement and workaholism are stable or change over time. For this aim, they used both variable- and person-centered approaches. Authors found four work engagement-workaholism profiles, concluding that both phenomena are largely independent psychological states. Results also showed that managers' levels of work engagement and workaholism were relatively stable over time, in particular the mean levels of workaholism showed high absolute stability over time. This thoughtful paper constitutes the first study in exploring simultaneously the development of work engagement and workaholism over time.

Moreno-Jiménez and Gálvez (2013) investigate one of the core components of recovery from job strain: Psychological detachment from work. They used a two-wave longitudinal study with a time lag of 6 months, in a sample of Spanish employees. On the basis of the conservation of resources theory, authors hypothesized that they would find reciprocal relations among psychological detachment and several outcomes (i.e., anxiety, vigor, and life satisfaction). Results showed that detachment from work at T1 predicted positively vigor and life satisfaction at T2, and negatively anxiety at T2. Additionally, T1 anxiety had an effect on T2 detachment. Thus, this study showed that positive effects of psychological detachment were also found in the long term. Furthermore, these findings also provide initial support for the theoretical models that postulate a reciprocal detachment-outcome relationship. To our knowledge, this is one of the first studies in showing the reciprocal effects of psychological detachment and outcomes.

The paper by Torrente, Salanova, and Llorens (2013) focuses also on work engagement, but in this case at team level. Based on the

emotional contagion theory, their study explores whether similarity of team members in terms of gender and company tenure is related to teamwork engagement. Results of analyses among 161 teams showed that teamwork engagement was positively related to gender similarity. Further, and contrary to the initial hypothesis, analyses also revealed that teamwork engagement was negatively associated with similarity in terms of company tenure. Taken together, these findings constitute one of the first attempts to explore the influence of team composition on engagement.

Cifre, Vera, Rodríguez-Sánchez, and Pastor (2013), following a gender perspective, analyze whether the features person- and job-fit have similar effects on job related well-being (i.e., work engagement and job satisfaction). A large international sample from 29 countries was used to test the hypotheses. Their findings clearly indicate that there were gender differences neither on well-being nor on ideal job characteristics. However, a different pattern was found regarding perception of current job characteristics, where clear gender differences appeared. Further, this study demonstrates that well-being is influenced by the fit between what the job provides and the employee's expectations, needs, and preferences.

Garrosa, Carmona, Ladstätter, Blanco, and Cooper-Thomas (2013) used a diary study to examine predictors of employees' daily emotional well-being (i.e., positive and negative affect). Results showed that daily NA at the end of the working day was positively predicted by daily family-work conflict, job-related exhaustion, and search for meaning in life. In addition, a negative affective state was negatively related to daily detachment and presence of meaning in life. Results also indicate the importance of detachment from work, presence of meaning in life, and family-work facilitation for achieving positive affect before going to sleep.

Finally, in their diary study among dual-earner couples, Sanz-Vergel and Rodríguez-Muñoz (2013) investigated whether work enjoyment might have an impact on employees' significant others. Results showed that daily work enjoyment contributed to employees' daily well-being (i.e., physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive liveliness), which in turn was transmitted to the partner. Furthermore, it was also found an indirect effect of daily work enjoyment on partner's well-being via employees' well-being. Thus, this article highlights the relevance of positive experiences at work, which may be transferred to the home domain.

We hope that the positive focus of this special issue may serve to encourage further research in the domain of happiness and well-being at work. Hopefully, the topics presented in these papers will provide new ideas and challenging questions for further progress of this emerging field.

Conflicts of interest

The authors of this article declare no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the authors for their contributions and all the reviewers for their comments to improve the quality of the papers. We also thank the Editor of this journal, Dr. Jesús Salgado, for his confidence and his support of this project.

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