Work Engagement as a Dynamic Process:
The Interplay between Events, Emotions and Resources

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Introduction

Work engagement as an affective-motivational construct is a positive psychological phenomenon that attracts increasing attention (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008). The aim of the present study is to focus on the dynamic micro processes that enhance or reduce work engagement and to examine how these micro processes differ between individuals. Building on *Affective Events Theory* (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), we argue that work events lead to emotional reactions which in turn influence work engagement. In line with the *Job Demands-Resources model* (Demerouti et al., 2001) the interplay between events, emotions and work engagement should differ between individuals depending on personal and social resources (Figure 1). We propose that positive affectivity and social support make people less dependent on positive events and secure them from not loosing work engagement when negative events occur.
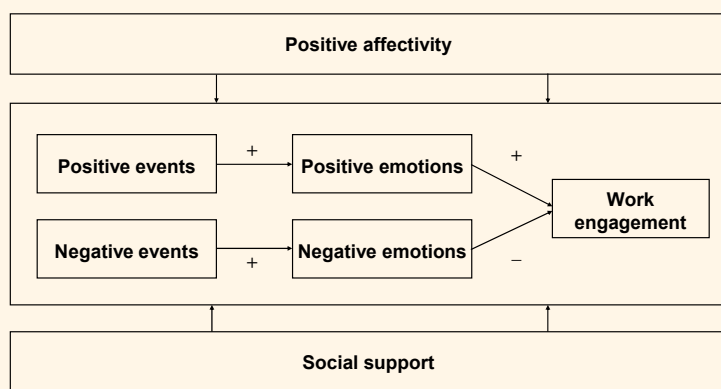

Figure 1. Theoretical model of antecedents of daily work engagement.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Positive emotions mediate the relationship between positive events and work engagement. Negative emotions mediate the relationship between negative events and work engagement.
- **H2:** Positive affectivity moderates the relationship between positive and negative events and work engagement.
- **H3:** Social support moderates the relationship between positive and negative events and work engagement.

Method

- **Sample**: N = 55 software engineers from Germany
- **Procedure:** 1.) General questionnaire to measure positive affectivity and social support at work, 2.) interval-contingent experience sampling methodology: Participants completed a web-based survey twice a day for nine working days to measure daily work engagement, work events and emotions.
- **Questionnaire measures**: *Positive affectivity* (10 items, α = .82, Watson et al., 1988), *social support* (3 Items, α = .78, Frese, 1989)
- **Experience-sampling measures**: *Work engagement* (5 Items, α = .92), *positive emotions* (6 Items, α = .90), *negative emotions* (6 Items, α = .88), *positive events* (praise from supervisor, being asked for help, involved in planning- and decision making processes), *negative events* (making failures, time pressure, conflicts at work), open-ended questions about additional events.
- **Data Analysis:** HLM was used to model within- and between individual variations in work engagement. Within-individual variations were centered around the mean for each person.

Results

- Variance in work engagement within individuals: 53%
- **H1:** Positive emotions partially mediated the relationship between positive events and work engagement (Sobel-Test of the indirect effect: z = 7.86 **). Negative events fully mediated the relationship between negative events and work engagement (Sobel-Test of the indirect effect: z = -8.43 **; Figure 2).
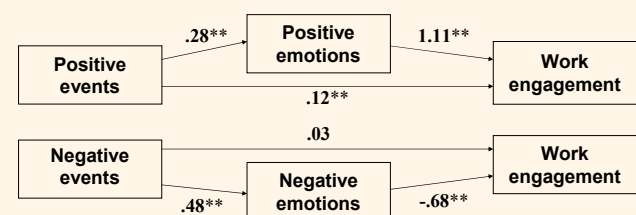

Figure 2. Events and emotions as predictors of work engagement.

- **H2:** Positive affectivity moderated the relationship between positive events and work engagement: The positive relationship was stronger for individuals low in positive affectivity (Figure 3).
- **H3:** Social support moderated the relationship between negative events and work engagement. The negative relationship was stronger for individuals with low social support (Figure 3).
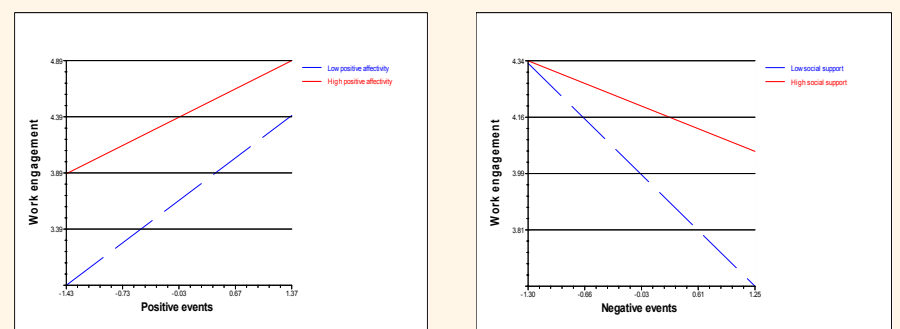

Figure 3. Interaction between positive events and positive affectivity in predicting work engagement (left). Interaction between negative events and social support in predicting work engagement (right).

Discussion

- **Contribution**: Daily fluctuations in work engagement can be predicted by work events and emotions. The effect of positive events on work engagement depends on people's level of positive affectivity. Social support acts as a buffer when negative events occur.
- **Future Research** should focus on different types of events and specific emotional states to advance our knowledge about what fosters work engagement. Furthermore, research needs to address the antecedents of positive and negative work events at multiple levels of analysis.
- **Practical Implications**: Organizations, supervisors and individual employees should actively create positive events to promote work engagement.

References

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