

# Everyday working life: Explaining within-person fluctuations in employee well-being

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## Abstract

Even workers who are generally happy at work can suffer short-term losses of enthusiasm and fulfilment. Short-term fluctuations matter because they can better explain work-related well-being (e.g. work engagement, flow, positive affect or passion), employees' relations with other people at work (e.g. co-workers, clients), life outside work, and ultimately productivity. This article reviews what we know about short-term variations in employee well-being and highlights new theoretical assumptions and results from the seven articles in this special issue. The articles identify key psychological mechanisms involved in explaining within-person changes in well-being, including the ways in which people appraise events at work, the importance of humour, the sense of hope, and the balance between skills and challenges. Interventions that offer leadership training and cultivate signature strengths at work can also be effective in enhancing employee well-being. Boosting short-term well-being can make a big difference to employees and organizations.

## Keywords

affective events theory, diary studies, employee engagement, flow, happiness, positive affect, within-person fluctuations, work-related well-being

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Theoretical and empirical work on employee well-being has been dominated by the trait approach (Wood and Beckmann, 2006). Thus, scholars have been interested mainly in differences between individuals in job-related affect and well-being (e.g. job satisfaction; for a meta-analysis see Judge et al., 2002), and employees' levels of well-being have been attributed to and explained by the fact that they differ from one another with regard to their working conditions and/or dispositional traits. Despite the importance of this between-person approach in the study of employee well-being, researchers started to question its predictive validity owing to inconsistent findings with regard to the relationship between traits, work-related well-being and job behaviours across different situations (Nezlek, 2008). Furthermore, the role of time and the dynamic relationships that evolve over time have been recognized as critical in theory development (Fried et al., 2007; Pitariu and Ployhart, 2010). These issues cannot be addressed by studies examining between-individual differences either with cross-sectional designs or with longitudinal designs over extended periods of time.

As a consequence, scholars started to shift from static to more dynamic models of employee well-being that, along with between-person differences, investigate short-term, within-person fluctuations (Daniels et al., 2008; Ilies et al., 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2011). Recent methodological advancements (e.g. multilevel modelling techniques) provide the opportunity to examine state (i.e. daily, weekly and monthly) aspects of employee well-being, their predictors and outcomes. Previous studies that have used such methods suggested that a significant amount of variance in core indicators of employee well-being (e.g. job satisfaction, work engagement) may be attributed to within-person fluctuations (Ilies and Judge, 2002; Judge and Ilies, 2004; Xanthopoulou and Bakker, *in press*). Investigating these within-person fluctuations is important because it helps understanding how and why employees who are generally happy, may not be equally happy every day (Gable and Reis, 1999; Sonnentag et al., 2010), and how these changes may determine their behaviour at work. Furthermore, the study of short-term fluctuations may help generate better hypotheses regarding employee well-being that, when tested with between-person studies, received trivial support (e.g. the happy-productive worker thesis: Cropanzano and Wright, 2001). For all these reasons, the study of within-person fluctuations in well-being may contribute to a better explanation of employee functioning at work on a day-to-day basis.

Although there is a significant amount of theoretical and empirical work that focuses on positive organizational behaviour (i.e. the study of positively oriented strengths and psychological capacities and their role for employee well-being and organizational flourishing: Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008; Luthans, 2002; Wright, 2003), as well as empirical evidence regarding short-term fluctuations in negative aspects of well-being, studies on positive indicators of employee well-being are still rare. In an attempt to cover this void in the literature, this special issue focuses on the psychological mechanisms and processes that explain short-term, within-person fluctuations in positive employee well-being.

We start this editorial by defining well-being at work, and we explain the importance of focusing on positive functioning rather than malfunctioning. Next, we justify the significance of within-person fluctuations in well-being for theory development and organizational practice, over and above the role of between-person differences. Then, we

review significant findings of previous studies on short-term fluctuations in positive aspects of employee well-being, and we introduce the seven articles of this special issue. We conclude with an overall discussion, where the added value of the studies that have been selected for this special issue is discussed.

## Defining employee well-being

Work-related well-being concerns the evaluations employees make about their working life experiences, and as such it may have both a cognitive and an affective component (Bakker and Oerlemans, 2011). Applying Diener et al.'s (1991) definition of general well-being to work-related well-being, Bakker and Oerlemans argue that an employee is considered to have high levels of well-being when he/she is satisfied with his/her job, and when he/she experiences positive emotions more frequently (e.g. happiness, enjoyment) and negative emotions less frequently.

In an attempt to understand well-being, Russell (1980, 2003) in his circumplex model made the distinction between positive vs negative and passive vs active affect. Accordingly, affective states can be distinguished on the basis of two neurophysiological dimensions. The first dimension refers to the valence of the affective state that may be determined on a pleasure–displeasure continuum. The second dimension refers to the level of arousal induced by the affective state that may be determined on a high–low activation continuum. Each emotional state can be defined on the basis of these two dimensions. Accordingly, feeling happy is placed at the quadrant that is characterized by pleasantness and moderate activation, while feeling calm and content are characterized by high levels of pleasure but low levels of activation.

Bakker and Oerlemans (2011) used the circumplex model of affect (Russell, 1980) to explain the theoretical and empirical distinction between different forms of employee well-being. As concerns positive indicators of well-being, they discussed job satisfaction, work engagement and happiness. Job satisfaction is defined as a pleasurable emotional state that results from job incumbents' evaluations about their experiences at work (Locke, 1969). According to Bakker and Oerlemans and based on the affective component of the construct, job satisfaction may be perceived as a facet of well-being that is characterized by high levels of pleasure and low levels of activation, since perceiving your work as positive does not imply that you are active in attaining or improving this condition. Being happy at work is also a positive but a more active state than job satisfaction. According to Bakker and Oerlemans, happiness is characterized by high levels of pleasure and moderate levels of activation. Compared with other positive emotional states, a happy worker is less activated than an enthusiastic worker, but more activated than a relaxed worker.

The enthusiastic worker shares similar qualities with the engaged worker. Work engagement is defined as an affective-motivational state of work-related well-being that is characterized by high levels of energy while working (vigour), high levels of involvement and enthusiasm (dedication), and by being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work (absorption: Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). Thus, work engagement may be perceived as a more active state of well-being than job satisfaction and happiness, since engaged employees are more energetic (Bakker and Oerlemans, 2011). Finally, work-related flow is another

positive indicator of employee well-being that is characterized by enjoyment (i.e. feelings of happiness), total absorption in the activity (i.e. the feeling that 'time flies') and intrinsic motivation (i.e. activities are partaken regardless of external rewards or costs: Bakker, 2008). Accordingly, being in flow may be characterized as a pleasurable state of high activation, where one is intrinsically energized and enjoys the activity.

In line with the above theoretical analysis, well-being may be used as a general 'umbrella' term that encompasses different constructs. Indeed, there are a number of distinct components – job satisfaction, engagement, involvement, positive emotions – that have been studied as positive indicators of employee well-being over the years (Diener, 2000; Fisher, 2010). In a similar vein, in this special issue we study positive well-being as an overarching term that may incorporate different states that are characterized by high levels of pleasure and from low to high levels of activation.

### *Why focus on positive indicators of well-being?*

Happiness and positive aspects of well-being have been a focus of attention of sociologists for many decades (Veenhoven, 1991), while there is a well-established research tradition on the role of positive emotions in organizational sociology (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989). More recently, positive indicators of well-being, such as happiness, have been a subject of interest in economics (Layard, 2006), as well as in psychology with the emergence of the positive psychology movement (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology shifted the attention from the study of malfunctioning to the study of those positive qualities in people that help them flourish. As a consequence, the field of positive organization behaviour (POB) has emerged and developed.

POB emphasizes the need for more focused theory development, research and effective applications of positive traits, states and behaviours of employees in organizations (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). This trend by no means implies a positivity bias that discards all previous theoretical and empirical work on employee ill-health and malfunctioning. Rather, the advocates of the POB approach argue convincingly that it is quite unlikely that employee malfunctioning and optimal functioning are explained by identical psychological mechanisms (Tetrick, 2002). As noted by Warr (in press a), when positive and negative aspects of well-being are distinct conceptually, they deserve separate examination and interpretation. Therefore, examining positive indicators of employee well-being is crucial both for theoretical and practical reasons, because it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of working life.

Despite the fact that the majority of previous studies on employee well-being focuses on between-person differences, they clearly suggest that enhanced well-being is beneficial both for employees and organizations (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2001). For example, the meta-analysis of Lyubomirsky et al. showed that happiness is associated with and precedes various successful work-related outcomes such as better performance evaluations from the supervisor, higher creativity and problem-solving abilities, lower levels of absenteeism and turnover intentions, as well as higher income. In addition, Judge et al. (2001), in their qualitative and quantitative review, estimated the mean true score correlation between overall job satisfaction and performance to be .30. Also, the meta-analysis of Halbesleben (2010) showed that

work engagement correlated positively with commitment, performance and health indicators, and negatively with turnover intentions.

The sources of employee well-being can be traced both to the person and to the environment (Warr, in press b). Dispositional characteristics that relate to well-being in a consistent manner include extraversion and emotional stability (Judge et al., 2002). Thus, employees who have a disposition towards cheerfulness, sociability and high activity, and who do *not* have the general tendency to experience distressing emotions such as fear, depression and frustration, generally report a higher level of well-being. As concerns the causes of well-being in the workplace, studies at the between-person level of analysis showed that the availability of job resources, such as autonomy, performance feedback, task variety and social support, related to higher levels of job satisfaction and work engagement (Bakker, 2011; Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006).

Previous empirical studies provide important insights for the better understanding of the positive aspects of employee well-being. However, the majority of these studies have focused on between-person differences, and have treated well-being as a static phenomenon that can be generalized over months or even years. Nevertheless, many aspects of well-being (e.g. positive emotions, job satisfaction, work engagement) can be conceptualized and measured as transient states that vary from one moment to another or from one day to another within the same person (Warr, in press a). The main aim of this special issue is to explain this transient character of well-being at and about work, and examine whether assumptions concerning the antecedents and outcomes of well-being that are based on between-person studies apply to the within-person level of analysis as well. In what follows, we explain the added value of studying within-person fluctuation in employee well-being.

### *The significance of within-person fluctuations*

According to the state (as opposed to the trait or between-person) approach, there are certain individual characteristics, attitudes and behaviours that may exhibit substantial within-person variations from one situation to another, in response to the changing characteristics of the environment (Cervone, 2005; Ilies et al., 2007). Thus, states refer to all experiences that may vary within the same person, and as such their study is of crucial significance for understanding individual experiences from a micro-perspective. This definition puts emphasis on the dynamic nature of states that is attributed to their sensitivity to external stimuli.

The notion of states is mainly used when referring to (positive) emotions or affective components of well-being, since emotional states are conceptualized as short-lived reactions to external cues (Gray and Watson, 2001). Accordingly, happiness is not just a disposition that varies from one person to another, as the majority of previous between-person studies on happiness at work have suggested (Judge et al., 2002; Judge et al., 2008). Rather, it also concerns feelings of happiness at a given moment (Russell and Carroll, 1999) in response to external stimuli (Fisher, 2010). For instance, a teacher may be happy when she is teaching very motivated students. However, the next hour, her positive emotions may evaporate if she has to deal with students who are misbehaving. This indicates that happiness (and other positive forms of employee well-being) can be

conceptualized and measured as both a trait and a state depending on the research question under study (i.e. whether one is interested in explaining overall well-being, or whether one is interested in measuring momentary well-being with respect to specific situations: Allen and Potkay, 1981), and both trait and state aspects of well-being require research attention.

Along these lines, Russell and Feldman Barret (1999) made the distinction between core affect and prototypical emotional episodes. They define emotional episodes as complex sets of interrelated sub-sets that concern a specific object (i.e. person, condition, event, thing or thought), and include the related emotional reactions, behaviours and cognitive appraisals. Emotional episodes have a beginning and an end, and are of limited endurance. For instance, a happiness episode may relate to a pleasant event (e.g. receiving positive feedback from my supervisor) that is appraised in a positive way (e.g. I am good in my job), and may result in the respective behaviours (e.g. enhanced performance). As soon as this episode ends, happiness returns back to baseline, till the next emotional episode. The concept of prototypical emotional episodes is in line with Affective Events Theory (AET: Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), which suggests that employees' positive emotional states are immediate responses to pleasant antecedent events at work.

Based on the above, it may be concluded that an employee who experiences high levels of well-being is not just a person who has a positive disposition towards work. Rather, she or he also has frequent, momentary, positive psychological experiences while at work on a daily basis. Capturing the dynamic aspect of employee well-being allows investigation of positive experiences and optimal functioning as they happen (or very close to their actual occurrence), and thus yields stronger evidence of its antecedents and outcomes than study designs with long interval periods (Sonnentag et al., 2010). Furthermore, investigating short-term fluctuations in positive indicators of well-being may further explain theoretical assumptions regarding employee well-being that have received trivial support so far. For instance, the inconsistent evidence concerning the happy-productive worker thesis (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001) may perhaps be attributed to the fact that well-being has been mainly investigated as a static phenomenon, and consequently the effect of within-person fluctuations on performance has been neglected. As proposed by Beal et al. (2005), performance levels may also fluctuate within the same person, even during the course of a day. Thus, it is important to study episodes of performance in relation to the dynamic changes of employee affective well-being. Examining state levels of employee well-being reduces measurement biases and leads to a better evaluation of causal effects.

The study of within-person changes in well-being is crucial for theory development for one more reason. Past knowledge on well-being, its antecedents and outcomes that is based on studies at the between-person level should not be taken for granted when studying the same relationships at the within-person level (Chen et al., 2005). Instead, assumptions about psychological processes that have been supported at the between-person level of analysis may be erroneous if applied to the within-person of analysis (and vice versa). For instance, findings on the relationship between job demands and engagement are found to be different when engagement is measured as a trait and when engagement is measured as a state (Xanthopoulou and Bakker, *in press*). While in between-person



analyses job demands relate negatively to engagement in a consistent manner (see the meta-analysis of Halbesleben, 2010), in quite a few studies at the within-person level, demands are found to relate positively to engagement. For example, Bakker et al. (2007) showed that on days that assembly line workers experienced higher workloads than usual, they were more engaged in their work. These findings suggest that perhaps, when measured at the within-person level, and on a short-term basis, job demands may be perceived more as challenges. In contrast, when demands are assessed retrospectively, they are more likely to be perceived as stressors, because the negative experience of facing high levels of demands chronically is more likely to prevail over the positive momentary experience.

The above suggests that it is important to test empirically the same psychological mechanisms at different levels of analysis. Support for similar or parallel processes at different (between and within) levels favours the homology of the proposed theoretical assumptions across levels of analysis (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000). This adds to the parsimony and breadth of the theoretical framework. In contrast, rejection of homology sets boundaries and indicates the need for theory refinement. Along these lines, it may be concluded that it is not enough to know that happy employees are better performers, healthier or more successful than unhappy employees (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Instead, it is also necessary to find out whether, on days that employees feel happier than usual, they are healthier, more successful and perform better. Insights on within-person fluctuations of positive employee well-being may be transformed into job redesign strategies that aim at creating happy and productive workforces on a day-to-day level.

The study of intra-individual fluctuations is complementary to the study of between-person differences. These two streams of research suggest that an employee's general level of well-being is relatively stable, but that there is substantial fluctuation from day to day around this general level. As George (1991) proposed, traits may have an impact on states or related behaviours, but states are the ones that initiate the psychological processes explaining day-to-day well-being. This is because states are in close proximity to the actual experiences and the consequent behaviours. Therefore, the advantage of the situational, within-person approach over and above the between-person approach is that it helps to better understand the function of individual characteristics in a more coherent way by acknowledging both enduring structures and dynamic processes (Cervone, 2005). Therefore, an integrative approach is needed in order to better understand the everyday life of a happy worker.

### *What we know so far*

There are some published studies that adopt this integrative (between- and within-person) approach in the study of positive indicators of employee well-being. One of the first studies that examined both between- and within-person differences in daily positive affect is the diary study of Sheldon et al. (1996). The authors demonstrated that individuals experienced higher daily well-being on days when autonomy and competence needs were relatively more fulfilled, after controlling for trait-level psychological need satisfaction. Reis et al. (2000) replicated these findings and found further that increased daily relatedness was associated with increased daily well-being. Although these studies led to

important findings, they were based on student samples and thus it is difficult to generalize their results to working adults.

There also have been studies examining within-individual fluctuations in various positive aspects of employee well-being in the working population. Even though it has been studied traditionally as a trait (see Ilies et al., 2007), a recent stream of research has conceptualized and measured job satisfaction as a time-varying state and attempted to examine its antecedents and outcomes in experience-sampling studies. Ilies and Judge (2002) proposed that job satisfaction should be measured as a state and, indeed, recent empirical results suggest that up to one-third of the total variance in job satisfaction is owing to intra-individual variations in discrete job satisfaction (e.g. Heller and Watson, 2005; Ilies and Judge, 2002; Ilies et al., 2006; Judge and Ilies, 2004). Importantly, when job satisfaction is measured as a state, individuals' characteristic (average) job satisfaction scores converge with their general (trait-like) ratings of job satisfaction (with convergent correlations approaching .60) when the number of state job satisfaction scores used to compute the average is 10 or more (Ilies and Judge, 2004). As for the antecedents of state job satisfaction, Ilies and Judge (2002) found that job satisfaction had a dynamic intra-individual relationship with mood at work across time. Judge and Ilies (2004) replicated this finding and also found that the within-individual association between mood at work and job satisfaction dissipates rather quickly with the passage of time.

Studying fluctuations in employees' job satisfaction over time has not been limited to examinations of antecedents of these fluctuations (e.g. mood: Ilies and Judge, 2002). Attesting to the importance of work-derived well-being constructs such as job satisfaction for employees' broader lives, there have been multiple attempts to conceptualize and study work–family 'attitudinal spillover'. Heller et al. (2004) proposed that employees' off-work life (e.g. family relationships) is influenced by employees' job satisfaction, while Judge and Ilies (2004) found that on days when employees were more satisfied with their jobs they tended to report significantly more positive affect at home. Interestingly, Ilies et al. (2009) found that employees not only reported more positive affect at home on more satisfying work days (as Judge and Ilies found) but they also expressed more positive affect as rated by their spouses. Finally, in an experience-sampling study where employees were asked to describe (and rate) the most positive event that occurred on each of 15 working days and then instructed either to discuss this event with their spouse at home or not to discuss it (what was termed work–family interpersonal capitalization), Ilies et al. (2011) found that discussing a positive event at home increased job satisfaction over and above the influence of the positive event itself and after controlling for a checklist of other possible daily positive work events.

Next to job satisfaction, researchers who study work engagement argue that levels of vigour, dedication and absorption may also change within the same person as a result of external cues in the work environment. Indeed, daily diary studies have shown that the amount of total variance in work engagement that may be attributed to within-person fluctuations ranges from 28 percent to 72 percent ( $M = 42\%$ ; for a review see Xanthopoulou and Bakker, in press). This means for instance, that employees who feel engaged on a certain day may feel less so on the next day because of what happens around them. Xanthopoulou et al. (2008) investigated whether daily social support fosters day-levels of self-efficacy beliefs and work engagement among flight attendants travelling to three



intercontinental destinations. Results showed that the social support built up with the new crew during the outbound flight fostered individual employees' sense of self-efficacy before the inbound flight, which, in turn, determined their levels of work engagement and performance during the inbound flight. Similarly, Simbula (2010) in a diary study among 61 teachers showed that on days that teachers reported more support from their colleagues they were more engaged and in turn more satisfied with their work and enjoyed better mental health on that day.

Furthermore, in their diary study among Greek employees working in fast-food restaurants, Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) expanded this line of research, and investigated the relationship between within-person fluctuations of resources and engagement on the one hand and daily productivity on the other. Results showed that daily job resources (e.g. supervisor coaching and positive team climate) contributed to employees' personal resources (day-levels of optimism, self-efficacy and self-esteem), which, in turn, explained daily work engagement. Importantly, this study clearly showed that engaged employees performed better on a daily basis. The higher the employees' levels of daily engagement were, the higher the restaurants' financial returns on that day. Also, Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2009) showed that work engagement may not only have consequences for employees themselves, but also for their direct colleagues. In a five-day diary study of 62 dyads of employees ( $N = 124$  employees and  $N = 620$  occasions), the authors examined the crossover of work engagement from one colleague (the 'actor') to the other (the 'partner') on a daily basis. The frequency of daily communication moderated the crossover effect: the daily crossover of work engagement was evident only on days that colleagues communicated more frequently than usual. Moreover, when frequently communicated, daily actor work engagement (particularly vigour) had a positive indirect relationship with a partner's job performance through partner's work engagement.

Despite the fact that flow has been defined mainly as a fluctuant state, there is a rather limited number of studies that investigate within-person fluctuations of flow in general, and work-related flow in particular (Fullagar and Kelloway, 2009). For instance, Rodriguez-Sanchez et al. (2011) found significant within-person fluctuations in flow levels of employees during the course of the day. Furthermore, Demerouti et al. (2012), in their diary study among German and Dutch employees, examined the relationship between daily flow experiences at work and energy, both immediately after work and at the end of the evening. The results of this study showed that on days that employees enjoyed flow experiences they felt more energetic and less exhausted both at the end of the working day and at the end of the evening.

Similarly to flow, and in contrast to what one would expect considering that emotions are likely to change substantially within the same individual from one moment to another, there are relatively few published studies on short-term, within-employee fluctuations in positive emotions. Miner et al. (2005) found that 56 percent of the variance in hedonic tone of mood was explained by within-person variance. Further, in line with AET (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), these authors hypothesized and found that the emergence of positive events at work on a daily basis related positively to hedonic tone, while the occurrence of negative events related negatively to hedonic tone. In a similar vein, Harris et al. (2003), in a 12-day diary study among 22 call-centre employees, found that daily

goal attainment related positively to both pleasurable affect and positive activated affect after work. Interestingly, the relationship between goal attainment and pleasurable affect was more prominent where goals were more important for the employee. Finally, Xanthopoulou et al. (2011) in a five-day diary study found that on days that employees perceived high levels of job resources (e.g. autonomy, quality supervision) they felt more positive emotions, which in turn made them feel more efficacious and optimistic.

The above review of empirical work – which is by no means exhaustive – shows that an approach that integrates both between-person differences as well as within-person fluctuations provides a more complete framework in understanding employee well-being. Previous studies emphasize the role of the work context by suggesting that what happens at work at the specific moment or day is of particular importance for understanding within-person fluctuations in employee well-being. However, most previous studies have mainly focused on one-to-one (antecedent-well-being) relationships, thus neglecting the underlying psychological mechanisms that may further explain these relationships. Also, previous studies clearly suggest that certain positive indicators of employee well-being (e.g. job satisfaction and engagement) have attracted more research attention than others (e.g. flow). Thus, the studies included in this special issue aim to advance our knowledge on the psychological mechanisms that explain short-term, within-employee fluctuations in various positive indicators of work-related well-being.

### *This special issue*

This special issue presents seven articles that aim at a better understanding of short-term, within-person fluctuations in positive employee well-being. To this end, we have selected theoretical and empirical articles, and studies that apply both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and elaborate analytical techniques. The effectiveness of interventions aimed at increasing well-being at work is also evaluated and discussed. The indicators of positive well-being that are examined by the studies of this special issue range from positive emotions and affect to work-related passion, work engagement and work-related flow. Importantly, these studies focus on the psychological processes that explain how short-term fluctuations in positive affective states may consequently determine other positive well-being states, such as vitality and life satisfaction.

This special issue opens with a theoretical article by Robert and Willbanks (2012, this issue) on humour events as drivers of employee happiness and well-being. The authors developed the Wheel Model of Humor, and propose humour events as an important driver of employee happiness and well-being through their influence on positive affect. Drawing on theories of humour and emotion, the Wheel Model suggests that humour-induced positive affect results in the transmission of emotions to social groups, which then creates a climate that supports humour use and subsequent humour events. Moreover, the model proposes a circular pattern to highlight the cumulative and escalatory process through which individual humour events can impact individuals and groups over repeated cycles of the wheel. Robert and Willbanks also describe individual and environmental variables that are likely to have an impact on relationships within the Wheel Model. They discuss specific research contexts to which the model can be applied (mentoring, leadership, groups/teams), as well as other future research directions.

The second article by Ceja and Navarro (2012, this issue) focuses on within-person fluctuations of flow experiences at work, and the role that perceived challenges and skills play in determining these experiences. Aiming to provide a more rigorous test of the central theoretical assumption that flow experiences happen suddenly and present discontinuous changes within the same person (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993), these authors integrated catastrophe theory (Thom, 1975), and particularly the cusp catastrophe model (Guastello, 2002) in the theory of flow. Ceja and Navarro applied the experience sampling methodology and followed 60 employees from various occupations over 21 working days. Based on an impressive data set of more than 6000 momentary reports of flow experiences, skills and challenge levels, they examined which model (i.e. linear, logistic or cusp catastrophe) could best explain the transitions in and out of the flow state. In line with predictions, results showed that the cusp catastrophe model explained more variance in flow than alternative linear and logistic models. This was particularly the case for employees who frequently experienced high levels of flow. Accordingly, flow at work is best represented as a non-equilibrium condition that combines continuous and sudden changes. These changes are influenced by momentary levels of challenges and skills that determine when one will enter into the 'flow zone', and how strong this experience will be.

The third article in this special issue concerns a diary study by Ouwenel et al. (2012, this issue). The objective of this study was to examine the positive within-person relationships between positive emotions, work-related hope and the three dimensions of work engagement on a daily level. Following broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) and AET (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), the authors propose that the experience of positive emotions at work causes hope during the next morning, which in turn facilitates state work engagement (vigour, dedication and absorption) during the working day. University staff filled in a diary questionnaire for five consecutive working days, twice a day. As predicted, the experience of positive emotions had an indirect effect on the level of vigour, dedication and absorption through hope across days. Ouwenel and her colleagues examine for the first time the role of work-related hope for daily levels of work engagement and advance past knowledge on the psychological processes that explain the relationship between positive emotions and work engagement.

The fourth article, by Culbertson et al. (2012, this issue), takes daily fluctuations in work engagement as a starting point, and examines how these fluctuations relate to optimal functioning at home. In an experience-sampling study of extension agents conducted over two weeks (and two times per day), these authors found that both work engagement and work-to-family facilitation varied significantly within the same person from one day to another. Furthermore, analyses supported a positive within-individual relationship between daily work engagement and work-to-family facilitation that was partially mediated by positive mood at work and at home. The results also supported a moderating effect of work-family interpersonal capitalization (or the sharing of positive work experiences at home; see also Ilies et al., 2011) in the relationship between work engagement and work-family facilitation. More specifically, the results revealed that the relationship between engagement and work-family facilitation was stronger for individuals who had the propensity to talk with their partners about good things happening at work.

The fifth article in this special issue is the qualitative diary by Kiffin-Petersen et al. (2012, this issue). This study offers a thorough examination and extension of the AET (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) by examining the role of different cognitive appraisals in explaining the relationship between positive events, on the one hand, and positive emotions, on the other. In an attempt to understand the emergence of positive emotions during interactions with customers, these authors conducted a qualitative diary study with the critical incidents technique among sales employees from a variety of industries. Employees were asked to bring to mind the most uplifting customer interaction of the specific day, and to provide information on the nature/type of the event, how this event was appraised, and the emotion felt. Thematic analyses revealed that helping customers solve their problem was the event most likely to trigger positive emotions. Importantly, results showed that the way employees appraise each event may determine the type of emotion that will be experienced. Finally, in line with the affective shift model of engagement (Bledow et al., 2011) and recent research on affective spin (Beal and Ghandour, 2011), Kiffin-Petersen et al. (2012, this issue) explain how initially negatively valenced appraisals may change into positive ones. The authors discuss the significant implications for organizational practice, and particularly how to manage employee–customer interactions in a way that results in enhanced employee well-being and customer satisfaction.

This special issue closes with two intervention studies. The article by Nielsen and Daniels (2012, this issue) focuses on leaders when implementing teams, where their role changes from delegating work to that of a coach and facilitator. The main assumption is that such organizational changes may create a mismatch between the demands of the function and leaders' resources. The authors applied a controlled intervention study in order to examine whether training leaders in team management may change their appraisals of the job (i.e. increase their challenge experiences) and consequently enhance their optimal functioning at work. Twenty-nine team leaders and their followers participated in the study. Experience sampling data were collected from the team leaders, and survey data were collected from their followers, over an 18-month period. At Time 1, diary data were collected from the leaders and the intervention started. Eleven leaders followed an action learning and evidence-based team leader training course that lasted for six days spread over a period of six months, while 18 leaders were allocated to the control condition. At follow-up, diary data from leaders and survey data from followers were collected. Results showed that training increased leaders' challenge experiences and subjective well-being states only under conditions where team members were open to change. Interestingly, on days that leaders were challenged more than their average, they reported better well-being.

Finally, Forest et al. (2012, this issue) tested the effectiveness of an intervention aimed at developing employees' signature strengths, and how the use of signature strengths may cause changes in harmonious passion and predict employee well-being over a two-month period. One hundred and eighty-six employees from the experimental group, who were also full-time students, completed three activities aimed at developing their knowledge and use of their signature strengths at work. More specifically, they identified their own signature strengths, they visualized and described themselves at their personal best, and they were instructed to use their signature strengths in novel

ways for the following two weeks at work. The results supported the effectiveness of the intervention since employees from the experimental group increased the use of their signature strengths over time. Furthermore, results also showed that participants from the experimental group reported a higher use of their signature strengths at the end of the study as compared with participants from the control group. Finally, and in line with predictions, findings revealed that increases in the use of signature strengths reported by participants from the experimental group were related to increases in harmonious passion, which in turn led to higher levels of well-being. In other words, within-person changes in harmonious passion may explain why the use of signature strengths at work enhances employees' general (i.e. life satisfaction, vitality) and work-related well-being (i.e. self-acceptance, purpose and personal goal) over time.

## General discussion and conclusion

The seven articles presented in this special issue advance past knowledge on short-term, within-person variations of positive aspects of employee well-being. The different indicators of positive employee well-being that were examined in these studies and the variety of methods that were applied are unquestionable advantages of the special issue. In this way, the special issue offers a diverse and rich approach on the intra-individual, psychological processes that explain employee well-being and optimal functioning at work. Next to the methodological advancements like, for example, the application of cusp catastrophe models and thematic analysis in studying intra-individual changes in work-related well-being, the studies of this special issue make certain theoretical contributions to the literature.

First, the findings of the articles presented here advance previous theoretical assumptions explaining employee well-being and particularly the notions of AET (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) – one of the more influential theories in the study of state well-being at work. Robert and Willbanks (2012, this issue) propose that discrete humour events may function as a driver for employee happiness and well-being that may be further transmitted through emotions cycles to the group and the organizational level (in the form of humour climate). The qualitative analysis of Kiffin-Petersen et al. (2012, this issue) extends AET by examining the role of employee appraisals as the linking mechanism that explains the relationship between affective events and experienced emotions. Adopting previous within-person findings on the relationship between appraisals and emotions (Nezlek et al., 2008), their study suggests that the same person may use a different appraisal mechanism when facing the same positive event at work. Consequently, this may result in different emotional experiences. Furthermore, Ouweneel et al. (2012, this issue) showed that positive emotional reactions at work may lead to higher levels of employee well-being because they cause employees to evaluate their work and influence their level of hope. The article by Culbertson et al. (2012, this issue) uses AET to explain work-to-family facilitation and emphasizes the significance of sharing positive events that happen at work with the partner during off-job hours. All in all, these findings contribute to theory refinement at the within-person level of analysis by providing insights on the psychological mechanisms that explain the link between positive events or experiences at work and employee well-being.

Secondly, the articles presented in this special issue advance the conceptualization of within-person fluctuations in employee well-being. The within-employee approach implies the occurrence of (sudden) changes from one situation to another within the same person. However, sudden changes have rarely been modelled and studied as such. At this point, the study by Ceja and Navarro (2012, this issue) challenges the simplicity of previous empirical approaches to flow, and adds to the theory and measurement of the construct by modelling drastic and discontinuous changes. The main contribution of this study to the literature is that it supports empirically, for the first time, an enriched conceptualization of work-related flow that examines its dynamic nature and the conditions that determine when one enters and when one exits the 'flow zone'. This demonstrates that the conditions that facilitate flow experiences (a balanced combination of perceived skills and challenges) should be constantly re-created.

The articles included in this special issue are not restricted to what happens during working hours only, but also examine the interplay between work and family life on a daily basis. For instance, the article by Culbertson et al. (2012, this issue) addresses positive affective spillover and facilitation from work-to-family by extending previous findings on the emerging construct of work-to-family interpersonal capitalization (Ilies et al., 2011). Apart from their theoretical significance, these findings may also guide organizational practitioners on how to improve employee well-being by taking into account both work and family domains.

Finally, there is a lack in the literature of intervention studies that aim at enhancing well-being in general and employee well-being in particular. This special issue fills this void by presenting two studies on the effectiveness of interventions aimed at increasing employee well-being over short-periods of time. The article by Nielsen and Daniels (2012, this issue) suggests that training techniques may determine intra-individual variations in challenge experiences. In turn, daily increases in challenges may be beneficial for daily subjective well-being. The study by Forest et al. (2012, this issue) presents a successful intervention program, which may increase employee harmonious passion well-being through the enhancement of signature strengths. These intervention studies further emphasize the importance of treating positive indicators of employee well-being as state-like constructs by indicating that these are malleable, developable and open to change (Luthans, 2002).

The present theoretical review and the seven articles comprising this special issue emphasize the importance, from a practical point of view, of monitoring well-being states on a daily basis in order to find out under which circumstances employees feel and function better at work. Given that within-person fluctuations in well-being are highly dependent on both environmental and personal characteristics that may also vary significantly within the same individual, managers should try to inspire and stimulate employees so that they feel highly competent and skilful on a daily basis. This can be done by (re)designing resourceful work environments, such that employees have the means to deal with the demands and the challenges experienced on the job. Consequently, this may help employees to maintain high performance standards on a day-to-day basis.

To conclude, the theoretical argumentation and the empirical evidence reported in the articles of this special issue demonstrate that examining within-person variations is a fruitful endeavour that adds substantially to our understanding of employee happiness



and well-being and organizational life on a day-to-day basis. We do hope that this special issue will inspire and guide researchers and managers in this interesting domain.

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