

Crossover of Work Engagement

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Work engagement is related to a plethora of positive outcomes both at the individual and organizational level. This positive organizational state can cross over from one individual to another, and this process may depend on several factors, such as the work context or individual differences. Crossover is a form of emotional contagion, and a conscious procedure in which transference of emotions and affective states is facilitated by the empathic reactions of partners.

work engagement

crossover

agreeableness

1. Introduction

Crossover is a form of emotional contagion, and a conscious procedure in which transference of emotions and affective states is facilitated by the empathic reactions of partners ^[1]. Simply put, when we spend time with others, and pay close attention to them, our affective states can cross over. Crossover processes can cause affective states, emotions, or well-being to be transmitted between colleagues ^{[2],[3]}, leaders and followers ^{[4],[5],[6],[7]}, and dual-earner couples ^{[8],[9],[10]}. Work engagement, in particular, has received extra attention within the crossover literature. Engaged employees are enthusiastic about their jobs ^[2] and can be a source of inspiration for others ^[3]. Research has shown that work engagement can be transmitted among working spouses ^{[11],[12]}, as well as from one employee to another in the workplace ^{[2],[3],[7]}. This is very important, considering the various positive outcomes of work engagement at the individual, team and organizational levels. For example, due to their dedication, engaged employees demonstrate better in role task performance ^[13], have better financial returns ^[3], and improved well-being ^[14]. In addition, engaged employees, due to their physical, cognitive, and emotional connection to their work roles ^[15] are more likely to be entrepreneurial ^[16] and exhibit proactive behaviors ^[17]. The fact that engagement can cross over from one employee to another, means that it can also emerge as a collective characteristic of work teams ^{[2],[18]}. Indeed, there are studies that have highlighted the positive association between team level work engagement and team performance ^{[19],[20]} as well as the positive relationship between work engagement and performance at the organizational level ^{[21],[22]}.

Past research has shown that the transmission of work engagement can be facilitated by various factors ^{[23],[24]}. These may include factors such as frequency of communication e.g., ^[3] or more individual characteristics, such as empathy ^{[25],[26]}. This brings into question whether broader personality traits, such as those measured by the Big-5, can also influence the extent to which engagement can be transmitted between individuals.

2. Work Engagement

Kahn [15] was the first that introduced the construct of personal engagement at work, defining it as a psychological, emotional and physical state transferring peoples' energy into their works. According to this view, an authentic expression of self occurs during situations of engagement, which in turn is beneficial for the individual. Regarding work engagement, there is a broad consensus among scholars about its core dimensions which are energy and involvement [27] and Kahn's [15] conceptualization of engagement suggests that it entails a behavioral-energetic, an emotional, and a cognitive component [28]. From this perspective, Schaufeli and Bakker [29] define work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind, characterized by vigor, dedication (emotional component) and absorption (cognitive component). Vigor refers to having high levels of energy and mental resilience while working (behavioral-energetic component). Dedication refers to a sense of enthusiasm, pride, and significance that someone feels due to his/her work (emotional component), and finally absorption refers to being highly concentrated to work or a specific task so that it can even become rather difficult for a person to detach himself/herself from work (cognitive component).

Work engagement has been found to relate to several positive organizational outcomes including organizational commitment and improved well-being [14],[29] job performance [3],[30] and lower turnover intention [31]. Engaged employees are quite energetic, self-efficacious [32], willing and happy to assist their colleagues [33], they tend to create their own positive feedback, and despite committing a lot of effort and resources, they are still left with a state of fulfillment and satisfaction about what they have accomplished [27].

3. Crossover of Work Engagement

Crossover is defined as the process that occurs when psychological well-being experienced by a person affects the level of psychological well-being of another person in the same social environment [34]. Consequently, crossover is a dyadic inter-individual transmission of mental states or emotions among closely related individuals, which occurs within a particular domain of life such as family or workplace [35].

Westman and Vinokur [36] proposed three main mechanisms responsible for the crossover process. The first mechanism refers to a direct transmission of from one partner to another through empathetic reactions (direct empathetic crossover). They argue that well-being experienced by one partner produces an empathic reaction in the other, which in turn leads to an increase in his/her own level of strain. The second mechanism concerns an indirect transmission of well-being as a result of interpersonal transactions and behavioral interactions between partners (indirect crossover). Thus, experiencing some change in well-being by one person can trigger a change in their behaviors as well as the way they interact with others and consequently influence their well-being. As such, social undermining or conflicting interactions could be mediating the crossover of negative affective states, and social support can mediate the crossover for positive affect [12]. Finally, the third mechanism suggests that well-being experienced by partners is not actually due to any crossover effect, but to common stressors and shared contexts which affect both partners. These three mechanisms can either operate independently of one another or jointly [37], and findings of empirical studies [25],[38],[39], support all of these propositions.

Although Westman ^[34] initially placed the emphasis on negative forms of well-being, such as job stress, strain, and burnout, it is possible that positive experiences may also cross over from one partner to the other via the same mechanisms as the negative aspects ^[34]. Work engagement is one of the most widely researched positive aspects of individual well-being ^[40]. In terms of its position in the nomological network of well-being constructs, it is negatively related to job burnout ^[41], and positively with life satisfaction ^[42], ^[43], and happiness ^[44]. Moreover, when employees experience work engagement they also have high levels of intrinsic work motivation ^[45] which is to say that they tend to find enjoyment in the job itself regardless of whether there are any additional rewards or benefits associated with doing it ^[45].

Based on the research of emotional contagion in the workplace e.g., ^[46], ^[47], ^[48], ^[49], there is a considerable amount of studies that have focused on the crossover of work engagement among employees and have also attempted to uncover the factors and the conditions that moderate this process. For example, Wirtz et al. ^[7] study showed that work engagement can cross over from subordinates to their leaders over time, indicating this way that subordinates can shape their leaders' work experiences and affect their well-being. In their diary study, Bakker and Xanthopoulou ^[3] showed that daily work engagement crossed over from one employee to the other within a dyad, only on those days that these employees interacted more frequently than usual, indicating that frequency of communication played a moderating role in the transmission of work engagement. In another study, Bakker et al. ^[2] found that crossover of work engagement, and especially vigor, took place on days when colleagues interacted more frequently, and that expressiveness, built through frequent daily interaction, could increase the possibility for work engagement to cross over from one employee to another. Similarly, Tian et al. ^[50] showed that work engagement crossed over from one partner to another and communication quality had a significant moderating effect on this process. Finally, in their study, Chiotis and Michaelides ^[51], found that work engagement crossed over from one employee to another within a dyad and this effect was further intensified if either one or both employees in the dyad are characterized by high levels of agreeableness.

4. Conclusions

Given the higher levels of interdependence that employees may experience due to increased demands for working in teams or pairs ^[52], as well as the positive organizational or individual outcomes of work engagement, it is crucial to investigate under which conditions crossover of work engagement takes place or which factors may facilitate this process. As such, it is important to examine crossover effects in various work contexts, as well as in dual-earner couples. To understand the dynamic nature of work engagement, researchers should employ more daily diary studies. Such methodological approaches would allow a more nuanced representation of how and when crossover effects occur.

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