

Strength Use and Well-Being at Work among Teachers

Subjects: Psychology

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Teachers' well-being at work is an important indicator of their mental health. Strengths use has been identified as a significant predictor of enhanced well-being at work.

Keywords: strength use ; hedonic well-being at work ; eudaimonic well-being at work

1. Introduction

Teachers are the most important resource for the high-quality development of education. They are responsible for teaching students knowledge and for the prosperity of the country. Improving teachers' well-being at work not only directly contributes to their mental health and work performance ^[1] but also promotes schools' sustainable educational effectiveness and student growth ^[2]. Consequently, examining the factors contributing to teachers' well-being is of great importance.

Since the emergence of positive psychology, the concept of strength use (SU) has gained prominence, denoting the extent to which individuals utilize their strengths in their daily lives ^[3]. SU has been found to be closely related to well-being in its general context ^[4], but there are few studies examining SU and the well-being at work of college teachers ^[5].

2. SU and Well-Being at Work

Well-being is considered an optimal state of mind and involves living human life to the best. It is not just about feeling good; it is about working well and living a good life ^[6]. William ^[7] believed that well-being encompasses how people experience and evaluate their lives positively. In the literature ^[7], well-being was conceptualized through two foundational theoretical perspectives: the hedonic and eudaimonic. From the hedonic approach, well-being focuses on the pursuit of happiness and life satisfaction. The eudaimonic approach emphasizes the pursuit of the realization of human potentials ^[8]. Huang et al. studied the effect of job characteristics on hedonic well-being and concluded that trust in colleagues was positively correlated with teachers' self-esteem and hedonic well-being ^[9]. In addition, Wang et al. analyzed the hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being of students through machine learning and traditional statistical analysis, and they obtained different influencing factors for the two types of well-being ^[10]. Several studies have separately explored hedonic and eudaimonic well-being at work. For example, Nina ^[11] demonstrated that hedonic well-being among female workers could be predicted by work-family balance and optimism. As for eudaimonic well-being at work, Kundi, et al. ^[12] found that eudaimonic well-being at work was related to job performance and affective commitment. Although many scholars have studied either kind of well-being at work, few studies have examined both kinds of well-being together in organizational psychology. Therefore, conducting research that compares and synthesizes the two kinds of well-being at work is imperative and holds substantial value in elucidating a more holistic understanding of teachers' overall satisfaction and productivity in their professional roles.

SU has been hypothesized to have a positive relationship with well-being at work. Character strengths theory suggests that SU has a positive effect on well-being because people naturally engage in activities aligned with their inherent strengths ^[13]. A study on character strengths and subjective well-being confirmed that SU mediates the association between character strengths and hedonic well-being—in particular, that different character strengths could lead to different degrees of strength use ^[14]. In addition, SU also resonates with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which recommends individuals to maintain, protect, and preserve their resources ^[15]. According to the COR theory, when people develop a resource surplus, they may experience positive well-being ^[16]. Moreover, the theory also posits that interventions that promote resource building and resource protection may improve well-being and prevent stress and burnout. Taken together, SU could be an important predictor of well-being at work. Consistently, SU has been found to be related to well-being in its general context ^[4], yet there remains a scarcity of research on its relationship to well-being at work, with only one study identifying a positive association between SU and work engagement—an indicator of eudaimonic well-being at work among college teachers ^[5].

3. The Mediating Role of Basic Need Satisfaction

There are many studies that show people can increase their well-being by consciously engaging in a variety of positive activities. Lyubomirsky and Layous ^[17] proposed the positive-activity model to indicate when and why positive activity enhances well-being and examined the moderating and mediating mechanisms in the relationship. One of the important moderating factors is the person–activity fit, with SU happening to be a positive activity that brings the individual's strengths into full utilization and fits a person to a high degree. Therefore, SU can improve individuals' well-being by meeting basic psychological needs. However, limited research has been conducted on how this potential mechanism works through the lens of basic need satisfaction.

Among the theories in positive psychology, the most important theory on satisfaction of basic life needs is the self-determination theory (SDT). The SDT divides basic human needs into three components: autonomy (the need to authentically integrate experience and self-feeling), competence (the need to effectively control one's environment) and relatedness (the need to foster a sense of connection and belongingness with others) ^{[18][19][20]}. It emphasizes basic psychological need satisfaction as a necessary condition for integrity, psychological growth, and well-being ^{[21][22]}. Several studies have demonstrated that the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs is related to overall well-being ^{[23][24]}. For example, Yang et al.'s research suggested that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs could account for the relationship between nature benefits and psychological well-being ^[25]. However, Deci proposes a model of eudaimonia based on the SDT. This model argues that behaving in ways that satisfy these three psychological needs reflects eudaimonic living, which thus contributes to high levels of EWB ^[26].

Furthermore, many studies have demonstrated the relationship between SU and basic need satisfaction ^{[27][28][29][30][31]}. For example, Kong and Ho investigate the role of strength use in the workplace by drawing on SDT to propose that strength use at work can yield performance benefits in terms of task performance and discretionary help ^[28]. SU can fulfill the need for competence by stimulating positive self-feedback and a sense of mastery ^[29]. Moreover, when employees use their strengths, they perceive their actions as spontaneous, which gives them a sense of autonomy ^[27]. Employees with a strong sense of autonomy possess the freedom to choose among work-related activities, thereby increasing the likelihood of engagement in many other areas in workplace ^[30]. In addition, individuals inherently seek respect and acknowledgement from others ^[30]. Using personal strengths allows individuals to perceive themselves as valuable contributors to a team while preserving their unique identity ^[31]. Together, these studies have suggested that SU may facilitate the satisfaction of basic needs.

In summary, SU, well-being, and basic need satisfaction seem to be correlated with each other. According to the positive-activity model, which suggests that positive activities such as SU may improve personal well-being by basic need satisfaction ^[17], it is reasonable to assume that basic psychological needs can mediate the association between SU and well-being at work. However, limited studies have explored this mediation effect.

References

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