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Affect regulation and well-being in the workplace: An interpersonal perspective

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Chapter 15 in A. Antoniou, C. Cooper, G. Chrousos, C. Spielberger, and M. Eysenck, (Eds.), Handbook of Managerial Behavior and Occupational Health Edward Elgar.

During and outside of work, the ways in which people manage their own and others' emotions and moods can impact on their own and others' well-being. For example, in relation to managing one's own affect, constantly having to present a happy face towards customers can result in emotional exhaustion, particularly if this expression of emotion is not consistent with one's internal affective state. Likewise, with respect to managing others' affect, if a team member were to joke with a colleague who was feeling anxious about an upcoming deadline, this could reduce the tension experienced by the colleague, and also make the team member feel better.

Over the last 25 years, there has been a great deal of research regarding the management of one's own affect. However, research concerning the management of other people's affect is still in its infancy. It is important to recognise the interpersonal aspects of affect regulation, for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, researchers interested in emotions are increasingly suggesting that emotions are social in nature, with interpersonal functions such as communication (e.g., Leach & Tiedens, 2004; Manstead, 1991; Mowday & Sutton, 1993; Parkinson, Fischer & Manstead, 2005). Practically, it is evermore important to understand relationships in the workplace, owing to the changing nature of work (e.g., the rise in service jobs) and the changing structure of organisations (e.g., increases in team working). As Barsade, Brief and Spataro (2003) put it, "the workplace is comprised of many people working together, and it is very helpful to understand how the social aspects of affect influence work life" (p. 19).

In this chapter we seek to integrate the available literature on the effects of both intra- and interpersonal affect regulation processes on well-being at work. We discuss evidence for links between both types of affect regulation and well-being in organisational contexts, and suggest possible mechanisms for these effects.

Well-being at work

Individuals' well-being at work can have important implications for both organisations and individuals themselves. For example, individuals' work-related strain can result in changes in health-related behaviours (e.g., smoking, alcohol intake), psychological problems (e.g., sleep disturbance), and medical problems (e.g., immune deficiencies) (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Quick, Horn & Quick, 1986). Work-related well-being can also enhance or compromise work performance (e.g., Price & Hooijberg, 1992) and affect rates of absenteeism (e.g., Elkin & Rosch, 1990; Johnson & Indvik, 1997). Accordingly, well-being at work has long been recognised as a major concern amongst occupational health psychologists. It is therefore considered important to understand the factors that contribute towards well-being in the workplace.

Traditionally, research to this end has focused on the role of job characteristics as antecedents of job satisfaction and strain. For example, Hackman and Oldham's classic Job Characteristics Model contends that characteristics including skill variety, autonomy and task significance are important contributors to outcomes such as job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Likewise, Karasek's Job Demands-Control Model predicts that job demands and decision latitude have an interactive effect on individuals' job-related strain (Karasek, 1979). However, more recently there has been a change in emphasis away from looking at job characteristics and individuals' responses to these, and towards looking at the active role that individuals play in terms of their work experiences.

Intrapersonal affect regulation

In particular, there has been increasing attention paid to the active role that individuals play in the regulation of affect at work. Affect regulation has been defined as "the process of initiating, maintaining, modulating, or changing the occurrence, intensity, or duration of... feeling states" (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie & Reiser, 2000, p. 137). Researchers have usually conceptualised affect regulation as an intrapersonal

process. As such, researchers have been largely concerned with the deliberate ¹ regulation of individuals' own affective states (i.e., their emotions and moods). Intrapersonal affect regulation is most frequently performed with the aim of improving or maintaining one's own positive affect (Parrott, 1993; Wegener & Petty, 1994; Westen, 1994). For example, an individual might choose to think about happy memories in order to improve a negative mood state. But it should be noted that intrapersonal affect regulation is conceptually distinct from coping, since affect regulation can refer to upward and downward regulation of affect and affect maintenance, and it specifically concerns the influence of one's own affect, as opposed to general life events (Parkinson & Totterdell, 1999).

Intrapersonal affect regulation in the workplace

Within organisational contexts, intrapersonal affect regulation predominantly been studied under the theoretical framework of emotional labour. Hochschild's (1983) book The Managed Heart regarding flight attendants first brought to light the notion of emotional labour, which she defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p. 7). As such, emotional labour can be seen as a form of deliberate intrapersonal affect regulation (Grandey, 2000). Emotional labour is distinct from other forms of affect regulation that occur within or outside of organisations in that it is exchanged for a wage, and is performed in accordance with 'display rules' that require employees to express particular emotions as part of the job role. According to Hochschild (1983), there are two major types of emotional labour. 'Deep acting' refers to the manipulation of one's experienced emotion. 'Surface acting' refers to the manipulation of one's emotional expression only. Grandey (2000) further clarified the distinction between these two types of regulation, contending that deep acting is achieved using antecedent focused regulation strategies (e.g., reframing a situation), whereas surface acting is achieved using response focused strategies (e.g., suppressing an unwanted emotion).

Most occupations that involve some sort of contact with other people require some degree of emotional labour (Briner & Totterdell, 2002). For example, Mann's

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¹ Whilst it has been argued that individuals can and do automatically regulate their own affect (e.g., Forgas & Ciarrochi, 2002; Forgas, Johnson & Ciarrochi, 1998), this chapter is concerned with more deliberate regulation processes.

(1999) investigation of emotional labour amongst office workers suggested that these employees attempted to manage their emotions in almost two-thirds of their work-based communications with colleagues. But emotional labour is most prevalent in jobs that involve a high degree of contact with customers or clients, in particular in service roles. Indeed, emotional labour has been studied in a variety of service occupations, for example amongst fast-food workers (Leidner, 1991), supermarket cashiers (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990), debt collectors (Sutton, 1991), hairdressers (Parkinson, 1991), and call centre workers (Holman, Chissick & Totterdell, 2002; Totterdell & Holman, 2003).

Intrapersonal affect regulation and well-being

Outside of the work domain, a number of researchers have reported links between intrapersonal affect regulation and well-being. In particular, research has found effects of regulating one's own affect on indicators of well-being such as depression and life satisfaction (e.g., Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1998; Gross, 1998; Gross, 2002; Gross & John, 1997; Gross & John, 2003; Nolen-Hoeksema and Morrow, 1993).

However, the majority of research that links intrapersonal affect regulation and well-being has come from research in organisational settings, and has concerned emotional labour. In fact, over the 25 years since Hochschild's seminal work, the topic of emotional labour has transformed from a sociological concern into a key occupational health concern. A recent review by Holman, Martinez-Iñigo and Totterdell (in press) presents the mounting body of evidence suggesting important relationships between the performance of emotional labour and individuals' work-related well-being.

But how does affect regulation affect individuals' well-being? Based on literature concerning emotional labour performed to meet organisational requirements, and affect regulation performed in the pursuit of other goals (e.g., to improve one's affective state), a change in resource levels has been proposed to be the main mechanism of the effects of intrapersonal affect regulation on well-being (Holman et al., in press). Conservation of Resources theory contends that people strive to obtain, protect and enhance valued resources such as energy, self-esteem and social support (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001). People do this because a reduction in one's resources is typically associated with a reduction in well-being, whereas a bolstering of one's

resources improves well-being (e.g., Ito & Brotheridge, 2003; Schaufeli, Van Dierendonck & Van Gorp, 1996). Intrapersonal affect regulation causes changes in individuals' resource levels for three main reasons: effort, dissonance, and others' responses (Holman et al., in press).

With regards to effort, many researchers have identified the process of regulating affect as effortful, claiming that the act of regulating consumes valuable resources such as energy (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Demerouti, Bakker & Bulters, 2004; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Using response focused regulation (e.g., surface acting) has been found to heighten physiological responding (Gross, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1993; 1997), and to involve more effort (Richards & Gross, 1999; 2000) compared to antecedent focused regulation (e.g., deep acting). Dissonance refers to the mismatch between expressed and felt emotion that can occur during intrapersonal affect regulation, especially when individuals regulate only their emotional response (i.e., surface act). A state of dissonance can threaten an individual's sense of self and self-authenticity, both of which are valuable resources (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Gross & John, 2003; Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini & Isic, 1999; Zapf & Holz, 2006). Others' responses to intrapersonal affect regulation are also important determinants of the effects of this process, as suggested in interactive feedback models of affect and affect regulation (e.g., Côté, 2005; Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008). Taking the example of emotional labour, when a customer responds positively to the emotional labour display, this can provide the employee with valued resources, for instance a sense of personal accomplishment. In contrast, a negative response from a customer can diminish such a resource. Past research has demonstrated that antecedent focused regulation produces a more authentic displayed emotion compared to response focused regulation, and thus produce more favourable customer or client responses (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Gross & John, 2003).

This evidence therefore suggests that using response focused affect regulation is likely to result in a worsening of an individual's well-being, whereas using antecedent focused regulation may not. This is supported by numerous studies regarding emotional labour (e.g., Bono & Vey, 2005; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Martínez-Iñigo, Totterdell, Alcover & Holman, 2007; Totterdell & Holman, 2003), which have reported surface acting to result in worsened well-being, but deep acting to result in no change or an improvement in well-being. As such, regulating one's

own affect can act as a source of work-related strain, or as a means of dealing with strain, depending on the strategies adopted.

Interpersonal affect regulation

Whilst extant research has shown robust links between intrapersonal aspects of affect regulation and well-being, to date there has been little attention paid to the interpersonal aspects of affect regulation. As such, the full picture of how affect regulation impacts on well-being is not clear.

Interpersonal affect regulation is defined as the deliberate and socially induced initiation, maintenance or modification of the occurrence, intensity, or duration of feeling states. So, for example, if a work colleague felt anxious about a deadline, an employee might try to make the colleague feel calmer by talking the work through with him or her, or by praising his or her efforts. Given these examples, it is important to note that just as intrapersonal affect regulation was highlighted as being conceptually distinct from coping, interpersonal affect regulation can also be viewed as separate from social support. Whilst individuals may regulate others' affect with the intention of support, the concept of interpersonal affect regulation is specifically focused on the management of affect. Moreover, interpersonal affect regulation may also be performed to worsen others' affect. For example, if an employee was irritated by a colleague, he or she might try to upset that colleague by shouting at or ignoring the person.

It can be argued that emotional labour is also an interpersonal form of affect regulation, in that it is done with respect to someone else – the customer (e.g., Côté, 2005). However, emotional labour involves the regulation of an individual's own affective state. Here, it is argued that individuals can and do deliberately try to regulate *other people's* affect. Indeed, the idea of regulating others' affect has been recognised by researchers within the emotional labour tradition (e.g., Pugliesi, 1999; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Sutton, 1991), but has yet to be examined in depth.

Interpersonal affect regulation in the workplace

Whilst the topic of interpersonal affect regulation per se is relatively new, there is a great deal of evidence that interpersonal affect regulation occurs within organisations, especially between colleagues. For example, research concerning team member relationships has indicated the importance of interpersonal affect regulation with regards to resolving team conflicts (Gobeli, Koenig & Bechinger, 1998; Von Glinow, Shapiro & Brett, 2004). Interpersonal affect regulation is also used as 'caregiving' or 'toxin handling' between colleagues (Frost & Robinson, 1999; Kahn, 1993; 1998; Martens, Gagné & Brown, 2003). Humour in particular is used in medical organisations to help colleagues cope with distress (e.g., Francis, 1994; Francis, Monahan & Berger, 1999). In fact, studies in settings as diverse as law firms (Lively, 2000) and debt collection agencies (Sutton, 1991) have reported the occurrence of interpersonal affect regulation amongst colleagues.

Interpersonal affect regulation is also used by leaders towards their followers. Literature suggests that transformational leaders deliberately try to influence the affect of their followers, for example energising them, in order to gain support and allegiance (e.g., Brown & Moshavi, 2005; Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Cross & Parker, 2004; Lewis, 2000). Conversely, interpersonal affect regulation may also be used by employees towards their superiors. For example, Pierce's (1999) research into the roles of paralegals suggests that they are frequently expected to improve their lawyers' moods and emotions.

There is also a great deal of evidence that interpersonal affect regulation is used by employees towards individuals external to their organisation. More and more frequently, interpersonal affect regulation is becoming a key part of service roles, with employees regulating the affect of their customers or clients. In some cases, interpersonal affect regulation by employees towards customers or clients is a means of giving care. For example, medical professionals use tactics such as humour (Francis, 1994; Francis et al., 1999; Locke, 1996) to encourage more positive emotions amongst their patients. In other cases, interpersonal affect regulation is performed more instrumentally. Sutton's (1991) study regarding the interpersonal emotional behaviours of debt collectors highlighted the fact that these types of employees use interpersonal affect regulation towards debtors in order to influence debtors to pay the money they owe. For example, collectors were found to display irritation or anger towards friendly debtors in order to make the debtors feel more anxious and therefore to create a sense of urgency towards making a payment. Lee and Dubinsky (2003) and Rafaeli and Sutton (1990) also discuss the instrumental use of interpersonal affect regulation towards customers in retail settings.

Our own recent research has identified a full range of behaviours, or strategies, that individuals use to regulate others' affect (Niven, Totterdell & Holman, 2007a). The research generated 378 distinct strategies used to elicit, intensify, suppress and eliminate particular affective states such as happiness, calmness, enthusiasm, pride, anger, misery, guilt and jealousy. Some of the most commonly mentioned strategies for improving others' affect included listening, joking and complimenting. Some of the most commonly mentioned strategies for worsening others' affect were ignoring, mocking and criticising.

Interpersonal affect regulation and well-being

Although it is clear that interpersonal affect regulation does occur in a variety of workplaces, research has only recently begun to draw links between this process and well-being. We contend that the emerging research area of interpersonal affect regulation could provide a fresh perspective on understanding well-being in the workplace. More specifically, the process of interpersonal affect regulation (in addition to the process of intrapersonal affect regulation) can have important implications for the well-being of both the person whose affect is being regulated (the target) and also the person who is performing the regulation (the agent).

Effects on targets' well-being

Interpersonal affect regulation strategies are used with the express intention of influencing the way that the strategy target feels. As such, a successful interpersonal affect regulation attempt should result in a change in the targets' affective state. Indeed, there is some evidence for this assertion. Our own study examining the effects of interpersonal affect regulation in a prison setting found shorter-term effects of interpersonal affect regulation on strategy targets' moods (Niven, Totterdell & Holman, 2007b). Further research in this setting also highlighted effects of interpersonal affect regulation on strategy targets' well-being, particularly in terms of enthusiasm and tension (Niven, Totterdell & Holman, 2007c). In addition, other researchers have reported effects of interpersonal affect regulation-type behaviours such as listening and aggression on aspects of well-being including strain and burnout (e.g., Henderson & Argyle; 1985; Kahn, 1993; 1998; LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002; Thoits, 1995).

We propose that interpersonal affect regulation influences targets' well-being through various pathways. One mechanism is a change in the target's resource levels. This pathway assumes that particular resources will be bolstered or threatened when a person's affect is regulated. As discussed above, a change in an individual's resource levels has implications for that person's well-being (e.g., Ito & Brotheridge, 2003). Accordingly, interpersonal affect regulation would exert an impact on targets' well-being, through its effects on valued resources. Targets' resources are likely to be bolstered following the use of strategies to improve affect. For example, being listened to would enhance a person's levels of social support. In contrast, targets' resources are likely to be threatened following the use of strategies to worsen affect. For instance, being criticised or insulted might diminish a person's self-esteem.

Another mechanism is intrapersonal affect regulation. This pathway assumes that some strategies take effect through provoking a response from the target that involves intrapersonal affect regulation, and through this response impact on the target's well-being. For example, the strategy of pointing out the upsides of someone's situation might induce the target to reappraise and reframe this situation. Alternatively, being mocked might result in the target faking a smile, in order to give the agent the impression that his or her words had little impact on the target. Intrapersonal affect regulation has been consistently reported to relate to individuals' well-being, as discussed previously. Therefore, the use of intrapersonal affect regulation, as induced by interpersonal affect regulation, would cause a change in the target's well-being.

From the above proposed pathways, it is clear that using positive interpersonal affect regulation strategies is likely to result in an improvement in the target's well-being, whilst using negative strategies is likely to result in the worsening of targets' well-being, although individuals may be able to resist these effects to differing extents. This is consistent with the evidence for effects of interpersonal affect regulation on well-being cited above. As such, some strategies used to influence others' feelings may help others to cope with work-related stressors, whilst others may be maladaptive, acting as a source of strain or impeding coping efforts.

Effects on agents' well-being

Rind and Kipnis (1999) ask, "Can we change other people without changing ourselves as well?" (p. 141). In other words, does the use if interpersonal affect regulation impact on the strategy agent, as well as the target? Our own research has

provided some support for the proposed effect of interpersonal affect regulation on strategy agents' well-being. Our first prison study found effects of interpersonal affect regulation on strategy agents' moods (Niven et al., 2007b), and the second found effects on aspects of well-being, particularly enthusiasm and tension (Niven et al., 2007c). However, to date, there has been little other research investigating this proposition.

Again, we contend that interpersonal affect regulation can influence agents' well-being through a number of pathways. Here, a change in the agent's resource levels may be an important mechanism. It is likely that the act of using interpersonal affect regulation behaviours is effortful. For example, speaking aggressively towards someone could be both physically and emotionally draining. The effort expended through the use of interpersonal affect regulation towards others would therefore cause a change (more specifically, a worsening) in strategy agents' well-being. However, the effortful nature of some types of interpersonal affect regulation might be offset by a resource enhancing effect. For instance, effectively improving someone else's affect might bolster valuable resources including self-esteem and personal accomplishment. As such, the overall effect of some interpersonal affect regulation strategies could be an improvement in agents' well-being.

A second mechanism is the reciprocation of interpersonal affect regulation by the target. This pathway assumes that the use of interpersonal affect regulation might provoke targets to use similar strategies towards the initial agent. According to theories of interpersonal behaviour, every individual's interpersonal behaviours constrain or elicit subsequent behaviours from those they are directed towards, with a pattern of complementarity usually followed, such that positive interpersonal behaviours most often produce a positive behavioural response, and so on (e.g., Losada & Heaphy, 2004; Tracey, 1994). This seems likely in the case of interpersonal affect regulation. For example, if a target were to be spoken to aggressively, he or she might choose to ignore the initial strategy agent. The initial agent would then effectively become the target of the new regulation attempt, with effects on his or her well-being therefore expected through the pathways discussed above. This iterative proposition resembles the feedback loops of Côté's (2005) social interaction model and the emotion cycle model discussed by Hareli and Rafaeli (2008).

From these pathways, it appears that the use of positive interpersonal affect regulation strategies will result in an improvement in strategy agents' well-being, whilst

negative strategies will result in the worsening of agents' well-being. This is again consistent with the evidence for effects of interpersonal affect regulation on well-being cited above. The act of trying to influence someone else's feelings can therefore have positive or negative effects on the agent's well-being, depending on the strategy chosen. Accordingly, regulating others' affect may be seen as both a stressor and a means of coping with strain.

Other factors influencing the effects of interpersonal affect regulation

The effects of interpersonal affect regulation on well-being are likely to vary according to a number of factors. For instance, the characteristics of either of the two individuals involved in the interpersonal affect regulation process (i.e., the agent or target) might moderate the effects of interpersonal affect regulation on either of these individuals' well-being. Characteristics such as emotional skills (e.g., emotional expressivity, emotional intelligence) and interpersonal skills (e.g., empathy, interpersonal control) are especially relevant here. The context within which interpersonal affect regulation is used might also moderate the effects of interpersonal affect regulation on strategy agents' and targets' well-being. For instance, interpersonal affect regulation strategies are interpreted in different ways in different contexts. Finally, characteristics of the relationship within which interpersonal affect regulation occurs could also vary the effects of regulation on well-being. In particular, the relative status of the agent and target, and perceptions of shared (ingroup) versus non-shared (outgroup) membership are important factors.

Summary

In this chapter, we have presented evidence that two forms of affect regulation – intrapersonal and interpersonal – influence well-being at work. We have also described a number of possible mechanisms by which these effects may occur, and suggested a number of additional factors that might moderate the effects of interpersonal affect regulation on well-being. However, some of the propositions regarding interpersonal effects are as yet untested. Elucidating the underlying processes and boundary conditions will help to understand how, when and why well-being at work is likely to be affected by the regulation of affect. This in turn will aid

both researchers and practitioners in identifying fruitful points of intervention to alleviate occupational health problems.

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