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The Role of Emotion and Emotion Regulation in Job Stress and Well Being

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Christopher C. Rosen
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RESEARCH IN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND WELL BEING VOLUME 11

THE ROLE OF EMOTION AND EMOTION REGULATION IN JOB STRESS AND WELL BEING

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THE ROLE OF EMOTION AND EMOTION REGULATION IN JOB STRESS AND WELL BEING

RESEARCH IN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND WELL BEING

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Jonathon R. B. Halbesleben and
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OVERVIEW

In our 11th volume of Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being, we offer ten chapters that examine the role of emotion and emotion regulation in occupational stress and well-being research. The first three chapters broadly consider new directions in emotion regulation, with a focus on developing new models that explain the emotion regulation process or summarizing newer bodies of literature that provide insight into the adaptive aspects of emotion regulation. In our lead chapter, Michael Howe, Chu-Hsiang (Daisy) Chang, and Russell E. Johnson integrate affect within a control theory-based framework to describe how velocity made towards desired states at work affects well-being. In the second chapter, Renae M. Hayward and Michelle R. Tuckey challenge existing paradigms by focusing on the concept of emotional boundary management. In particular, the focus of this chapter is on how adaptive functions of emotion regulation may help to unify disparate findings in the emotion regulation literature. The third chapter of this section, by Amber K. Hargrove, Carolyn Winslow, and Seth Kaplan, provides an overview of research and theory that has considered how self-guided activities can be used to boost employee emotional regulation skills. As such, this chapter provides guidance to employers, organizations, and individuals who are interested in developing self-guided activities that can be used to enhance well-being and emotion regulation at work.

The next section of volume 11 focuses on emotion regulation within specific employee populations. The fourth chapter, by P. D. Harms, Dina V. Krasikova, Adam J. Vanhove, Mitchel N. Herian, and Paul B. Lester, examines the role of stress and emotional well-being as antecedents of important outcomes in military contexts. Specifically, this chapter provides a framework for understanding the emotional well-being of soldiers. The fifth chapter, by Laura von Gilsa and Dieter Zapf, focuses on emotion regulation in service work. Specifically, the authors identify how multiple motives for emotion regulation are relevant in the service context and they argue that these motives are important for understanding underlying emotion regulation processes. In the sixth chapter, Susanne Scheibe and

Hannes Zacher integrate the literature on aging, emotion regulation, and occupational stress and well-being. Specifically, they take a lifespan perspective to emotion regulation and develop a conceptual model on how aging affects emotion regulation and the stress process.

The final section of this volume focuses on chapters that discuss how considering new variables, or methodological approaches, may be used to enhance our understanding of this literature. The seventh chapter, by Cristina Rubino, Christa L. Wilkin, and Ari Malka, focuses on understanding the role of discrete emotions as a mediator of the effects of workplace stressors on well-being. In this chapter, the authors build on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model by identifying how positive emotions are linked to resources, whereas negative resources are linked to demands. In the eighth chapter, Carrie A. Bulger introduces the concept of self-conscious emotions, which refers to a group of emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, pride, and embarrassment) that are commonly experienced at work. These emotions are considered in the context of how they may reflect a reaction to, or source of, stress that has the potential to impact employee behaviors and attitudes that affect well-being. In the ninth chapter, Melissa L. Cast, Grace Ann Rosile, David M. Boje, and Rohny Saylors introduce the concepts of emotional contagion exchange and emotional restorying of labor to the literature. In particular, the authors construct a model that explains multiple interplaying processes wherein emotional storytelling allows employees to cope with emotional contagion by converting surface-level acting to deep level-acting. The final chapter, by Angela Mazzetti, is unique in that its focus is primarily methodological. In particular, this chapter considers challenges encountered by qualitative researchers and presents recommendations to support qualitative researchers interested in studying work-related emotions and stress.

Together, these chapters offer insight into the role of emotions and emotion regulation in occupational stress research. These chapters challenge our traditional thinking and offer several exciting directions for future research. We hope you enjoy volume 11 of Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being.

Pamela L. Perrewé
Christopher C. Rosen
Jonathon R. B. Halbesleben
Editors

CONTENTS

UNDERSTANDING AFFECT, STRESS, AND WELL-BEING WITHIN A SELF-REGULATION FRAMEWORK

Michael Howe, Chu-Hsiang (Daisy) Chang and Russell E. Johnson

ABSTRACT

Research on self-regulation has tended to focus on goal-related performance, with limited attention paid to individuals' affect and the role it plays during the goal-striving process. In this chapter we discuss three mechanisms to integrate affect within a control theory-based self-regulation framework, and how such integrations inform future research concerning employee stress and well-being. Specifically, affect can be viewed as a result of velocity made toward one's desired states at work. Fast progress results in positive affect, which enhances employee well-being and reduces the detrimental effects associated with exposure to occupational stressors. On the other hand, slow or no progress elicits negative affect, which induces employee distress. Second, affect can also be considered an input of self-regulation, such that employees are required to regulate their emotional displays at work. Employees who perform

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emotional labor compare their actual emotional display against the desired display prescribed by display rules. Third, affect can function as a situational disturbance, altering employees' perceptions or assessments of the input, comparator, and output for other self-regulatory processes.

Keywords: Self-regulation; affect; emotions; goals; velocity; discrepancy

Self-regulation, an ongoing process of setting goals and subsequently striving to achieve them (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Johnson, Chang, & Lord, 2006), is a widely studied phenomenon for organizational researchers. At the individual level, the principles of self-regulation are fundamental to understanding and predicting a wide range of individual behaviors and outcomes (Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010), including the stress process (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Edwards, 1992; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982). Moreover, effective management of this process plays an important role in determining organizational performance (Locke & Latham, 1990; Rodgers & Hunter, 1991; Tubbs, 1986).

A substantial amount of research demonstrating the importance of goals in a wide variety of settings has been conducted (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Johnson et al., 2006; Locke & Latham, 2002). Indeed, goals are essential to self-regulation, directing attention, effort, and action when discrepancies exist between one's current state and a more desirable potential state. However, in order for goal-striving to occur, feedback pertaining to the current state must also be available (Erez, 1977; Neubert, 1998). Without information about the current level of performance, it becomes impossible to compare the current state to the goal state, and this inability to uncover discrepancies precludes any systematic behavioral or cognitive adjustments aimed at reducing the gap. Locke and Latham (2002, p.708) noted the importance of feedback: "For goals to be effective, people need summary feedback that reveals progress in relation to their goals. If they do not know how they are doing, it is difficult or impossible for them to adjust the level or direction of their effort or to adjust their performance strategies to match what the goal requires."

Given the performance orientation of goal theory, a significant portion of self-regulation research is focused on how to best use goals to enhance task performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). Conspicuously missing from this literature is the systematic integration of affect, despite the fact that

experiencing affect is commonplace at work and such experiences play an important role in influencing employee cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). While there has been some theoretical work aimed at linking the two concepts within a control theory framework (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1990; Johnson et al., 2006), empirical work in this area has been sparse and additional conceptual work remains to be done. In fact, a more thorough integration of affect may deepen our understanding of both goal setting and goal striving processes relevant for employee well-being.

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate the role of affective experiences during self-regulation and its implications for stress. We begin by presenting a brief overview of a control theory based view of self-regulation, in which actual states are compared against desired states and, when discrepancies are detected, action is taken to redress them (Lord et al., 2010). We consider three ways that affect can impact self-regulation in this framework. We begin by considering affect as an outcome of the self-regulation process, considering how success (and failure) in self-regulation generates affective experiences. Second, we describe the role of affect as an input within the self-regulatory process. This differs from traditional self-regulation conceptualizations that focus on behavioral, task-based regulation. In contrast, people also regulate their emotional state around desired affective states (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003). Third, we consider how affect can have unintended consequences for the self-regulation process, serving as an external disturbance that influences how actual states and desired states are perceived, how discrepancies between the two states are monitored, and the actions that are taken to minimize discrepancies. Considering each of these ways that affect impacts the process of self-regulation is integral for understanding employee health and well-being.

A CONTROL THEORY VIEW OF SELF-REGULATION

Self-regulation refers to the motivational processes that promote goal-relevant behaviors (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Kanfer, 1991; Lord et al., 2010), and within this framework, there are two major sub-processes. One process – *goal setting* – is related to the establishment of goals, or mental representations of desired states (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). The second process – *goal striving* – focuses on the subsequent pursuit of these goals. Across a wide range of domains, research has consistently shown that commitment to difficult, specific goals leads to increased performance by

increasing effort, persistence, and attention (Locke & Latham, 2002). Goal striving encompasses all of these mechanisms as well as others that direct individual behavior toward goal attainment (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Given that both goal setting and goal striving are necessary for goal-directed behavior in organizations, theories of self-regulation must account for both of these processes.

One such theory that includes both processes is control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1998; Powers, 1973). While not without criticism (e.g., Bandura & Locke, 2003), control theory is a prevalent theory in the domain of self-regulation, having received support in a wide variety of contexts (Katzell, 1994; Vancouver, 2005). For example, the discrepancy between actual and desired states has been used to explain the job search behaviors of the unemployed (Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hooft, 2010) as well as organizational commitment and job turnover (Hollenbeck, 1989). In addition, a lack of progress regarding goal attainment is responsible for negative affective outcomes (Chang, Johnson, & Lord, 2010).

In control theory, individuals have numerous goals, and these goals are arranged hierarchically (Powers, 1973). This structure informs goal setting because higher level goals constrain the lower level goal choices made, acting as the standards against which performance at the lower levels is judged (Lord & Levy, 1994). Once established, performance standards influence goal striving behavior via a series of negative feedback loops. Whenever the actual state falls below the desired goal state, a negative discrepancy is created. This discrepancy draws attention to a particular goal and serves as a motivation for action aimed at eliminating the detected discrepancy (Carver & Scheier, 1998). This process is summarized in Fig. 1.

As is illustrated in Fig. 1, feedback about one's actual state originates from the environment. This feedback is interpreted and serves as an input signal for a comparator mechanism. The comparator mechanism evaluates this actual state against the desired state (established during the goal setting process). Based on the relative magnitude of these two states, the comparator determines whether a meaningful discrepancy exists. Control theory predicts that the presence of a discrepancy is undesirable, and in an effort eliminate the detected difference, behavioral (or cognitive) action is taken whenever the comparator detects a discrepancy between the actual and desired states.

If the comparator detects a discrepancy, a decision must be made on how to resolve it. This decision point is depicted by the decision mechanism in Fig. 1. There are two general avenues available to alleviate the discrepancy: changing behavior or changing cognition. The behavioral route

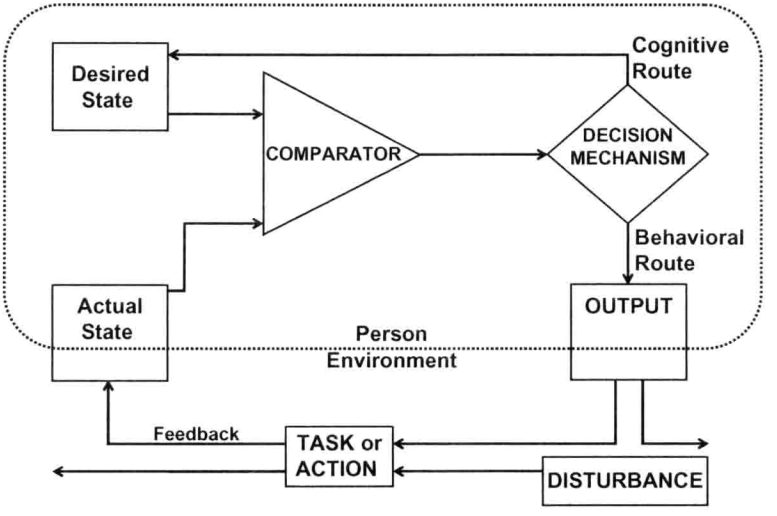

Fig. 1. Sample Feedback Loop.

encompasses attempts to alter the current state by targeting the environment. This could be done by increasing effort (e.g., working harder) or adopting a new approach to increase efficiency (e.g., working smarter). The cognitive route involves targeting desired state rather than the actual state. For example, a discrepancy can be reduced by adopting a desired state that is more closely aligned with the actual state. However, task goals or emotional display rules cannot be revised downward arbitrarily because doing so is likely to have adverse effects on higher-level desired states within the goal hierarchy. Accordingly, behavioral change is generally the primary response to a noticed discrepancy while longer duration, stable discrepancies are more likely to elicit cognitive changes (Campion & Lord, 1982; Donovan & Williams, 2003).

While each method of discrepancy reduction focuses on modifying a different signal supplied to the comparator, information about the success of the chosen course of action is determined by the difference between the two signals when the comparator subsequently reevaluates them. Reduced or eliminated discrepancies indicate that the chosen course of action is working and no further actions are likely to be induced. In contrast, relatively stable discrepancies may signal the need for further attention and action (Carver & Scheier, 1998). It is also important to note that individual action is not the only source of discrepancy modification. A discrepancy