



The power of micro-moves in cultivating regardful relationships: Implications for work–home enrichment and thriving



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 February 2015

Received in revised form 8 September 2015

Accepted 11 September 2015

Keywords:

Micro-moves

Positive regard

Work–home enrichment

Thriving

Positive relationships

Generativity

ABSTRACT

In this article, we highlight the power of micro-moves in cultivating positive regard from work and nonwork sources (stakeholders) and how the latter facilitates work–home enrichment (in both directions) and can foster employee thriving in the work and nonwork domains. Integrating the emerging literature on micro generative moments (Dutton & Carlsen, 2011), the Resource-Gain-Development model of enrichment (Wayne et al., 2007) and the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005), we specify how micro-relational moves can build regardful relationships (i.e., positive regard) and how this, in turn, can foster greater work–home enrichment and thriving. Our theoretical model further suggests that employees who sense a positive regard from their managers and coworkers as well as from their relatives and friends are likely to experience significant development, affect and capital gains (high work–home enrichment), which expands opportunities to thrive (i.e., develop an enhanced capacity for learning and a sense of vitality). We also suggest that work–home enrichment fosters greater thriving in life, but that this relationship depends on personal and contextual characteristics, including people's level of mindfulness, motivation to learn, preferences for integration (personal characteristics) and job autonomy and quality of family life (contextual characteristics). We aim to advance theorizing about generative relationships and the context in which they allow individuals to experience work–home enrichment and help them to thrive and realize their full potential.

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1. Introduction

Recent research points to the importance of micro-moves (Golden-Biddle, 2014) and micro-moments (Fredrickson, 2013) in organizations. By micro-moves we refer to small acts or behaviors that can lead to positive changes in the ways people approach, engage and act in a variety of situations. These acts, as Golden-Biddle (2014) noted, are barely visible, but nonetheless are essential to foster momentum and hope (Golden-Biddle, 2014, p. 126), and are crucial for positive, generative moments to emerge (see also Dutton & Carlsen, 2011). We suggest that acts of gratitude and compassion, and emotional expression are important vehicles for positive change and can help people to manage their work–home lives effectively and ultimately thrive. However, this line of research is in its embryonic stage of development both theoretically and empirically. Specifically, while research points to the importance of micro-moves and their capacity to create positive change in general (Golden-Biddle, 2014), little is known about the ways in

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which micro-relational moves enable generative moments between people to emerge (Dutton & Carlsen, 2011), or their implications for an individual's ability to achieve work-home enrichment and thriving across multiple domains.

In this article, we develop a conceptual model that helps specify the ways in which micro-relational moves can cultivate positive relationships that are characterized by a high level of positive regard (Rogers, 1951), facilitate work-home enrichment and, ultimately, augment individual thriving. We expand on theoretical perspectives and approaches anchored in research on work-home enrichment (Resource-Gain-Development model, Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007), positive work relationships (Dutton & Ragins, 2007), thriving (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005) and clinical therapy (positive regard, Rogers, 1957). The proposed model, illustrated in Fig. 1, examines why and how micro-moves (specifically acts of gratitude, compassion, and emotional expression) cultivate relationships with work and home stakeholders that are characterized by high levels of positive regard; i.e., relationships that convey a message of acceptance and approval to the other person (Rogers, 1957), and the mechanism through which positive regard may facilitate work-home enrichment and, in turn, engender a sense of thriving in all areas of people's lives [defined as the "psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning" (Spreitzer & Sutcliffe, 2007, p. 538)]. To provide a more comprehensive framework we also consider the key personal and contextual characteristics in which this complex process unfolds.

We aim to extend current research on micro-relational moves, work-home enrichment and thriving in several ways. First, we focus on positive relationships that are generative and life-giving at work and in nonwork domains (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011), and highlight their central role in promoting greater work-home enrichment and thriving in life. A focus on positive relationships that are generative in nature is important, since developing healthy relationships in multiple areas of life can contribute to reducing people's stress, boosting their morale and increasing their productivity (Dutton, 2003a; Heaphy & Dutton, 2008; Turvey & Olson, 2006). Furthermore, understanding how micro-moves can cultivate regardful relationships is vital for developing new theories about positive change in people's lives (Golden-Biddle, 2014). Second, this theoretical effort may help to better elucidate why and how work and nonwork relationships marked by positive regard can facilitate the work-home enrichment process. This is theoretically important because social relationships are considered a key to fostering the successful integration of work and nonwork experiences (Trefalt, 2013). However, this line of research has been slow to develop in the literature on work-family enrichment. We contribute to the literature by offering a complementary view to social exchange theory, which has traditionally dominated studies examining the impact of supportive relationships on work-family enrichment (see Crain & Hammer, 2013 for a review). Our view complements this theory by underscoring a humanizing perspective centered on the idea that people can also interact with each other in way that instills and develops a sense of worth (Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015; Dutton, & Carlsen, 2011). We also outline the individual and contextual factors that help explain why some people are more likely than others to thrive in the presence of higher levels of work-home enrichment, thus providing insights into the boundary conditions facilitating this process. Third, the interest in thriving has increased mainly because it may provide a prism towards a better understanding of human development, growth and performance (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung 2014; Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012; Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012). The model we develop also forefronts the importance of exploring individual thriving in nonwork domains to better account for the ways in which people develop a sense of thriving in their life (Spreitzer, 2013). This can shed light on one of today's most crucial questions; namely, ways to enable people to thrive and reach their potential. Thus, considering regardful relationships and work-home enrichment as important enablers of thriving in individuals' lives as a whole

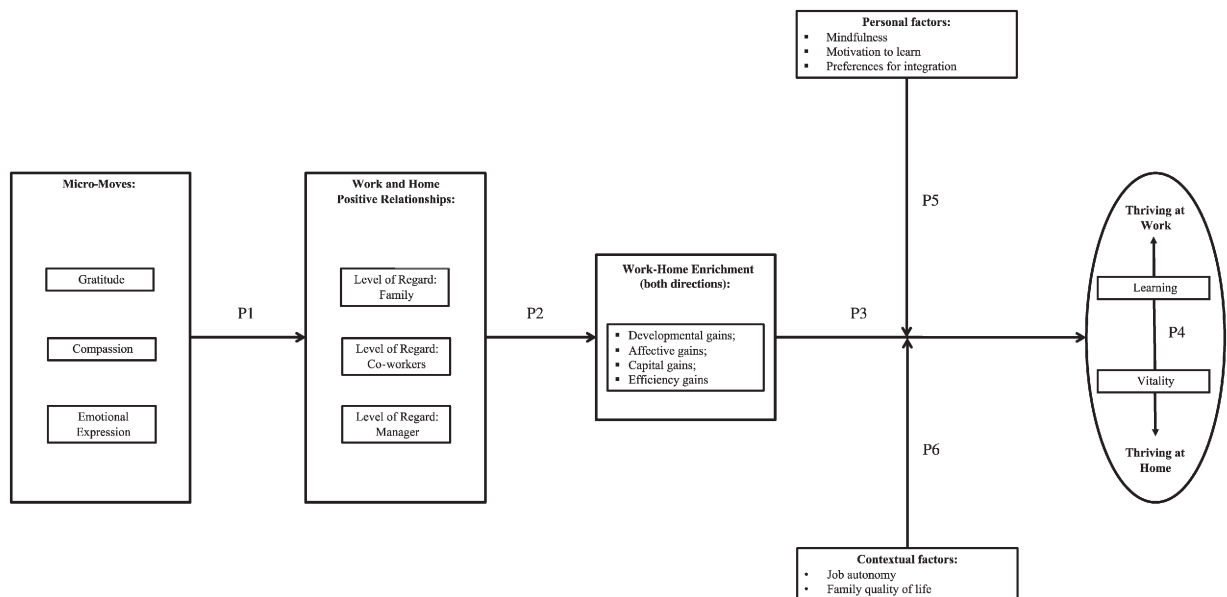


Fig. 1. Linking Micro-Moves and Foci of Positive Regard to Work-Family Enrichment and Thriving.

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