



The role of passion for work and need satisfaction in psychological adjustment to retirement [☆]



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ABSTRACT

Two studies tested a model in which passion for work predicts psychological adjustment to retirement through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. With a sample of 103 French-Canadian retirees from a variety of occupations, the first study used a retrospective cross-sectional design. The second study followed 73 French-Canadian teachers over a 6-year period and examined the relationship between passion for work, assessed when participants were still working, and psychological adjustment to retirement, measured when participants were retired. All participants completed questionnaires on demographics, passion for work, basic psychological needs and psychological adjustment to retirement. Results from structural equation modeling confirmed the hypothesized model, such that both studies confirmed the mediating role of basic psychological need satisfaction in the passion–psychological adjustment to retirement relationship. Need satisfaction significantly mediated the relationship between harmonious passion for work and psychological adjustment to retirement in Studies 1 and 2. The mediation was also confirmed between obsessive passion and psychological adjustment to retirement in Study 1, but not in Study 2. These findings suggest that passion for work matters in psychological adjustment to retirement. Being passionate about work can thus lead to positive or negative outcomes in retirement, depending on whether the passion is harmonious or obsessive, respectively.

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“Retirement is the ugliest word in the language.” ~Ernest Hemingway

1. Introduction

Retiring from the workforce can represent a significant change for many individuals. Changes can be felt on a financial, social and emotional level and can influence new retirees' standard of living, daily activities, social networks and well-being (Wang, Henkens, & van Solinge, 2011). Although there has been extensive research on retirement adjustment, results have been inconsistent and thus remain inconclusive regarding the nature of the impact of retirement. On the one hand, retirement has been found to have beneficial effects (e.g., Mein, Martikainen, Hemingway, Stansfeld, & Marmot, 2003; Wang, 2007). On the other hand, some studies suggest that

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retirement has important negative effects (e.g., Dave, Rashad, & Spasojevic, 2008). Thus, a better understanding of this adjustment process would provide a clearer picture of the outcomes, that is, the challenges and costs that it generates at an individual and societal level.

We propose that employees' experience at work, and more specifically, the type of passion they have for their work, will influence their psychological adjustment to retirement. We present two studies that examined the relationship between harmonious passion and obsessive passion and psychological adjustment to retirement. The first study investigated retrospectively how passion for work is associated to psychological adjustment to retirement. The second study used longitudinal data over a 6-year period to examine how passion for work predicts psychological adjustment to retirement.

2. Passion for work

Passion is defined as a strong inclination toward an activity (e.g., work) that one loves and finds important, that is self-defining, and in which significant time and energy are invested (Vallerand & Houliort, 2003; Vallerand et al., 2003). Two types of passion are possible: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. When work is highly valued, is meaningful and has been freely accepted as important by the person, it will be internalized in the person's identity and self in an autonomous fashion, leading to a harmonious passion (Vallerand, Houliort, & Forest, 2014; Vallerand et al., 2003). This type of internalization emanates from the intrinsic and integrative tendencies of the self (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2003) and solicits the authentic integrating self. Personal endorsement and a sense of volition in pursuing the activity are experienced. The passionate activity occupies a significant but not overpowering space in the person's identity. Hence, workers with a harmonious passion for work can partake in their professional activities in a flexible, mindful (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007) and open manner that is conducive to positive experiences (Hodgins & Knee, 2002; see Vallerand et al., 2014). In such a case, the passionate activity is in harmony with other life spheres.

However, when work is attached to certain contingencies, such as self-esteem, feelings of social acceptance or a sense of excitement that is uncontrollable, it will still be internalized in the person's identity and self, but in a controlled way, leading to an obsessive passion. People with an obsessive passion for work cannot help but engage in their professional activities, reflecting a rigid persistence toward their passionate activity. This dependency on the passionate activity may eventually be experienced because obsessive passion involves ego-invested rather than integrative self processes (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). When invested with an obsessive passion, workers are more likely to experience conflicts with other life spheres, as well as frustration and rumination when not engaging in their professional activities. Having an obsessive passion impedes significant investment in other life activities, and thereby precludes the opportunity to revive and recharge one's cognitive, affective and behavioral repertoire. Hence, the two types of passion are qualitatively different and lead to different outcomes.

According to the dualistic model of passion (DMP – Vallerand et al., 2003), harmonious passion for work leads to more adaptive outcomes than obsessive passion. In fact, harmonious passion was repeatedly found to predict more positive cognitive, affective and behavioral outcomes than obsessive passion (see Vallerand et al., 2014, for a review). For instance, harmonious passion for work was positively related to “flow” (desirable state that people experience when they feel completely immersed in the activity) over a 6-month period (Lavigne, Forest, & Crevier-Braud, 2012), work satisfaction (Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008; Vallerand, Paquet, Philippe, & Charest, 2010) and psychological well-being (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Fernet, Lavigne, Vallerand, & Austin, 2014; Forest, Mageau, Sarrazin, & Morin, 2011; Houliort, Philippe, Vallerand, & Ménard, 2014). Passion was also examined in relation to work–life conflict. In two studies involving professional nurses, Vallerand et al. (2010) found that obsessive passion was positively related to work–life conflict, whereas harmonious passion was negatively related to this conflict. Similar results were obtained among teachers (Caudroit, Boiché, Stephan, Le Scanff, & Trouilloud, 2011).

Overall, these findings strongly suggest that passion for work can influence one's professional and personal experiences and their outcomes. Retirement, which represents a significant life stage, is one important outcome of a person's career. It is possible that the passion that once influenced so many cognitive, affective and behavioral outcomes in one's working life can predict valuable outcomes in retirement. Before presenting the theoretical arguments linking passion for work and retirement, the major factors involved in the retirement adjustment process will be briefly presented.

3. Psychological adjustment to retirement

Over the last two decades, numerous studies have investigated retirement adjustment with the aim of identifying which factors contribute to general well-being. Although many authors have developed retirement adjustment theories (i.e. role theory, continuity theory, activity theory; Wang, 2007), it appears that the transition to retirement is unique to each individual and is influenced by many factors (i.e. retirees' attributes and environmental features). Such factors include sociodemographics (age, gender, socioeconomic status and education level), contextual factors (perceived health, retirement decision, control and planning) and lastly, psychosocial factors (marital status, social support and work attitudes). Among the psychosocial factors that are particularly relevant to the present studies, researchers have stipulated that one's prior relationship to work is an important factor of retirement adjustment, with the most salient aspect of this relationship being the level of work centrality (Wang et al., 2011). Defined as the degree of importance that work plays in one's life compared to other life roles (Walsh & Gordon, 2008), work centrality has been associated with higher levels of commitment to and satisfaction with one's work and greater difficulty adjusting to retirement (Reitzes & Mutran, 2006; Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008). However, Wong and Earl (2009) found that a high level of work centrality prior to retirement did not influence retirement adjustment (better or worse), nor did it influence retirees' global level of activity (higher or lower).

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