



# Moving beyond the pleasure principle: Within and between-occasion effects of employee eudaimonia within a school organizational climate context

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## ABSTRACT

Eudaimonic notions of well-being have increasingly figured in the well-being literature. The impact of such constructs in the organizational psychology literature has been more limited. Within an Organizational Health Research Framework (OHRF), we present findings that demonstrate the importance of eudaimonic, or psychological well-being (PWB), constructs which have been purported to be more temporally stable than affective dimensions of subjective well-being (SWB). Several hypotheses were tested on three school teacher samples from around the globe. Of particular emphasis, both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses indicated that the predictive model demonstrated that individual PWB is the strongest predictor of employees' positive affect while positive organizational climate was the strongest predictor of school morale and distress. In conclusion, we found support for the role of eudaimonic constructs within the OHRF, identifying independent effects for individual and organizational characteristics on employee well-being, and with differential effects on positive and negative domains of SWB.

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## Introduction

Since Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1977) reported on the experience of stress among school teachers in Northern London, few occupational groups have received as much attention as have school teachers. Comparisons between teachers of different gender, subject areas, primary and secondary levels, and even cross-culturally have been made (e.g. Burns 2000; Jacobsson, Pousette, & Thylefors 2001; Travers & Cooper 1996). Findings consistently cite teaching poorly motivated students, maintaining classroom discipline, time pressures and work overload, educational reform, being evaluated by others, peer interaction, and lack of status as sources of stress and job dissatisfaction (e.g. Travers & Cooper 1996). Though perhaps it is only natural that the teaching profession should be so stressful for as Weinstein (1979) so insightfully suggested over 30 years ago, "Nowhere but schools are large groups of individuals packed so closely together for so long yet expected to perform at peak efficiency on different learning tasks, and to interact harmoniously" (p. 54).

The influence of employee's own cognitive appraisal processes may influence perceptions of, and responses to, workplace conditions. Individual characteristics appear to be highly related to stressful appraisals within the workplace (Bond & Bunce 2003). Consequently, we report here on our investigations into the relationship between individuals' characteristics and school organizational climate and their impact on well-being among three international samples of school teachers. We extend typical analyses of employee well-being to consider the role of eudaimonic components of employee well-being, which the well-being literature identifies as a significant contributor to individual mental health outcomes (Fava et al., 2004), but which have to date received little empirical investigation within an organizational context.

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### *Organizational health research framework*

The Organizational Health Research Framework (OHRF; Hart & Cooper 2001) provides a framework by which to model individual and organizational characteristics and their impact on both employee and organizational well-being. The OHRF focuses on perceptions of organizational climate that reflect cognitive judgments of organizational structures and processes, and are not affect-biased (Hart & Cooper 2001). Consequently, the OHRF posits that perceptions of organizational climate are mostly independent of individual characteristics such as personality, although recognizing the role of individuals' personal characteristics in influencing their own sense of well-being (Parker et al. 2003). The OHRF also delineates the effects of organizational and individual characteristics on well-being outcomes; organizational characteristics are more strongly related to organizational well-being, while individual characteristics are more strongly related to individual employee well-being outcomes (Hart & Cooper 2001). The OHRF also specifically focuses on both positive and negative organizational climate components and proposes independent effects on positive and negative well-being respectively. That is, positive work experiences mostly impact on positive well-being, while negative work experiences impact on negative well-being outcomes.

### *Defining cognitive and affective components of employee well-being*

Discriminating between positive and negative well-being constructs reflects increasingly normative practice as the interest in 'positive psychology' features more prominently in the research literature (e.g. Kahneman 1999). Historically, well-being models were informed by medical definitions of ill-being which suggest that the absence of illness-states is itself an indication of wellness. This is increasingly contrary to the position of many, though hardly revolutionary. The World Health Organization's (WHO) constitutional preamble defined health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1948, p. 100). Well-being research is now typically described as deriving from two perspectives (Ryan & Deci 2001). The 'hedonic' or subjective well-being (SWB) approach focuses on perceived happiness and satisfaction, defining well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. In contrast, the 'eudaimonic' approach focuses on perceptions of meaning and self-realization, defining well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully-functioning (Rogers 1961).

Based on the hedonic principles that pleasure and happiness are of primary concern to the individual, Kahneman (1999) defined hedonic psychology as the study of "what makes experiences and life pleasant and unpleasant" (p. ix), and identified three SWB components: life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood. The importance of SWB components have been demonstrated with regards their relationship to depression and anxiety in a large population study (Burns et al. 2011). Also, within clinical samples, high levels of negative affect are related to an increased likelihood of depression and anxiety while low positive affect has been identified as a particular vulnerability for depression (Kring, Persons, & Thomas 2007). The importance of positive SWB components has perhaps been overshadowed by a focus on negative well-being states, though concepts such as engagement and vigor are receiving greater interest in their role promoting positive health outcomes. Indeed, positive emotions have been identified as significant precursors of future behavioral intentions and the development of attitudes of self that are more likely to predispose an individual to positive experiences and decrease the likelihood of negative mental health outcomes (Fredrickson 2004). The growing recognition of the importance of such positive concepts has begun to influence organizational research (e.g. Shirom 2007), with increasing impact on population health policy (e.g. Huppert 2008).

In contrast to SWB, the psychological well-being (PWB) approach focuses on eudaimonic constructs (e.g. self-acceptance, self-concept, self-actualization) that are associated with optimal SWB states, high positive and low negative affect. Instead of focusing on the affective experiences of individuals' life transactions, eudaimonia emphasizes those aspects of the human condition which may increase the likelihood of such transactions being perceived as either positive or negative and contributes to effective and healthy functioning (Ryff, Singer, & Love 2004). The Psychological Well-Being Scales (Ryff 1989) reflect one frequently cited multi-dimensional model of PWB and comprises six dimensions, namely: Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Purpose In Life, Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations With Others and Autonomy. Since high correlations between a number of the PWB factors, especially the mastery, growth, purpose and acceptance (EGPS) factors, have been reported (Clarke, Marshall, Ryff, & Wheaton 2001), a revised PWB structure that includes a second order latent factor (EGPS) reflecting these four highly correlated PWB variables has been proposed (Abbott et al. 2006). Burns and Machin (2009) also identified Abbott et al.'s (2006) modified 3-factor PWB model and differentiated items from a 2-factor model of SWB reflecting positive and negative affect, but with moderate correlations between factors supporting the relatedness of SWB and PWB.

### *The role of personality in determining employee well-being*

Cross-sectional relationships between well-being and personality are well demonstrated; extraversion and neuroticism are highly related with levels of positive and negative SWB respectively (Diener & Lucas 1999). Personality also appears related to changes in SWB; neuroticism and openness to experience predict increases in negative affect after a stressful life event, while extraversion and openness to experience predict increases in positive affect (Kling, Ryff, Love, & Essex 2003). PWB constructs are also related to personality; those high in PWB are frequently described as reporting higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness, and with lower levels of emotional instability (Burns & Machin 2010). In comparison to personality, PWB has been identified as a stronger predictor of positive affect (Burns & Machin 2009), while personality, and neuroticism in particular, was a stronger predictor of negative affect (Burns & Machin 2010). Despite moderate to

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