Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes
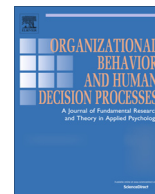
Can personality traits and daily positive mood buffer the harmful effects of daily negative mood on task performance and service sabotage? A self-control perspective ☆

Nai-Wen Chi [a],[*], Huo-Tsan Chang [b], Hsien-Lier Huang [b]

[a] Institution of Human Resource Management, National Sun Yat-Sen University, 70, Lienhai Rd., Kaohsiung 80424, Taiwan
[b] National Changhua University of Education, Graduate Institute of Human Resource Management, 2, Shi-Da Road, Changhua City 500, Taiwan

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Although researchers have suggested that employee daily negative mood leads to unfavorable performance outcomes, it remains unclear "when" daily negative mood is particularly or less harmful with respect to performance outcomes. Based on the self-control framework and the undoing hypothesis, we examined whether daily negative mood impairs employee daily task performance and increases service sabotage behaviors, as well as whether individual characteristics associated with self-control can buffer the detrimental impacts of daily negative mood. After testing our theoretical model using data from two field studies with different research settings and designs, we found that employee daily negative mood negatively predicts task performance, while employee conscientiousness and daily positive mood can weaken this association. In addition, employee daily negative mood positively predicted service sabotage, whereas emotional stability attenuated the positive relationship between daily negative mood and service sabotage. Theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.

1. Introduction

Mood at work refers to how employees feel or the affective states they experience when engaging in actual workplace activities (George & Jones, 1996; George & Zhou, 2007). Within an organizational setting, employees often experience various mood states while at work due to the wide range of events that occur (Chi, Tsai, & Tseng, 2013; Diefendorff, Richard, & Yang, 2008). Given that employees' mood at work influences their work attitudes and thoughts (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the ways in which employees' mood at work influences their performance and behaviors have become a critical issue in both practical and academic fields (Brief & Weiss, 2002; George, 2011; Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006; Miner & Glomb, 2010; Rothbard & Wilk, 2011).

Employee mood at work can be broadly categorized into positive and negative moods (George & Zhou, 2007; Tsai, Chen, & Liu, 2007). Researchers have generally found that employee *positive mood* (e.g., excited, enthusiastic, proud, or interested) predicts high levels of task performance and organizational citizenship

behaviors (Ilies et al., 2006; Miner & Glomb, 2010; Rothbard & Wilk, 2011; Tsai et al., 2007). In contrast, recent studies have found that *negative mood* (e.g., distressed, hostile, nervous, or upset) leads to unfavorable performance outcomes, such as reducing task performance or increasing counterproductive work behaviors (Judge, Scott, & Ilies, 2006; Miner & Glomb, 2010; Rothbard & Wilk, 2011; Yang & Diefendorff, 2009). As such, both practitioners and researchers have proposed suggestions to alleviate negative mood (David & Congleton, 2013; Judge et al., 2006; Rothbard & Wilk, 2011; Schwartz, 2012; Yang & Diefendorff, 2009).

However, there are reasons to believe that the detrimental effects of negative mood can be weakened under certain circumstances. Empirically, the meta-analysis conducted by Shockley, Ispas, Rossi, and Levine (2012) showed that employee negative mood significantly predicts lower levels of task performance and higher levels of counterproductive work behaviors. However, the credibility intervals associated with the negative mood-performance outcome correlations were considerably large, suggesting the existence of the moderators of these relationships. Theoretically, several scholars have proposed that negative mood increases individuals' harmful and dysfunctional behaviors due to self-control failure; however, individual characteristics related to *self-control* can mitigate the aftereffects of negative mood (Baumeister, 2002; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Javaras et al., 2012;

Lian et al., 2014; Ode & Robinson, 2007; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Thus, the self-control theory provides a useful framework to clarify which types of self-control related characteristics can buffer the detrimental effects of negative mood on performance outcomes. As negative mood is an essentially unavoidable part of employee daily work, additional research is needed to understand "when" employee negative mood is particularly or less harmful with respect to performance outcomes. Clarifying these issues can better guide organizational practice and managerial decision regarding "how" to mitigate such detrimental effects.

In order to advance our understanding of negative mood at work, the present study was designed to make the following four theoretical and methodological contributions. First, we applied the self-control perspective (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001) as the overarching theory to explain *why* and *when* employee daily negative mood influences both positive and negative performance outcomes. Based on the self-control framework, we theorize that individual characteristics associated with self-control can buffer the detrimental effects of daily negative mood. At the individual-level, we included *conscientiousness* and *emotional stability*: the former influences the individual *motivations* for regulating goal-directed behaviors when experiencing negative mood (Ilies et al., 2006; Jensen-Campbell, Knack, Waldrip, & Campbell, 2007; McCrae & Löckenhoff, 2010), while the latter captures the individual *capacity* to handle emotions and cope with the negative consequences associated with negative mood (Barrick & Mount, 2000; Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001). At the within-person level, *daily positive mood* was chosen as a moderator because it builds individual daily cognitive, psychological, and physical *resources* to control and "undo" the aftereffects of daily negative mood[1] (Fredrickson et al., 2000; Tice, Baumeister, Shmueli, & Muraven, 2007).

Second, the self-control perspective suggests that employee daily negative mood at work not only impairs individual motivations and resources to concentrate on the task, but also reduces individual capacity to control impulsive and irrational behaviors (Lian et al., 2014; Tice et al., 2001). Thus, it is plausible that daily employee negative mood produces more negative behaviors directed toward the stakeholders (e.g., coworkers, organizations, or customers). Given that frontline employees' behaviors directly influence customer satisfaction as well as organizations' profitability (Liao & Chuang, 2004; Liao & Chuang, 2007), it is important to investigate whether employee daily negative mood triggers negative behaviors directed against *customers,* as well as ways to alleviate such effects. Therefore, in addition to daily task performance, we include *service sabotage* (i.e., employee behaviors that intentionally harm customer interests; Chi et al., 2013; Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011) in our model to fully capture the effects and boundary conditions of daily negative mood on positive/negative performance outcomes.

Third, as employee mood and behavior at work can vary widely on a daily basis (Ilies et al., 2006; Judge et al., 2006), it is more appropriate to test the negative mood-performance relationship at the within-person level (Miner & Glomb, 2010). However, the majority of the studies have examined the effects of negative mood

on performance outcomes as well as the moderators on these effects at the between-person level (Shockley et al., 2012). Thus, it remains unclear whether employee between- and within-person levels factors can simultaneously mitigate the harmful effects of daily negative mood. To expand our understanding of the boundary conditions associated with the daily negative mood-performance relationships, we apply a multilevel research design to test the within-person level moderating effect of daily positive mood as well as the between-person level moderating effects of emotional stability and conscientiousness on the associations between daily negative mood, task performance, and service sabotage. The multilevel research design not only offers a more accurate picture of within-person mood on behaviors, but also takes the between-person variances into consideration (Shockley et al., 2012).

Finally, in order to enhance the generalizability and internal validity of the research findings (Schwab, 2005), we test the theoretical model using two studies with different research settings and designs: (a) Study 1 examines the proposed relationships by collecting daily negative mood and daily objective performance data (i.e., *task errors*) from bank tellers, allowing us to examine how daily negative mood influences the objective daily task performance; (b) Study 2 confirms and extends the findings of Study 1 by testing the proposed hypotheses with a larger and more diversified sample, as well as utilizing the time-lag design to collect daily mood and supervisor-rated performance data at different time points of a workday. Fig. 1 outlines the conceptual model of the proposed relationships.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Daily negative mood and daily performance outcomes: The self-control framework

In the present study, we employ the self-control framework (Tice et al., 2001) to explain the relationship between employee daily negative mood and performance outcomes, as well as potential moderators of these relationships. *Self-control i*s the ability to control and regulate one's impulses, emotions, behaviors, and performances in order to achieve personal goals and interests (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Tice et al., 2001). The self-control perspective asserts that a negative mood leads to self-control failure because controlling the negative mood decreases the capacity, motivation, and resources needed for other self-control goals (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). Specifically, when people try to control or regulate a negative mood, other self-control goals are abandoned (e.g., achieving performance goals, displaying appropriate behaviors toward customers), leading to self-control failures (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). In turn, people are unable to focus on their performance goals or control their behaviors.

Tice et al. (2001) and Muraven and Baumeister (2000) have proposed several theoretical mechanisms to explain why negative mood impairs self-control: (a) *the motivation mechanism,* which suggests that negative mood impairs individuals' motivation to regulate goal-oriented behaviors and put forth the efforts to pursue future goals. For example, employees who experience negative mood become less motivated to direct behaviors toward the realization of distal goals, which in turn results in them giving up the pursuit of positive outcomes and performance goals; (b) *the resource mechanism*, which suggests that individuals possess limited regulatory resources for self-control (e.g., strength and energy), and that negative mood depletes their resources needed to regulate behaviors to attain their goals (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Muraven & Slessareva, 2003). For example, when employees are in a negative mood, they have to expend their

---

[1] Although individual positive affectivity might trigger the "undoing" process to buffer the detrimental effects of daily negative mood as well, we decided to include daily positive mood in our model for two main reasons. First, Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, and Tugade (2000) proposed the "undoing" hypothesis and theorized that within-person positive mood can undo and correct for the aftereffects of negative mood, rather than positive affectivity. Thus, it is more appropriate to match our level of analysis with the level of theory. Second, most researchers have tested the undoing hypothesis at the within-person level (e.g., Dimotakis, Scott, & Koopman, 2011; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Fredrickson et al., 2000); we followed their approach to examine whether daily positive mood can buffer the harmful effects of daily negative mood on daily performance outcomes.