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Flow in the Workplace: Experiencing Flow among Employees of Rehabilitation Centers

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Abstract
The aim of the study was to explore the flow experience among employees of rehabilitation centers (N = 90) in Tbilisi, Georgia, with respect to variables such as subjective happiness and self-undermining behavior. Correlational analysis revealed significant relationships between the three variables, while regression analysis showed that both self-undermining behaviors and subjective happiness significantly predicted flow perception at workplace. Flow was negatively related to self-undermining, while it had positive link with subjective happiness.

Keywords: Flow, self-undermining, subjective happiness, intrinsic motivation.

Literature Review

If positive psychology strives to build well-being in the world, then well-being must be buildable/creatable (Martin E.P. Seligman, 2011). The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is related to subjective feelings: well-being, satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (future); engagement and happiness (present); flow; at the individual level, one speaks of positive qualities: the ability to love, courage, boldness, interpersonal competencies, forgiveness, wisdom, striving for the future, spirituality, aesthetic sensitivity. At the group level, it is the individual's pursuit of civic positions: responsibility, nurture, altruism, patience, and work ethic, patience (Seligman, 2002). Kashdan believes that the main goal of positive psychology should be directed toward the development of positive feelings, strengths, and positive relationships (Kashdan, 2004).

Flow

The theory of flow is focused on the work engagement process of healthy individuals, which involves possible improvement of cognitive skills. The flow includes sense of control and competence, high levels of concentration, cognitive enjoyment and harmony during work performance. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), flow experience is closely related to positive emotions, high levels of intrinsic motivation, and a sense of control. If a person is intrinsically motivated in terms of one's work and performs it voluntarily, then they experience "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Graef, Csikszentmihalyi, & McManama-Gianinno, 1983). Each individual tries to initiate and determine one's own behavior. If they feel that they are making their own choices, then their work is performed successfully and efficiently (Deci & Ryan, 2000). During flow, people enjoy their work without being aware of it. With performing the work that matches their life purposes and having a sense of control over their work, people achieve personal development and feel happy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) argues that human achieves happiness through controlling one's internal life. Individual has an ability to maintain control over their life, experience its most pleasurable moments, focus their attention on realistic goals, and match their problems to their skills. In this case, a person is fully mobilized, is focused on their work, experiences the feelings of "flow" and is aware of being in full control of their actions.

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Flow at work is a "short-term peak experience at work that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment and intrinsic work motivation" (Bakker, 2008, p. 401).

During absorption, employees are completely engaged in the work process and have a sense of time flying fast (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). They enjoy performing tasks, feel happy, and positively assess the quality of their working life (Veenhoven, 1984). This enjoyment or happiness is the result of the cognitive and affective assessment of flow experience (Diener, 2000; Diener & Diener, 1996). Intrinsic motivation involves performing certain work-related actions in order to feel enjoyment and get satisfaction in the particular field. Employees with high intrinsic motivation are continuously interested in their work (Bakker, 2008, p. 401). Intrinsic motivation occurs when work brings enjoyment, when one experiences the joy in fulfilling certain motivation, and strives towards performing new and challenging tasks. It can be argued that subjective psychological wellbeing depends upon the extent of a person's intrinsic motivation to perform particular task or activity. In such cases, person can be highly beneficial for both a society and one's own mental and physical health (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). When professional skills coincide with the requirements of the job employee experiences flow at work.

Flow can be described as a subjective state, which is experienced when people are engaged in the work-related activities to the point where they forget about time, tiredness, and almost everything apart from the work itself. The major characteristic of flow is intense empirical engagement in work from moment to moment. Intense empirical engagement of flow is responsible for three additional subjective characteristics, which are said to be the mixture of action and consciousness, a sense of control, and an altered sense of time (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2005). Engagement and flow are not the same. Scholars assume that the core difference between those two is stability (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engagement is a fixed state of mind, while flow is a changeable mental condition, where a balance between a challenge and skills is fragile (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2005; Bakker, 2011).

The most significant precondition for experiencing flow is correspondence between individual's skills and work-related tasks. Also, it is important that the task, as well as the level of skills could make the achievement of a goal possible (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).

Self-undermining

The concept of self-undermining is inspired from that of self-limitation, albeit these two are different (Bakker, 2020). Bakker and Costa (2014) propose that "self-undermining" can be used in relation to the behaviors that can damage the performance of work. Those with self-undermining behaviors make mistakes during work, creating conflicts at workplace. In addition to high requirements of work-related tasks, this creates a hindrance, posing a threat to adequate functional behavior.

Those inclined to self-undermining behavior are not prone to initiating self-improvement or achieving mastery in their work and experiencing flow. Lack of communication, mistakes at workplace, and work-related stress lead to self-undermining. People with self-undermining tendencies do not experience job satisfaction and flow. Unlike self-limitation, self-undermining is not a conscious act in the face of failure. This is the result of emotional burnout, a response to stress.

Bakker and Costa have used the JD-R Model to prove that self-undermining stems from emotional burnout resulting, in turn, from high level work pressure. Lack of emotional resources and self-control (Vohs & Faber, 2007) needed to meet the requirements of working life impedes person's ability to function efficiently, leading to risks related to interactions with clients and others' safety.

Subjective Happiness

Practitioners of positive psychology have described happiness as a synonym of wellbeing, as one of the elements of a multidimensional matrix. Apart from happiness, it involves meaning of life, goals, love, competence, independence, sense of self-efficacy, cognitive and physical functioning (Kashdan, Biswas, Diener, & King, 2008).

Studies have found that high income, good health, good family relationships, and personal goals are associated with psychological well-being (PWB) (Grob, 1991; Diener & Diener, 1995); at the same time, according to PWB theories, social indicators alone do not determine life satisfaction (Diener & Suh, 1997). People's

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reactions vary and are significantly determined by their unique values and experiences. According to Diener, demographic factors and life events can directly impact the feeling of psychological well-being when the achievement of personal goals depends on it (Diener et al., 1999; Preiser & Ziessler, 2009). Various theories emphasize that negative feelings and problems are always involved in life, and their perception is conditioned by attitudes towards life (Veenhoven, 1994b) and internal and external resources of the personality (Preiser & Ziessler, 2009). In general, the introduction of phenomena related to human psychological well-being is a very practical and valuable matter for introducing the phenomenon of human happiness. Studies have found that the economic situation in the northern countries alone does not represent a sufficiently significant factor that affects the feeling of satisfaction with the lives of children, adolescents, and adults. According to one of the researchers of the phenomenon of happiness (Wilson, 1967), the happy person is a well-paid, young, educated, religious, and married person. According to other researchers (Diener et al., 1999), a happy person is a person of positive temperament who can look at events more broadly and not only from a negative angle, lives in an economically developed society, has social guarantees, and possesses adequate resources that help him achieve the goals he has set.

Happiness can be seen as a key precondition and determinant of success. In other words, happiness produces success (Walsh, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2018). Simple cognitive and behavioral strategies that people use in everyday life might prove sufficient to improve happiness rates (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). People might control their happiness rates, depending on how they interpret and react to particular events in their lives (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, Schkade, 2005). It is worth noting that when people rate the quality of their happiness, the frequency of positive emotion is better predictor than its intensity. We are focused on positive emotions since we consider happiness to be the key to our success. Positive emotions can serve critical and adaptive purposes, encouraging a person to put an effort in new undertakings and prepare for future challenges (Fredrickson, 2001). Scholars think that happy people enjoy more success than their less happy peers and this success comes from experiencing positive emotions (Walsh et al., 2018). Success (or the consequences that are related to career success) is highly emphasized at work since most of the people spend most of their time at work or in work-related activities.

Quite simple and, consequently, appealing measure of wellbeing is just to ask people whether they are happy or not. Indeed, the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) asks respondents to indicate the level of their happiness on the 7-points Likert scale. Additionally, respondents are asked to compare their wellbeing to that of others'. Information used by a respondent to define their happiness when answering such questions remains unclear to a scholar. It can be argued that happiness is a "tough" construct for a scientific research (Seligman, 2011; Forgeard, Jaywickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011).

Method

Participants and Procedures

The study was carried out in Tbilisi, Georgia, at *Puzzle*, the Center for Rehabilitation of Children and Adolescents, and at the neurological clinic *Valeo.*

The study sample consisted of 90 respondents with only three male participants. The mean age of the participants was 31, with the minimum age of 20 and maximum age of 54. 45 of the respondents were not married, 41 were married, and four were divorced.

The survey was administered online via Google Drive's Google Forms. The time required for filling out the questionnaires was 25-30 minutes on average.

The research was launched only after obtaining the IRB approval. Participation was voluntary and confidential. Prior to filling out the survey, participants read the informed consent, information about the goals of the research and its confidential and anonymous nature, and instructions on how to fill out the questionnaires. IP addresses have been deleted after completing the survey and no emails or names of participants were recorded. Data safety and privacy protection was ensured.

Instruments

The Work-related Flow Inventory (Bakker, 2008) is 13-items measure assessing the perception of work-related flow. Those 13 items are divided into three parts: Absorption, described as a complete engagement in work-related tasks, enjoyment brought by work, and intrinsic work motivation.

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Respondents are asked to choose their answers on the 7-points Likert scale with 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *occasionally*, 4 = *regularly*, 5 = *often*, 6 = *very often*, and 7 = *always.*

Subjective Happiness Scale ([SHS], Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) consists of four items, measuring how individual assesses their own subjective happiness in general, as well its relation to the happiness of their peers. The questionnaire allows for assessing internal consistency. Answers are given on a Likert scale with 1 = *never happy at all* and 7 = *very happy* for the first item, 1 = *less happy* and 7 = *more happy* for the second item, and *1 = not at all* and 7 = *great deal* for the third and fourth items.

Self-undermining Scale (Bakker & Wang, 2020) is a six-items measure, which assesses self-undermining behavior at workplace. Respondents are asked to answer on 5-points Likert scale with 1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *regularly*, 4 = *often*, 5 = *very often.*

Results

Correlational analysis was used to determine the relationship between flow and self-undermining. As the Table 1 shows, statistically significant moderate negative correlation was revealed between these two variables, $r(88) = -.377$, $p < .001$.

Table 1. Correlation between Flow and Self-undermining

Correlation			
		Flow	Self-undermining
Flow	Pearson Correlation	1	-.377**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	90
Self-undermining	Pearson Correlation	-.377**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90
**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).			

On the other hand, as shown in the Table 2, Statistically significant moderate positive correlation was revealed between flow and subjective happiness, $r(88) = .404$, $p < .001$.

Table 2. Correlation between Flow and Subjective Happiness

Correlation			
		Flow	Happiness
Flow	Pearson Correlation	1	.404**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	90
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	.404**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90
**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).			

Additionally, linear regression analysis was used in order to understand whether flow could be predicted by subjective happiness and self-undermining.

Table 3. Regression on Flow: ANOVA

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*
1	Regression	14,732	2	7.366	11.964	.000[b]
	Residual	53,565	87	.616		
	Total	68,298	89			
a. Dependent Variable: Flow						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Happiness, self-undermining						

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The Table 3 shows that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(2) = 11.964$, $p < .001$.

Table 4. Regression on Flow: Beta Coefficients

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4,451	,661		6,732	,000
	Self_undermining	-,496	,205	-,252	-2,415	,018
	Happiness	,231	,081	,299	2,857	,005
a. Dependent Variable: Flow						

As shown in the Table 4, both self-undermining and subjective happiness emerged as significant predictors of flow; specifically, self-undermining negatively predicted flow ($\beta = -.252$, $t = -.2.415$, $p < .05$), while subjective happiness emerged as a positive predictor ($\beta = .299$, $t = .2.857$, $p < .01$). Also, the findings indicate that subjective happiness has higher predictive value (at .01 level) as compared to self-undermining (at .05 level). Given the findings, regression equation can be produced: Flow = 4.51 – self-undermining*.496 + subjective happiness*.231.

Discussion

One of the key foundations of a successful organization is a happy employee. Happiness at workplace, realization of creative potential, reduced burnout and turnover of professional employees (Rusbult & Farrell, 1983), and loyalty of consumers (Harter et al., 2010) lead to greater success of an organization (Diener et al., 2018).

The flow experience among personnel employed at rehabilitation centers is an important aspect for improvement of lives of individuals with special needs and for development of rehabilitation centers, as well as for physical and mental health of employees.

The goal of the present research was to study the flow experience in connection with self-undermining behaviors at workplace and subjective happiness. The findings supported the two hypotheses of the study. Specifically, correlational analysis revealed significant relationships between the variables in question, showing that flow was positively related to subjective happiness, while self-undermining behavior was its negative correlate. Regression analysis further confirmed the assumptions with subjective happiness emerging as a positive and self-undermining behavior as a negative predictor of flow. In other words, the higher an employee's perception of subjective happiness, the higher is the experience of flow, whereas the higher levels of self-undermining behavior lead to lower experience of flow.

Happy employees put more effort in their work (George, 1995; Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006) and the quality of their engagement is higher (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). According to Kashdan (2004), the main goal of positive psychology should be focused on enhancing and developing positive feelings, strengths, and positive interactions.

On the other hand, those who score high on self-undermining scale, make more mistakes, create problems, and have higher rates of emotional burnout (Bakker & Costa, 2014). People with higher levels of self-undermining behavior who work at organizations, in general, and in rehabilitation centers, in particular, put a client's safety and development at risk, while the absence of self-undermining behaviors leads to higher levels of flow experience, job satisfaction, engagement, sense of belonging, positive and negative feelings at workplace, positive and negative affects, intrinsic motivation and flourishing (Fisher, 2010). Indeed, the present study showed that self-undermining is negatively associated with flow.

Lastly, it can be noted that for those employed at rehabilitation centers, work can be considered a means to experience flow as a state of wellbeing-related psychological condition (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988).

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Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present research has certain limitations. The instruments used in the study were translated in Georgian impromptu for the research without being validated and adapted to Georgian context. Another limitation is the small size of sample not allowing for generalizations to other organizations or larger population in general. Future research should focus on larger samples of employees of other rehabilitation centers in Georgia, which would allow for more accurate, generalizable results, and encourage growth and development of the organizations in the field.

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