

What Do You Do and Who Do You Think You Are? Activities Speak Louder Than Words

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In focusing on what employees do, this dissertation provides opportunities to assess whether particular activities are congruent with who employees are, and whether, and to what extent, those activities constrain or enhance employee well-being and performance. Changes in work activities over time may sometimes imply that at a certain moment what employees do no longer sufficiently reflects who employees are professionally or what they can deal with in terms of workload. A first step in furthering understanding in this area is to study what employees (are asked to) do and how employees perceive such tasks.

After the introduction, Chapter 2 shows that it is possible to automatically extract information about what employees (are expected to) do from online vacancies with the use of text mining, and that the results are to in part comparable with and in part complementary to more mainstream job analysis methods. Text mining of vacancies provides a relatively efficient way of collecting and analyzing tasks and as such could aid in filling the lack of detailed studies about what employees do. In linking these tasks to well-being, I found that tasks differ in terms of being burdensome or enjoyable and that studying individual tasks can help in furthering our understanding of employee well-being. Chapter 3 shows that employees with a calling (i.e., employees who work for intrinsic enjoyment of the work itself rather than financial benefits or career advancement) expand their job through enhancing job crafting. This behavior can explain why employees with a calling may unintentionally do more than they can handle in terms of well-being, even though others in the organizations may benefit from their growing contribution and helping behavior. Although many employees may need to adjust who they are at work more often nowadays, the studies in Chapter 4 show that not all employees are equally equipped to deal such changes. I developed a scale for work identity rigidity, which measures the extent to which employees have an unfavorable attitude toward

identity-related change and are unwilling to change who they are at work. Chapter 5 shows that (in)congruences between what employees do and who they are at work explain well-being and performance through the experienced meaningfulness at the level of work activities. The work of professionals can be divided in eight activity types that differ in the extent to which they are congruent with professional identity (i.e., ‘doing what you are’) and the extent to which they are significant for the organization (i.e., ‘doing what matters’). The chapter also discusses how balance in the total set of work activities can be disrupted and regained by both professionals and organizational agents.

Together these studies suggest the importance of considering what employees (are asked to) do, which is guided by who they are and how they see their work, and vice versa. Each individual activity can be related to employee well-being, which means that when activities change so may the balance between meaningful and meaningless work. Incongruence between what employees do and what the employee and/or the organization need in terms of well-being or performance may also unintentionally occur based on employees being true to themselves or their calling rather than rational decisions. It is thus important for researchers and practitioners alike to continuously assess what employees do at the level of activities and use that specific information to understand and optimize employees’ well-being and performance through changing what employees do, who they are, or their subjective experiences of the two. Although more research is needed to understand how to address incongruences when they occur, I showed that a greater understanding of what employees do, how they perceive these activities, and how this impacts well-being and performance is an important first step in this process. With this dissertation I hope to inspire further investigations of what employees do, because those activities may (unintentionally) become disconnected from who employees are, what makes them happy, what they can deal

with in terms of workload, and what the organization needs and expects in light of the changing nature of work.