



Promoting harmonious work passion among unmotivated employees: A two-nation investigation of the compensatory function of cooperative psychological climate

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Harmonious work passion
Self-determination theory
Psychological climate
Intrinsic motivation
Task performance
Interpersonal helping

ABSTRACT

This research draws on self-determination theory to investigate (a) the role of cooperative psychological climate in promoting harmonious work passion among employees with low intrinsic motivation; and (b) the mediating role of harmonious passion in linking cooperative psychological climate to behavioral outcomes. We propose that cooperative psychological climate facilitates harmonious passion and, in particular, plays a compensatory role among employees with low intrinsic motivation. In turn, harmonious passion is expected to facilitate both task performance and interpersonal helping, thereby linking cooperative psychological climate to these employee behaviors. We test the model using data from employees and their supervisors across two countries (Singapore and Brazil) and find cross-national evidence that cooperative psychological climate compensates for low intrinsic motivation to predict harmonious passion. Harmonious passion also positively predicts task performance and interpersonal helping, but only in the Brazilian sample. This research enriches the nomological network of harmonious passion, provides an alternative pathway to driving employee passion when intrinsic motivation is lacking, and underscores the value of considering the joint roles of passion predictors so as to reap the performance benefits of harmonious work passion.

1. Introduction

Interest in the concept of work passion has burgeoned over the past decade among scholars (Perrewe, Hochwater, Ferris, McAllister, & Harris, 2014; Vallerand, Houliort, & Forest, 2014) as well as managers (Boyatzis, McKee, & Goleman, 2002; Hagel, Brown, Ranjan, & Byler, 2014), as a growing body of evidence demonstrates the benefits that derive from having harmoniously passionate employees. Defined as a strong inclination toward an activity that people like and find important, and in which they invest significant time and energy (Vallerand, 2010), passion extends into the work realm, and benefits of work passion include psychological and attitudinal aspects such as subjective vitality, affective commitment, positive perceptions of job resources and adjustment to retirement (e.g., Forest, Mageau, Sarrazin, & Morin, 2011; Houliort et al., 2015; Lavigne, Forest, Fernet, & Crevier-Brand, 2014), as

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well as behavioral outcomes including job creativity, task and financial performance, and citizenship behaviors (Burke, Astakhova, & Hang, 2015; Ho & Pollack, 2014; Ho, Wong, & Lee, 2011; Liu, Chen, & Yao, 2011). Despite this growing interest in work passion, however, research in this area is still in its nascent stage of development, and “our knowledge of work passion is modest” (Perrewe et al., 2014, p. 149).

In particular, our knowledge of the antecedents of work passion is scant compared to what we know about passion outcomes, and it remains unclear how organizations can develop and sustain employee passion. Thus far, only a handful of studies have examined predictors consisting of personal factors such as one's identification with work and autonomy orientation, and contextual factors such as perceived leadership style and team/unit autonomy support (e.g., Liu et al., 2011; Murnieks, Mosakowski, & Cardon, 2014; Vallerand et al., 2014). While these preliminary studies are insightful, the potential for discovering drivers of passion remains largely untapped. In particular, it remains unknown whether each passion predictor operates additively and independently of one another, or whether they function jointly, such that they work in conjunction with each other and the efficacy of one factor in driving passion is contingent on the presence or absence of another factor. To the extent that drivers of passion can potentially compensate for each other, this will not only enrich current perspectives on how passion predictors operate (i.e., separately or jointly), but also provide employees and managers multiple alternative pathways to cultivate passion, thereby allowing employers to adopt a more targeted and efficient approach to building employee passion.

Drawing on self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which posits that motivation (i.e., one's energy, direction, and persistence of behavior) can arise from intrinsic or extrinsic forces (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Moran, Diefendorff, Kim, & Liu, 2012), we investigate the joint functions of two parallel antecedents of work passion – employees' intrinsic interest in the work itself, and their perceptions of the external organizational climate in which such work is done (in the form of cooperative psychological climate). While intrinsic and extrinsic forces can both manifest in autonomous, self-determined motivation (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005), their motivational potential emerges from different sources. Intrinsic motivation stems from individuals' interest in and enjoyment of the work itself, whereas the motivational potential of psychological climate stems from the external work environment. Thus, we juxtapose both aspects to propose and test a compensatory model of passion predictors, whereby the presence of a cooperative psychological climate can compensate for a lack of intrinsic motivation in driving passion. In particular, because cooperative psychological climate encapsulates perceived cooperation displayed by various members of the organization (e.g., supervisors, coworkers) and encompasses a variety of resources (e.g., instrumental and social support), it is not only conceptually relevant but also practically important in presenting managers with multiple options for enhancing climate perceptions and, in turn, work passion.

Building on the dualistic model of passion which presents passion as either harmonious or obsessive in nature (Vallerand et al., 2003), we target our investigation toward predicting harmonious passion because it is more consistently associated with positive outcomes compared to its obsessive counterpart (Vallerand et al., 2014). Thus, the potential benefits ensuing from harmonious passion underscore the greater emphasis and urgency toward understanding how to enhance this form of passion. We also empirically validate such potential benefits by investigating two critical behavioral outcomes – task performance and discretionary helping behaviors – and testing the mediating role of harmonious passion in transforming the antecedents into behavioral consequences.

We test the proposed conceptual model in two disparate countries – Singapore and Brazil – so as to underscore the importance of work passion in different cultures and also provide a more informed and nuanced perspective on whether the proposed relationships hold true in different cultural contexts. In particular, compared to organizational research conducted in North America and Europe, studies investigating management and organizational practices in Singapore and Brazil are rarer, despite the growing presence of Asian and Latin American firms in the global marketplace. Thus, our findings can advance not only cross-national research on work passion but also our broader understanding of workplace practices, attitudes, and behaviors among relatively understudied employee populations.

Overall, our study makes the following contributions to the work passion literature. First, we address the relative dearth of research on predictors of work passion by not only presenting a new predictor of harmonious passion – cooperative psychological climate, but also offering a more situated view of this predictor by considering how it operates in conjunction with intrinsic motivation. Adopting a compensatory approach to studying passion predictors advances extant theorizing in passion research by introducing the possibility that one factor may substitute or compensate for the relative lack of another in driving passion. Second, this research validates the work passion construct in societies with diverse cultural values, thereby providing credence to the notion that passion is not merely a Western-centric organizational phenomenon (Burke et al., 2015). In particular, to the extent that our study shows that harmonious passion predicts task performance and interpersonal helping behaviors in different countries and cultures, this will underscore the managerial imperative of promoting and sustaining employee passion cross-nationally. Finally, from a practical standpoint, our findings on how organizations can promote passion, even among those employees who are not intrinsically motivated by their work, offer viable alternative solutions for developing and managing employee passion.

2. Theoretical development and hypotheses

2.1. Dualistic model of passion and SDT

In the past decade, Vallerand and his colleagues developed a dualistic model of passion that stems from SDT and has been used to examine individuals' passion for various activities within and outside the work realm (e.g., Vallerand, 2015; Vallerand et al., 2003). Representing a motivational construct that explains individuals' energy, direction, and persistence of behavior (Pinder, 1998; Vallerand, 2015), passion comprises both an affective component (i.e., strong liking or love for an activity) and a cognitive one (i.e.,

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