French Managers and Their Subordinates' Well-Being

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Abstract—Well-being at work has many positive aspects. Our general hypothesis is that employees who feel well-being at work will be positively valued by their superiors, and that this positive value, which evokes the concept of social norms, allows us to assign to well-being at work a normative status. Three populations (line managers, students destined to become human resource managers, and employees) responded to a well-being questionnaire. Managers had to indicate, for each item, if they appreciated (or not) an employee feeling the well-being presented in the item; students had to indicate which items an employee should check if s/he wants to be positively (versus negatively) appreciated by his/her superior; and employees had to indicate to what degree each item corresponded to the well-being they used to feel. Three hypotheses are developed and confirmed: Managers positively value employees feeling some sense of well-being; students are aware of this positivity; spontaneously employees show a state of well-being, which means, knowing that spontaneous self-presentation is often produced by social desirability, that employees are aware of the well-being positivity. These data are discussed under a conceptual and applied angle.

Keywords—Normativity, well-being at work, organization, evaluation.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN a highly competitive organizational context, psychological health problems of workers are alarming: stress, psychological distress, depression, burnout, etc., are manifestations of poor health, which weigh heavily on individuals, companies and states [1]-[3]. Conversely, numerous studies attest to the benefits of good psychological health of workers [1], [4], and [5], and more generally the benefits of job satisfaction, happiness at work, or of Psychological Well-Being at Work (PWBW).

Regarding Psychological Well-Being (PWB), it is observed that employees who have a low PWBW are less productive, make inferior decisions, are more likely absent from work and reduce their contributions to the organization [6], [7]. But conversely, the positive effects of well-being are recognized by several researchers. Longitudinal studies [8], [9] show strong correlations between the well-being of employees and their performance. It is also found in [10] that employees who feel good in their work adopt more organizational citizenship behavior. The employees' well-being has positive effects on organizational performance indicators such as productivity, profitability, turnover, safety, and also customer satisfaction and loyalty [11]. In another study by [12], it is found that productivity is significantly correlated with several aspects of organizational climate including employees' well-being. Similarly, a positive and significant relationship between PWB and individual performance at work was observed [13]. According to this last research, the three dimensions of burnout have negative correlations with PWB and organizational commitment. Finally, we note [14] that the performance of well-being employees is considered by their superiors as better than that of employees showing a low level of well-being. However, this last research (and some others) may lead to two interpretations: the first one, which is the most intuitive, is to say that employees in a state of well-being are more efficient than others; the second is to consider that line managers positively value the employees stating a sense of well-being and consequently assess their performance favorably. If the second option was accepted, it would lead to the attribute to well-being gaining the status of a social norm. The objective of the present work is to try to verify this second option.

It is now important to define PWB. According to some authors [8], PWB is a subjective and overall judgment meaning that people feel a large quantity of positive emotions and relatively few negative emotions. As for several authors [15]-[19], PWB includes five positive and negative components: emotional well-being, job satisfaction, aspiration, anxiety and exhaustion. Others [20] perceive six dimensions, all positive: good self-esteem and positive assessment of life, good relationships with others, a feeling of control on life and environment, and a feeling of power to take decisions and be autonomous, to give meaning to life, and to feel the continuity of personal development.

The origins of PWB are philosophical and refer to the notion of happiness, with two approaches: the hedonic approach and the eudemonic one. According to the hedonic approach, mainly developed by Epicurus and Plato, happiness is "seeking pleasure and satisfaction of desires ... [it refers] to obtain what one wants, and to the pleasant emotions of this obtaining" [1, p.16]. In this approach, the individual is considered in a state of hedonic well-being when positive emotions prevail over negative ones. As for the eudemonic approach, following Aristotle, happiness is a principle to which every human being tends in order to reach its *daimon* or his/her true self. "In seeking to achieve and reach their full potential, humans succeed to live in a state appointed *eudemonia*, usually translated today by the terms of happiness, or sometimes well-being or fulfillment" [1, p. 16]. In this eudemonic approach, "living in accordance with oneself and one's values is the heart of well-being" [1, p.24-25]. Some

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authors [21]-[23] have adopted an integrated approach to these two conceptions, the PWB becoming a multidimensional construct with hedonic and eudemonic components.

In psychology, three orientations influenced the PWB concept: 1) humanistic approach, influenced by eudemonism and the work of Maslow [24] and Rogers [25] focuses on the ability to self-determination, updating and self-realization, and optimal self-development; 2) positive psychology is interested in what makes humans happy, resilient and optimistic. It is marked by the concepts of the meaning of life, happiness and well-being and aims to promote commitment, fulfillment and self-realization. The concept of positive psychology was initiated by Seligman [26] in order to coordinate the work on human positive functioning (positive emotions, positive character traits ...); 3) health psychology refers, according to Word Heath Organization definition, to a state of complete physical mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Several scales were constructed to measure PWB: *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* [27], *Maslash Burnout Inventory* [28], *Satisfaction with Life Scale* [29], *Index of Psychological Well-Being* [30], *Scale of Psychological Well-Being* [20] ... However these models (and the scales to which they gave rise) have been criticized: they have often used a deductive approach despite the lack of a solid theoretical framework [1]. Consequently, Massé et al. [31] developed a model based on an inductive approach. This model is directly inferred from the experience of employees: it follows an ethno-semantic approach based on an inventory of signs and somatic, emotional, cognitive and behavioral manifestations through which a population expresses his psychological health. This model brings out six dimensions of PWB (self-esteem, balance, social engagement, sociability, self-control and control of happiness events). One of the advantages of this model is that it also led to the construction of a scale: Echelle de Mesure des Manifestations du Bien-Être Psychologique (EMMBEP; in English, *Measurement Scale of Psychological Well-being Events*).

The objective of the present research is to examine the possible enhancement of well-being at work, using the model and scale of Massé et al. [31].

II. METHOD

This research was conducted in France on three populations: managers (N = 128 men), students (N = 176: 134 women and 42 men) destined to become, at the end of their training, human resources managers, and employees (N = 307 men).

Each participant answered, on a voluntary basis, the EMMDEP. This scale consists of 25 items, measuring six dimensions: self-esteem (4 items), balance (4 items), social engagement (4 items), sociability (4 items), self-control (4 items) and control of happiness events (5 items). Cronbach's alpha is 0.93. Compared to the original scale, we transformed two items: "I have a beautiful smile easily" became "I easily smile"; and "I feel in health, in top form" became "I feel healthy, in top form". In addition, all items, originally formulated in the past, have been put in the present.

The managers have been submitted to the legislative paradigm [32]: they had to indicate, for each item, if they appreciated (or not) an employee feeling a sense of well-being presented in the item; they ticked off each item in a dichotomous way (appreciated response versus rejected response).

The students were confronted with a new paradigm, created for the occasion: the "courtesan self-presentation paradigm". They were faced with the following instructions: "You are asked to answer the following questions by imagining the answers that an employee should check to be positively valued from his superior, and those he should check if he wants be frowned upon this superior". Students ticked off each item in a dichotomous way (to be positively valued versus to be frowned upon). Let us remind that the self-presentation paradigm can be used in three ways [33]: 1) with a neutral instruction (answer as honestly as possible), 2) under instruction of self- enhancement (to give the best self-image) 3) under instruction of self-deprecation (to give the worst self-image). Self-enhancement and self-deprecation instructions are often used together: the difference in responses between the two instructions is considered highlighting the respondents awareness perception about the difference in social value assigned to the different answers. But this joint use seems methodologically problematic, whether performed within-subject (each respondent successively meets both instructions, leading to a potential halo effect that can only be compensated by controlling the order effect) or between-subject (in this case, the inter-subject differences can dodge the results). The method we chose (the "courtesan self-presentation paradigm") avoids both of these pitfalls.

As for employees, they were faced with the self-presentation paradigm with neutral instruction, that is to say, they had to indicate, sincerity, on a four-point scale (true, mostly true, mostly false, false), the degree to which each item corresponded to a well-being they used to feel.

III. HYPOTHESIS

We make the following three hypotheses:

- Managers positively value the employees reporting a high sense of well-being (H1);
- Students are aware of this positive valuation and they think that an employee must provide more well-being answers when the employee wants to give a positive self-image compared to when he wants to give a bad image (H2); and,
- Employees are aware of this positive valuation and they usually display a high sense of well-being (H3).

IV. RESULTS

A. On Managers (N = 128)

We can see that positive responses are significantly more frequent than negative responses (χ^2 = 2215.83; p≈.00), as shown in Table I.

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES RAW DATA MANAGERS (AND % BRACKETS)

Positive responses	2,930 (91.62 %)
Negative responses	268 (8.38 %)
Total	3,198 (100 %)

Due to two non-responses, the total is less than 3,200 (128 participants x 25 items.

B. On Students (N = 176: 134 Women and 42 Men)

Overall (that is to say men and women together), positive responses are significantly more frequent than negative responses (χ^2 = 3166.70; p≈.00). And these data are also observed among women (Table III: χ^2 = 2445.10; p≈.00) and men (Table IV: χ^2 = 721.52; p≈.00). There was also no difference between the answers of women and men (χ^2 = 2.05, p = .15, ns).

Finally, no differences are observed between managers and students when men and women are combined (χ^2 = 3.09; p = .07) or in men are assessed alone (χ^2 = 0.007; p = .93); however, female students provide more positive responses than managers (χ^2 = 4.58; p = .03).

TABLE II
DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT RESPONSES MEN AND WOMEN GATHERED IN RAW (AND % BRACKETS)

Positive responses	4,022 (92.72 %)
Negative responses	316 (7.28 %)
Total	4,338 (100 %)

Due to 62 non-responses, the total is less than 4,400 (176 participants x 25 items).

TABLE III
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES RAW DATA INTO STUDENTS (AND% BRACKETS)

Positive responses	3,071 (93.03 %)
Negative responses	230 (6.97 %)
Total	3,301 (100 %)

Due to 49 non-responses, the total is less than 3350 (134 x 25 participating items).

TABLE IV
DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT RESPONSES IN MEN RAW (AND% BRACKETS)

Positive responses	951 (91.71 %)
Negative responses	86 (8.29 %)
Total	1,037 (100 %)

Due to 13 non-responses, the total is less than in 1,050 (42 participants x 25 items).

TABLE V
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES RAW DATA USED (AND% BRACKETS)

Positive responses	6,387 (83.41 %)
Negative responses	1,270 (16.59 %)
Total	7,657 (100 %)

Due to 18 non-responses the total is less than 7,675 (307 participants x 25 items).

C. On Employees (N = 307)

Here again, positive responses are significantly more frequent than negative responses (χ^2 = 3419.57; p≈.00). However, it is noteworthy that managers provide more positive responses than employees (χ^2 = 124.90; p≈.00). Note

also the systematic differences between the students' responses and the employees' responses: students give more positive responses than employees, men and women together (χ^2 = 208.81; p≈.00), men alone (χ^2 = 47.71; p≈.00) or women alone (χ^2 = 180.61; p≈.00).

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We hypothesized that the feeling of well-being would meet the main criteria characterizing a social norm. Our results indicate that this is the case: managers positively value employees reporting a high sense of well-being (hypothesis 1). The data obtained on our second population shows that future human resources specialists, i.e. students, are aware of this positivity and are reporting higher well-being proposals to give a good self-image than to a give poor self-image (hypothesis 2). We also note that both managers and students value well-being with a significantly stronger intensity compared to the intensity shown by employees, but nevertheless, employees also report a high level of a sense of well-being (hypothesis 3 is also confirmed). If we consider that a neutral self-presentation paradigm frequently produces responses full of social desirability, this last result means that employees are aware of this positivity.

Obviously, a limitation to this study is the operationalization of our variable: we measured PWB using the questionnaire of Massé et al. [31], while other choices would have been possible. Note however, in support of our choice, that the metric qualities of this instrument are perfectly adequate (including a very satisfactory internal consistency: α = .93). Moreover, our results, far from being inconsistent, correspond with the assumptions we made. Mutations faced by organizations, especially due to globalization and to the induced competition, lead organizations to seek more performance and flexibility, and thus to extend their requirements in terms of performance and individual flexibility. The required skills are more frequently related to adaptability. The work of Pulakos [34], [35] on adaptive performance (which translates the ability of individuals to be adaptable to new conditions and requirements of jobs), point out that this performance would be supported by an adaptive competence including eight factors (interpersonal adaptability –to be able to work with new teams, new colleagues, customers, suppliers; demonstrate cultural adaptability –to be able to work in different cultural contexts; physical adaptability –to be able to work in diverse and challenging environments; to solve uncertain and unpredictable work situations, etc.). Faced with these new requirements, employees can feel stress, with the negative consequences that may ensue. It is logical that line managers, renewing their personnel evaluation criteria [36], positively value those of their subordinates who, despite the requirements of the new economic situation, continue to report high a level of well-being.

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