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What do you do and who do you think you are?

Activities speak louder than words

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Publication date
2019

Document Version
Other version

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Other

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Berkers, H. A. (2019). *What do you do and who do you think you are? Activities speak louder than words*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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Download date:09 Nov 2026

CHAPTER 6
Discussion

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation set out to address that understanding of what employees do provides opportunities to assess whether those activities are congruent with the employee's self-concept, and optimize rather than constrain their well-being and performance. I have built on three literatures to understand what employees do, how they see their work, and how they see themselves. I use job analysis to shed light on how to understand what employees do, calling to provide insight on the vulnerability of employees who do what they love, and identity theory to investigate why it is problematic when what we do and who we are at work become disconnected. Below I combine the insights of the studies presented in the previous chapters and review the theoretical implications for each of these three literatures.

Job analysis: what employees do

Job analysis is the process of collecting and analyzing information to understand both what employees do (that is, which tasks they undertake) and what is required for satisfactory performance in a given job, and as such forms the foundation for the majority of HR practices. However, recently job analysts have been criticized for not capitalizing on technological developments, such as big data, and for their lack of attention to the changing nature of work (McEntire et al., 2006; Sanchez, 1994; Sanchez & Levine, 2001). In Chapter 2, I show that it is possible to automatically extract tasks from online vacancies. Comparing the output of text mining to a more traditional way of collecting and analyzing job information, showed that text mining techniques can be implemented in the job analysis field, yielding a new means to collect valid job information. Specifically, on the basis of the text mining method it was possible to collect tasks from a wider variety of contexts in which nurses operate, thereby enhancing both context-specificity and generalizability as compared to a task inventory.

In addition, this dissertation contributes to the ongoing debate about what type of job information is (most) useful, since the status quo in the job analysis literature seems to be that there is no one superior job information type (Harvey & Wilson, 2000, 2010; Morgeson & Campion, 1997; Sanchez & Levine, 2009). With the plethora of job information types available nowadays (Berkers, Mol, Kismihók, & Den Hartog, 2015; Prien et al., 2004), practitioners and researchers alike often include a variety of job information types in their job analysis, without clearly explaining the bases for doing so. I provided argumenta-

tion in favor of detailed as opposed to abstract, and contextualized as opposed to generic job information. While the job analysis literature seems to have moved toward the use of abstract and general forms of job information (Peterson et al., 2001), the relevance of using a fine-grained (i.e., specific and contextualized job information) understanding of the determinants of employee well-being and performance is supported by the finding that tasks are not equal in their impact on these critical outcomes in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5. Only a limited number of other studies in the job analysis area have focused on the task level, but the differential impact of tasks on different outcomes underscores the relevance of using contextualized data on what employees do (Aiken et al., 2001; Eatough et al., 2016; Semmer et al., 2015; Taber & Alliger, 1995).

To me, the fact that subjective differences exist in how tasks are perceived should be seen as an argument in favor of job analysis rather than an argument against it. One of the challenges that job analysis faced as a result of the changing nature of work is the realization that standardized jobs are increasingly a thing of the past (Sanchez & Levine, 2012). Employees even within the same job often carry out different tasks (Fine, 1996), for example as the result of their expanding job crafting behavior as we showed in Chapter 3. Even if employees perform the same tasks, there are likely differences between how employees subjectively perceive those tasks or their job (Parker, 2007). As discussed in Chapter 5, professionals may care more or less about an activity depending on the degree to which that activity represents their self-concept and contributes to the goals of the organization. The finding that not all tasks are equal provides the job analysis literature an opportunity to regain relevance by helping to uncover which tasks are crucial to determining employee well-being and performance, rather than aiming to provide a unified, standardized overview of what all employees in a specific occupation do.

Calling: how (some) employees see their work

Calling, a work orientation that is focused on the enjoyment of the job itself, has been associated with both positive and negative consequences for employee well-being, and, albeit to a lesser extent, for job performance (Duffy & Dik, 2013; Duffy et al., 2016). This dissertation added OCB and work overload to the known outcomes of calling. Still little was known about the mechanisms that explain how calling may function as a double-edged sword (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy & Dik, 2013). Previous research tended to focus on

attitudinal mechanisms that explained either positive or negative outcomes of calling, including career commitment (Duffy et al., 2011), perceived organizational instrumentality (Cardador et al., 2011), occupational self-efficacy (Park et al., 2016), disengagement (Hagmaier et al., 2013), detachment (Clinton et al., 2017), and moral duty (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). An alternative mechanism is what employees who see their work as a calling do rather than how they feel or what they think. The results in Chapter 3 suggest that enhancing job crafting constitutes a behavioral mechanism through which calling affects both OCB and work overload.

Employees may engage in work activities because this allows them express who they are as professionals, which is potentially risky in terms of workaholism or over-commitment (Birkeland & Buch, 2015; Brockner et al., 1986). In a same way, employees with a calling may unintentionally start experiencing negative implications of doing what they love because they are naturally driven to contribute more by expanding the job that they enjoy and see as important. Being true to a calling may thus entail taking on more work to ensure that everything that is needed gets done, which was found to be associated with becoming overburdened as well as helping others in Chapter 3. Experiencing work as a calling may thus be seen as a motivational force that elicits specific work behaviors. Moreover, attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction or organizational commitment) are likely to be aligned with seeing work as a calling in order to create a consistent self-concept and prevent cognitive dissonance between attitudes and calling. Despite being emotionally exhausted, employees with a calling were found to sustain their job satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2016). This suggests that attitudes may not change even if employees are exhausted, and that behavior may form a more appropriate mechanism to explain the potentially ineffective courses of action for employees with a calling. That is, what employees do (more and more) can unintentionally be contradictory to what they need (recovery).

Further support for enhancing job crafting as a behavioral mechanism that explains the double-sided consequences of calling is provided by the preliminary evidence against an alternative hypothesis provided in the calling literature, namely that employees who see their work as a calling suffer due to their restrained flexibility (Elangovan et al., 2010). The result that there is no significant relationship between calling and Work Identity Rigidity (WIR) as reported in Chapter 4, however, contradict Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas's (2012)

finding that employees with a calling tend to have a tunnel vision, limiting their flexibility to switch careers. Only employees who had a problematic identification with their work, as reflected in high scores on obsessive passion (Vallerand et al., 2003), had a more rigid work identity and were less willing to deal with changes that pertain directly to who they are at work. In line with Cardador and Caza (2012) and based on our findings, I thus argue that it is unlikely that all employees who see their work as a calling are limited in their flexibility. Better understanding of the conditions and behavior that might suppress the positive effects of calling is thus needed, as employees are increasingly looking for work that they see as a calling (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015) and can benefit from seeing work as a calling.

Identity: how employees see themselves

This dissertation augments known triggers for identity work within the identity literature, such as the experience of a trauma (Maitlis, 2009) or starting a new job (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006), with changes that occur to the work content that affect employees' identities. Specifically, I showed that the (in) congruence between identity and work may reside at the level of an individual's work activities. Identifying a specific activity that does not match one's identity can explain experienced stress (Petriglieri, 2011) and can be used as a basis for deploying relatively straight-forward and targeted interventions around that specific activity as opposed to the entire job. When, for example, the image of what it means to be a physician does not match reality due to an increase in administrative work (Heijne, 2015a, 2015b), action that help reduce this specific type of work or make it manageable to restore balance and retain meaningfulness of the job may prevent physicians from experiencing exhaustion or even (start thinking about) quitting their job.

In addition, little was known about the individual differences in employees' ability and their willingness to deal with changes that affect their identity at work. The wide variety of negative emotions associated with adjusting who one is showed that identity work is far from easy (Winkler, 2016). Some employees are focused on these negative aspects of identity-related change, or foresee problems due to their lack of resources, and as a reaction create an unfavorable attitude toward identity-related changes. Building on the work of Cardador and Caza (2012), I defined this reluctance and unwillingness to change one's identity as Work Identity Rigidity. The results in Chapter 4 showed that

employees indeed differ in the extent to which they have an unfavorable attitude toward identity-related changes. In this sense, WIR could, for example, help to explain why certain professionals struggle more with identity work when what they do does not match who they are as discussed in Chapter 5. By distinguishing that individuals are not all the same, also when it comes to dealing with identity, organizations can facilitate circumstances under which identity-related change is beneficial rather than detrimental to employees' well-being and performance.

Finally, this dissertation contributed a quantitative approach to studying the differences between employees in dealing with identity-related change. Most quantitative research in the identity literature has been focused on organizational identification (Miscenko & Day, 2015), for which a reliable and validated measure exists (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). When it comes to research on individual, interpersonal, or occupational work identity, the literature is dominated by qualitative research that captures the rich and detailed processes around identity construction and identity customization (Pratt et al., 2006), identity loss (Maitlis, 2009), or compromised identities (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In a recent overview of the identity literature, Miscenko and Day (2015, p. 12) argued for future empirical research "to use quantitative methodologies to further generalize and validate the qualitative findings". This dissertation complements the aforementioned qualitative work with a quantitative measure of WIR, which received initial validation in Chapter 4. This quantitative investigation of why certain employees are more or less open towards changing who they are at work than others shows that the likelihood that individuals engage in identity work and their potential success in adjusting their identity may depend on whether their attitude toward identity-related change is positive or negative.

OVERARCHING THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Combining insights of the chapters in this dissertation yields three overarching contributions that help build a framework for understanding (the congruence between) what employees do in their jobs and who they are, and its implications for well-being and performance. First, what employees do, in terms of work activities, helps explain how employees feel, see their work, and see themselves. Second, what employees do may not always be driven by rational decisions, which can create unintentional incongruence between what employees do and what the employee or the organization need. Third, studies on what employees do and its subsequent impact can benefit from specificity in

measuring and understanding well-being and performance. These contributions are discussed below.

First, this dissertation showed that the extent to which what employees do is reflective of who they are, how they see their work, and what matters to the organization influences how well employees feel and perform. Organizational research pays a lot of attention to behavior already, but mostly as a dependent variable, for example in research aimed at identifying the antecedents of performance or OCB (cf. Podsakoff et al., 2000). In that approach, behavior is the end stage that researchers and practitioners aim to influence rather than a process or perspective that helps to explain how employees feel about their work and themselves. In this dissertation, however, what employees do is conceptualized as forming part of an iterative process that can also help explain employee well-being and performance. For example, doing more and more (enhancing job crafting) explains why employees who see their work as a calling become overloaded while at the same time exhibiting more OCB to express their prosocial motives. I thus argue to complement using behavior as an outcome with behavior as part of an iterative process that can explain reciprocal relationships, because through action, employees make sense of their work, themselves, and their environment (Savickas et al., 2009), and vice versa their work, environment, and identity guide what employees do. This alternative approach allows for the incorporation of volatile aspects of work and explains how changes in activities may impact the well-being and performance of employees (Barley & Kunda, 2001). Moreover, this approach may help to explain counter-intuitive phenomena, such as why employees who do what they love become overburdened, or why professionals do things that do not clearly contribute to the organization. Of course, such work would need to be longitudinal in nature or use experience sampling methods to be able to follow such processes over time.

Second, the research in this dissertation suggests that what employees do can be driven by factors that extend beyond motivation or rationality, or more specifically that how employees see their work and how they see themselves are also relevant motivational forces. In organizational research, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have been suggested as mechanisms to explain whether employees do something because it is inherently interesting or because it is related to a desired outcome (Gerhart & Fang, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000), and, although challenged, expectancy theory suggests that employees make weighed decisions based on expected outcomes (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996).

These theories about motivation are grounded in the principle that individuals rationally strive to maximize their benefits. However, as noted by Shamir (1991), hedonism can insufficiently explain situations in which employees transcend their self-interest for the organization, such as for transformational leadership (i.e., pursue shared organizational goals) and OCB (i.e., doing something beyond what is required and rewarded). In this dissertation as well, hedonism cannot explain why employees with a calling craft their job as it is related to overload and it cannot explain why professionals engage in tasks that over time have negative effects on their well-being. Following Shamir, I thus suggest that more attention need to be paid to alternative motivational drivers, namely the drive of humans to be self-expressive, authentic, true to their calling, or altruistic. This would be especially relevant in situations in which the action itself is not enjoyable, rewarding, and potentially even harmful for the employee, since rationality can hardly explain phenomena such as self-sacrifice at work (i.e., situations in which an employee harms him- or herself in order to do good for others). An example being employees with a calling who remain in an 'abusive' relationship with their employer (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). In addition, alternative forms of motivation might be more suitable for the current workplace, as for many employees work has become inextricably related to who employees are and these employees do not settle anymore for working solely for money (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015).

Third, this dissertation advocates specificity in measuring and understanding well-being and performance, as it may be expected to augment the insights gleaned from general approaches. With some exceptions (cf. Chan & Anteby, 2016; Gabriel et al., 2011; Taber & Alliger, 1995), most previous research in this area has focused on the job level rather than task level investigations. Theories and empirical studies that examine general job satisfaction instead of the satisfaction that derives from the performance of individual tasks are easier to generalize across employees and contexts. However, abstract theories and general measures may insufficiently capture nuance and complexity (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The results in this dissertation showed that looking at the relationships of specific tasks with job satisfaction, work overload, or emotional exhaustion yields valuable insights. Moreover, some tasks are meaningful because professionals get to do what they are and what matters, whereas other tasks are stressful because they are seen as meaningless. I therefore echo Tett and colleagues' (2000) plea for measurement specificity. The nuances in how

professionals perceive ambiguous work activities that may provide as well as lack meaningfulness would be obscured in the use of general concepts or measures. A specific approach would be more suitable to capture the complexity of work and more insightful than very abstract measures of job satisfaction, for example, in interventions aimed at promoting employee well-being and performance.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The insights provided in this dissertation can help practitioners address continuous changes in work activities that many employees experience in three ways. First, practitioners may employ the various findings reported in this dissertation to initiate a continuous dialogue between employees and employers about the nature of work, how in their specific context it might be changing, and what the consequences of that for the employee may be. As discussed, work is likely to keep changing in terms of the activities that are needed from job incumbents (Grant & Parker, 2009; Sanchez & Levine, 2012). Discussing work activities can offer both parties a way to reflect on what is done, whether it is done in the most efficient way, and whether work is sufficiently enjoyable in a comprehensive manner (Fine, 2004). The aim here is to strike a balance between work activities congruent with identity and those activities employees are required to perform. Employers can facilitate such dialogue, whereas employees can take initiative and signal which work activities are unduly burdensome or meaningless. Employees may, for example, map their own work activities to the model of meaningful work and identify for themselves, or with their team or supervisors, which activities they consider to be meaningful and which not. Insights from this exercise can be used to align understanding between employees and employers about what is important or congruent and why. When the rationale for certain activities insufficiently addresses incongruence and threatens well-being and performance these insights can be used to create interventions, either by employees independently (e.g., through crafting or identity work) or in consultation with their supervisor (e.g., through job redesign). Practitioners can thus intervene and ensure the sustainability of meaningful work by regularly checking whether what is done is at least to a sufficient degree commensurate with employee identity, that it matters for the organization, and that is not overburdening in terms of well-being.

Second, this dissertation has shown that individuals differ in many ways when it comes to who they are, how they experience their work, and what they do.

Taking the idiosyncratic ways in which employees work and experience work into account is important, because these differences matter to how well employees feel and how well they perform. Sensemaking is the process that creates meaning. It is linked to both action and identity, and helps to explain behavior, attitudes, and well-being (Weick, 1993; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). What is seen as a meaningful activity by one individual could be considered meaningless and stressful in the eyes of another. Practitioners could leverage this by adjusting their practices to match individual needs. Specifically, when it comes to those changes in work that affect identity, practitioners may, for example, use interventions that provide employees with a more rigid work identity with resources that facilitate adjusting who they are, such as training to help employees develop a growth mindset (Dweck, 2015; Paunesku et al., 2015). Expecting each and every employee to deal with change in the same way is unrealistic (Oreg, 2003). Employees have a similar responsibility in developing themselves, if needed, in order to deal with change, as resistance is futile.

Third, practitioners can use the outcomes of this dissertation to address the vulnerability of certain employees. This dissertation provided additional evidence for the dark side of calling that becomes manifest in negative consequences for the well-being of employees. Employees with a calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) and professionals who strongly identify with what they do (Pratt et al., 2006) are especially inclined to make considerable sacrifices and to continue to execute activities even when they are harmful, meaningless, or insignificant. In this I see a facilitative role for employers and a proactive role for employees. On the one hand, supervisors may help employees to set boundaries by talking about what they expect, what they consider important for the organization, why certain tasks are required, and when employees should stop proactively taking on additional work. Chances of getting a burnout are notoriously high in professions in which individuals are likely to see their work as a calling (Hakanen et al., 2006), making it relevant for organizations to intervene and to try to prevent their employees from overworking themselves. On the other hand, employees may determine for themselves what is important to them, why they choose to do certain activities, and when to say no to certain (additional) tasks. This may be accomplished by reflecting on whether a task is still sufficiently meaningful, to act or speak up when issues surface, and to take action in the form of job crafting or identity work if needed.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the studies in this dissertation provide a number of insights about what employees do, how they see their work, and how they see themselves, some limitations have to be taken into account in interpreting the results. First, most empirical studies were conducted in the Netherlands (e.g., exceptions are Chapter 2 and Study 1 in Chapter 4), which means that the results are most likely to generalize to employees in that particular context or similar ones, as opposed to other more culturally distant contexts. Especially the results of Chapter 3 may be less generalizable across cultures, as the measure for calling, for example, was less reliable in the Netherlands compared to the US (i.e., tested in Study 1 Chapter 4). Also the increase in the experience of work as a calling is potentially less prevalent in other societies (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). In order to fully grasp the impact of seeing work as a calling on employee well-being and performance across cultures, more research and a reliable measure for calling that is less culturally grounded are needed.

Second, none of the studies were longitudinal even though the back-drop of this dissertation was the changing nature of work. This dissertation only provides a cross-sectional view of issues relating to changes in the current workplace, which was in line with my aim to address and reflect what employees do in the moment and whether those activities are congruent with their identity and constrained by their well-being or organizational expectations. However, longitudinal studies are required, for example, to rule out non-causal explanations of our finding that job crafting mediates the relationship between calling, OCB, and work overload. Without longitudinal research it is impossible to pinpoint when employees with a calling start to become overburdened. More research on calling needs to include time, as is starting to happen in both qualitative (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017) and quantitative (Clinton et al., 2017) studies. The same call for more longitudinal research is made vis-à-vis the identity literature (Miscenko & Day, 2015). Longitudinal studies are required to, for example, examine the extent to which employees successfully adjust their identity based on their WIR.

Third, this dissertation addressed the need for more quantitative research in the identity literature with our development of the WIR scale, but I acknowledge that further qualitative research is needed as well. Qualitative research would, for example, help to support and further define what the experience of imbalance in meaningful work is like for professionals, when and

how they experience this, and what they do to resolve it. Although quantitative research is needed to establish the relationships between our meaningful work activities and critical outcomes, qualitative research may help to understand the sense-making processes behind those relationships. Qualitative research could also advance the results about calling as a double-edged sword, as it may be better able to explain why this is the case. It would also be valuable to understand why employees with a calling engage in enhancing job crafting behavior (e.g., because they enjoy it, because they feel morally obliged to, or because it reflects who they are) and what might distinguish employees with healthy and unhealthy callings, as there are still many questions to be answered. I believe it is worthwhile, for example, to distinguish between self and other driven motivations, as is done in the model of meaningful work in Chapter 5, to show that employees with a calling driven by others may be more vulnerable to harming themselves in terms of well-being by not setting sufficient boundaries.

Fourth, although we showed that not all tasks are equal in how they are experienced and how they impact employee well-being and performance, more empirical research is needed to further support this claim. It would, for example, be interesting to combine our insights from Chapter 2 and 5, and study the impact of the extent to which individual tasks represent professional identity and contribute to the organization on employee well-being, affect, and performance. In addition, research on calling could be complemented by a task-level focus. At the moment calling is seen as a job-level construct, however, based on our other studies it is likely that some tasks represent a calling better than others. It would be interesting, for example, to test whether there is a growing dislike towards tasks that do not match employees' calling. Employees' refusal to carry out tasks they see as meaningless may have implications for the organizations and society they work in, as those tasks potentially still need to be executed. In addition, it would be interesting to research what kinds of tasks employees with a calling craft into their job. Employees with a calling expanding their job with burdensome tasks out of moral obligation would explain the dark side of calling better than employees with a calling cherry picking tasks they enjoy.

Fifth, the impact of robotization on work needs far more attention than it has been getting to date. Computers are increasingly replacing employees in many sectors (Bresnahan, 1999; Frey & Osborne, 2013). Supermarkets, for example, are replacing cashiers with self-service check-outs and ground staff at airports is being replaced by self-serviced machines for checking in luggage.

In the near future it is predicted that jobs as diverse as loan officers, watch repairers, and insurance writers will be (increasingly) computerized (Frey & Osborne, 2013). It is possible to anticipate negative effects such as destruction of work and job polarization (Aghion & Howitt, 1994), as well as positive effects such as the computerization of routine or unenjoyable tasks (Autor et al., 2003). This development thus calls for research on what employees do and how they see their work to ensure that employees are still doing the 'right' things after their work is (partly) computerized. In addition, computerization is currently technology-driven, since activities that can be robotized are the most likely candidates for automatization. Better insights into what employees do and how these tasks affect them could potentially reverse this process and ensure that the most burdensome, boring, or dangerous tasks are outsourced to computers while retaining in human jobs the more meaningful tasks.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation departed from the notion that understanding of what employees do provides opportunities to assess whether those work activities are congruent with who employees are to ensure that those actvities do not constrain employee well-being (i.e., doing too much) or performance (i.e., not clearly contributing to the organization). Each individual activity can be related to employee well-being, and as those activities change, so may the balance between doing sufficiently meaningful work and compromising well-being and performance. Incongruence between what employees do and what the employee and/or the organization need may also unintentionally occur based on employees being true to themselves or their calling rather than making rational decisions. It is thus relevant 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. Together these studies suggest the importance of understanding what employees do and I hope to have inspired further investigations of whether the employee's and organization's image of a given job are still congruent amidst the changing nature of work.