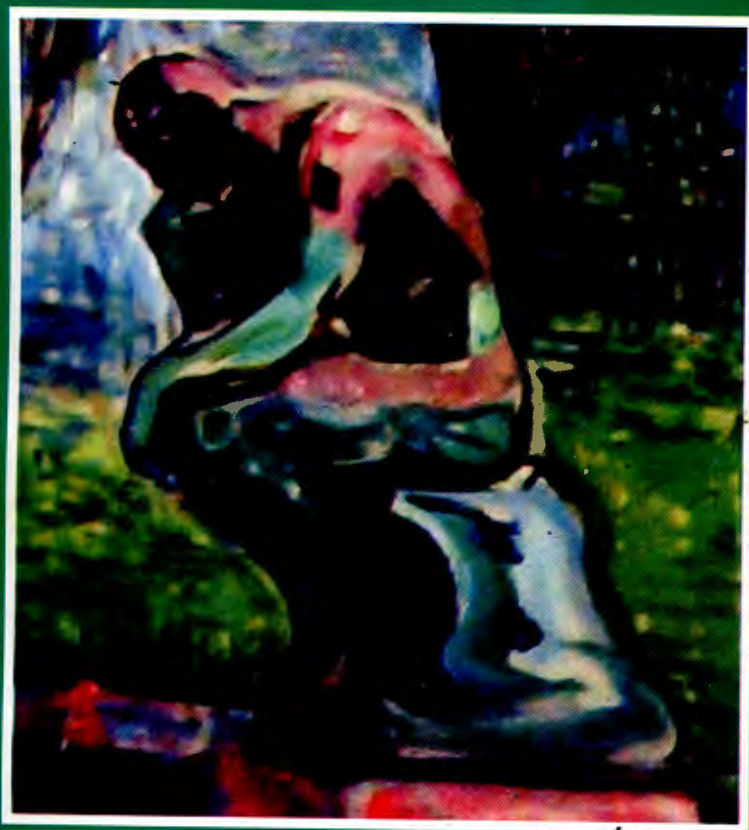# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN NIGERIA:
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G. E. Abikoye
A. O. Bankole
A. M. Sholarin

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VIGOUR AT WORK: ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

By

Muyiwa A. Sholarin & Olusola Koyi

Abstract

While often used in everyday exchanges, feeling vigorous at work, that is, individuals' feelings that they have physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive liveliness, has hardly been subjected to any conceptual inquiry or empirical research. Also, while its opposite construct, burnout syndrome, has received ample theoretical and empirical attention, vigour at work has received very scanty mention. In this chapter, we pursue the following objectives: to present a positive psychological construct of vigour at work; and to explore the antecedents of vigour and its consequences, including vigour's possible effects on individuals' mental and physical health, and job performance. We conclude by pointing out a few open research questions that concern the study of vigour at work.

INTRODUCTION

Vigour, in its various forms, has long been the topic of literary accounts, artistic descriptions, and philosophical inquiries. As a prime example of a positive emotion, however, vigour has rarely been the topic of conceptual and integrative analysis. This stands in sharp contrast to the exponential growth in research on vigour's negative counterpart, burnout at work. The popularity of burnout as a major topic of research appears to continue unabated. Burnout is often

viewed as an affective reaction to ongoing stress whose core content is the gradual depletion over time of individuals' intrinsic energetic resources, comprising of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and diminished personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996; Abikoye, 2009).

In this chapter, we focus on the opposite of burnout, namely on individuals' feelings that they possess physical strength, emotional energy and cognitive liveliness, a set of interconnected affective experiences dubbed as vigour. Vigour is viewed as a core affect (Russell, 2003) attributed to one's work milieu. Following Gray and Watson (2001), we define an emotion as a highly structured response to a specific type of events or environmental interactions that gives rise to a characteristic adaptive behavior, adaptive behavior that is relevant to the needs, goals, or survival of the organism. This definition includes the so-called basic emotions (e.g., fear, joy, love) and social emotions (e.g., guilt, jealousy). Gray and Watson (2001) used the dimensions of duration, focus on the situation, intensity, frequency, and function to differentiate between emotion and mood. Gray and Watson (2001) viewed emotions as referring to short term, focused, intense, infrequent, and adaptive responses, while moods refer to long term and pervasive, unfocused, less intense, and continuous responses, and proposed the term affect to denote both emotions and moods.

According to the cognitive theory of emotions developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), cognitions and emotions are theoretically separable even though they tend to appear conjoined in nature, mutually affecting each other over time. Most theories regard emotions as indicating fundamental action tendencies whose purpose is to motivate behavior related to the survival of the species (e.g., Watson, 2002). The primary functions, or adaptive value, of emotional experiences are expressed in such activities as preparing for action, withdrawing from danger, and communicating with other members of the species. Vigour, like other basic emotions, represents an innate pattern of responses to environmental cues that has evolved because of its general functional significance.

VIGOUR CONCEPTUALIZED

Vigour represents a positive affective response to one's ongoing interactions with significant elements in one's job and work environment that comprises the interconnected feelings of physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive liveliness. Theoretically, this view of vigour is derived from Hobfoll's (1998) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. The COR theory's central tenets are that people have a basic motivation to obtain, retain and protect that which they value. The things that people value are called resources, of which there are several types, including material, social and energetic resources. In general, resources are those personal energies and characteristics, objects and conditions that are valued by individuals or that serve as the means for the attainment of other objects, personal characteristics, conditions or energies. Examples of internal resources are optimism, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Examples of external resources are employment, social support and economic status. The concept of vigour relates to energetic resources only, namely to physical, emotional and cognitive energies. Vigour represents an affective state that individuals attribute to their job and workplace when asked about it and do so spontaneously, in contrast to emotional traits like positive affectivity that refers to the tendency to experience positive affect across situations and times (Fox & Spector, 2002).

Feeling vigorous is probably directly related to one's appraisal of relevant job demands and available coping resources, as proposed by Lazarus appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1999). The cognitive appraisals leading to feeling vigorous may as well include one's assessment of one's movement toward a goal and the pace of that movement, as proposed by Carver and Scheier's (1998) theory of regulated behavior. This theory proposes that human experience is largely powered by goals toward which people progress and a self-regulation system that checks one's current status in relation to one's goal-determined reference values. It further postulates that the rate of progress toward goals gives rise to affect (Carver & Scheier, 1990, 1998).

WORK-RELATED PREDICTORS OF VIGOUR

It is quite possible that there are innate, genotypic differences that antecede phenotypic variations in vigour (Watson, 2002). For instance, it is expected that men would experience higher levels of vigour than women, and would thus report these levels, since the accepted norms associated with the masculine gender role emphasize strength, independence, and invulnerability (Stanton, Parsa, & Austenfeld, 2002). The literature on dispositional influences on affective states may lead to the expectation that those high on the personality trait of extraversion (or positive affectivity) are more likely to experience vigour relative to those high on the trait of neuroticism (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Indeed, Matthews et al. (1990) found that the mood state of energetic arousal was related to extroversion.

In this section, we focus on job features and organizational characteristics that may lead job incumbents to feel energetic. This is analogous to researchers' efforts to explore the ways in which stress and overload are implicated in the development of burnout (Maslach et al., 2002; Shirom, 2003). As noted, employees' work-related emotional experiences result from their appraisals of ongoing interactions with their job and work environments. Therefore, organizations do not have a direct way of eliciting specific emotional reactions in all employees. Organizations do attempt to regulate employees' emotions, including by means of prescribing, neutralizing, buffering, or normalizing them (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). In a similar vein, organizational decision makers may devise strategic interventions designed to modify or transform certain work elements in such a way as to increase the likelihood of employees feeling invigorated.

Job Redesign

Hackman and Oldham (1980) have developed one of the most influential models explaining employee positive emotions, specifically job satisfaction, by job features and their resultant psychological states. The job characteristic model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) posits that the higher the levels of five job characteristics - task autonomy, significance, feedback, identity and

skill variety, the more pronounced the resultant psychological states. These resultant psychological states are knowledge of results, perceived meaningfulness of work, and felt responsibility for job outcomes. The resultant psychological states lead to higher employee job satisfaction and performance. Empirical research has shown that the most powerful predictors of employee job satisfaction and performance were job autonomy and feedback (Fried & Ferris, 1989). Brousseau (1983) has argued that autonomous jobs, namely jobs that allow employees to formulate more elaborated work plans and pursue self-determined goals, would enhance feelings of personal efficacy and thereby enhance their feelings of cognitive liveliness.

Multiple and/or conflicting roles

Having multiple or conflicting roles in an organization has been regarded in the organizational behavior literature as inducing perceived role conflict among employees (Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981). In contrast to this prevailing view, Marks (1977) has suggested that multiple and conflicting roles can lead to the creation of additional energetic resources. Drawing on similar situations in the physical sciences, Marks (1977) argued that role conflict might actually increase available energetic resources. The mechanism involved may include one's exposure to many sources of information, one's being able to adjust more flexibly to the demands of diverse role partners, one's reduced level of boredom, and ones' being able to develop cognitive skill like finding creative solutions that integrate diverse viewpoints. Again, vigour could be expected to mediate the relationship between multiple role, as appraised to those experiencing them, and augmented energetic resources.

Work Groups

Work groups tend to share emotions because of common socialization experiences and common organizational features, norms and regulations that govern the expression of emotions, task interdependence, and the phenomenon of emotional contagion (Brief & Weiss, 2002). It has been found that work teams characterized by mutual trust and high social support tend to be more cohesive and goal-directed, and that these qualities in turn lead to favourable employee morale and job-related well being (Karasek & Theorell,

1990). Specifically, work group cohesion was found to predict vigour, measured as a mood state (Terry, Carron, Pink, et al., 2000).

Leadership Style

There are indications in the literature that leaders who feel energetic are likely to energize their followers (Brief & Weiss, 2002). In a similar vein, the transformational leadership literature often makes the claim that transormational leaders exhibit energizing emotions to in order to arouse similar emotional states among their followers (Avolio, 1999). Transformational leadership comprises four key elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio, 1999). Some of these elements could affect, directly or as mediated by another variable, the experience of vigour. For instance, individualized consideration, the expression of care and demonstration of empathy to followers, enhance their level of perceived social support, and inspirational motivation is likely to heighten followers' self-efficacy. Intellectual stimulation, a component of transformational leadership which consists of encouraging followers to think creatively (Avolio, 1999), is likely to have a direct positive effect on cognitive liveliness, a component of vigour.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIGOUR
Vigour and Employee Mental Well Being

Since positive affective state are indicators of mental well being (e.g., Katwyk et al. 2000), individuals' level of vigour may be considered as an indicator of their optimal psychological functioning. Many investigators defined the conceptual domain of health-related quality of life as including vigour. Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) found that positive emotions, including vigour, broaden the scope of cognition and enable flexible and creative thinking, in line with earlier findings (e.g., Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999). They (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002) further found that this process of cognitive broadening enhanced psychological resilience among their subjects and produced an upward spiral toward enhanced emotional well-being. Therefore, it is possible that positive emotions, including vigour, trigger a dynamic process of continuous improvement in mental well-being among those experiencing them.

Vigour and Employee Physical Health

While vigour's likely effects on mental well-being are straight forward, its effects on physical well being are more complex. One of the limitations regarding the body of knowledge on the effects of positive emotions on physical health is that while these effects have been shown to be positive in sign, the nature of the physiological pathways linking these two entities are yet to be fully understood (Ryff & Singer, 2002).

It has been suggested that positive emotions change the levels of brain dopamine (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999), thereby simultaneously expanding cognitive functioning and regulating cardiovascular activity. Brain research (e.g., Davidson, 2000) has revealed that when people are emotionally distressed, like when they are anxious or depressed, the most active sites in the brain are circuitry converging on the amygdala, part of the brain's emotional centers, and the right prefrontal cortex, a brain region that controls hyper vigilance typically found among people under stress. By contrast, people who experience positive emotions, like feeling enthusiastic or energized, display heightened activity in the left prefrontal cortex while the right prefrontal cortex remains quiet.

Another possible physiological pathway is that linking positive emotions with improved immune function, as reflected in the psychoimmunological literature (e.g., Salovey et al., 2000). Yet, another possibility is that allostatic load mediates the relationship between positive emotions and physical health (Ryff & Singer, 2002). Allostatic load refers to a measure of cumulative wear and tear on several physiological systems, including the cardiovascular, metabolic, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, and sympathetic nervous system (Ryff & Singer, 2002).

Vigour and Job performance

Several emotion theorists have argued that certain affective states are associated with specific action tendencies (e.g., Frijda, Kuipers, & Schure, 1989; Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001). Fredrickson, in her broaden-and-build model of positive emotions (2002), has argued that positive emotions are accompanied by thought-action repertoires, that is, an urge to think or act in a certain

direction. It follows that feeling vigourous may generate a particular thought-action repertoire that expands activity, broaden the range of options, and promote creative solutions for work-related problems.

Several studies have documented the role of positive emotions in promoting performance (Huy, 1999; Rafaeli & Worline, 2001; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994; Worline, Wrzesiewski, & Rafaeli, 2002). Indeed, performance is interwoven with emotion in organizational life. Positive emotions have been linked to several performance-related behaviors, including enhanced creativity, more effective decision-making, sales-related pro-social behaviors, and the use of more successful negotiation strategies (Baron, 1990; Forgas, 1998; George, 1991; Staw & Barsade, 1993). While vigour is not specifically referred to in the above literature, we assume that the relationship between vigour and job performance will be positive, and that it is likely to be reciprocal rather than recursive. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggested that individuals who engage in interesting activities that match their level of skills are likely to experience a variety of positive emotions, probably including vigour.

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this chapter on vigour is in tune with the new development of the field of positive psychology and the emergence of positive organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002). Vigorous feelings at work possibly allow employees to effectively cope with work-related demands, and more importantly are likely to have a positive impact on their well-being.

In this chapter, the emphasis has been on job and work characteristics conducive to employee vigour, and on the influence of employee vigour on job performance. However, how does employee vigour affect the organization as a whole? Are there vigorous organizations, and if so what are their inherent characteristics? The emphasis throughout this chapter has been on vigour at work. However, vigour may be experienced in and outside of work. That is, it may be experienced as an affective response to events and situations that individuals encounter outside of work. It is possible that vigour felt at work spills over to the family and other life domains and vice versa. These are open questions that need to be addressed in future research.

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