

Outcomes of Workplace Interruptions: Scale Development and Evidence of a Positivity Bias

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Presenter Information

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Interruptions in the Workplace

This study focuses on the outcomes of four types of interruptions (intrusions, breaks, distractions, and discrepancies) and their relationship with age. When considering the perceived outcomes of these interruptions, it may be important to consider the age of the individual who was interrupted, given the positivity bias (e.g., Johnson & Whiting, 2013). This phenomenon suggests that as people age, they are more likely to report positive emotions, and less likely to report negative emotions. Therefore, we expect older individuals would be more likely to report positive outcomes of interruptions and less likely to highlight negative outcomes.

Part- and full-time workers ($N = 216$, $M_{age} = 22.10$, $SD_{age} = 4.29$) responded to eight newly developed scales designed to capture the positive and negative outcomes of each type of interruption, ($\alpha = .87-.93$). Results suggest that as age increased, negative outcomes were reported less for interruptions ($r = -.15$, $p = .03$), breaks ($r = -.21$, $p = .002$), and discrepancies ($r = -.22$, $p = .001$), and positive outcomes were reported more discrepancies ($r = .21$, $p = .002$). Overall, results suggest that as people age they are less likely to report negative outcomes associated with various interruptions, yet more likely to experience/report positive outcomes. This study contributes to the literature by providing validity evidence of validity of concise, specific scales measuring positive and negative outcomes of interruptions and supporting the positivity bias with respect to perceptions of interruption outcomes.

Key words: aging, cognition, interruptions, breaks, distractions, scale development, stress.