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Why does using personal strengths at work increase employee engagement; who makes the most out of it; and how?

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**Why Does Using Personal Strengths at Work Increase Employee Engagement; Who
Makes the Most Out of It; And how?**

Abstract

Engaging in behaviors that take advantage of one's personal strengths at work can promote employee flourishing in the workplace and mental health. Personal strengths use has thus gained increasing attention within occupational psychology and positive organizational scholarship. In this paper, we first integrate work on personal strengths use with the latest developments in the job demands-resources theory (and its extensions) to develop a conceptual model explaining how and why personal strengths use on the job increases work engagement. Specifically, we propose that feelings of inspiration and meaningfulness explain the relationship between personal strengths use and work engagement. Second, we identify two mechanisms through which employees can amplify the benefits associated with personal strengths use at work; that is, we propose that the increased engagement associated with strengths use makes employees more likely to capitalize on the positive aspects of their work by engaging in work-family interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection. Further, our model predicts that employees' psychological capital moderates the effects of personal strengths use. We tested our theoretical predictions in a sample of 160 full-time employees who provided ratings that comprise a three-level dataset (person, week, and day) comprising 943 matched weekly ratings and 2787 daily ratings. Our hypotheses were largely supported by these data. Implications for theory, practice, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Personal strengths use, work engagement, meaningfulness, interpersonal capitalization, positive work reflection.

Why Does Using Personal Strengths at Work Increase Employee Engagement; Who Makes the Most Out of It; And how?

Work is one of the most important life roles for many individuals, and it can also be a direct and important source of happiness and well-being for employees, especially when they perceive their jobs to be inspiring, meaningful, and engaging. But how can people take better advantage of their engagement in work activities? An emergent stream of research in occupational psychology suggests that when employees use their personal strengths at work, such as by engaging in proactive behaviors that allow them to make the best of their work situation and put in their optimal performance (e.g., Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018), they experience increments in psychological well-being. These increments are generated by increased work engagement (Bakker & van Wingerden, 2020) which is considered a precursor or component of well-being (Hakanen, Peeters, & Schaufeli, 2018) and, in the longer term, by the personal growth (van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019) stimulated by using one's personal strengths.

The positive perspective on work and psychological well-being that we take, anchored in the current version of the job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), is also relevant to health more generally. Recent work in occupational health has examined the influence of work engagement on heart rate variability, an indicator of the optimal functioning of the autonomic nervous system (Seppälä et al., in press). This research suggests that using personal strengths at work can have positive implications for employees' physical health, particularly through enhancing work engagement. Furthermore, there have been recent calls in the medical and general health literature for examining the effects of work not only on mental disorders and mental health problems, but also on mental well-being, defined as "a positive construct (not framed in terms of deficits or limitations), encompassing thriving

and actualisation, positive feelings, and positive social and psychological functioning” (Rugulies et al., 2023, p. 1368), outcomes that are examined in our study.

Given that work engagement represents an important mechanism by which strengths use can increase well-being (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018), we aim to contribute to the theory and research on personal strengths use by proposing and testing two conceptual mechanisms that explain why personal strengths use increases work engagement. Namely, through two volatile personal resources – increased inspiration and meaningfulness. Our work also extends this theory by identifying two ways in which feelings of being energized and absorbed at work induced by personal strengths use, i.e., work engagement, can lead to enhanced well-being. Specifically, we propose that when employees are engaged at work, they can achieve interpersonal and intrapersonal psychological benefits by engaging in interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection. Finally, we introduce psychological capital as an individual difference construct that explains why some employees derive more (or less) inspiration and meaningfulness from using their personal strengths at work.

At the broadest level, our theorizing is positioned within *positive organizational scholarship*, which is a field of scientific inquiry “concerned primarily with the study of especially positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members” (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 4; Cameron & Caza, 2004; see also Luthans, 2002) that has emerged following the *positive psychology movement* (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Consistent with these movements, where the concept of personal strengths use has originated (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), we ground our predictions within the job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018) and its extensions (e.g., ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) when building our conceptual model. Importantly, the choice of each of the constructs included in our model, as well as the

relationships that we propose and test, was informed by, and grounded in, this theory, as we highlight in the hypothesis development section below.

Our first contribution to the literature on the use of personal strengths addresses the reason why employing personal strengths leads to work engagement. Specifically, it is because utilizing one's strengths cultivates personal resources, as evidenced by feelings of inspiration and meaningfulness. Towards this end, we integrate recent developments in the job demands-resources theory (e.g., Bakker et al., 2014), research on personal strengths use (van Woerkom et al., 2016), intra- and interpersonal capitalization (e.g., Bono et al., 2013; Ilies et al., 2017), with Kahn's (1990) classical conceptualization of personal engagement at work to build our conceptual model. Importantly, we model these processes at the within-individual level by examining week-to-week relationships, to capture the temporal dynamism of these relationships.

As we explain in more detail, job demands-resources theory specifies that both stable (key) and volatile personal resources contribute to work engagement. Psychological capital, a core construct in positive organizational scholarship, is considered a stable personal resource that comprises four first-order characteristics—hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017), and these have been noted as *key personal resources* in the job demands-resources theory and related models (e.g., ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Therefore, our second contribution to the literature on personal strengths use concerns proposing and testing that individuals' psychological capital modulates the creation of *volatile personal resources* – inspiration and meaningfulness – and the downstream effects of those volatile resources on work engagement. As an additional contribution, we propose and examine whether experiencing work engagement allows employees to amplify the effects of their positive work experiences. We propose that this can be achieved through engaging in work-family interpersonal capitalization (Ilies et al., 2011) and positive work reflection

(Bono et al., 2013), and this serves as an explanation for the documented effect of engagement on well-being. The conceptual model that incorporates our propositions is presented in Figure 1 below.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Theory and Hypotheses

The JD-R theory takes a job design perspective to explain how various job demands and resources interact to shape job performance and employee well-being via two routes: a stress (well-being and health-impairment) process with a focus on burnout and a motivational process with a focus on work engagement that is thought to enhance well-being and health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Seppala et al., in press). According to the theory, every work experience, issue, or aspect of work can be considered along the two dimensions of job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to the aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort (e.g., work pressure, cognitive demands) and usually cause physiological and/or psychological costs in employees (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job resources are those aspects of the job that help employees achieve work goals, and reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs (Demerouti et al., 2001)—such as social support, growth and developmental opportunities, task significance, and meaningfulness. The theory underlines that for every specific job, the relevant demands and resources can be mapped to see whether employees work under high job demands and if more resources should be provided to address these job demands. A core tenet of the theory is that employees use various proactive and reactive strategies to influence job demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti 2017, Van Veldhoven et al. 2020), thus providing for a more complete and comprehensive understanding of employee well-being and performance that includes employees' agentic efforts.

Personal strengths use is an emerging construct in positive organizational scholarship and has been recently integrated with the job demands-resources theory as reflecting agentic behaviors that allow employees to make the best of their work situation and put in their optimal performance (e.g., Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018; Wood et al., 2011). Job demands-resources theory (Bakker et al., 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; van Woerkom et al., 2016) posits that when employees utilize their strengths—skills, abilities, and characteristics that enable them to generate personal resources, including emotional and energetic ones—it leads to a build-up of personal resources. This accumulation, in turn, results in increased work engagement. Indeed, recent research using diary studies of strengths use and work engagement at the week-to-week level, intervention studies, and meta-analyses show that playing to one's strengths does predict employee engagement at work (Dubreil et al., 2016; Harter et al., 2002; van Woerkom et al., 2016).

Concerning the within-individual conceptualization of the mechanisms linking strengths use and work engagement (and we believe this also applies to the downstream effects of work engagement on the end outcomes in our model), van Woerkom et al. (2016) specifically note that work experiences and their psychological outcomes are strongly influenced by employees' psychological states. The authors further explain that studying between-individual differences in strengths use (as cross-sectional studies do) "is not able to capture or explain fluctuations in these states" yet "certain research designs – such as weekly diaries – are well suited to explaining both variations in strengths use as well as differences in work engagement..." (pp. 384-385).

Work engagement is a positive experiential state (Schaufeli et al., 2002) that reflects the main motivational process in the job demands-resources theory (see Bakker et al., 2014). However, this theory has been criticized for not offering sufficient explanation regarding the underlying mechanisms explaining why job characteristics influence employee outcomes

(Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). We develop such an explanation by proposing that inspiration (an emotional experience) and meaningfulness (as a cognitive perception about work), two volatile psychological resources genuine to the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and the job demands-resources theory, are generated by personal strengths use and link personal strengths use to work engagement. Explaining the effects of personal strengths use at work represents an important contribution, because even though personal strengths use has been linked to work engagement in previous studies, the theoretical mechanisms that might be responsible for this link have not yet been explicitly proposed and tested (see van Woerkem et al., 2016, for a test of the mediating role of self-efficacy).

Inspiration refers to feelings of excitement and motivation to pursue a specific goal (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). As an energizing and positive emotional state, inspiration can be classified as an energetic volatile resource in the framework of the job demands-resources model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Inspiration helps employees to focus their attention and efforts toward achieving their goals and should thus lead to increased work engagement. According to Thrash and Elliot (2003; 2004), inspiration is characterized by three aspects: First, inspiration entails an orientation toward transcendence or enriched possibilities. Second, inspiration is evoked by a stimulus, and one cannot willingly become inspired. Third, inspiration is motivational and involves an approach-motivation, or goal striving (Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

In the work context, utilizing one's strengths is likely to evoke inspiration by enabling employees to experience a sense of transcendence. This happens when they behave in ways that capitalize on their strengths, rather than having to compensate for their weaknesses. The focus on using strengths allows employees to improve their circumstances or achieve desired outcomes (Linley & Harrington, 2006). Such a dynamic motivates them to actively strive towards goals and immerse themselves in their work, ultimately leading to an experience of

work engagement. Indeed, although earlier conceptualizations of work engagement (personal engagement; Kahn, 1990) does not specifically include inspiration as a condition for engagement, the qualitative studies reported by Kahn (1990) illustrate experiences of being inspired and engaged at work, when employees immerse themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically in work that is aligned with their personal philosophy and values.

Next, meaningfulness is a positive appraisal of the work experience and a perception that one's work is purposeful and aligned with one's beliefs and values (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980; Spreitzer, 1995). Meaningfulness is one of the psychological states "at the causal core of the [job characteristics] model" (Hackman & Oldham 1976, p. 255), and it is also one of the psychological conditions necessary for engagement in Kahn's (1990) seminal article on personal engagement. As using one's personal strengths at work draws upon the individual's authentic self and personal values (Linley & Harrington, 2006; van Woerkom et al., 2016), it increases the perception that what one does at work is meaningful. It follows that through the increased experience of meaningfulness, using personal strengths at work should increase work engagement. Indeed, there has been correlational research reporting significant associations between strengths use and perceived meaningfulness at work (e.g., Allan, Owens, & Douglass, 2019; Liu, van der Linden, & Bakker, 2022; Littman-Ovadia, Lavy, & Boiman-Meshita, 2016), as well as between-individual level research reporting associations between meaningful work and work engagement (e.g., van Wingerden & van der Stoep, 2018).

Hypothesis 1. There will be indirect effects of personal strengths use on work engagement through the experience of (a) inspiration, and (b) meaningfulness, at the intraindividual level (across weeks).

As previously noted, and explicitly detailed in our hypotheses, we test two psychological processes to explain why the use of personal strengths increases employees' work engagement at the intraindividual level. Specifically, we examine the week-to-week

variations in the levels of these constructs. This approach contrasts with an interindividual level analysis, which would assume stability of these constructs over time. Our methodology is consistent with recent theorizing and research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Liu et al., 2022; van Woerkom et al., 2016). In doing so, we assume that employees vary in the extent to which they use their personal strengths at work over time, which is in line with van Wingerden and van der Stoep (2018, pp. 2–3) who note that “it is important to differentiate between the possession and the actual use of strengths.” This also implies that individuals can vary in the extent to which they utilize their personal strengths at work from one week to another, as shown by van Woerkom et al. (2016), and as our empirical study presented herein examines. In addition, we will also examine interindividual differences in the strength of these processes, as we explain below.

Interindividual Differences

We have proposed two theoretical processes explaining why variations in the extent to which individuals use their personal strengths are associated with variations in their work engagement. But do these processes operate the same for all individuals? The job demands-resources theory and its extensions specify that both *volatile* and *stable* personal resources are important in explaining work engagement, as well as its downstream effects on well-being and family life (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Following this theory, our first hypothesis specifies inspiration and meaningfulness as volatile personal resources explaining the effect of personal strengths on work engagement. We now turn our attention to a stable personal resource—psychological capital—that should theoretically predict the strength of the intraindividual effects that we have proposed, across individuals (a cross-level moderated process).

The first-order characteristics of psychological capital – hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017), are key personal resources in the job

demands-resources theory and related models (e.g., ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), and are proposed to modulate the generation of volatile personal resources such as inspiration and meaningfulness. Employees who have confidence in their abilities to accomplish challenges, are able to look on the bright side of each situation, persevere toward their goals, and are resilient when they experience challenges that have the potential to generate more resources for themselves (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Specifically, Thoits (1994) argued that key personal resources, which include psychological capital, facilitate resource generation by helping individuals identify opportunities for resource gain. Therefore, individuals with higher psychological capital can acquire more (volatile) personal resources and more effectively utilize their available resources in pursuit of their goals (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

In our model, we anticipate that employees possessing higher psychological capital will benefit more from using their strengths at work. Specifically, they are likely to experience greater levels of inspiration and meaningfulness, which in turn lead to increased work engagement, compared to those with lower psychological capital. This is because psychological capital is a key personal resource that enables positive appraisals and the retention of positive and constructive memories (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). First, employees who are more optimistic are more attune to the positive side of any situation (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Being able to utilize their strengths at work can be perceived as one such bright event at work (or a series of such events), which can evoke feelings of inspiration and lend greater meaningfulness to employees' work. Further, the greater self-efficacy that high psychological capital individuals possess increases employees' confidence that they are indeed able to perform optimally at work when they utilize their strengths, and this provides them the motivation and purpose to invest themselves more fully at work.

Finally, employees who have higher psychological capital are more hopeful and resilient, characteristics which enable them to persevere even in the face of adversity. For example, these employees could positively reappraise negative situations to highlight the potential gains (rather than losses) to their resources, as well as perceive that their use of their strengths can assist them in overcoming adversities, thus amplifying the positive association between strengths use at work and meaningfulness and inspiration. In sum, employees with higher psychological capital are likely to benefit more strongly from using their strengths at work, such that for these employees, using personal strengths at work elicits greater feelings of inspiration and meaningfulness, which in turn facilitates higher work engagement, compared to employees with lower psychological capital.

Hypothesis 2. Employees' psychological capital will moderate the intraindividual indirect effects of personal strengths use on work engagement through the experience of (a) inspiration, and (b) meaningfulness, such that those with higher levels of psychological capital will show stronger indirect effects.

Further Capitalizing on Work Engagement

While we have thus far explained how personal strengths use at work can generate resources for employees and facilitate their engagement at work, we push our theorizing one step further to suggest that the positive benefits of strengths use do not stop at work engagement. In line with the positive psychology movement and resource theories, we propose a model which includes the amplification of positive effects on resources through resource gain spirals (e.g., Hobfoll, 2002; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). That is, the feelings of inspiration, meaningfulness, and engagement at work, which are induced by the use of personal strengths, can galvanize employees. This, in turn, encourages them to capitalize further on their resource gains, thereby activating resource gain cycles. Specifically, employees can capitalize on their positive work experiences after or even

outside of work, both interpersonally, through work-family interpersonal capitalization, and intrapersonally, through positive work reflection.

Work-family interpersonal capitalization is a social-interactional construct comprising actions and behaviors that allow employees to relive and prolong the positive effects of positive events and experiences at work by sharing such events and experiences with members of their family (e.g., spouses; Ilies et al., 2011). It is also a mechanism through which employees can create additional personal resources in the family domain (Ilies et al., 2017). In organizational psychology, this concept was first proposed by Ilies et al. (2011) following theory in social psychology (e.g., Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 1994) and research involving romantic partners (e.g., Gable et al., 2006). Theoretically, having an engaging day (or week) at work should make employees more likely to share their positive work experiences at home because engagement is inherently a positive and motivational experiential state (Ilies et al., 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2002). That sharing positive experiences has further benefits for employees was demonstrated by Ilies et al. (2011) who, in a randomized field experiment with daily assessments over a period of two weeks, found that work-family interpersonal capitalization had a positive effect on job satisfaction over and above the effect of the positive event or experience itself (and other positive experiences). Most relevant to our research here, in a daily study conducted over two weeks, Ilies et al. (2017) found that on days when they felt more engaged at work employees were more likely to engage in work-family interpersonal capitalization.

Positive work reflection is a form of intrapersonal capitalization as it refers to thinking about the positive and beneficial aspects of work (Bono et al., 2013; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005). It is akin to rumination in that it is cognitively driven but focuses on the positive side of work as opposed to fixating on negative or stressful events at work or on ways to buffer the effects of work stress (Bono et al., 2013). Within the framework of the job

demands-resources model and in positive organizational scholarship, positive work reflection explains how individuals amplify the beneficial outcomes from positive situations at work, and thus garner and accumulate even more resources (Sonnentag & Grant, 2012; Westman, 2001). As Daniel and Sonnentag (2014) explain, because work engagement is a positive and fulfilling state of mind, it makes employees think more positively about their jobs (Sonnentag & Grant, 2012) and it might activate positive cognitions about their work experiences.

Indeed, these authors found a positive relationship between work engagement and positive work reflection in a longitudinal (yet cross-sectional) study. Although research linking work engagement to positive work reflection at the intraindividual level is lacking, we propose a comparable association. This association is similar to the link between work engagement and work-family interpersonal capitalization. We suggest that on weeks when employees feel more engaged at work, they are more likely to engage in positive work reflection. This likelihood is due to the positive energy and motivation associated with work engagement.

Hypothesis 3. At the intraindividual level (across weeks), work engagement will be positively related to (a) work-family interpersonal capitalization, and (b) positive work reflection.

In sum, we have proposed that intraindividual variations in personal strengths use leads to changes in work engagement over time (week-by-week) by increasing feelings of inspiration and meaningfulness, and that psychological capital moderates these intraindividual effects. We also proposed that when employees are more engaged at work, they are more likely to engage in work-family interpersonal capitalization and in positive work reflection, and we will test these two links at the week-to-week level as well. We shall also test proposed indirect effects from inspiration and meaningfulness to work-family interpersonal capitalization and to positive work reflection through work engagement, although we have not formally hypothesized these indirect effects.

Methods

Procedure Overview

As alluded to, we followed van Woerkom et al. (2016) and designed our study to examine the hypothesized within-individual relationships with repeated weekly data measures over a six-week period. Unlike van Woerkom et al., however, our study did not only involve weekly reports; rather, for several constructs that have been found to exhibit day-to-day variation in previous research, we collected daily reports on three days each week and then used the daily reports to compute the weekly scores for these variables.¹ Specifically, we measured inspiration, work engagement, and the two end outcomes at daily level (three times per week). Personal strengths use and meaningfulness were measured on a weekly basis; theoretically, these constructs have more of an evaluative (cognitive) component, compared to those measured at the daily level that are more affective and experiential (e.g., meaningfulness vs. inspiration), and are theorized to reflect more sustained and accumulative experiences rather than immediate responses to daily stimuli. This methodology reduces same method bias when testing associations between constructs measured with daily reports averaged at the week level and constructs measured at the weekly level, and also allowed us to measure the work-family capitalization construct in the environment when it occurs (in the evening, at home) rather than relying on retrospective ratings at the weekly level, enhancing the ecological validity of this research.

Data Collection and Sample

We utilized a marketing and research survey company to recruit 160 married employees working full-time to participate in the study. Upon reading the informed consent and agreeing to participate in the study, participants first completed a baseline survey on their demographics and psychological capital.² Over the following six weeks, participants

¹ We did test a day-to-day within-individual model comprising the constructs measured daily (some constructs were only measured once per week thus we could not test the full model at the day-to-day level).

² The study was approved by the Ethics Review committee at the University of the first author.

completed three daily surveys (in the middle of the workday, at the end of the workday, and in the evening before bed) for three days during each week (every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday). The evening survey on Fridays was longer and included additional measures assessing perceptions and behaviors regarding the whole week. We received a total of 8518 completed surveys that resulted in 943 week-level (matched) data records. Attrition in our study was exceptionally low, with over 95% of the 160 participants consistently providing data for almost all daily surveys, and 98% completing nearly all end-of-week surveys. This robust level of engagement, alongside correlation analyses showing no significant demographic biases in attrition rates, which attests to the reliability and validity of our study's findings. Respondents in our study were mostly women (53%), and more than half (54%) had a university education. The mean age of our sample was 36.31 years ($SD = 8.50$), and on average, our study respondents had been working in their organizations for approximately 6.62 years ($SD = 6.99$ years). To ensure data quality and address insufficient effort responding (IER), we implemented proactive strategies during survey design and analysis. Participants were cautioned against extremely fast or uniform responses, aligning with survey best practices (Ward & Meade, 2023). This approach effectively minimized IER, as few invariable responses were identified and excluded during data cleaning. Additionally, we utilized the *careless* package in R (Yentes & Wilhelm, 2018) to compute longstring indices across our datasets, further confirming minimal careless responding. These measures enhanced the reliability and integrity of our data.

Measures

Psychological capital (baseline). Employees were asked to rate their extent to which they agreed with each item (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) in the 24-item scale developed by Luthans and colleagues (2007). A sample item is “I’m optimistic about what

will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .83.

Personal strengths use (weekly). We followed previous research on personal strengths use (van Woerkom et al., 2016) and measured this construct at the weekly level (although there has been research that conceptualized and measured this construct at the daily level). Employees rated how often they attempted to utilize their personal strengths at work over the last week (1 = *never* to 7 = *almost always*) using the nine-item scale from van Woerkom and colleagues (2016). A sample item is “I sought opportunities to do my work in a manner that best suited my strong points.” The omega reliability coefficients for this measure are 0.89 (within level) and 0.99 (between level)³.

Meaningfulness (weekly). As with the personal strengths use measure, because we believe that meaningfulness, as a cognitive assessment of work, would show more meaningful variations over weeks, rather than days, we measured meaningfulness at the weekly level. Participants were asked to recall their work experiences and indicate their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) with three items (Spreitzer, 1995). A sample item is “The work I did this week was meaningful to me.” The omega reliability coefficients for this measure are 0.78 (within level) and 0.99 (between level).

Inspiration (daily; middle-of-workday). As inspiration is an emotional state that is likely to show meaningful day-to-day variations, we assessed it at the daily level. We measured participants’ feelings of inspiration in the middle of the workday using the 4-item subscale developed by Thrash and Elliot (2003). Participants rated how often they felt each of the statements described that day (1 = *never* to 7 = *very often*). A sample item is “Today, I

³As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, rather than computing averaged Cronbach's alphas over measurement occasions as is seen in much experience-sampling research, we calculated omega coefficients for all multilevel variables in this study. This approach is informed by the recommendation of Geldhof et al. (2014), who suggest that omega coefficients provide a more rigorous and accurate measure of reliability in multilevel research contexts. Omega coefficients allow for the separate estimation of within-person and between-person reliability, the best indicators of the stability and consistency of construct score across different levels of analysis.

encountered something at work that inspired me.” The omega reliability coefficients for this measure are 0.88 (within level) and 0.97 (between level).

Work engagement (daily; end-of-workday). Following intraindividual research on work engagement and its effects on work-family interpersonal capitalization (Ilies et al., 2017), participants’ state work engagement was measured at the end of each workday using three items from the work engagement scale developed by Rothbard (2001). Participants rated their extent of agreement with each item (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). A sample item is “When I was working today, I was totally absorbed by it.” The omega reliability coefficients for this measure are 0.83 (within level) and 0.97 (between level).

Positive work reflection (daily; end-of-workday). Following Sonnentag and Grant (2012), we measured positive work reflection daily. Employees rated their positive thoughts about doing something good at work at the end of each workday (1 = *not at all true* to 5 = *very true*) using a three-item scale (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006). A sample item is “I realized that I liked being able to help people (colleagues or customers) at my job.” The omega reliability coefficients for this measure are 0.88 (within level) and 0.99 (between level).

Interpersonal capitalization (daily; evening). As in other studies (Ilies et al., 2017), we asked employees to rate whether they shared positive work events with their spouse each evening at home (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) using the same three-item scale used by Ilies et al. (2017). A sample item is “I shared some interesting work events with my spouse.” The omega reliability coefficients for this measure are 0.87 (within level) and 0.99 (between level).

Discriminant Validity

We examined discriminant validity through multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs), comparing intended models with alternative models at both week and day levels. For the week-level analysis, our two-factor model, involving personal strengths use and

meaningfulness, exhibited a strong fit (CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.06), suggesting distinctiveness of these constructs, whereas the single-factor model showed a significantly poorer fit (CFI = 0.73, TLI = 0.68, RMSEA = 0.11), evidenced by the χ^2 difference test ($\Delta\chi^2/df = 937.50$, $p < .001$). Similarly, at the day level, the four-factor model, involving inspiration, work engagement, positive work reflection, and interpersonal capitalization, demonstrated an excellent fit (CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.03), reinforcing the individuality of each construct and in stark contrast to a single-factor model (CFI = 0.20, TLI = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.15, $\Delta\chi^2/df = 8237.46$, $p < .001$), a two-factor model (CFI = 0.40, TLI = 0.27, RMSEA = 0.13, $\Delta\chi^2/df = 6085.00$, $p < .001$), and a three-factor model (CFI = 0.70, TLI = 0.62, RMSEA = 0.10, $\Delta\chi^2/df = 2853.80$, $p < .001$). These results collectively support the discriminant validity of our constructs at both day and week levels, confirming their distinctness and appropriateness in our model, thereby strengthening the theoretical underpinnings and the validity of our findings in the organizational context.

Measurement Invariance

Prompted by an anonymous reviewer, we conducted rigorous measurement invariance tests for both day- and week-level variables. These tests confirm that our constructs are measured consistently across different time points, thus maintaining their conceptual meaning over time. Our approach involved testing both configural and metric invariance for each set of variables. The configural invariance model for week-level variables, involving personal strengths use and meaningfulness, demonstrated a good fit with the data (CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.06). This model serves as the baseline, showing that the factor structure of our constructs is consistent across different measurement occasions. The fit indices confirm that the constructs retain their conceptual similarity over time. The metric invariance model, which tests whether factor loadings are equivalent across groups, also showed a strong fit (CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06). The minimal changes in CFI ($\Delta CFI = 0.002$) and

RMSEA (Δ RMSEA = 0.002) from the configural model are within acceptable thresholds (Δ CFI \leq 0.01; Δ RMSEA \leq 0.015), affirming that the way constructs relate to their indicators remains stable over time. For day-level variables, the configural model, involving inspiration, work engagement, positive work reflection, interpersonal capitalization, exhibited excellent fit (CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.03), indicating that the constructs maintain a consistent factor structure across time points at this level as well. The metric invariance model maintained this strong fit (CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.03), with negligible changes in fit indices from the configural model. This consistency supports the equivalence of factor loadings across different days, further validating our measurement approach. These findings collectively establish the measurement invariance of our constructs at both day and week levels. The stability and robustness of our measures across different time points are evidenced by the stability of fit indices, especially in the context of metric invariance.

Analytical Strategy

As the data we collected have a nested structure (multiple weekly responses nested within individuals), we tested our hypotheses through multilevel modeling. Specifically, for Hypotheses 1 and 3, which proposed relationships at the intraindividual level, we estimated a multilevel path-analytical model (for examples, see Lanaj, Johnson, & Wang, 2016; Lin, Savani, & Ilies, 2019) to examine the proposed effects simultaneously, across the six weeks of the study. For Hypotheses 2a and 2b, which proposed two cross-level moderated-mediated effects, we first estimated two independent “intercepts-and-slopes-as-outcomes” models (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) to test first-stage moderation, and then two moderated-mediated models with psychological capital predicting the magnitudes of the indirect effects. All hypotheses were tested using Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2018).

To ensure that the path estimates for the intraindividual effects from our multilevel models are based solely on intraindividual variation (week-to-week) and are not affected by

variances at the person-level, we implemented specific strategies. We applied person-mean centering, which involves subtracting the person mean from each of that person's weekly scores, for all level-1 predictor variables. This includes mediating variables in the path analytical models in all models tested. This approach follows well-established methodological recommendations (e.g., Enders & Tofighi, 2007; Hofmann & Gavin, 1998; Kreft et al., 1995). To reduce potential multicollinearity and to facilitate the interpretation of results when testing the cross-level moderating effects hypothesized in H2a and H2b (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), we also followed the most commonly used approach (Enders & Tofighi, 2007) and applied grand-mean centering (i.e., subtracting the mean of the entire sample from each individual's score for the variable) for the level-2 moderating variable, psychological capital, in the "intercepts-and-slopes (or indirect effects)-as-outcomes" models.

Indirect effects were computed by multiplying the relevant path coefficients and the significance of each indirect effect was examined through a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications, which generated the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for the estimates of the indirect effects (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). When examining the cross-level first-stage moderating effects of psychological capital on the relationships of strengths use on inspiration and meaningfulness (which were not formally hypothesized but were assumed; see Figure 1), in addition to the "intercepts-and-slopes-as-outcomes" models we estimated, we also conducted simple slope analysis using an online calculator developed by Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006). When a significant moderating effect was found, we examined the patterns of the moderation by plotting the effects at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator (Dawson, 2014). The moderated indirect effects proposed in H2a and H2b were examined by estimating the conditional indirect effects at higher versus lower levels of the moderator and the significance of each conditional indirect effect was examined through the 95% confidence intervals.

Although we measured positive and negative affect at the daily level (twice a day), we decided not to include these as controls in the primary analyses. This decision follows the argumentation from Spector et al.'s (2000) influential "don't throw the baby out with the bath water" article which is especially relevant to our analyses as it deals with controlling for negative affect in stress research which is parallel to the potential role of positive affect in influencing positive outcomes. Yet we recognize the ongoing debate on the topic, thus we report in footnote 5 below and in the notes to the tables the results from alternative analyses that included positive and negative affect as controls.

Finally, following suggestions by Hoffmann and colleagues (2000), we computed the values of pseudo- R^2 using Snijders and Bosker's (1999) formula for estimates of effect size in all multilevel models estimated.

Results

Before testing our hypotheses, it was necessary to partition the observed variance of variable scores into variances at different levels and examine if the variables demonstrated sufficient week-level variability, to justify the use of multilevel modeling to test the week-level associations. In Table 1, we present the decomposition of all variables' variances across different levels. As can be seen from the table, on average, 23% of week-level variables' total variances was attributed to the week level.⁴ This shows that our examined variables demonstrate sufficient week-to-week variability and multilevel modeling is suitable for testing our hypotheses.

Insert Table 1 about here

In Table 2 we present the means and standard deviations of all study variables as well as the person-level and week-level correlations. As shown in Table 2, at the week level,

⁴ For the variables measured at the day level, a substantial proportion of the total (day-to-day and person levels) variance was attributed to day-to-day variation (37% on average).

personal strengths use is positively correlated with inspiration ($r = .07, p < .05$) and meaningfulness ($r = .17, p < .01$), both of which correlated positively with work engagement ($r = .17, p < .01$ and $r = .13, p < .01$, respectively). Work engagement, in turn, is positively correlated with both interpersonal capitalization ($r = .10, p < .01$) and positive work reflection ($r = .22, p < .01$).

Insert Table 2 about here

As explained in the analytical strategy section above, Hypotheses 1 and 3 were examined simultaneously in a single multilevel path-analytical model. The estimates as well as the standard errors from this path model are presented in Table 3. To visualize the effects and facilitate interpretation, we also provide the path coefficients and their significance levels in Figure 1.

Insert Table 3 and Figure 1 about here

As Table 3 and Figure 1 show, at the week level, personal strengths use was positively related to both inspiration ($B = 0.08, p = .03$) and meaningfulness ($B = 0.18, p < .001$). Sequentially, both inspiration and meaningfulness were positively related to work engagement ($B = 0.14, p = .001$ and $B = 0.06, p = .03$, respectively). To examine if the psychological experiences of inspiration, meaningfulness, and engagement operate as underlying psychological mechanisms explaining the beneficial effects of personal strengths use, we computed two sets of indirect effects and examined their significance using Monte Carlo simulations.

First, personal strengths use positively influenced work engagement through inspiration (indirect effect = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.03]) and meaningfulness (indirect effect = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.02]), which provides support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Second,

work engagement significantly mediated the positive effects of inspiration on interpersonal capitalization (indirect effect = 0.02, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.04]) and positive work reflection (indirect effect = 0.03, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.06]), as well as the positive effects of meaningfulness on interpersonal capitalization (indirect effect = 0.01, 90% CI = [0.00, 0.02]) and positive work reflection (indirect effect = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.03]). These latter indirect effects were not formally hypothesized but they are implied by our model, and we tested them for completeness.

The moderating effects of psychological capital on the week-level within-individual effects of personal strengths use on inspiration and meaningfulness were estimated by two “intercepts-and-slopes-as-outcomes” models, presented in Table 4. As shown in the table, psychological capital indeed related positively to the random slope (β_{11}) for the effect of personal strengths use on inspiration ($B = 0.12, p = .02$), but did not relate significantly to the random slope for the effect of personal strengths use on meaningfulness ($B = 0.06, p = .47$). To ascertain if psychological capital moderated the “personal strengths use – inspiration” relationship in the direction that we expected, we plotted the interaction and examined the simple slope estimates at higher (+1 SD) versus lower levels (-1 SD) of psychological capital. As shown in Figure 2, at higher levels of psychological capital, the effect of personal strengths use on inspiration was positive and significant (simple slope = 0.14, $p = .01$); while at lower levels of psychological capital, the effect of personal strengths use on inspiration was not significant (simple slope = 0.02, $p = .60$).

Insert Table 4 and Figure 2 about here

Next, to examine whether psychological capital also moderates the personal strengths use – inspiration – work engagement indirect effect specified in Hypothesis 2a, we estimated a first-stage moderated mediation model and computed the indirect effects of personal

strengths use on work engagement via inspiration at higher (+1 SD) versus lower levels (-1 SD) of psychological capital. The results showed that the indirect effect was positive and significant at higher levels of psychological capital (estimate = 0.02, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.04]) but was not significant at lower levels of psychological capital (estimate = 0.003, 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.01]). The difference between the indirect effects at higher versus lower levels of psychological capital was also found to be significant (90% CI = [0.00, 0.03]). Thus, hypothesis 2a was supported by the data but hypothesis 2b was not (we did not test the moderation of the indirect effect through meaningfulness proposed in hypothesis 2b because psychological capital did not moderate the intraindividual effect of personal strengths use on meaningfulness, as indicated above).

The tests of Hypotheses 3a and 3b, proposing that work engagement predicts work-family interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection, were included in the same model used to test hypotheses 1a and 1b (see Table 3). Work engagement related positively to both interpersonal capitalization ($B = 0.12, p = .02$) and positive work reflection ($B = 0.24, p < .001$), thus supporting hypotheses 3a and 3b.

Supplementary Analysis and Results

As noted, to examine the robustness of our results, we also estimated another multilevel path-analytical model that included the constructs measured daily, at the day-to-day level.⁵ The results of these analyses indicated that inspiration related positively to work engagement ($B = 0.11, p < .001$), as it did in the weekly analyses (again, we only included inspiration in this model because it was the only other construct measured at the daily level,

⁵ We also estimated an alternative model in which we controlled for positive (PA) and negative affect (NA), measured both in the middle-of-workday and end-of-workday surveys, on the endogenous variables. We measured each of these two emotional states with five items from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson & Clark, 1994). Comparing the two models, we found that the inclusion of PA and NA as controls only slightly altered the strength of the three paths (i.e., $0.11 \rightarrow 0.09$, $0.07 \rightarrow 0.06$, $0.16 \rightarrow 0.13$, $ps < .05$) but there were no changes in the statistical significance of the paths. This suggests that our findings are robust, whether or not affective controls are included, thereby validating the consistency of our results across different analytical approaches.

besides work engagement and the two end outcomes), based on theoretical and methodological reasoning as we explained earlier. Work engagement was positively related to interpersonal capitalization ($B = 0.07, p = .02$) and to positive work reflection ($B = .16, p < .001$), which shows that the data supported hypotheses 3a and 3b at the day-to-day level. We also estimated the indirect effects of daily inspiration on interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection through work engagement, as we did with the week-level data. We found that the indirect effect of inspiration on interpersonal capitalization via work engagement was positive and significant (estimate = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.02]), and the indirect effect of inspiration on positive work reflection via work engagement was also positive and significant (estimate = 0.02, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.03]). These results indicate that work engagement is a psychological mechanism linking inspiration experienced at work and positive after-work capitalization outcomes at the day-to-day level.

Discussion

The underlying research goal of our study was to understand how and why personal strengths use leads to work engagement on a week-to-week basis. We examined two volatile resources, inspiration and meaningfulness, as reflecting the psychological mechanisms that account for this association. Furthermore, we integrated an individual difference, psychological capital, into our model to explain why some employees are more (vs. less) likely to benefit from personal strength use. Finally, we examined the downstream consequences of work engagement and focused on interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection to gauge the impact on employee well-being. The results of our study largely provided support for our hypotheses.

On weeks when employees used their personal strengths at work more frequently, they were more likely to report feeling inspired during the work week and were also more likely to perceive that their work during that week was meaningful. On weeks when

employees were more engaged at work, they were also more likely to capitalize on their positive experiences at work, both by sharing their positive work experiences with their family members and through positive work reflection. The fact that the relationships between work engagement, interpersonal capitalization, and positive work reflection were significant at both the weekly and daily levels, as shown in the supplemental analysis, is noteworthy and highlights the robustness of our results. Furthermore, it suggests that the positive benefits of personal strengths use go beyond momentary or daily associations. These benefits may accumulate over time, leading to lasting benefits for employees. Finally, our results showed that psychological capital is a key (stable) personal resource that moderates the extent to which the weekly use of personal strengths at work facilitates employee inspiration and also strengthens the indirect effect on work engagement. However, we did not find a significant moderating effect on the relationship between personal strengths use and meaningfulness. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings below.

Implications for Theory

Our work contributes to the broader literature on positive organizational scholarship, by testing and extending theory on job demands and resources, specifically concerning the resource generating capacity of using personal strengths at work. First, as we have noted, we tested recent propositions from job demands-resources theory linking personal strengths use to work engagement (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018) and, importantly, we theorized and found that feelings of inspiration and perceptions of work meaningfulness represent psychological processes explaining why using personal strengths leads to higher work engagement. This first contribution is closely tied to our second contribution: within job demands-resources theory. We contribute to the literature on work engagement by aligning work engagement with the earlier conceptualization of engagement at work (personal

engagement; Kahn, 1990) and traditional models of work motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

The concept of personal engagement, developed by Kahn (1990) more than three decades ago has been based on conceptual reasoning anchored within previous models explaining how employees' perceptions of their jobs influence their motivation, satisfaction, and involvement on the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Oldham & Hackman, 2010), and reflects a deep psychological connection between employees and their work. Yet Kahn's original work did not generate a large volume of research based on his original conceptualization of engagement, until the closely related (but not identical, e.g., Rich et al., 2010) concept of work engagement was proposed and positioned at the core of job demands and resources theory. The job demands-resources theory has generated hundreds if not thousands of empirical investigations, mostly supporting the central role of work engagement as an essential motivational state explaining both inter- and intraindividual differences in employee performance and well-being. As we see it, the morphing of personal engagement into work engagement resulted in a more "operationalizable" construct that can be more easily studied empirically and also has very important implications for practice. However, the richness of Kahn's (1990) original conceptualization has been to some extent lost, even though some researchers have tried to return to the original conceptualization (Rich et al., 2010).

Following our discussion and analysis of the JD-R theory (e.g., Bakker et al., 2023) and of work engagement which is central to this theory (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2022), our model enriches the broader literature on personal and work engagement and employee well-being in several ways. Our study can be considered one of the few examples to draw on and extend the meta-analysis findings by Mazzetti et al. (2023). In line with their results showing that personal and developmental-oriented resources are closely and positively associated with

work engagement, personal strength use, a strategy of self-development and a proactive approach to one's behavior at work leads to work engagement via inspiration and meaningfulness – central concepts in Kahn's (1990) seminal theory development paper. This also responds to the latest call by Mazetti et al. (2023) and Christian et al. (2011) for new research to expand the consequences of work engagement (Bakker et al., 2023, see for an overview of the latest research on this area). To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to integrate positive work reflection and interpersonal capitalization with the work engagement literature. Further, in terms of the measurement of work engagement, our within-person approach at a week level contributes to conversation on the dynamic nature of the construct, which is a key element in developing interventions within short time intervals (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2022; Rofcanin et al., 2019).

By including meaningfulness, a central antecedent of engagement in Kahn's model, and adding inspiration, which—we think—was implicit in Kahn's conceptualization, as valuable personal resources and indicators of the core psychological processes leading to engagement when employees use their personal strengths at work, we believe our work contributes to theory on work engagement and job demands and resources. Importantly, using one's personal strengths is, we believe, very relevant to Kahn's (1990, pp. 692–693) guiding assumption that “people are constantly bringing in and leaving out various depths of their selves during the course of their work days [...] to respond to the momentary ebbs and flows of those days and to express their selves at some times and defend them at others.” As a result, we believe that our theorizing and results showing that, on a weekly level, the use of personal strengths at work facilitates employee work engagement because employees feel more inspired and perceive their work as being more meaningful represents a contribution to theory on work engagement and extends job demands-resources theory. With our theorizing

and empirics, we also hope that we bridge the two related yet distinct conceptualizations of engagement at work.

Third, we contribute to theory on psychological capital, a core construct in positive organizational scholarship (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017), by proposing that it has an important role in facilitating the acquisition of volatile personal resources when employees use their personal strengths at work. As the focus of this research was not on examining the differences in the average levels of weekly variables between individuals with different levels of psychological capital, we did not hypothesize direct interindividual relationships between psychological capital and other constructs in our model, i.e., the main effects of psychological capital. That said, we conducted several post-hoc exploratory interindividual analyses. At the between-individual level, psychological capital was positively associated with both end outcomes in our model (work-family interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection), as well as with our exogenous variable (personal strengths use) and mediators (inspiration, meaningfulness, and engagement). In these between-individual analyses, personal strengths use and work engagement partially mediated the effects of psychological capital on the end outcomes. These exploratory analyses confirm the importance of psychological capital in positive organizational scholarship highlighted by Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017) and suggest that it should be included as a core (stable) personal resource within the framework of job demands-resources theory, as we did. Furthermore, the meta-analysis by Mazzetti et al., (2023) identified personality attributes that are likely to impact and shape work engagement (e.g., self-efficacy and resilience) by showing the boundary role of psychological capital at the person level. Our results offer an empirical examination attempting to answer the question of who is most likely to make the best use of their immediate work environment and feel engaged at work (e.g., Bakker et al., 2020; Breevaart et al., 2014).

Although we found indirect effects of personal strengths use on engagement through both inspiration and meaningfulness, our findings also indicate that those with higher psychological capital experience higher inspiration when they use their personal strengths at work compared to those with lower psychological capital as we hypothesized, we did not find a similar moderated effect on meaningfulness. These different findings suggest that perhaps using personal strengths at work has such a strong effect on meaningfulness (the effect was indeed stronger than that on inspiration in our data) and further on engagement (as predicted by Kahn, 1990) that individual differences do not matter much, and all employees can experience this positive effect associated with using their personal strengths at work. However, this also underscores the importance of including inspiration as a volatile resource that can be generated through the use of personal strengths in multilevel job demands-resources theory, as the experience and outcomes of inspiration can be influenced by psychological capital, which itself can be developed in employees using various types of interventions (see Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

Finally, we extended job demands-resources theory by proposing and finding that work-family interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection are outcomes of being engaged at work. While job demands-resources theory and its related research often allude to resource gain spirals and discuss how daily resource gains beget further resource gains (and the enduring nature of these gains), there has been little theorizing (or empirical investigations) surrounding the mechanisms through which such spirals operate. Our theorizing and results suggest that the inter- and intra-personal capitalization of positive events at work could represent such mechanisms, as employees who capitalize on positive work events prolong and energize the resource gain process. Indeed, the positive relationships reported in our study at both the daily and weekly levels hint at these accumulative and enduring resource gains and establish potential links between daily work engagement and

employees' subsequent outcomes. Because positive work reflection and interpersonal capitalization have been found to influence job and life satisfaction (Ilies et al., 2011; Ilies et al., 2015) and even physical and mental health (Bono et al., 2013), it is likely that these active behaviors and cognitions explain, in part, the documented effects of work engagement on employee health and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), and these novel explanations thus expand job demands-resources theory.

Practical Implications

Given our positive results, the most straightforward recommendation is that organizations provide support for employees' strengths use at work. Research has found that employees who perceived greater organizational support for using their personal strengths did engage in more behaviors that took advantage of their personal strengths at work (van Woerkom, Mostert et al. 2016). Besides this, organizations could encourage employees to deliberately think about how using their strengths on the job makes them feel, and about the impact that personal strengths use has on their performance and on others at work.

Organizations can also teach employees how to identify and use their personal strengths at work, and, in the longer term, how to develop their strengths and personal resources by implementing strengths-based coaching programs (Peláez, Coe, & Salanova, 2020). The fact that our results hold on both the week- as well as day-levels (for the relationships between constructs that were measured daily) suggests that the use of personal strengths at work is a promising strategy that has immediate and lasting benefits for employees' well-being, one that has the potential to stretch beyond the weekly level by building on resource gain spirals.

Furthermore, our results indicate that psychological capital influences the indirect effect of strengths use on engagement through inspiration. Based on this, we suggest the development of more integrative intervention programs. These programs should focus on teaching employees how to use their personal strengths at work (Peláez et al., 2020), increase

their personal resources (Bakker & van Wingerden, 2020), and build psychological capital (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Such programs could be particularly effective in enhancing employee engagement, performance, and well-being. Finally, on this issue, perhaps trying to create a culture that makes it apparent to employees that their organization supports their efforts to use their personal strengths on the job (van Woerkom, Mostert et al., 2016) should be included in such integrative programs.

Moreover, organizational training programs can emphasize the importance of positive work experiences, encouraging employees to reflect upon good things they do at work (e.g., Sonnentag & Grant, 2012) and share those reflections at home with family members, given the known effects of positive work reflection and work-family interpersonal capitalization on employee health and well-being (Bono et al., 2013; Ilies, et al., 2011, 2015). On this topic, we recommend that future theorizing and research should examine the individual differences in how employees can further capitalize on positive work events and experiences, as well as on being engaged at work. In our follow-up exploratory analyses, we examined whether psychological capital might be one of these individual differences. However, it turned out not to be the case.

Limitations, Strengths, and Implications for Future Research

The work engagement measure that we used mostly reflects absorption and does not include all aspects of work engagement as conceptualized by Bakker and colleagues. That said, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002), which is the measure most commonly used in studies grounded in job demands-resources theory, has been criticized for not reflecting Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of engagement (Rich et al., 2010). As our theorizing regarding a central prediction in our model—that meaningfulness explains why using personal strengths at work increases work engagement—was explicitly based on Kahn's work, we believe that the measure of work

engagement we utilized is appropriate for the theory. Nevertheless, we suggest that future research replicate and extend our findings using alternative measures of work engagement, including the UWES components.

Our study design does not permit definitive conclusions regarding the causal ordering of the constructs in our model; that is, issues regarding reversed causality are mitigated but not eliminated by our design. For example, while both strengths use and meaningful work have been proposed to increase work engagement and performance by van Wingerden and van der Stoep (2018), these authors proposed that meaningful work leads to strengths use, as opposed to our theorizing that using personal strengths increases perceptions of meaningfulness. Although they found support for their model, we should note that this was a cross-sectional (interindividual) study and all the construct scores in that study were provided on the same survey. This type of design makes inferences about causality impossible, and it is also likely that the findings were seriously influenced by common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). While we did not employ an experimental design that would allow strong causal inferences, our methodology is an improvement over that of van Wingerden and van der Stoep (2018) which suggests that our causal ordering is more likely. That is, we included multiple daily or weekly measurements of the independent variable and intermediary (inspiration, meaningfulness, and work engagement) and end outcomes (work-family interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection), measured with timing consistent with our causal ordering as much as we could. In testing the day-to-day indirect effect of inspiration on work-family interpersonal capitalization through work engagement (supplemental analysis), for example, the independent variable was measured during work in the middle of the workday, the mediator was measured at the end of the workday, and the outcome was measured later in the evening at home. This approach to measuring and modeling greatly minimizes retrospective bias and common method variance effects.

Besides our sophisticated methodology, another strength of our research is that we developed our model based on solid theoretical grounding within the job demands-resource theory, and Kahn's (1990) central proposition that meaningfulness as a psychological state is a precursor of personal engagement. We thus integrated meaningfulness within the job demands-resources theory as a volatile resource and we added inspiration as another psychological state that explains why employees feel more engaged when they utilize their personal strengths on the job. We also integrated psychological capital in our conceptual model, as a stable (key) personal resource that can enable employees to increase the resource-building associated with the use of personal strengths and the increased engagement associated with those resources, which is entirely consistent with the job demands-resources theory.

An additional consideration in our study is the treatment of psychological capital as a level-2 variable, viewed traditionally as a stable, trait-like characteristic. While this aligns with the prevailing conceptualization of psychological capital, our discussion of the "resource gain cycles" opens up new avenues for exploration. Particularly, the potential dynamism of psychological capital in response to daily interpersonal dynamics and experiences suggests that its variability and influence may extend beyond the trait-like nature. Although our current data, measured only at baseline, restricts the examination of psychological capital's variability over time, this highlights an important area for future research. We recommend that subsequent studies incorporate more frequently sampled assessments of psychological capital. Such research could offer valuable insights into its potential fluctuations and contributions to resource gain cycles, thereby enriching our understanding within the job demands-resources theory framework. This exploration, while beyond the scope of our current study, presents an intriguing prospect for deepening the theoretical integration of meaningfulness, inspiration, and personal engagement in organizational settings.

Finally, while we mentioned in the section on theoretical contributions that capitalizing on positive resources at work and work engagement (such as through work-family interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection) should partly explain the documented benefits of resources and work engagement on employee health and well-being, our model did not include these health and well-being outcomes. Nevertheless, given the previously documented positive effects of work-family interpersonal capitalization and positive work reflection on health and well-being (Bono et al., 2013; Ilies et al., 2015), we believe future research testing an expanded model similar to ours but including health and well-being as the end, outcomes would be worthwhile conducting.

Conclusion

In this article, we drew on job demands-resources theory and research in positive organizational scholarship to propose that inspiration and meaningfulness are psychological processes that explain the effects of personal strengths use on work engagement, and that work engagement in turn predicts capitalization behaviors and cognitions. We tested these processes at the intraindividual level, as they unfold across weeks, at work and home. We also proposed, and tested whether, these intraindividual processes vary across individuals depending on employees' stable personal resources—psychological capital—in our cross-level hypotheses and analyses. We believe we have developed an interesting and nuanced conceptual model that is grounded in the motivational (positive) side of the job demands-resources theory, integrating both established and emerging constructs from positive organizational scholarship. Our model also extends theory on several levels by explaining *why* using personal strengths at work makes employees more engaged, *who* benefits the most, and *how* can employees further capitalize on the positive emotional-motivational state of mind of being engaged at work.

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Table 1. Variance Decomposition of Variable Scores

Variables	Total Variance	Variance Components Across Levels	
		Week-level (%)	Person-level (%)
Week-Level Variables			
Personal Strengths Use	0.57	0.18 (31%)	0.40 (69%)
Inspiration	0.92	0.13 (15%)	0.78 (85%)
Meaningfulness	0.59	0.22 (37%)	0.37 (63%)
Work Engagement	0.55	0.11 (21%)	0.44 (79%)
Interpersonal Capitalization	0.79	0.15 (19%)	0.64 (81%)
Positive Work Reflection	0.65	0.10 (16%)	0.55 (84%)
Day-Level Variables			
Inspiration	1.08	–	0.78 (71%)
Work Engagement	0.81	–	0.44 (54%)
Interpersonal Capitalization	1.08	–	0.64 (59%)
Positive Work Reflection	0.78	–	0.55 (70%)
Person-Level Variables			
Psychological Capital	0.26	–	0.26 (100%)

Note. The percentage values refer to the proportion of variance at each certain level (i.e., week-level, or person-level) contributing the total observed variance.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables (Week- and Person-Level)

Variables	Mean	<i>SD_w</i>	<i>SD_p</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age	36.31	–	8.50	–												
2. Gender	1.53	–	0.50	-.11	–											
3. Education	4.39	–	1.06	-.11	-.03	–										
4. Organizational Tenure	6.62	–	7.00	.55**	.00	-.07	–									
5. Marital Status	1.96	–	0.25	.16*	.06	-.09	.06	–								
6. Number of Children	1.08	–	1.04	.38**	.12	-.12	.18*	.18*	–							
7. Personal Strengths Use	3.46	0.42	0.63	-.01	-.04	.06	.02	-.05	-.04	–	.07*	.17**	.18**	.12**	.06	
8. Inspiration	2.27	0.37	0.88	.05	-.12	-.06	.03	-.10	-.01	.54**	–	.19**	.17**	.17**	.23**	
9. Meaningfulness	3.36	0.46	0.61	.02	-.02	.02	.04	-.17*	-.03	.54**	.65**	–	.13**	.12**	.11**	
10. Work Engagement	3.32	0.34	0.66	.05	.05	-.05	.02	-.07	-.00	.34**	.22**	.33**	–	.10**	.22**	
11. Interpersonal Capitalization	3.11	0.39	0.80	-.06	-.02	-.04	-.01	.02	-.05	.46**	.58**	.52**	.29**	–	.08*	
12. Positive Work Reflection	3.35	0.32	0.74	-.04	.06	-.10	-.07	-.02	-.07	.52**	.53**	.47**	.39**	.46**	–	
13. Psychological Capital	3.58	–	0.51	.05	-.19*	.12	.08	-.13	-.04	.45**	.42**	.40**	.26**	.26**	.40**	–

Note. *SD_w* represents week-level standard deviation, while *SD_p* refers to person-level standard deviation. Person-level correlations are presented below the diagonal, while week-level correlations are presented above the diagonal. N (person-level) = 160. N (week-level) = 943.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3. Estimates from Multilevel Path-Analytical Modeling (Week-Level Analyses)

Predictors	DV: Inspiration		DV: Meaningfulness		DV: Work Engagement		DV: Interpersonal Capitalization		DV: Positive Work Reflection	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	3.12**	.06	3.35**	.06
Personal Strengths Use	.08*	.04	.18**	.05						
Inspiration					.14**	.05				
Meaningfulness					.06*	.03				
Work Engagement							.12*	.06	.24**	.05
Level-1 Residual		.13		.18		.09		.17		.11
Level-1 Pseudo R ²		.05		.15		.20		.06		.13

Note. DV = dependent variable, B = unstandardized path coefficients, SE = standard error. Variables including inspiration, meaningfulness, and work engagement were centered around their respective person means, which means the Level-2 variance components of these variables were eliminated, so that the intercept estimates for them were fixed as zero. In an alternative model, we controlled for positive and negative affect (aggregated from day-level scores) on all endogenous variables and the path estimates changed very little (only the path from work engagement to interpersonal capitalization became marginally significant at $p=.065$). N (person-level) = 160. N (week-level) = 943.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

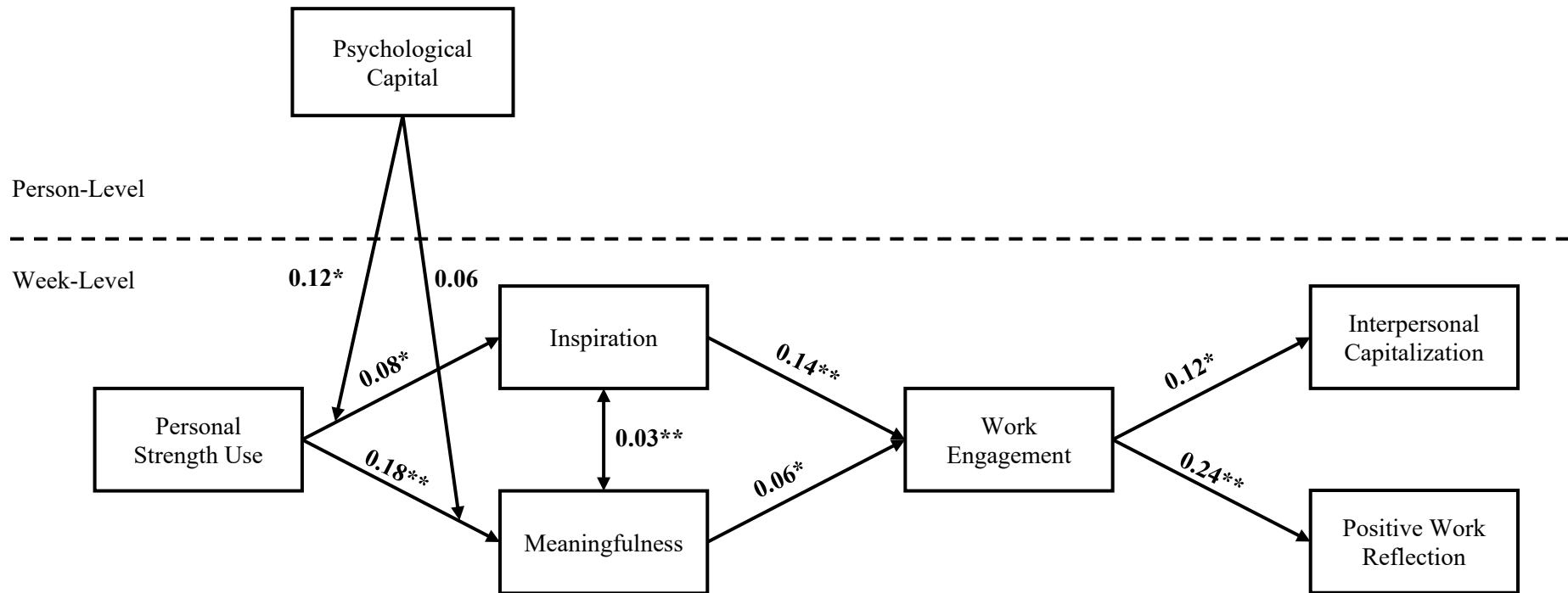
Table 4. Testing of the Cross-Level Moderating Effects of Psychological Capital

Predictors	DV: Inspiration		DV: Meaningfulness	
	B	SE	B	SE
Level 1:				
Intercept (β_{00})	2.27**	.06	3.36**	.04
Personal Strengths Use (β_{10})	.08	.04	.22**	.05
Level 2: Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital				
On the Intercept (β_{01})	.73**	.13	.48**	.09
On the Random Slope (β_{11})	.12*	.05	.06	.09
Level-1 Residual	.16		.23	
Level-2 Residual	.62		.27	
Level-1 Pseudo R ²	.03		.12	
Level-2 Pseudo R ²	.18		.17	

Note. DV = dependent variable, B = unstandardized path coefficients, SE = standard error. The above estimates were from two independent “intercepts-and-slopes-as-outcomes” models, with either inspiration or meaningfulness as the dependent variable. For both models, we also estimated alternative models with positive and negative affect as controls (both were aggregated from day-level scores) and the estimates did not change substantively. N (person-level) = 160. N (week-level) = 943.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

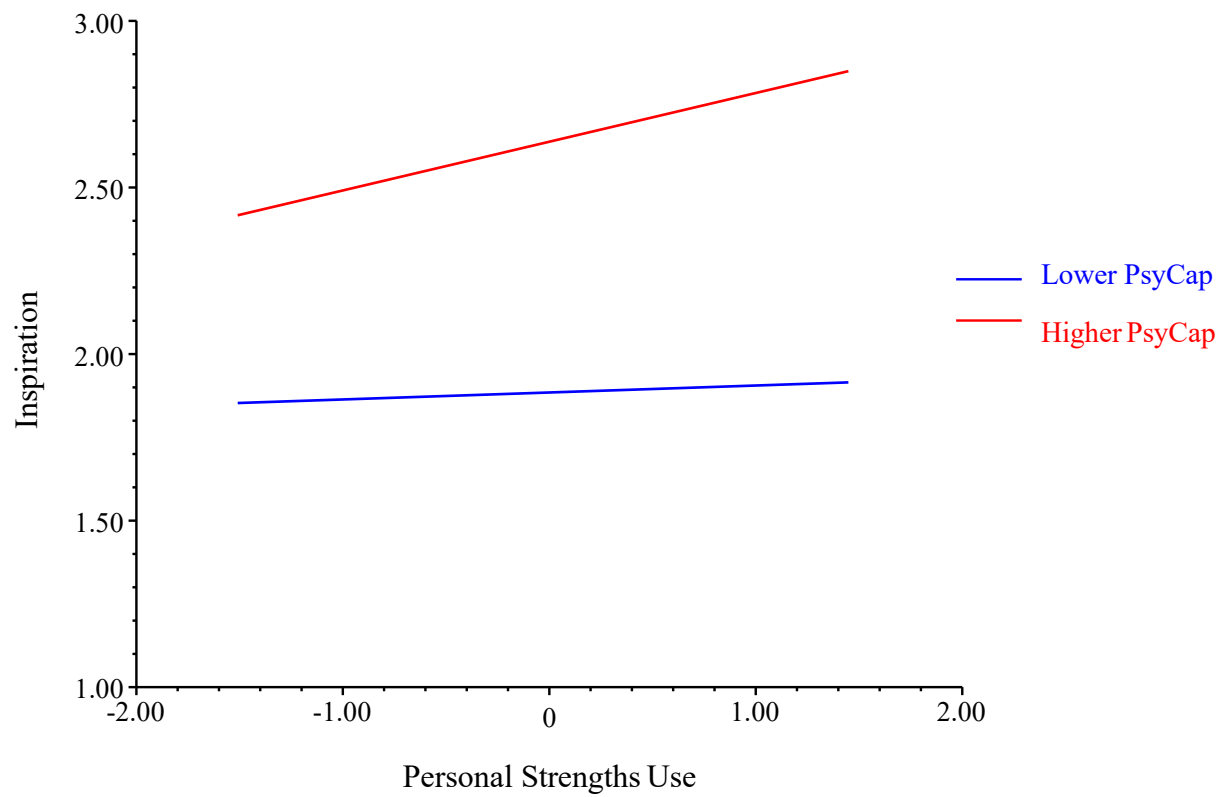
Figure 1. Conceptual Model with Estimates from Multi-Level Path-Analytical Modeling (Week-Level)



Note: All week-level relationships specified in the above model were estimated simultaneously in a single path-analytical model. The two cross-level moderating effects of psychological capital were estimated in two separate “intercepts-and-slopes-outcomes” models. All the six unidirectional paths at the week level were specified as random slopes, which could vary randomly across individuals. In estimating the week-level model, all predictors, including personal strengths use, inspiration, meaningfulness, and work engagement, were centered around their corresponding person means (i.e., group mean centering) so that the estimates represent pure week-level relationships. All coefficients shown in the above figure are unstandardized path estimates. N (week-level) = 943, N (person-level) = 160.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Figure 2. The Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital on the Relationship Between Personal Strengths Use and Inspiration



Appendix. Items in Scales

Psychological capital (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007).

1. I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution.
2. I feel confident in representing my area of work in meetings with management.
3. I feel confident contributing to discussions about the company's strategy.
4. I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my area of work.
5. I feel confident contacting people outside the company (e.g., suppliers, customers) to discuss problems.
6. I feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues.
7. If I should find myself in a jam at work, I could think of many ways to get out of it.
8. At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my work goals.
9. There are lots of ways around any problem.
10. Right now I see myself as being pretty successful at work.
11. I can think of many ways to reach my current work goals.
12. At this time, I am meeting the work goals that I have set for myself.
13. When I have a setback at work, I have trouble recovering from it, moving on. (R)
14. I usually manage difficulties one way or another at work.
15. I can be "on my own", so to speak, at work if I have to.
16. I usually take stressful things at work in stride.
17. I can get through difficult times at work because I've experienced difficulty before.
18. I feel I can handle many things at a time at this job.
19. When things are uncertain for me at work, I usually expect the best.
20. If something can go wrong for me work-wise, it will. (R)
21. I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job.
22. I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work.
23. In this job, things never work out the way I want them to. (R)
24. I approach this job as if "every cloud has a silver lining".

Personal strengths use (van Woerkom, Mostert, Els, Bakker, de Beer & Rothmann, 2016).

1. At work, I focused on the things I do well.
2. In my job, I made the most of my strong points.
3. I organized my job to suit my strong points.
4. I capitalized on my strengths at work.
5. I sought opportunities to do my work in a manner that best suited my strong points.
6. I drew on my talents in the workplace.
7. In my job, I tried to apply my talents as much as possible.
8. I actively looked for job tasks I am good at.
9. I used my strengths at work.

Meaningfulness (Spreitzer, 1995).

1. The work I did this week was very important to me.
2. My job activities over this past week were personally meaningful to me.
3. The work I did this week was meaningful to me.

Inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

1. Today, I experienced inspiration at work.
2. Today, I encountered something at work that inspired me.
3. Today, I was inspired to complete my job duties.
4. Today, I felt inspired at work.

Work engagement (Rothbard, 2001).

1. Today, I often got carried away by what I was working on.
2. When I was working today, I was completely engrossed in my work.
3. When I was working today, I was totally absorbed by it.

Positive work reflection (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006).

1. I realized that I liked being able to help people (colleagues or customers) at my job.
2. When I help others, I think about the positive points of my job.
3. I consider helping others one of the positive aspects of my job.

Interpersonal capitalization (Ilies, Liu, Liu, Zheng, 2017).

1. I shared some interesting work events with my spouse/family members.
2. I told my spouse/family members about some happy events at work.
3. I shared my work progress with my spouse/family members.