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Positive work reflection: literature review and meta-analysis

Abstract: The analysis of positive experiences at work should not be limited only to positive affect. Positive work reflection is an important and relatively new concept with a high potential. The aim of this review is to map the current situation about the studies in this field. Five databases have been used to identify 21 relevant article. The role of positive work reflection as mediator, moderator, antecedent, and outcome has been revealed. Additionally, meta-analysis has been performed to summarize a few findings. The meta-analysis has confirmed that positive work reflection is positively related to work engagement, positive affect, work–family enrichment, and work meaningfulness. Results are discussed and suggestions for practice together with ideas for future research are provided.

Keywords: *positive work reflection, literature review, meta-analysis, positive affect at work, positive experiences at work*

INTRODUCTION

Positive experiences at work are related to desirable outcomes both for employees (e.g. employees` psychological well-being) and organization (e.g. work engagement, organizational commitment, etc.) (e.g., Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012; Wang et al., 2017; Yoon et al., 2022). However, it seems that the majority of the research about positive experiences at work is mainly limited to positive affect. Yet, it is known that emotions and cognitions are (potentially) related (Maiese, 2014; Pessoa, 2008; Salzman & Fusi, 2010).

It could be assumed that positive experiences at work, for example, finishing a project, could lead to enjoyment, satisfaction, and fulfillment as talking about emotions or affect, and increase positive thinking about self, leadership, teamwork, organization, etc. Broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004) argues that those positive emotions can lead to enhanced flexibility of thinking which may help a person to recognize a wider range of possibilities to act in various situations. In other words, positive emotions broaden the mindsets of a person (Fredrickson, 2004).

There are some well-known studies about positive work reflection (this construct refers to thinking about the positive aspects of one's job during leisure hours (Meier et al., 2015)), and it`s role in the field of human resource management/organizational psychology. For example, a study by Danile & Sonnentag (2014) has revealed that positive work reflection is related to positive affect, work engagement, work-family enrichment, and even mediates the relationship between work engagement and work-family enrichment. Additionally, in their review, Vadvilavičius & Stelmokienė (2024), have suggested that positive experience, like positive affect and positive work reflection, is an important construct to explain the reciprocal relationships between work engagement and work–family enrichment.

It seems that positive work reflection is an important construct that can provide valuable information about employees` experiences at workplace along with positive affect and other variables. Although there are some studies in this field, they are scattered and the synthesis of them is needed. This review examines the current status of research activity on the positive work reflection, mapping conducted and available research in this area. The

following research questions were proposed for this review.

1. How many and what type of studies have been conducted on positive work reflection?
2. What are the predictors of positive work reflection?
3. What are the outcomes of positive work reflection?
4. What is the role of positive work reflection on the relationship between different variables (moderation, mediation, etc.)?
5. What kind of research is recommended for the future?

In order to strengthen the findings, meta-analysis will be performed to summarize the findings.

METHODS

Five electronic databases (*Web of Science*, *Academic Search Ultimate (EBSCO)*, *ScienceDirect*, *Emerald Management eJournals Collection* and *SCOPUS*) were used (see Figure 1). The literature search was conducted using a combination of the following two keywords: "positive work reflection" OR "positive reflection at work". Only articles in English published in peer-reviewed journals were searched. The search procedure was not restricted by date or region the research was conducted. Initial findings were extracted in *.ris* files that could be asked from the corresponding author. Search algorithm and results can be found in Appendix A.

Two inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) primary data was used; 2) positive work reflection was measured. Exclusion criteria: 1) qualitative study design or other article types, not presenting primary quantitative results (e.g. opinion papers, commentaries); 2) secondary studies (e.g., meta-analysis); 3) positive work reflection was not measured.

The names of the study authors, the country where research was conducted, data related to participants (number of participants, age and gender), research design, measures, the role of positive work reflection, and correlation coefficients were extracted manually.

RESULTS

Rayyan.ai software was used for screening process. In total, 117 articles were found, from which 44 were duplicates and were removed from the following analysis. At first, only the titles and abstracts were screened. After screening, 25 articles were left for full review. The full article review revealed that 21 article was suitable based on inclusion criteria.

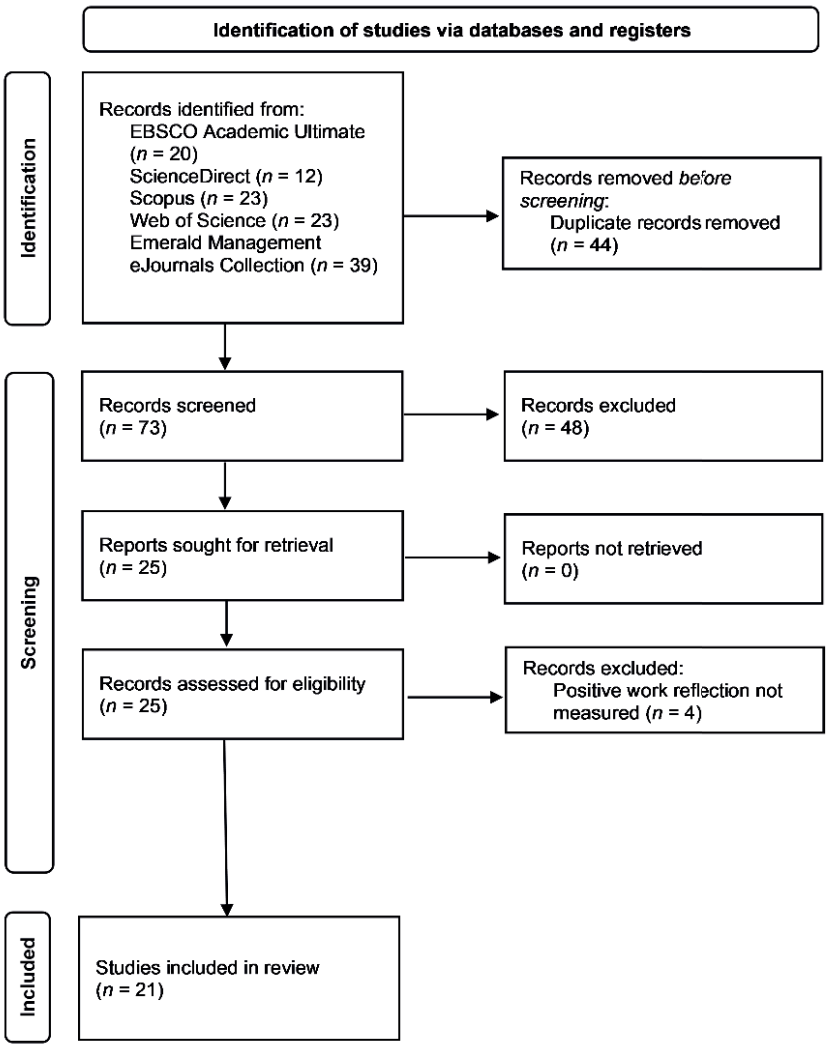

Figure 1. Flowchart

Characteristics of studies

Detailed information on characteristics of each analyzed article can be found in Appendix B. Articles were published between 2005 and 2024, with 13 studies published between 2020 and 2024. 21 paper presented 27 studies with 6513 participants (from 59 to 500 participants in a study; mean number of participants per study – 241). Out of 25 studies that presented data about gender of participants, 15 studies reported having more female participants, six studies reported almost an equal female to male ratio (45-55% of each gender in a study), and four studies reported having more male participants. Most studies, included in a review, were conducted in the USA (n = 7) and Germany (n = 7). Other studies were conducted in various countries across the globe (Japan (n = 2), India (n = 2), Australia (n = 1), Ecuador (n = 1), etc.). The average age of participants ranged from 24.5 to 45.9, while five studies did not report this information.

Cross-sectional study was the most popular study design (n = 10), followed by 10 studies that applied longitudinal design, and seven studies that used diary study. Positive work reflection scale by Fritz and Sonnentag (2005, 2006) was used the most often (n = 15 papers), followed by Binnewies et al. (2009) scale (n = 5) and an instrument developed by Matsuo (2020) was used once. Internal reliability of scales was good and ranged from .62 to .97 for Fritz and Sonnentag (2005, 2006) scale, from .72 to .94 for Binnewies et al. (2009) scale, and .87 to .91 for Matsuo (2020) scale.

Relationship between positive work reflection and other variables

Only quantitative studies were included; therefore the following analysis was based only on quantitative research findings. The analysis is divided into two sections: the role of positive work reflection in different relationship models (moderator, mediator, predictor, or outcome) and the correlational relationship between positive work reflection and various variables.

The role of positive work reflection

Moderating role of positive work reflection

Two studies analyzed the moderating role of positive work reflection on the relationships between variables. Study by de Vries et al. (2022) revealed that positive work reflection moderated the relationship between a) sports performance and cognitive liveliness and b) sports performance and emotional energy in the sample of employees (not professional athletes). Both analyses confirmed the hypothesis. On the first case, when employees engaged in more positive work reflection, participants experienced more cognitive liveliness when they performed well during lunch break. On the second case, when employees engaged in more positive work reflection, participants gained more emotional energy when they performed well during lunch break.

Furthermore, the Xu et al. (2018) found that positive work reflection a) moderated the relationship between affect variability and emotional exhaustion and b) moderated the mediated relationship between self-instability/pessimism and emotional exhaustion via affect variability. On the first case, the effect of variability on emotional exhaustion was weaker when positive work reflection was high. On the second case, the relationship between self-instability and pessimism on emotional exhaustion through affect variability decreased as positive work reflection increased.

Mediating role of positive work reflection

13 papers presented testing results about the mediating role of positive work reflection. The following paragraph presents only statistically significant results. Three studies confirmed that positive work reflection mediated the relationship between work engagement and work-family positive spillover/engagement (Andleeb et al., 2023; Daniel & Sonnentag, 2014; Kim & Beehr, 2023). Furthermore, positive work reflection mediated the relationship between meaningful work and affective commitment (Jiang & Johson, 2017), hybrid work and positive/negative affect (Karpagavalli & Suganthi, 2024b), empowering leadership and work-family positive spillover (Kim & Beehr, 2023), perceived prosocial impact and activated positive affect at bedtime / deactivated positive affect at bedtime (Sonnentag & Grant, 2012), transformational leadership and job satisfaction (Xu et al., 2021), transformational leadership and affective commitment (Xu et al., 2021), transformational leadership and burnout (Xu et al., 2021).

Finally, only a few analyses revealed unsignificant mediation effect of positive work reflection between emotional demands and work engagement (Tong & Spitzmueller, 2024), emotional demands and burnout (Tong & Spitzmueller, 2024), transformational leadership and work strain (Xu et al., 2021).

Positive work reflection as an antecedent

Further results present the significant role of positive work reflection as a predictor of: personal initiative, creativity, organizational citizenship behavior (Binnewies et al., 2009), burnout, proactivity (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005), positive affect (Karpagavalli & Suganthi, 2024a), work engagement, exhaustion, partner`s work engagement (Walter & Haun, 2020), radical creativity, incremental creativity, psychological capital (Wang et al., 2020), physical fatigue, burnout, life satisfaction (Weigelt et al., 2023).

Considering that a few studies used diary study design, results revealed that positive work reflection also predicted serenity, joviality, depressive mood, and angry mood in the evening and in the next morning (Meier et al., 2016). Furthermore, positive work reflection predicted perceived work meaningfulness, psychological availability, co-worker support in the morning (Sonnentag et al., 2021). However, studies did not confirm that positive work reflection predicted psychosomatic complaints, partner`s exhaustion, mental fatigue, emotional fatigue (Weigelt et al., 2023), task performance (Binnewies et al., 2009; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005), poor general well-being (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005).

Positive work reflection as an outcome

Finally, two studies presented that work engagement was a significant predictor of positive work reflection (Ilies et al., 2024; Sonnentag et al., 2021). No other variables were tested or they were already presented in mediation analysis.

Correlational analysis of positive work reflection

All reviewed papers presented correlational relationship between positive work reflection and other variables. The following analysis is divided into themes according to the variables. Only significant relationships will be summarized. For more see Appendix B. First of all, about tendentious results (see Table 1).

Positive work reflection and other variables: isolated results

Positive work reflection was positively related to personal initiative (Binnewies et al., 2009; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005), personal strengths use (Ilies et al., 2024; Matsuo, 2020), affective rumination, problem-solving pondering (Weigelt et al., 2023; Weigelt et al., 2019), feeling recovered during leisure time, occupational self-efficacy, organizational citizenship behavior, task performance (Binnewies et al., 2009), pursuit of learning (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005), inspiration, interpersonal capitalization, psychological capital (Ilies et al., 2024), affective commitment, work centrality (Jiang & Johson, 2017), hybrid workspace (Karpagavalli & Suganthi, 2024b), reflection on failures, work authenticity (Matsuo, 2020), psychological availability, co-worker support (Sonnentag et al., 2021), psychological capital (Wang et al., 2020), thriving, flourishing (Weigelt et al., 2019), and affective commitment (Xu et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, positive work reflection was negatively related to hindrance stressors (Tong & Spitzmueller, 2024), problem-solving pondering, emotional irritation, inability to recover, physical fatigue, mental fatigue, emotional fatigue, personal burnout, psychosomatic complaints (Weigelt et al., 2023), work strain (Xu et al., 2021), and emotional dissonance (Binnewies et al., 2009).

Finally, there were also some mixed results of the relationship between positive work reflection and serenity, angry mood, joviality, depression, neuroticism (Meier et al., 2016), overcommitment (Weigelt et al., 2023), and cognitive irritation (Weigelt et al., 2019).

Meta-analysis

Additionally, a meta-analysis was conducted to summarize the findings. However, the following analysis is limited to a few variables because of limited number of studies and effect sizes. Nevertheless, it may provide additional insights about the relationship between positive work reflection and: a) work engagement, b) positive affect, c) negative work reflection, d) work–family enrichment, e) work meaningfulness. These variables were chosen because there were at least three effect sizes that could be used for meta-analytical calculations, although it might be perceived as a limitation. In the case of longitudinal studies, only correlation at T1 was used if

Table 1. The relationship between positive work reflection and other variables.

Variable correlating with positive work reflection	Relationship
Work engagement	Positive work reflection was positively related to work engagement (Andleeb et al., 2023; Daniel & Sonnentag, 2014; Ilies et al., 2024; Kim & Beehr, 2023; Matsuo, 2020; Tong & Spitzmueller, 2024; Sonnentag et al., 2021; Walter & Haun, 2020; Weigelt et al., 2019).
Burnout	Positive work reflection was negatively related to burnout (Tong & Spitzmueller, 2024; Weigelt et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2021), exhaustion (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005; Walter & Haun, 2020; Xu et al., 2018), and psychological detachment (Tong & Spitzmueller, 2024; Weigelt et al., 2023).
Positive/negative affect	Positive work reflection was positively related to positive affect (Daniel & Sonnentag, 2014; Karpagavalli & Suganthi, 2024a; Karpagavalli & Suganthi, 2024b; Tong & Spitzmueller, 2024; Sonnentag & Grant, 2012) and negatively related to negative affect (Karpagavalli & Suganthi, 2024b).
Negative work reflection	Positive work reflection was negatively related to negative work reflection (Andleeb et al., 2023; Kim & Beehr, 2023; Wang et al., 2020). However, two studies revealed that the relationship was positive (Binnewies et al., 2009; Meier et al., 2016).
Work–family enrichment	Positive work reflection was positively related to work–family enrichment (Andleeb et al., 2023; Daniel & Sonnentag, 2014; Kim & Beehr, 2023).
Leadership	Positive work reflection was positively related to inclusive (Andleeb et al., 2023) empowering (Kim & Beehr (2023), and transformational leadership (Xu et al., 2021).
Creativity	Positive work reflection was positively related to creativity (Binnewies et al., 2009), radical creativity, and incremental creativity (Wang et al., 2020).
Work meaningfulness	Positive work reflection was positively related to work meaningfulness (Ilies et al., 2024; Jiang & Johson, 2017; Sonnentag et al., 2021).
Satisfaction	Positive work reflection was positively related to life satisfaction (Weigelt et al., 2023; Weigelt et al., 2019) and job satisfaction (Xu et al., 2021).

possible (e.g., Daniel & Sonnentag, 2014). There were some studies (e.g., Kim & Beehr, 2023) that provided the relationship between variables from different time stamps, and it should be considered as limitation as well.

The heterogeneity test was calculated to evaluate the variability in effect sizes across studies. Moderation analysis was not performed. A random-effects model was used because it could not be assumed that all studies were from a single population. Pearson correlation scores were transformed to Fisher`s z scores for combining correlation coefficients from different studies and later transformed back to Pearson`s r (Fisher, 1921). Meta-analysis was performed using *metafor* (Viechtbauer, 2010) and *robumeta* (Fisher et al., 2023) packages for *R* (R Core Team, 2024). Heterogeneity between studies was assessed using Q and I^2 statistics. See Quintana (2015) for more about the statistical procedure applied in this study.

Results of meta-analysis are presented in Table 2. Additionally, Figure 2-6 reports forest plots for each relationship.

The combined overall correlation coefficient revealed a moderate positive relationship between positive work reflection and a) work engagement, b) positive affect, c) work–family enrichment, and d) work meaningfulness. Surprisingly, the relationship between positive work reflection and negative work reflection was insignificant. However, as mentioned before, these results are limited to the number of effect sizes. Due to the number of studies, moderation analysis was not performed. Future studies are needed.

DISCUSSION

This review examined the current status of research on the positive work reflection. The search procedure on five databases identified 21 article. This review suggests that positive work reflection is related to various variables, but a few of them are more popular.

Although the earliest study identified in the review was published in 2005, it seems that the construct has

Table 2. Effect-size summary statistics for the relationships between work positive reflection and other variables.

Variable	No. of effects	Total sample size	Combined correlation coefficient (95% CI)		Heterogeneity test	I^2 (%; 95%CI)
			Unstandardized	Standardized		
Work engagement	9	2160	.46 (.28; .64)	.43 (.28; .57)	Q(8) = 123.53, p < .001	94.48 (87.81; 98.54)
Positive affect	4	1063	.35 (.28; .42)	.34 (.27; .40)	Q(3) = 3.61, p = .31	24.23 (.00; 92.99)
Negative work reflection	10	2992	-.05 (-.21; .11)	-.05 (-.20; .11)	Q(9) = 159.46, p < .001	94.47 (88.05; 98.37)
Work–family enrichment	3	751	.42 (.32; .52)	.40 (.31; .47)	Q(2) = 3.77, p = .15	46.81 (.00; 98.71)
Work meaningfulness	4	712	.56 (.38; .75)	.51 (.36; .64)	Q(3) = 18.80, p < .001	84.47 (51.28; 98.89)

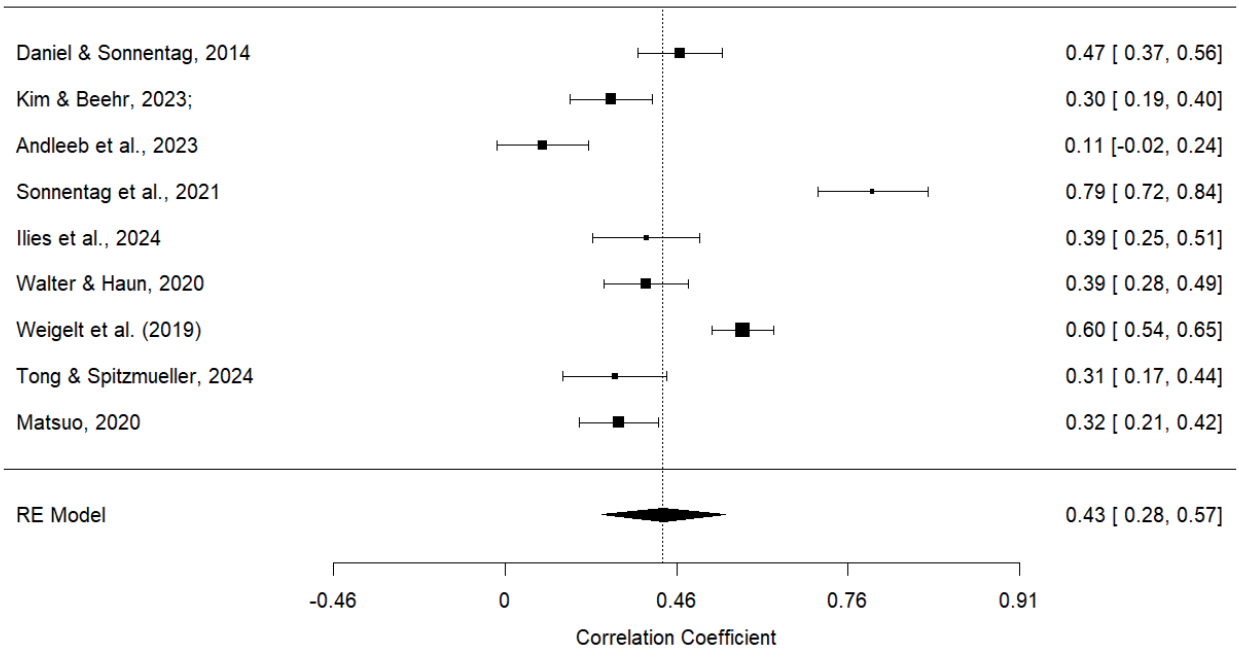

Figure 2. Forest Plot for Relationship Between Positive Work Reflection and Work Engagement

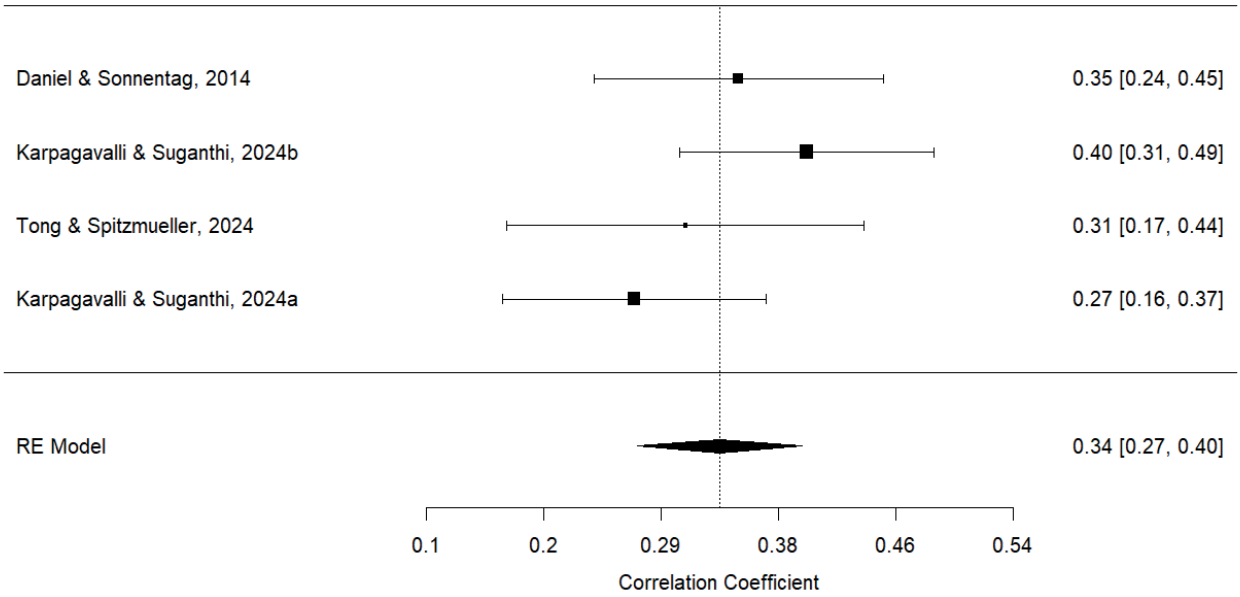

Figure 3. Forest Plot for Relationship Between Positive Work Reflection and Positive Affect

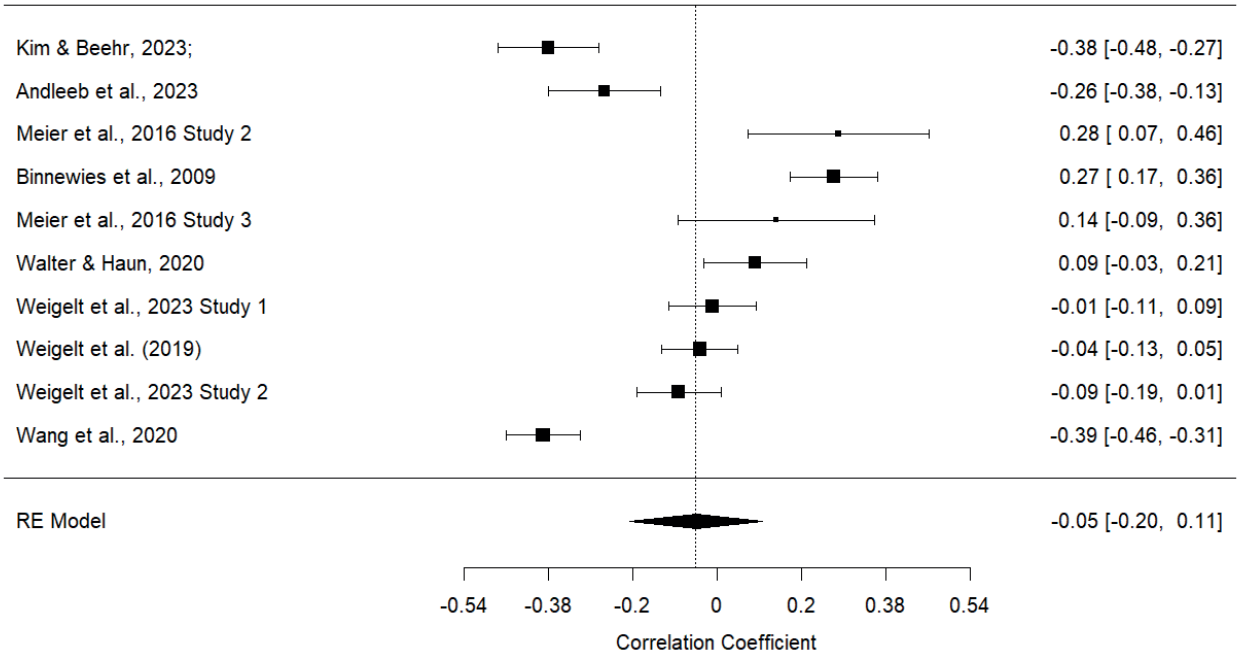

Figure 4. Forest Plot for Relationship Between Positive Work Reflection and Negative Work Reflection

become more popular in the period after 2019 (considering that publishing may last up to a year). It can be related to various factors, such as, the need to broaden the perspective on work engagement (as positive work reflection is one of the most popular covariates) or the increasing popularity of diary study design. Nevertheless, the rising popularity of positive work reflection is obvious, and, in some way, it confirms the need for research synthesis.

The number of participants varied as usual, however, considering the research designs that were used and research questions that were investigated, the number of participants seemed appropriate, for example, n = 59–160 for diary study, n = 87–358 for longitudinal studies, n < 221 for cross–sectional studies. Additionally, as usual, women tend to participant in social studies more often, which was confirmed by the review again. However, it can also be assumed that in some studies the number of female participants was different because of the population analyzed, e.g., Fritz & Sonnentag (2005) gathered data from employees of emergency medical services, which may be known as more male specific group, while in the

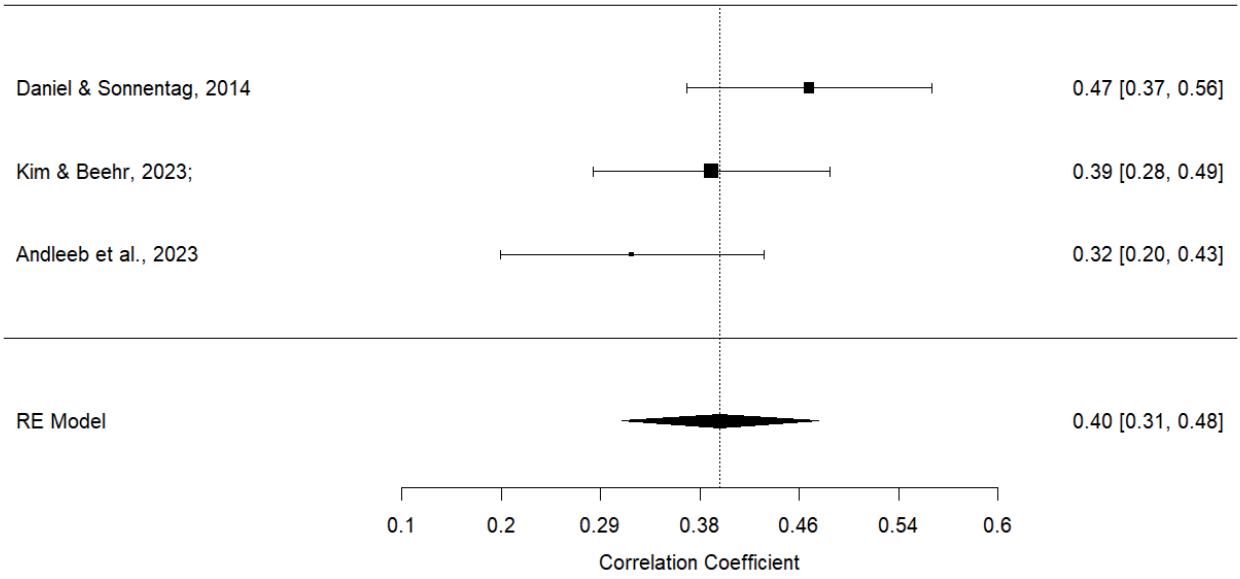

Figure 5. Forest Plot for Relationship Between Positive Work Reflection and Work-Family Enrichment

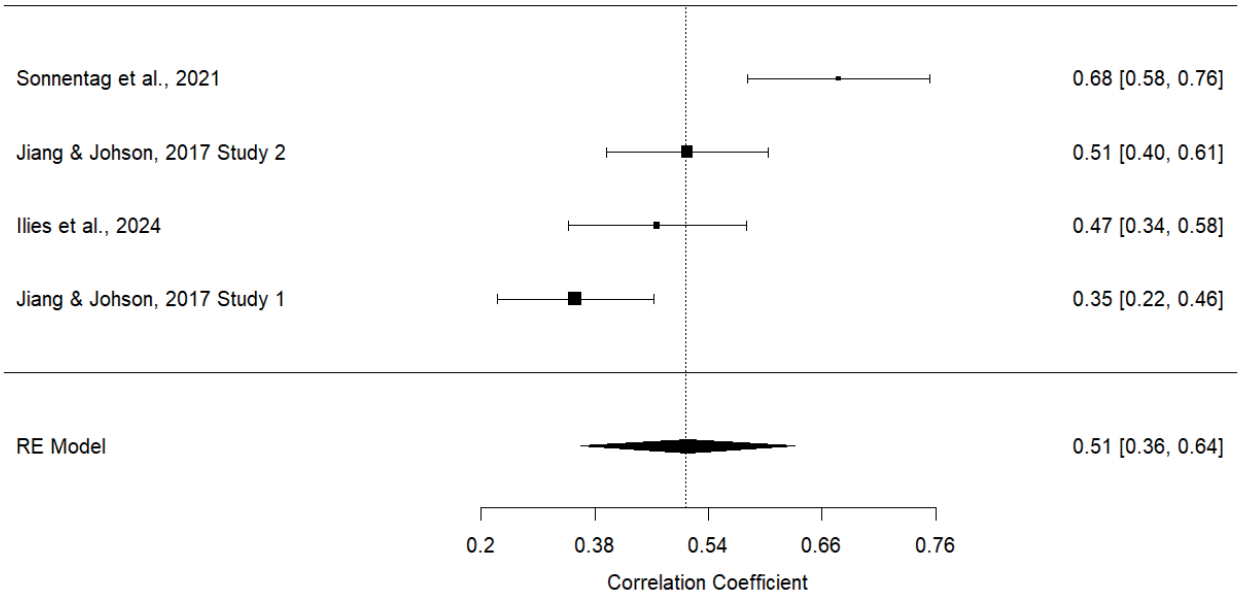

Figure 6. Forest Plot for Relationship Between Positive Work Reflection and Work Meaningfulness

first study Matsuo (2020) reported surveying the group of healthcare workers which may be feminine in nature. As usual, gender differences remain an important topic and could be analyzed more in the future. Finally, the mean age from 24.5 to 45.9 years probably represented the group of working people, considering that analyzed construct was mainly focused on people who did have a job. Nevertheless, future studies could be applied to test the positive work reflection in other areas, e.g., positive study reflection, positive motherhood/fatherhood reflection, etc.

U.S. and Germany were dominant countries in which positive work reflection was being analyzed, although these were not the only countries. Considering that Fritz & Sonnentag (2005) were one of the firsts to analyze positive work reflection as a construct and conducted their study in Germany it is not surprising that the authors do continue their work in the field. On the other hand, the dominant role of U.S. is not surprising, as has been revealed by other reviews as well (e.g., Belrhiti et al., 2018; Mukaihata et al., 2022). Nevertheless, considering that there are possible cultural differences, more studies, especially cross-cultural, are highly encouraged. The only paper that presented data from three countries was performed by Sonnentag & Grant (2012). However, authors defined gathering data in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria which were culturally similar.

In general, three scales were found to measure positive work reflection. The most popular scale was proposed by Fritz and Sonnentag (2005, 2006). Considering that internal consistency ranged from .62 to .97 it could be concluded that the scale was reliable in various cultures. Only a three-item scale is a popular choice to measure the construct relatively quickly and get reliable results. The scale by Binnewies et al. (2009) is based on Fritz and Sonnentag (2005, 2006) scale and has one additional item. A meta-analysis by Vadvilavičius (2025) has revealed a high internal reliability for both scales, while some cultural differences do exist. Finally, one new instrument was developed by Matsuo (2020). The scale is mostly focused on reflection of success, however, theoretically, it may measure variance of positive work reflection as well. Unfortunately, Matsuo (2020) did not present the analysis of the relationship between the new scale of reflection of success and positive work reflection. Only one paper was found using this scale so further research would be welcomed.

Cross-sectional studies, although criticized, remain the most popular study design as has been revealed by this and other reviews (e.g., Mukaihata et al., 2022). Although with limitations, cross-sectional design can be a relatively cheap and quick way of conducting a study. Nevertheless, considering that positive work reflection may be highly related with various events at workplace, e.g., team conflict, it can be expected that positive work reflection is more dynamic than stable construct, and different research designs are needed. In other words, if positive work reflection is related to positive affect, it can be expected for positive work reflection to be dynamic and probably situation specific, suggesting that cross-sectional research design may not reveal the phenomenon well. On the other hand, considering that positive affect is not a cause of positive work reflection or *vice versa*, it could be suggested that positive work reflection is relatively stable and affected by various other factors, e.g., general job satisfaction, satisfaction with leader, etc. Longitudinal and diary design, that have been used in the studies, could help to answer the question about the stability of positive work reflection. However, analyzed studies did not check this notion. Also, longitudinal research design could be used to test the cross-lagged effect on the relationship between positive work reflection and other variables, such as work engagement. Additionally, no experimental study was found. Experimental research design could help to confirm causal relationships of positive work reflection; however, more theoretical background is needed.

Analysis revealed that positive work reflection worked both as moderator and mediator in various models tested. As a moderator, it seems that positive work reflection did have a positive effect, as higher positive work reflection strengthened the relationship between performance and cognitive liveliness/emotional energy (de Vries et al., 2022). On the other hand, positive work reflection weakened the relationship between affect variability and exhaustion (Xu et al., 2018). In general, the results do suggest that positive work reflection may have a positive effect on some outcomes. For example, if a person does think positively about one's work during leisure hours, there is a chance that a person will be more robust to negative experiences, like exhaustion or the relationship between two positive constructs will be stronger. Results do coincide with the Broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004). It can be speculated that positive thinking about work may increase positive mood. Higher positive thinking and increased positive mood may result in higher cognitive flexibility, one's being more open-minded, etc. These positive resources may help a person to deal with various stressors as well as gain new resources (Liu et al., 2016; Liu & Cheung, 2015).

In the second role, positive work reflection acted like a mediator between different pairs of variables. Most often, it was revealed that positive work reflection mediated the relationship between work engagement and work-family positive spillover/engagement (Andleeb et al., 2023; Daniel & Sonnentag, 2014; Kim & Beehr, 2023). In general, it is expected that work engagement will increase the positive mood of employees, resulting in higher job satisfaction and positive thinking about the work. Meanwhile, this positive affect and positive thinking about work may increase emotional energy, create new resources that can be transferred into home. The direct relationship between work engagement and work–family enrichment is discussed more by Vadvilavičius & Stelmokienė (2024). However, as it was discussed by the authors, a positive experience at work was an important third variable that could help to explain the relationship. There were other significant models of mediation, like investigating the relationships between transformational leadership and affective commitment (Xu et al., 2021), meaningful work and affective commitment (Jiang & Johson, 2017), etc. These results suggest that positive work reflection is an important variable that helps to explain the relationship between employee`s positive experiences at work and various outcomes. Further studies are encouraged, especially considering that there were insignificant findings, the role of positive work reflection should be confirmed theoretically before testing various models.

Although related to mediation analysis, few papers presented positive work reflection as an outcome or antecedent of other variables. In general, results suggested that positive work reflection was a great predictor of various pro-active behaviors, like personal initiative, organizational citizenship behavior (Binnewies et al., 2009) and had positive outcomes for a person as well, for example, lower burnout and higher life satisfaction (Weigelt et al., 2023). Alongside, as revealed by few diary studies, positive work reflection predicted higher serenity and joviality, and lower depressive and angry mood following day (Meier et al., 2016). Finally, as it was revealed, work engagement was a significant predictor of positive work reflection (Ilies et al., 2024; Sonnentag et al., 2021).

The review revealed a strong evidence that positive work reflection was related to work engagement, positive

affect, work–family enrichment, and work meaningfulness. Additional meta-analysis that was conducted for this study, did confirm that the relationship between positive work reflection and a) work engagement, b) positive affect, c) work–family enrichment, and d) work meaningfulness was positive and significant. These results confirmed that positive work reflection was related to a positive experience at work or with work related positive aspects. It could be suggested that higher positive work reflection is related to a lower negative work reflection. As a person thinks about the good aspects of one`s job, the negative thoughts could be eliminated. Results in review studies also revealed that the relationship was positive, negative, and insignificant. On one hand, it could be assumed that negative and positive work reflection is a part of continuum ranging from negative to positive reflection. For example, person is reflecting about one`s job and can only focus on positive or negative aspects. On the other hand, it can be assumed that both negative and positive work reflection occurs simultaneously, e.g., a person could positively think about aspects A and B, but negatively about aspects X and Y. Future studies are needed to explore this relationship more thoroughly. Lastly, positive work reflection is also related to other kind of variables, like burnout (negatively), leadership, creativity, job ant life satisfaction (positively), and much more. Therefore, human resource managers should take this construct into account and think about the ways how to encourage positive work reflection.

Proposed research agenda

The future research plan could include the following issues:

1. *Gender differences* of positive work reflection; does gender moderate the role between positive work reflection and other variables; other socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. work experience, education level) as well as personality should be added to analysis;
2. *Organizational context* for positive work reflection; the role of leadership, team, culture, etc.;
3. *Cross-cultural comparison* of positive work reflection; the role of culture for positive work reflection, e.g., power distance, masculinity/femininity, long-term/short-term orientation;
4. Testing the concept of *positive reflection* in other areas, e.g., positive study reflection, positive motherhood/fatherhood reflection, etc.;
5. *Stability of positive work reflection* over time;
   5.1. Use longitudinal and/or diary study design;
6. *New instruments to measure positive work reflection*, considering that existing scales are too short and cannot measure the construct; validity research for positive work reflection scale;
   6.1. Test the relationship between Matsuo (2020) scale and positive work reflection scale (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2005, 2006) or Binnewies et al., 2009).;
7. *Experimental research design is encouraged* to find causal relationships of positive work reflection and other variables;
8. *Test the relationship with negative work reflection;*
   8.1. Further conceptualization of both negative and positive work reflection is needed.

These are only some suggestions for future research, considering the results of this review and additional meta-analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

Positive work reflection is relatively new but an important topic in human resource management. This review has examined the current state of positive work reflection research. Analysis has revealed that positive work reflection acts as a moderator, mediator, antecedent, and outcome of various variables that are related to positive experiences at work and even after work. Additional meta-analysis has provided some summary of the significant relationships that include positive work reflection. With reference to current findings future agenda is provided.

ETHICAL STATEMENT:

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No funding was received.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest to declare.

Generative AI

The paid version of Writefull [v. 2025.31.0] was used to assist with proofreading the manuscript.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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APPENDIX A
SEARCH ALGORITHM AND RESULTS

Database	***Keywords and algorithm used***	***Search date***	***Primary number of articles (n)***	***Limited to only English articles (n)***	***Source types: academic journals / research articles***	***Without duplicates (n)***	***NOTE:***
EBSCO Academic Ultimate (EBSCO)	“positive work reflection” OR “positive reflection at work”	*2025.01.10*	*22*	*21*	*20*	*20*	-
ScienceDirect	“positive work reflection” OR “positive reflection at work”	*2025.01.10*	*13*	*13*	*12*	*12*	
Scopus	“positive work reflection” OR “positive reflection at work”	*2025.01.10*	*25*	*25*	*23*	*23*	-
Web of Science	“positive work reflection” OR “positive reflection at work”	*2025.01.10*	*23*	*23*	*23*	*23*	-
Emerald Management eJournals Collection	"positive work reflection" OR "positive reflection at work"	*2025.01.10*	*39*	*39*	*39*	*39*	*Limited to articles only*

APPENDIX B
SUMMARY OF ARTICLES SELECTED FOR REVIEW

Authors	Sample	Design, measures	Results	
			Role (results)	Pearson r (variable)
Andleeb et al. (2023)	Pakistan; *n* = 221; restaurant industry;	Cross-sectional study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2006); Cronbach`s α = .62	Mediator between work engagement and work-family positive spillover (supported)	.21 (inclusive leadership) .11 (work engagement) -.26 (negative work reflection) .32 (work-family positive spillover)
Binnewies et al. (2009)	Germany; *n* = 358; nonprofit organizations; 66.5% female; mean age 40.5 (SD = 9.5)	Longitudinal study; modified Fritz & Sonnentag (2006); Cronbach`s α = .84/.85 (T1 and T2 respectively)	Predictor of: task performance (not supported); personal initiative (supported); creativity (supported); organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; supported)	-.09 ns (negative affect, measured only at T1) -.11/.24 (emotional dissonance, measured only at T1) .17/.10 (feeling recovered during leisure time; T1 and T2 respectively) .27/.21 (negative work reflection; T1 and T2 respectively) .12/.09 ns (occupational self-efficacy; T1 and T2 respectively) .08ns/.12(task performance; T1 and T2 respectively) .20/.26 (personal initiative; T1 and T2 respectively) .17/.23 (creativity; T1 and T2 respectively) .17/.35 (OCB; T1 and T2 respectively)
Daniel & Sonnentag (2014)	Germany; *n* = 256; mean age – 43.6 (SD = 12.2)	Longitudinal study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2006); Cronbach`s α = .87/.89 (T1 and T2 respectively)	Mediator between work engagement and work-life enrichment (supported)	.47 (work engagement, measured only at T1) .35/.24 (positive affect; T1 and T2 respectively) .47/.44 (work-life enrichment; T1 and T2 respectively)
de Vries et al. (2022)	The Netherlands; government employees; *n* = 59; 47.5% female; mean age 39.5 (SD = 7.47)	Diary study; Binnewies et al. (2009); Cronbach`s α = .94	Moderates[2] the relationship between sports performance and cognitive liveliness (supported) / emotional energy (supported)	.05[1] *ns* (Lunch break sports performance) .06 *ns* (Cognitive liveliness after lunch break) -.08 *ns* (Emotional energy after lunch break) -.02 *ns* (Work creativity)
Fritz & Sonnentag (2005)	Germany; employees of emergency medical services; *n* = 87; 4.6% female; mean age – 32.9 (SD = 9.7)	Longitudinal study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2005); Cronbach`s α = .90 (T2)	Predictor of: burnout (supported); poor general well-being (not supported); task performance (not supported); proactivity (partially supported);	-.01 *ns* (negative affect, measured only at T1) .21 *ns* (nonwork hassles, measured only at T2) .12 *ns* (social activity, measured only at T2) -.23/-.35 (exhaustion, measured T1 and T3 respectively) -.10 *ns* / -.26 (disengagement, measured T1 and T3 respectively) -.16 ns / -.10 *ns* (poor general well-being, measured T1 and T3 respectively) -.04 *ns* / -.11 *ns* (task performance, measured T1 and T3 respectively) .33/.24 (personal initiative, measured T1 and T3 respectively) .33/.41 (pursuit of learning, measured T1 and T3 respectively T3)
Ilies et al. (2024)	*NA;*	Diary study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2006); McDonald`s	Outcome of: work engagement (sup-	.52[1] (personal strengths use, measured weakly)

Authors	Sample	Design, measures	Results	
			Role (results)	Pearson r (variable)
	n = 160; 53% female; mean age 36.3 (SD = 8.5)	ω = .83 (measured daily and middle of workday)	ported; week-level analysis)	.53 (inspiration, measured daily and middle of workday) .47 (meaningfulness, measured weakly) .39 (work engagement, measured daily and middle of workday) .46 (interpersonal capitalization, measured daily and evening) .40 (psychological capital, measured only at T1)
Jiang & Johson (2017)	Study 1: USA; *n* = 206; 63% female; mean age – 44.5 (SD = 12.8) Study 2: USA; *n* = 194; 62% female; mean age – 38.5 (SD = 12.3)	Longitudinal (Study 1 and Study 2); Fritz & Sonnentag (2006); Cronbach`s α = .89/.97 (Study 1 and Study 2, respectively; measured at T2 in both studies)	Study 1: Mediator between meaningful work and affective commitment (supported); Study 2: Same as in Study 1, however, moderated by work centrality (supported)	Study 1: .35 (meaningful work, measured only at T1) .46 (affective commitment, measured only at T2) Study 2: .51 (meaningful work; measured only at T1) .57 (work centrality, measured only at T2) .56 (affective commitment, measured only at T2)
Karpagavalli & Suganthi (2024a)	India; *n* = 309; 46% female; mean age 24.5 (SD = 4.5)	Cross-sectional study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2005; 2006); Cronbach`s α = .84	Predictor of: positive affect (supported)	.27 (positive affect) .01 *ns* (work contact) .12 *ns* (growth mindset)
Karpagavalli & Suganthi (2024b)	India; *n* = 329; IT and software sector; 41% female; mean age – 26.9 (SD = 5.51)	Cross-sectional study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2006); Cronbach`s α = .83	Mediator between hybrid work and positive/negative affect (supported)	.48 (hybrid workspace) .40 (positive affect) -.32 (negative affect)
Kim & Beehr (2023)	USA; *n* = 274; 46.7% female; mean age 40.1 (SD = 4.87)	Longitudinal study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2006); Cronbach`s α = .92 (measured at T3)	Mediator between work engagement and work-family positive spillover (supported); Mediator between empowering leadership and work-family positive spillover (not supported);	.20 (empowering leadership, measured only at T1) .30 (work engagement, measured only at T2) -.38 (negative work reflection, measured only at T3) .39 (work-family positive spillover, measured only at T3)

Matsuo (2020)	Study 1:
	Japan;
	n = 298; healthcare workers; 95% female;
	
	Study 2:
	Japan;
	n = 291; healthcare workers; 43.3% female;
		Cross-sectional study (Study 1) and longitudinal study (Study 2);
		Reflection on success scale (Matsuo, 2020); Cronbach`s α = .91/.87 (Study 1 and Study 2 respectively)
			Study 1 and Study 2: development of the scale	Study 1:
				NA
				
				Study 2:
				.39 (reflection on failures, measured only at T1)
				.23 (work authenticity, measured only at T2)
				.32 (work engagement, measured only at T2)
				.21 (strengths use, measured only at T2)

Meier et al. (2016)	Study 1: Swiss; *n* = 131; 64% female; mean age – 33.4 (SD = 12.6) Study 2:	Diary study (Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3); Binnewies et al. (2009); Cronbach`s α = .94/.93/.94 (Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3 respectively)	Predictor of: serenity (supported in the evening and in the next morning), joviality (supported in the evening and in the next morning), depressive	Study 1: .13 *ns* (serenity-morning) .19 (serenity-end of work) .16 *ns* (serenity-bedtime) .14 *ns* (depressive -morning) .12 ns (depressive-end of work) .14 *ns* (depressive-bedtime)

Authors	Sample	Design, measures	Results	
			Role (results)	Pearson r (variable)
	USA; *n* = 86; 84% female; mean age – 42.1 (SD = 12.7) Study 3: USA; *n* = 74; 85% female; mean age – 40,4 (SD = 12.1)		mood (supported in the evening and in the next morning), angry mood (supported in the evening and in the next morning)	.20 (angry mood-morning) .03 *ns* (angry mood-end of work) .17 (angry mood-bedtime) Study 2: .28 (negative work reflection) .10 *ns* (psychological detachment) .20 *ns* (serenity-morning) .24 (serenity-end of work) .15 *ns* (serenity-bedtime) .34 (joviality -morning) .32 (joviality -end of work) .30 (joviality -bedtime) .37 (depressive -morning) -.34 (depressive-end of work) -.38 (depressive-bedtime) -.37 (angry mood-morning) -.39 (angry mood-end of work) -.34 (angry mood-bedtime) -.21 (neuroticism) Study 3: .14 *ns* (negative work reflection) .05 *ns* (psychological detachment) .09 ns (serenity-morning) .16 *ns* (serenity-end of work) .08 *ns* (serenity-bedtime) .14 *ns* (joviality -morning) .22 *ns* (joviality -end of work) .16 *ns* (joviality -bedtime) -.11 *ns* (depressive -morning) -.07 *ns* (depressive-end of work) -.04 *ns* (depressive-bedtime) -.08 *ns* (angry mood-morning) -.09 *ns* (angry mood-end of work) .02 *ns* (angry mood-bedtime) -.08 *ns* (neuroticism)
Tong & Spitzmueller (2024)	China; *n* = 169; doctors and nurses; 69.8% female; mean age 32.3 (SD = 7.45)	Longitudinal study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2005); Cronbach`s α = .87 (measured at T2)	Mediator between emotional demands and work engagement (not confirmed) Mediator between emotional demands and burnout (not confirmed)	-.15 *ns* (emotional demands, measured only at T1) .10 *ns* (interpersonal conflict, measured only at T1) .31 (positive affect, measured only at T3) -.13 *ns* (negative affect, measured only at T3) .31 (work engagement, measured only at T4) -.04 (burnout, measured only at T4) .19 (psychological detachment, measured only at T2) .02 *ns* (challenge stressors, measured only at T2) -.20 (hindrance stressors, measured only at T1)
Sonnentag & Grant (2012)	Switzerland, Germany, Austria; firefighters and rescue workers; *n* = 68; 13.2% female; mean age 37.2 (SD = 9.3)	Diary study; Binnewies et al. (2009); Cronbach`s α = .72-.88	Mediator between perceived prosocial impact activated positive affect at bedtime (supported)/ deactivated positive affect	.07[1] *ns* (job autonomy) .01 *ns* (day-specific time pressure) .06 *ns* (day-specific emotional dissonance) -.34 (day-specific time spent on accident or fire site)

Authors	Sample	Design, measures	Results	
			Role (results)	Pearson r (variable)
			at bedtime (supported)	.05 *ns* (day-specific perceived prosocial impact) .00 *ns* (day-specific perceived competence) .23 *ns* (day-specific activated positive affect at the end of working day) .24 *ns* (day-specific deactivated positive affect at end of working day) .36 (day-specific activated positive affect at bedtime) .19 *ns* (day-specific deactivated positive affect at bedtime)
Sonnentag et al. (2021)	Australia; government employees; *n* = 152; 50% female; mean age 39.5 (SD = 12.3)	Diary study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2005; 2006); Cronbach`s Cronbach`s α = .90 - .96 (measured at evening)	Predictor of: perceived work meaningfulness (morning; supported); psychological availability (morning; supported); co-worker support (morning; supported) Outcome of: work engagement (afternoon; supported);	.68[1] (work meaningfulness, morning) .62 (psychological availability, morning) .49 (co-worker support, morning) .79 (work engagement, afternoon) 1.00 (positive work reflection; previous evening)
Walter & Haun (2020)	Germany; *n* = 260 (130 heterosexual couples; 50% female);	Cross-sectional study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2006); Cronbach`s α = .91	Predictor of: work engagement (supported), exhaustion (supported), partner`s work engagement (supported), partner`s exhaustion (not supported)	.09 *ns* (negative work reflection) .39 (work engagement) -.15 (exhaustion) .15 (positive work reflection, partner`s) .04 *ns* (negative work reflection, partner`s) .21 (work engagement, partner`s) -.05 *ns* (exhaustion, partner`s)
Wang et al. (2020)	China; *n* = 500; 57.6% female;	Cross-sectional study; Binnewies et al. (2009); Cronbach`s α = .73	Predictor of: radical creativity (supported); incremental creativity (supported); psychological capital (supported)	-.39 (negative work reflection, employees` responses) .56 (psychological capital, employees` responses) .48 (radical creativity, supervisors` responses) .40 (incremental creativity, supervisors ` responses)
Weigelt et al. (2023)	Sample 1: Germany; *n* = 357; 75.6% female; mean age 32.3 (SD = 9.6) Sample 2: Germany; *n* = 388; 77% female; mean age 32.1 (SD = 9.5)	Cross-sectional study (Study 1 and Study 2) Binnewies et al. (2009); Cronbach`s α = .91/.93 (Study 1 and Study 2, respectively	Predictor of: physical fatigue (supported); mental fatigue (not supported); emotional fatigue (not supported); burnout (supported); psychosomatic complaints (not supported); life satisfaction (supported);	Sample 1: .02 *ns* (overcommitment; 4 items) .02 *ns* (overcommitment; 5 items) .01 (overcommitment; 6 items) -.08 *ns* (psychological detachment) -.22 (affective rumination) .26 (problem-solving pondering) -.01 *ns* (negative work-reflection) .00 *ns* (cognitive irritation) -.23 (emotional irritation) .02 *ns* (distraction) -.07 *ns* (inability to recover) Sample 2: -.11 (overcommitment; 4 items) -.12 (overcommitment; 5 items) -.13 (overcommitment; 6 items)

Authors	Sample	Design, measures	Results	
			Role (results)	Pearson r (variable)
				.10 (psychological detachment) -.29 (affective rumination) .16 (problem-solving pondering) -.09 ns (negative work-reflection) -.11 (cognitive irritation) -.27 (emotional irritation) .09 *ns* (distraction) -.17 (inability to recover) -.26 (physical fatigue) -.24 (mental fatigue) -.23 (emotional fatigue) -.32 (personal burnout) -.14 (psychosomatic complaints) .29 (life satisfaction)
Weigelt et al. (2019)	Germany; *n* = 474; 72% female; mean age 34.3 (SD = 9.6)	Cross-sectional study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2005); Cronbach`s α = .92	Factor structure was tested (related although distinct construct from psychological detachment, affective rumination, problem-solving pondering, negative work reflection)	-.02 *ns* (detachment) -.11 (affective rumination) .40 (problem solving pondering) -.04 *ns* (negative work reflection) -.09 (burnout) .53 (work engagement - vigor) .60 (work engagement - dedication) .55 (work engagement - absorption) .60 (work engagement) .41 (thriving-learning) .52 (thriving-vitality) .51 (thriving) .28 (life satisfaction) .31 (flourishing) .12 (cognitive irritation) -.07 *ns* (emotional irritation) .00 *ns* (irritation) .04 *ns* (worry) -.05 *ns* (neuroticism)
Xu et al. (2018)	Ecuador; hotels industry; *n* = 224; 40% female; mean age 31.8 (SD = 9.1)	Cross-sectional study; Fritz & Sonnentag (2005; 2006); one-item	Moderates the relationship between affect variability and emotional exhaustion (supported); Moderates the mediated relationship between self-instability/pessimism and emotional exhaustion via affect variability (supported)	-.02 *ns* (self-instability) -.07 *ns* (pessimism) .06 *ns* (affect variability) -.15 (emotional exhaustion)
Xu et al. (2021)	Study 1: USA; *n* = 353; employees from a public university; 76% female; mean age 45.9 (SD = 12.0) Study 2: USA; *n* = 231; 61% female; mean age 38.7 (SD = 10.9)	Longitudinal study (Study 1 and Study 2) Study 1 and Study 2: Fritz & Sonnentag (2005); Cronbach`s α (not reported; Study 1 – measured at T2; Study 2 – measured at T1)	Study 1: Mediator between transformational leadership and job satisfaction (supported); Mediator between transformational leadership and affective commitment (supported); Mediator between transformational lea-	Study 1: .36 (transformational leadership, measured only at T1) .41 (job satisfaction, measured only at T3) .32 ns (affective commitment, measured only at T3) -.15 *ns* (work strain, measured only at T3) -.39 (burnout, measured only at T3) Study 2: .33 (transformational leadership, measured only at T1) .08 *ns* (trait mindfulness, measured only at T1)

Authors	Sample	Design, measures	Results	
			Role (results)	**Pearson r (variable)**
			dership and work strain (not supported);	.39 (job satisfaction, measured only at T2) .57 *ns* (affective commitment, measured only at T2)
			Mediator between transformational leadership and burnout (supported);	-.14 (work strain, measured only at T2) -.33 (burnout, measured only at T2)
			Study 2: Same as in Study 1, however, moderated by trait mindfulness (supported)	