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The buffering role of sportsmanship on the effects of daily negative events

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**ABSTRACT**

Affective events theory (AET) argues that everyday negative events are likely to lower both daily work engagement and momentary positive affect. These problems can then persist on subsequent days. However, AET also argues that individual strategies can diminish the ill effects of negative events. We explicitly focused on good sportsmanship or abstaining from unnecessary complaints and criticism as a possible moderator of the effects of daily negative work events on daily work engagement and positive affect. We tested this possibility with a 3-day diary study among 112 employees. As expected, we found that daily negative events lowered daily engagement and momentary positive affect for two consecutive days. However, this effect only held on days that people exhibited low sportsmanship. For days that people exhibited high sportsmanship, there were no significant effects. Creating a resource rich work environment that enhances individuals’ sportsmanship behaviour can help to minimize the unfavourable impact of daily negative events.

Probably everyone who has held a paid job for any length of time has had occasion to experience the ill-effects of occupational stress. Stress can be costly to organizations, as employees fail to perform at their potential (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010; Jex, 1998) and may also spend money on health care (Sulsky & Smith, 2005). However, the human costs – the impact on the workers themselves – may be worse, as individuals are likely to experience diminished work engagement, lower positive affect, and perhaps illness (Sonnentag & Frese, 2003). For both economic and humanitarian reason, organizations will wish to reduce occupational stress (cf. Leiter & Maslach, 2010), though doing so requires a better understanding of the antecedents and moderators of these effects. An important, though perhaps somewhat neglected cause of work stress are negative events (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982). Research on affective events theory (AET) has documented that negative events have especially harmful effects on worker well-being and adjustment (e.g., Weiss & Beal, 2005; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Weiss & Kurek, 2003). Evidence suggests that individuals jarred by such events are likely to report lower engagement and less positive affect than their counterparts who are free of them (Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005; Weiss, Nicholas, & Daus, 1999). These ill-feelings can be surprisingly persistent, with their effects carrying over to subsequent days and continuing to harm employees’ moods (van Eck, Nicolson, & Berkhof, 1998). Consequently, it appears that the presence of negative events produces much of the discontent and disengagement that characterizes many organizations (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989).

In this present study we will document the deleterious impact of daily negative events on daily work engagement (i.e., the positive fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) and positive affect (range of positive emotions experienced in response to conditions of the job; Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000), both on the day of the events and also on the subsequent afternoon. We also explored an extension of this reasoning, investigating whether a dimension of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) – sportsmanship – can alleviate the harmful effects of negative work events. We propose that on those days when negative events occur, if the employee responds with sportsmanship behaviour, then he or she will not experience reductions in engagement and positive affect.

With these considerations in mind, this study has a two part goal. First, we explore and document the consequences of everyday negative events. Moreover, these effects should persist until at least until the following day. Second, we also investigate whether an outlook high in sportsmanship (Bateman & Organ, 1983; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1991; Organ, 1988) can allay the ill-effects of negative work events.

**Negative work events: overview and consequences**

AET maintains that discrete events in the day-to-day organizational environment impact and change employees moods and work attitudes (Weiss, 2002; Weiss & Beal, 2005). As a loose analogy, Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) compare this process to the orbits of planets, which describe regular revolutions around a more massive body. To account for a change in an orbit a planetary scientist will usually need to invoke an outside event, such as comet striking the world. In a roughly
parallel responses (personal baselines), which have occasion to be disrupted by organizational events. These events cause intra-individual interruptions or dislocations of baseline affect and attitudes, at least temporarily. To state matters with somewhat more precision, events are defined as significant happenings that produce a change in circumstances and “generate an emotional reaction or mood change in people” (p. 31).

**Daily negative events, positive affect and work engagement**

Although major life events, such as sickness or death of a family member, are known to have adverse impact on experienced stress and well-being outcomes (e.g., Diener, Colvin, Pavot, & Allman, 1991), AET stresses the significant impact of seemingly minor life events (Beal et al., 2005). Daily negative events have been shown to decrease both positive affect (DeLongis et al., 1982; Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Langston, 1994) and work engagement (Bledow, Schmitt, Frese, & Kühnel, 2011; Sonnentag, 2003; Xanthopoulou, Baker, Heuven, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2008). For example, Bledow and colleagues focused on three specific daily negative events – making errors, working under time pressure, and conflicts with colleagues and/or supervisor. These researchers found that on days that participants reported experiencing these three negative events they also experienced less positive affect and work engagement. In other words, events are situational antecedents of affect and transmit their influence on work engagement through the affective reaction on the part of the individual (Bledow et al., 2011; Trougakos, Beal, Green, & Weiss, 2008; Weiss et al., 1999). Negative events are associated with decreasing work engagement. A negative event, such as becoming aware of a failure or a conflict with the supervisor, is incongruent with people’s goals and should disrupt positive affect and work engagement.

**Carry-over effects of negative events**

The temporal scope of disruptive events is a relevant question for understanding their longer-term impact. Some have argued that the harmful impact of negative occurrences can persist into subsequent days (e.g., Eckenrode & Bolger, 1997), and this possibility is suggested by AET (Weiss & Beal, 2005; Weiss & Kurek, 2003), though available evidence is very limited. In general, we know little about the actual duration of an event’s effect (e.g., Stone, Neale, & Shiffman, 1993).

In order to clarify the causal relationship between daily events and outcomes like daily mood and affect and to gain some insight into the duration of event effects, AET researchers (e.g., Beal et al., 2005; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and others (e.g., Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Scott, Garza, Conlon, & Kim, 2014; Sonnentag, Dormann, & Demerouti, 2010) have advocated the use of diary studies. Although data collection can be practically difficult, this methodological paradigm allows scholars to assess the effects of a prior event on the next day’s outcomes. In general, no significant effects have been found, suggesting that the effects of events on mood are very transient (see Stone et al., 1993). However, Xanthopoulou et al. (2008); Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2009) found that supervisor coaching and social support by colleagues were not only beneficial for same day’s work engagement but also next day’s work engagement. Thus, contrary to mood daily situations at work seem to influence daily work engagement (which is perhaps less fluctuating than mood) the day after they occurred. In addition, Bolger et al. (1989) found that habituation of mood responses occurred when events were reported on a series of two or more days. Building on these insights, we expect that the effects of daily work events will persist the next day as well but will not persist the third day because the negative event of the second day will interfere with a negative event on an earlier day.

Thus far, we have discussed daily negative events, as well as their impact on engagement and positive affect. Based on AET, we have argued that these events have important effects, which carry-over into the next day. However, as we shall now see the problematic impact of negative events need not exist in all cases. In the following, we argue that only when individuals lack in orientation high in sportsmanship (e.g., Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ, 1988) will they show diminished engagement and positive affect.

**Moderating effects of sportsmanship**

There are a number of good reasons why employees engage in citizenship behaviours. Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006) explain that OCBs help group and organizational functioning because they can enhance productivity (helping new co-workers, helping colleagues to meet deadlines), free up resources (like more time available to execute tasks), and create social capital (better communication and stronger networks facilitate accurate information transfer and improve efficiency). Evidence supports these notions (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Hui, 1993). A comprehensive meta-analysis by Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, and Blume (2009) found that OCBs were related to various indicators of organizational performance, such as customer satisfaction and (reduced) turnover.

Apart from these benefits to work organizations, there are also self-serving reasons to engage in OCBs. For example, workers sometimes perform OCB as an impression management tactic (Bolino, 1999). By appearing to be dedicated and conscientious, individuals may directly benefit from their good citizenship (Grant & Mayer, 2009). For example, Bolino, Varela, Bande, and Turnley (2006) found that employees who reported engaging in supervisor-focused and job-focused impression management tactics tend to receive higher OCB ratings from their managers. As a result of their OCB, these workers also were scored higher in job performance and better liked by their bosses.

Findings such as these suggest that OCB, despite many advantages, can also have a dark side (Bolino, Turnley, & Niehoff, 2004). For instance, too much time spent performing citizenship behaviours may take time away from necessary job tasks (e.g., Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, & Harvey, 2013). Whereas we do not gainsay any of these observations, we here argue that at least dimension of citizenship – sportsmanship – brings an
additional benefit in dealing with daily negative events. By behaving as a “good sport” employees may buffer themselves from the harmful effects of daily negative work experiences. 

Sportsmanship is a dimension of OCB. It involves “a willingness to tolerate the inconveniences and annoyances of organizational life without complaining” (Organ, 1990) or “tolerating less-than-ideal circumstances or minor workplace distractions and discomforts without complaining” (p. 675; Nielsen, Bachrach, Sundstrom, & Halfhill, 2012). Whereas negative events are, almost by definition, difficult for most of us, on days in which individuals exhibit high sportsmanship they should report greater feelings of positive affect and also higher work engagement. Central to the arguments made here is not only that negative events diminish daily positive affect and work engagement but also that individuals can minimize these detrimental effects by engaging in sportsmanship. This is based on the idea that people are not victims of events that impinge on them; “rather they have a wide latitude in how they evaluate the meaning of events in their daily lives” (Langston, 1994, p. 1113; see also, Robertson, 2010).

How sportsmanship buffers employees from negative events

When individuals behave as “good sports,” they eschew testy complaints and other cantankerous responses (Bateman & Organ, 1983). There is evidence that avoiding negative conversations immediately after a negative event can promote better psychological adjustment. Rimé and colleagues (Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001; Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998) found that most people do share their emotions with others regarding a negative event. Although such sharing leads individuals to report perceived benefits, it does not predict actual emotional recovery (e.g., Zech & Rimé, 2005). Seery, Silver, Holman, Ence, and Chu (2008) challenged the notion that sharing leads to better adjustment. These researchers raised the question whether lack of expression in the face of negative events (collective trauma in their study) reflects vulnerability or resilience. Whereas there are circumstances under which sincere and meaningful self-disclosure can promote better psychological adjustment (Stanton & Low, 2012), such as when writing helps a victim find meaning in a traumatic event (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011), this is distinct from haphazardly complaining when something goes awry.

Discussing events immediately during or after they occur, forces the brain to re-live or “rehearse” the negative emotional response. This creates a stronger association in memory, exaggerating the influence of the emotional episode (Seery et al., 2008). For this reason, expressive responses make affect-provoking occasions more memorable, thereby enhancing their influence on well-being (Gable et al., 2004; Ilies, Keeney, & Scott, 2011; Langston, 1994). This does not occur on those days in which employees are “good sports.” When we engage in sportsmanship, we avoid complaining (Organ, 1988), and in this way block the formation of salient memory links between the event and our feelings.

Similarly and in line with the voice literature, the effectiveness of proffering one’s concerns is often enhanced if the employees express something supportive, as opposed to something critical. In addition, voice is more effective if negative emotions are minimized (see especially, Grant, 2013) and timing is appropriate (Morrison, 2014). Daily complaints, of course, are less likely to meet these criteria. The decision of whether to speak up is a process, which unfolds over time. An employee may need time to decide whether, when, and how to communicate a concern or particular issue. Unfortunately, it may be problematic for workers if they fail to take the time to prepare their concerns carefully.

In summary, we have made two arguments. First, complaining about negative events on the day that they occurred makes their impact stronger because it reifies the relevant memory traces. Second, if the complaint is poorly timed or expressed with too much emotion, then it is less likely to be received constructively and addressed. As a result of these two mechanisms, behaving stoically (i.e., acting with high sportsmanship) at least on the day that a negative event has occurred should reduce the detrimental effects of these events on both work engagement and positive affect. Specifically, we predict a significant two-way interaction of the following form. Negative events will lower work engagement and positive affect but only on days where an employee behaves with low sportsmanship. On days when sportsmanship is high, work engagement and positive affect will not be affected. Hence, it follows that sportsmanship should similarly prevent the unfortunate carry-over effects that come from negative events. This is also in line with the findings of Nielsen et al. (2012). Nielsen and colleagues examined team performance with a demanding situation. They found that performance was higher when individuals show high sportsmanship whereas the utility of sportsmanship is on independent tasks.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b: Daily sportsmanship will reduce the effects of daily negative events on afternoon work engagement (1a) for the day in which the event occurred. This effect on engagement should persist until the next afternoon (1b).

Hypotheses 2a–2c: Daily sportsmanship will reduce the effects of daily negative events on afternoon positive affect (2a). This effect should persist through the morning of the next day (2b) and into the following afternoon (2c).

Method

Participants and procedure

In order to collect data close to the work process and the events, we employed a dairy study, as recommended by Bolger et al. (2003). This methodological approach uncovers intra-individual process. We selected a 3-day longitudinal design (Avey, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2008; Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Participants were recruited by 18 Dutch students as part of their classroom and thesis requirements. Dementori and Rispens (2014) suggest that the student-recruited sampling method has several advantages (heterogeneity of the sample, cost reduction, elaborate research designs, and student learning) if it is conducted carefully.
Students had to approach employees (instead of self-employed) from various sectors and to stay in close contact with them such that they increase their commitment to adhere to the instructions. As hoped, this resulted in a sample with very heterogeneous jobs, as members of the final sample held different positions within several different economic sectors.

In order to maximize participation we followed the advice of Stadler, Robbins, Laurenceau, and Bolger (2013), keeping the number of days in our diary at a minimum. In particular, the survey was completed twice a day for three workdays. However, this smaller number of days necessitated that we increase the size of our overall sample in order to maintain statistical power (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013). As recommended by Maas and Hox (2005), we took steps to ensure that our study had more than 50 subjects. (Actually, we had 112, as discussed later.) Though we sought to be conservative in our analyses, these concerns are somewhat allayed by the lack of significant autocorrelations between the variables of interest. Other things being equal, this reduces the required sample size to detect significant effects (Stadler et al., 2013).

Of the 140 packets of diary surveys that had been distributed, 112 were returned completed, resulting in a response rate of 80%. The sample was 87% male. The mean age was 36.69 years (SD = 12.00), and 65% were married or living with a partner. The majority of the sample had university (50.9%) or college degrees (35.7%). Eighty one per cent of the respondents were working in teams. Organizational tenure was 8.22 years (SD = 10.24) and participants worked an average of 36.86 h per week (SD = 5.61). About 32% of the participants were employed in industry, whereas 16% and 11% were employed in the financial or the health care sector. Compared to the Dutch working population our participants were more often male, higher educated, employed, and worked more hours per week (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS], 2009).

Data were collected with a printed booklet with two parts: (a) sociodemographic and (b) a diary survey consisting of three identical daily measurements. The sociodemographics could be completed at any time during the study. The diary survey had two daily measurements. The first had to be filled out in the morning before going to work. The second was to be completed at the end of each workday, whereas the respondent was still at work. We instructed the participants to complete these morning and afternoon measures on three consecutive workdays for the diary survey.

When responding to the morning measures, participants were asked to report before going to work their momentary positive affect and their sleep quality from the previous night. When completing the afternoon measures, participants were asked to provide a description of a negative work event that they had experienced on that working day, their level of work engagement, their sportsmanship for that day, and their momentary positive affect.

**Measures**

As mentioned earlier, momentary positive affect was measured in both the afternoon and the morning. For both occasions, we used seven items from the Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (JAWS, Van Katwyk et al., 2000). The JAWS has a common stem of “At this moment I feel . . .” This is then followed by such affective terms as “energetic” and “inspired.” Items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Note that because of the morning measure, we have three assessments of affect – first afternoon, second morning, and second afternoon. This allowed us to test the predicted effects over three time periods.

Individuals listed a negative work event that they had experienced on that day. They were then asked to describe how they felt after the event. Similar to Gable et al. (2004) and Langston (1994) we measured how negative this event was by using a 5-point scale (1 = somewhat negative, 5 = very negative). As this measured how participants recall an event from the day, it was collected during the afternoon assessment.

Daily sportsmanship was assessed in the afternoon with four items developed by MacKenzie et al. (1991), which were, in turn, derived from the earlier work of Organ (1988). Sample items included: “Today, I spent a lot of time complaining about trivial things at work” and “Today, I focused on what is wrong at work rather than on the positive side” (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Scores were recoded such that higher scores indicated higher sportsmanship.

Day-level work engagement was measured on the job, so it could only be collected in the afternoon. We used nine items adapted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006). We included three items for vigour (e.g., “Today, I felt strong and vigorous while working”), three items for dedication (e.g., “Today, I felt proud of the work I did”), and three items for absorption (e.g., “Today, I was completely immersed in my work”). We computed an overall work engagement factor score (Schaufeli et al., 2006) for each of the 3 days.

**Controls:** Because the reaction to a negative work event is not only dependent on the occurrence of the negative event but also on the occurrence of positive events (Fredrickson, 2009), in all analysis we controlled for the intensity of a positive event. To capture this, we asked participants to report a positive event that they experienced on each working day as well as the intensity of the event by using a 5-point scale (1 = somewhat positive, 5 = very positive). To test the same-day effects (Hypotheses 1a and 2a), we controlled for the following sociodemographic characteristics: hours worked per day, age, and intensity of daily positive event. To test next-day effects (Hypotheses 1b, 2b and 2c) we controlled for daily work hours, age, intensity of previous day’s positive event, previous day’s work engagement or positive affect (respectively for the analysis of next day’s work engagement and positive affect) and sleep quality of the previous night. Sleep quality was operationalized as the factor score on the following items: “Last night I woke up . . . time(s),” “I slept well last night,” “Last night, I slept . . . hours.” These controls were included because they were related to our dependent measures (cf. Hox, 2002).

**Results**

Prior to the analyses, we inspected the daily negative events that participants reported in the dairy. It is interesting to
report that 54% of the events were related to the task accomplishment (e.g., crash of computer, unfinished task, unclear planning of a project, wrong calculation about materials, etc.). The next most frequently category concerned social events (e.g., conflict/argument with a colleague/supervisor, sick colleague, gossiping, release of a colleague), which represented another 27% of the reported events. Moreover, about 10% concerned personal events (e.g., an accident, problems with the car/cellphone, having a traffic jam, bad mood or low motivation). Another 9% of the reported events referred to work-related stressors, like time pressure, or not having enough work to do, reorganization.

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all the study variables are displayed in Table 1. As can be seen in the table, the intensity of the negative events was substantially lower than the intensity of the positive events. Day-level variables across the 3 days were averaged to correlate them with measures at the person level. Before testing our hypotheses, we examined the between-person and within-person variance components of work engagement and positive affect. Specifically, we calculated the intraclass correlation ($\rho$; i.e., the amount of variance that may be attributed to between-person fluctuations). For work engagement, the intraclass correlation was $\rho = .446$. This indicates that 44.6% of the total variance was between persons. For afternoon and morning positive affect, 53.2% and 31.7% of the total variance was between persons. Thus, our criterion variables varied both within and between persons, warranting an examination of predictor variables at the person and the day level. In addition, 42% of the variance in sportsmanship was between persons.

The MLwiN program (Rasbash, Browne, Healy, Cameron, & Charlton, 2000) was used to test the hypotheses. Similar to suggested practices (Ohy, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010), all day-level variables were centred around the person-mean. We used fixed effects because preliminary analysis showed that the model including random slopes did not result in a significant better model fit than the model including the fixed effects. In Model 1, we entered the control variables. In Model 2, we entered the main effects namely the intensity of negative event and daily sportsmanship. In Model 3, we entered the interaction term between intensity of negative event and daily sportsmanship. We examined fixed effects and tested the improvement of each model over the previous one by computing the differences of their log likelihood statistic $-2*\log$ and submitted this difference to a $\chi^2$-test.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables, $N = 112$ participants and $N = 336$ data points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>36.694</td>
<td>12.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hours worked</td>
<td>8.350</td>
<td>1.428</td>
<td>109*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sleep quality</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td>-.116*</td>
<td>.132*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Negative event (intensity)</td>
<td>2.455</td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>.123*</td>
<td>.185**</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive event (intensity)</td>
<td>3.680</td>
<td>.752</td>
<td>.213**</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>.335**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sportsmanship</td>
<td>6.063</td>
<td>.768</td>
<td>.246**</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.193**</td>
<td>.122*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Positive affect (morning)</td>
<td>5.035</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td>.345**</td>
<td>.151**</td>
<td>.128*</td>
<td>-.032</td>
<td>.356**</td>
<td>.274**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Positive affect (noon)</td>
<td>4.827</td>
<td>.659</td>
<td>.256**</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.116*</td>
<td>-.191**</td>
<td>.317**</td>
<td>.273**</td>
<td>.707**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Work engagement</td>
<td>3.448</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>.260**</td>
<td>.165**</td>
<td>-.053</td>
<td>-.175**</td>
<td>.416**</td>
<td>.380**</td>
<td>.388**</td>
<td>.586**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Main effects on work engagement and positive affect

Prior to testing our hypotheses, we inspected the main effects as well as the effects of the control variables. Multi-level analysis showed that the intensity of the daily negative event was negatively related to daily work engagement and momentary positive affect. Moreover, daily sportsmanship was positively related to daily work engagement and momentary positive affect. Of all other control variables, only age was positively related to both daily work engagement and positive affect.

Regarding the lagged analysis, we found that the intensity of previous day’s negative event was unrelated to next day’s work engagement and to next morning’s and afternoon’s positive affect. These findings suggest that daily negative events have no persistent relationship with next day’s work engagement. Moreover, daily sportsmanship had a significant lagged effect on next day’s work engagement. Sleep quality was found to be positive related to positive affect as reported in the morning and in the afternoon. The significant relationship between previous morning’s positive affect with next morning’s positive affect is an artefact (and as such should not be interpreted), since dropping all other predictors from the equation results in a non-significant relationship.

The interaction of sportsmanship and negative events on work engagement

In line with Hypothesis 1a (see Table 2), we found a significant interaction between daily sportsmanship and daily negative events ($t = -2.875, p < .05$). As expected, daily sportsmanship reduced the effects of negative work events on work engagement measured the same day. Simple slopes tests (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006) showed (see Figure 1) that there was a negative relationship between daily negative events and afternoon work engagement only on days that sportsmanship was low ($\gamma = -0.445(0.114), z = -3.903, p < .001$). On days that sportsmanship was high there was no relationship ($\gamma = .107(0.084), z = 1.279, \text{n.s.}$).

Analysis of the lagged effects showed (see Table 3) that there was a significant interaction effect between previous day’s negative event and sportsmanship ($t = -2.448, p < .01$). Specifically and as can be seen in Figure 2, previous day’s negative work event had a significant and negative impact on work engagement of the next day, but this occurred mostly when individuals reported low sportsmanship on the previous day ($\gamma = -0.362(0.141), z = -2.561, p < .01$). On days that
individuals reported high sportsmanship there was a positive and significant relationship ($\gamma = 0.298(0.141)$, $z = 2.108$, $p < .05$). This finding provides support for Hypothesis 1b. Note that, unexpectedly, next day’s work engagement was slightly higher when participants reported low intensity events combined with low compared to high sportsmanship. This finding is not in line with the same day effect on work engagement and should be interpreted with caution due to the restricted number of days (2 days per person) included in the lagged analysis.

The interaction of sportsmanship and negative events on positive affect

Multilevel analysis produced similar findings when positive affect was the criterion variable. In line with Hypothesis 2a (see Table 2), we found also a significant interaction between daily negative events and daily sportsmanship ($t = -2.573$, $p < .01$), which is displayed in Figure 3. Simple slope tests showed that on days that individuals reported low sportsmanship the negative impact of work events on same day momentary positive affect was significant ($y = -0.494(0.089)$, $z = -5.523$, $p < .001$), whereas on days that they reported high sportsmanship negative work events had no impact on momentary positive affect ($y = 0.085(0.059)$, $z = 1.440$, n.s.).

The moderating effects seem to have persisted until the next morning. Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, we found similar effects for the early assessment of momentary positive affect taken the following day. Specifically, the interaction between previous day’s negative event and sportsmanship was significantly related to positive affect of the next morning ($t = 2.516$, $p < .01$) (Table 3) and is displayed in Figure 4. Simple slope tests showed that previous day’s negative event had a negative effect on next morning’s positive affect when the person reported low sportsmanship the previous day ($y = -0.358(0.165)$, $z = -2.174$, $p < .05$), whereas there was a positive relationship on days that he or she reported high sportsmanship ($y = 0.442(0.165)$, $z = 2.684$, $p < .01$).

Unfortunately, the benefits of sportsmanship seem to have dissipated more quickly than we expected. Contrary to Hypothesis 2c, we found no lagged effects on the next day’s afternoon positive affect. As with engagement, these results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Multi-level estimates for model 3 predicting same day’s work engagement and same noon’s momentary positive affect, $N = 112$ participants and $N = 336$ data points.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work engagement</strong>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimate</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>Hours worked</td>
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<td>Positive event (intensity)</td>
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<td>Positive event (intensity)</td>
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<td>Sportsmanship</td>
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<td>Negative event (intensity) × Sportsmanship</td>
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<td>$-2\log (lh)$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between person (Level 2) variance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within person (Level 1) variance</td>
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<sup>a</sup> Complete results are available by the first author upon request.

<sup>b</sup> Model 3 was compared to Model 2 with the intercept, age, hours worked, positive event (intensity), negative event (intensity) and sportsmanship as predictors ($-2\log = 538.032$; Level 1 variance = 0.266; SE = 0.028; Level 2 variance = 0.167; SE = 0.038) and Model 1 with the intercept, age, hours worked and positive event (intensity) as predictors ($-2\log = 593.600$; Level 1 variance = 0.270; SE = 0.026; Level 2 variance = 0.168; SE = 0.037).

<sup>c</sup> Model 3 was compared to Model 2 with the intercept, age, hours worked, positive event (intensity), negative event (intensity) and sportsmanship as predictors ($-2\log = 630.276$; Level 1 variance = 0.343; SE = 0.036; Level 2 variance = 0.059) and Model 1 with the intercept, age, hours worked, and positive event (intensity) as predictors ($-2\log = 710.821$; Level 1 variance = 0.382; SE = 0.037; Level 2 variance = 0.263; SE = 0.056).
are conservative. They control for sleep quality, age previous day’s positive event, and hours worked the previous day. In an exploratory fashion, we also tested whether the suggested effects lasted even 2 days after the negative event occurred but this was not the case.

**Discussion**

Consistent with AET, our longitudinal study found that negative workplace events showed intra-individual effects on both work engagement and positive affect (cf. Beal et al., 2005). In addition, we extended these findings by showing that the ill-effects of these events persist at least until the afternoon of the following day. When something goes wrong at work, its ramifications can last at least 24 h, depending upon how the worker copes. We tested these theoretical extensions of AET by using a dynamic daily diary methodology, which allowed us to collect daily records with qualitative and quantitative information for the negative event, but also regarding the sportsmanship behaviour and two well-being indicators (work engagement and positive affect). These findings agree with those of Ilies et al. (2011), who demonstrated the impact of positive work events on job satisfaction. As Ilies et al. suggest, by modelling identifiable workplace events as predictors of work engagement and positive affect we gain better insight into the process by which employees form evaluations

**Table 3.** Multi-level estimates for model 3 predicting next day’s work engagement, next morning’s momentary positive affect, next noon’s momentary positive affect, N = 112 participants and N = 336 data points.α

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Next day’s Work engagementα</th>
<th>Next morning’s positive affectα</th>
<th>Next noon’s positive affectα</th>
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<td>Sleep quality</td>
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<td>Positive event (intensity) previous day’s</td>
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<td>Sportsmanship previous day’s</td>
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<td>Negative event (intensity) previous day’s</td>
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<td>Negative event (intensity) previous day’s × Sportsmanship previous day’s</td>
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α p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Complete results are available from the first author upon request.

α This variable represents previous day’s work engagement for the analysis of next day’s work engagement, previous morning’s positive affect for the analysis of next morning’s positive affect and previous noon’s positive affect for the analysis of next noon’s positive affect.

α Model 3 was compared to Model 2 with the intercept, age, hours worked, positive event (intensity), previous day’s work engagement, negative event (intensity) and sportsmanship as predictors (−2*log = 335.376; Level 1 variance = 0.241; SE = 0.036; Level 2 variance = 0.179; SE = 0.048) and Model 1 with the intercept, age, hours worked, positive event (intensity) and previous day’s work engagement as predictors (−2*log = 380.777; Level 1 variance = 0.262; SE = 0.036; Level 2 variance = 0.152; SE = 0.044).

α Model 3 was compared to Model 2 with the intercept, age, hours worked, positive event (intensity), previous noon’s positive affect, negative event (intensity) and sportsmanship as predictors (−2*log = 367.572; Level 1 variance = 0.222; SE = 0.033; Level 2 variance = 0.356; SE = 0.072) and Model 1 with the intercept, age, hours worked, positive event (intensity) and previous noon’s positive affect as predictors (−2*log = 415.495; Level 1 variance = 0.226; SE = 0.031; Level 2 variance = 0.355; SE = 0.068).

α Model 3 was compared to Model 2 with the intercept, age, hours worked, positive event (intensity), previous noon’s positive affect, negative event (intensity) and sportsmanship as predictors (−2*log = 394.608; Level 1 variance = 0.241; SE = 0.036; Level 2 variance = 0.288; SE = 0.048).

α Model 3 was compared to Model 2 with the intercept, age, hours worked, positive event (intensity), previous noon’s positive affect as predictors (−2*log = 455.824; Level 1 variance = 0.316; SE = 0.044; Level 2 variance = 0.288; SE = 0.067).

**Figure 2.** Interaction effect of daily negative work event and daily sportsmanship on next day’s work engagement.
of their job. Moreover, our study replies to calls to examine the operational context within which OCB behaviours are demonstrated and the impact of situational factors on their potential utility (Nielsen et al., 2012).

Our goal was also to consider employee behaviour that may diminish the effects of negative work events on positive well-being indicators. To do so, we integrated AET with OCB literature. The findings of our study supported this integration by showing that by adopting an outlook high in sportsmanship (Organ, 1988, 1990), these individuals can maintain their positive affect and engagement. We further found that these benefits persist until the following afternoon (for engagement) and until the next morning (for positive affect) and then they disappear as we found no effects on the third day. Based on two strands of research, investigating adjustment following traumatic stress (e.g., Seery et al., 2008) and also on expressing voice (e.g., Morrison, 2014), we suggested that this occurs for two reasons. First, expressive responses make the effect more memorable to the self. What went wrong may become more strongly and permanently lodged in memory. Second, voice is often most effective when it is carefully timed and when negative emotions are not overtly expressed. Withholding complaints, at least for a time, may allow employees to more effectively articulate their concerns. In case of negative events, our findings were consistent with these mechanisms. Talking on the same day (or the next) enhances the ill-effects of negativity. We also found that the effect eventually dissipate, as the impact of daily negative events does not carry-over a third day. One possibility is that a negative event on Day 2 might “block” or otherwise interfere with a negative event on an earlier day. This should be a topic for future investigations.

Theoretical implications: on the limits of “sportsmanship”

As we have already discussed, OCB is expected to have both positive and negative consequences (e.g., Bolino et al., 2013). That said, our suspicion is that this dimension represents a special case as it requires little or no time to exhibit. For this reason, sportsmanship does not interfere with time allocated to task performance (Nielsen et al., 2012). Focusing closely on daily fluctuating negative events and sportsmanship, we were able to show that withholding complaints on days that negative daily events happened worked to minimize their impact. With this in mind, we recommend that future investigators attend carefully to sportsmanship. It would be helpful to examine the benefits of sportsmanship over a longer period of time (e.g., over weeks or months). The positive effects of sportsmanship could dissipate if valid employee concerns are not eventually addressed.
Whereas more work is needed, there is some good news in our findings. Whereas negative events have consequences, an outlook characterized by sportsmanship can buffer employees from problematic effects. Nevertheless, there is a darker way to interpret our results, and it is worth discussing here. Our findings could be (mis)taken to suggest that adjustment at work is exclusively the workers’ responsibility. As sportsmanship might mitigate the ill-effects of negative events, and this is potentially within the reach of most workers, then the organization is somehow exempted from ethical conduct. Even leaving aside the moral ramifications of this conclusion – and these are serious – it is a gross simplification of our findings. Our study obtained an interaction between sportsmanship and negative events. Given this, it would be just as accurate to claim that negative events moderated the impact of sportsmanship. That is, sportsmanship was unnecessary on days in which things went well. By this logic, it is just as easy to conclude that it is always the organization’s responsibility to prevent negative events. We do not embrace either of these extreme views.

The one thing we can say for certain is that responsibility should not lie entirely with the workers. To illustrate this, suppose that a group of employees were able to completely and totally insulate themselves from the ill-effects of negative events. Would this be a good thing? We expect that this would not be favourable in the long run. Research suggests that petulant responses to mistreatment and injustice can promote positive social change (Tripp & Bies, 2009). Using sportsmanship to overcome short-term negative events might be worthwhile in many situations, but few would benefit if this strategy were to wholly displace other approaches that could better foster workplace improvements. For example, protesting mistreatment due to prejudice or sexual harassment might be upsetting and difficult in the short-run, but over time it might push organizations to adopt positive changes from which everyone, including reluctant firms, would benefit.

**Limitations and suggestions for future research**

One potential limitation is that our data were all self-report, raising concerns about inflated correlations and common-method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). For instance, it is possible that the same objective negative event may be perceived differently because individuals engage in sportsmanship. Indeed, sportsmanship was negatively related to the rating of intensity of the negative events but unrelated to intensity of positive events. As the relationship is not that high and because we were able to detect significant interaction effects although this is more difficult when predictors are correlated (Jaccard, Wan, & Turrisi, 1990), we do not think that this is a serious problem. Still, we took specific steps to reduce the problems associated with common-method bias in line with the suggestions of Conway and Lance (2010). We collected data at two different measurement points over multiple days. We also used person-centred scores, which reduces the impact of responses styles, and employed a number of control variables. Whereas we strongly agree that future research should include data from multiple sources, such as colleague- or family-rated sportsmanship, we caution that self-reports should not automatically be viewed as biased. Since our study explored intra-individual fluctuations in work engagement and positive affect as well as to the experience of daily negative events, the individual employee is likely to have the best access to such information.

Second, although we used to most commonly used and validated measure to capture sportsmanship, it is consisted solely of negatively formulated items (i.e., agreement shows low levels of sportsmanship). This wording may influence the way that individuals respond to these items and may create biases such as acquiescent bias (i.e., agree to all statements) or extreme response bias (i.e., provide extreme high or low ratings) (Nunnally, 1978). Although studies have shown that alternating positively and negatively worded items to measure attitudes does not influence responses of participants (Sauro & Lewis, 2011), this still needs to be proved for the scale of sportsmanship, which captures behaviours.

Second, we followed the procedure of other diary studies by using survey packets (e.g., Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). In this regard, participants received clear instructions to complete the questionnaire in the morning and afternoon (instead of completing all of the measures at the end of the day). Even so, we cannot be sure about the compliance of our participants. Although all participants reported the time of completion within the appropriate range of hours, and assured us that they had filled in the questionnaire in those moments, future research could overcome this issue by using handheld computers that allow us to know the exact time in which the survey was filled in. Nevertheless, this does not seem to be a major design flaw in our study. If all reports were completed at the same time, then they would likely contain greater measurement error. This would, of course, render our findings conservative.

Third, because individuals were forced to report a negative and a positive event per day, it is possible that the assessed negative events were not that negative. This is supported by the substantially lower mean scores on intensity for the negative compared to the positive events. Therefore, future studies should examine whether the buffering effect of sportsmanship holds even for more extreme negative events.

Fourth, we used a student-recruited sampling method, and this resulted in a non-representative sample (e.g., participants were more often male, higher educated, and working more hours per week compared to the Dutch population). Indeed, the characteristics of the sample were very specific. Fortunately, our sampling method resulted in a heterogeneous sample. Cook and Campbell (1979) suggested that a sampling method that enhances heterogeneity represents a satisfying and feasible solution that might be applied to facilitate generalization. Thus, future research should include more representative samples that allow us to test whether our findings generalize across populations and settings.

A final limitation concerns the fact that we included only 3 measures on the within person level leaving only two observations per person that can be predicted by the previous day (i.e., days 2 and 3). Although we found sufficient within-person variance, the lack of more measurement points may have
resulted in restricted variability within person. Although we tried to compensate this by increasing the N of the between person level, our findings of the lagged analysis should be interpreted with caution. Future research is necessary to replicate the lagged effects of daily work events using data from more days per person.

This study is also marked by several key strengths. First, by collecting repeated daily measures of our key constructs, we were able to gain a better understanding of within-person variation. Second, by testing our hypotheses with multi-level analysis we were able to distinguish between-individual and within-individual components of variance and to ascertain whether our measures represent more states or trait-like constructs. Third, the daily diary approach allowed us to collect qualitative data on the nature of daily negative work events, which provides us insight on kind of negative situations with which people are confronted.

**Practical implications**

In addition to replicating the effects observed herein, future research should consider their practical implications. Decreases in positive affect and work engagement, which occur when negative events are unaccompanied by sportsmanship, might have important ramifications. For instance, lacking sportsmanship, negative events may cause employees to suffer diminished well-being (Xanthopoulou et al., 2008) and job performance (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010). These are important outcomes that merit additional investigation. In the future, we hope to see more research exploring possible ways to mitigate the problems caused by negative workplace events (cf. Leiter & Maslach, 2010). It may be that organizations are able to have a positive impact with some straightforward interventions. For example, one promising approach was suggested by Sonnentag et al. (2010). These researchers recommend that important tasks, which require high engagement, be assigned when employees are at their best. Less critical aspects of the job could take place at other times, thereby providing workers with a chance to “catch their breath.” More generally, allowing time for recovery mitigates the ill-effects of negative events (Sonnentag, 2003). Future research should explore these and other possibilities for maintaining high job engagement.

**Conclusion**

The results of this research provided evidence that negative work events can impede daily work engagement and positive affect. Citizenship behaviour from employees, in the form of sportsmanship, can diminish these unfavourable effects. These findings support AET by showing how actual, discrete, and seemingly minor work events diminish affective reactions and subsequent attitudes. In addition, they highlight another important buffering function of sportsmanship as a part of citizenship behaviour. We hope these findings will provide an impetus to future research.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**References**


