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Positive Intervention at Work: A Longitudinal Pilot Study of Intentional Compassionate Acts of Kindness (ICAK) on Employee Engagement in Service Employees

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Introduction

Employee engagement is key.

- ***Employee engagement*** is "a positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295).
  - Linked to **positive organizational outcomes**, such as low turnover, employee performance, customer satisfaction, and financial performance (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Christian et al., 2011; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009; Vance, 2006; Wagner & Harter, 2006; Czarnowsky, 2008; Ketter, 2008).
- However, employees have been seen to perform at suboptimal levels due to disengagement (Wright & McMahan, 2011).
  - Estimated to cost U.S. businesses **300 billion dollars per years in lost productivity** (Fleming, Coffman, & Harter, 2005).

Introduction

There are many ways to increase employee engagement, such as acts of kindness (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2010).

Individual-based Interventions		
Behavioral Being kind, Practicing virtues	Volitional Setting goals, Increasing resilience	Cognitive Counting blessings, Optimism

Organizational-based Interventions				
Job (re)design & work changes	Personnel assessment & evaluation	Transformational leadership	Work Training	Career Management

- An **act of kindness intervention** is intentional, individual, and behavioral. When it is added to one's job, it becomes an organizational-based relational job design intervention.
- A job can be designed to hone in on **prosocial motivation** (Grant, 2007, 2008a, 2008b).

Introduction

The research on Acts of Kindness is sparse but with promising results

Acts of Kindness Built on Broaden & Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001)	
Life	**Work**
▪ Subjective well-being (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & Sheldon, 2004; Tkach, 2005), ▪ Self-acceptance (Tkach, 2005) ▪ Happiness and gratefulness (Otake et al, 2006)	▪ Compassion (1. Giving emotional support 2. Giving time or flexibility 3. Giving material goods) increased affective commitment (Lilius et al., 2008) ▪ Positive ind behavior & org effectiveness (Cameron, Mora, Leutscher, & Calarco, 2011) ▪ Study engagement (Proxy for work engagement, Ouweneel et al., 2014) ▪ Employee engagement no effect while teamed with other "self-enhancing" positive interventions" (Ouweneel et al., 2013)

Introduction

We looked at the relationship between intentional compassionate acts of kindness (ICAK) & employee engagement in service employees.

Objectives

1. To empirically test the ICAK on employee engagement relationship
2. To examine the process mechanisms
3. To observe effects over time from pre- to post-intervention

Introduction

Our hypotheses across our three objectives.

1. To empirically test the ICAK on employee engagement relationship

H1: A positive relationship between number of ICAK performed and employee engagement.

2. To examine the process mechanisms

H2a-c: A positive relationship between number of ICAK performed and employee engagement through the inducement of positive affect at work.

H3: Prosocial motivation would moderate the relationship between number of ICAK performed and employee engagement.

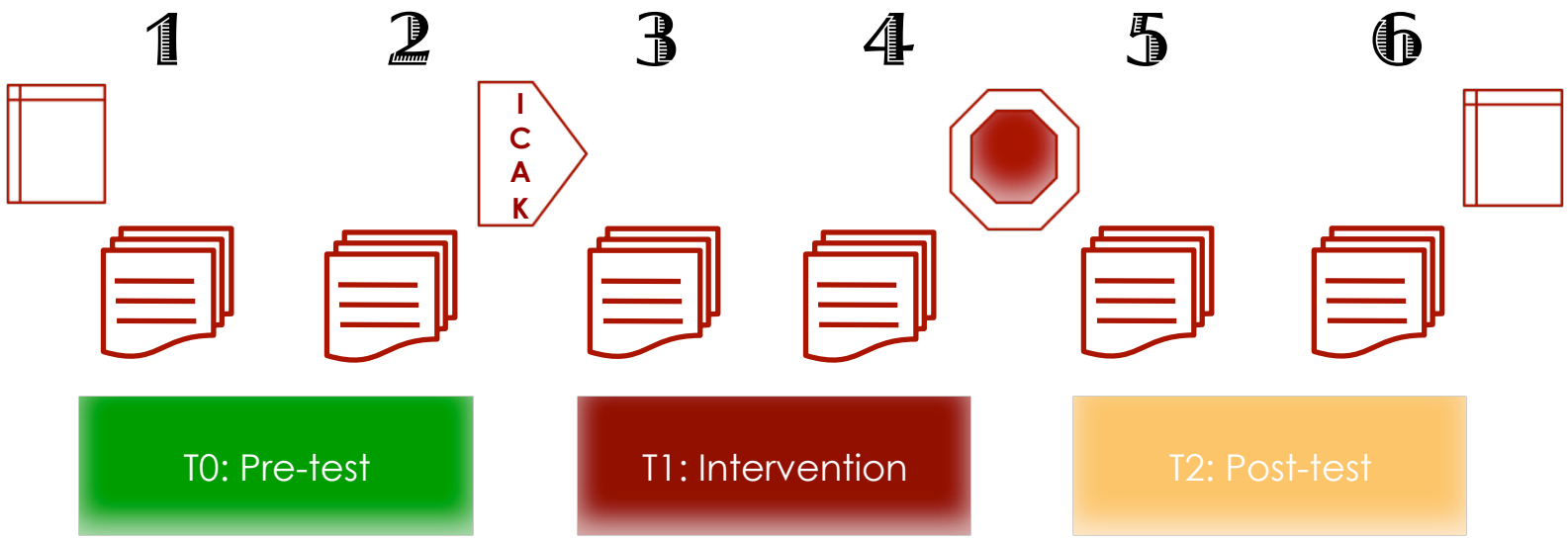
3. To observe effects over time from pre- to post-intervention

H4: Prosocial motivation levels will endure pre- and post-intervention.

H5a-c: Employee engagement, number of ICAK, and positive affect would increase through each phase.

Methods

Six-week longitudinal A-B-A time series design with three phases.



Methods

We recruited restaurant employees to voluntarily participate.

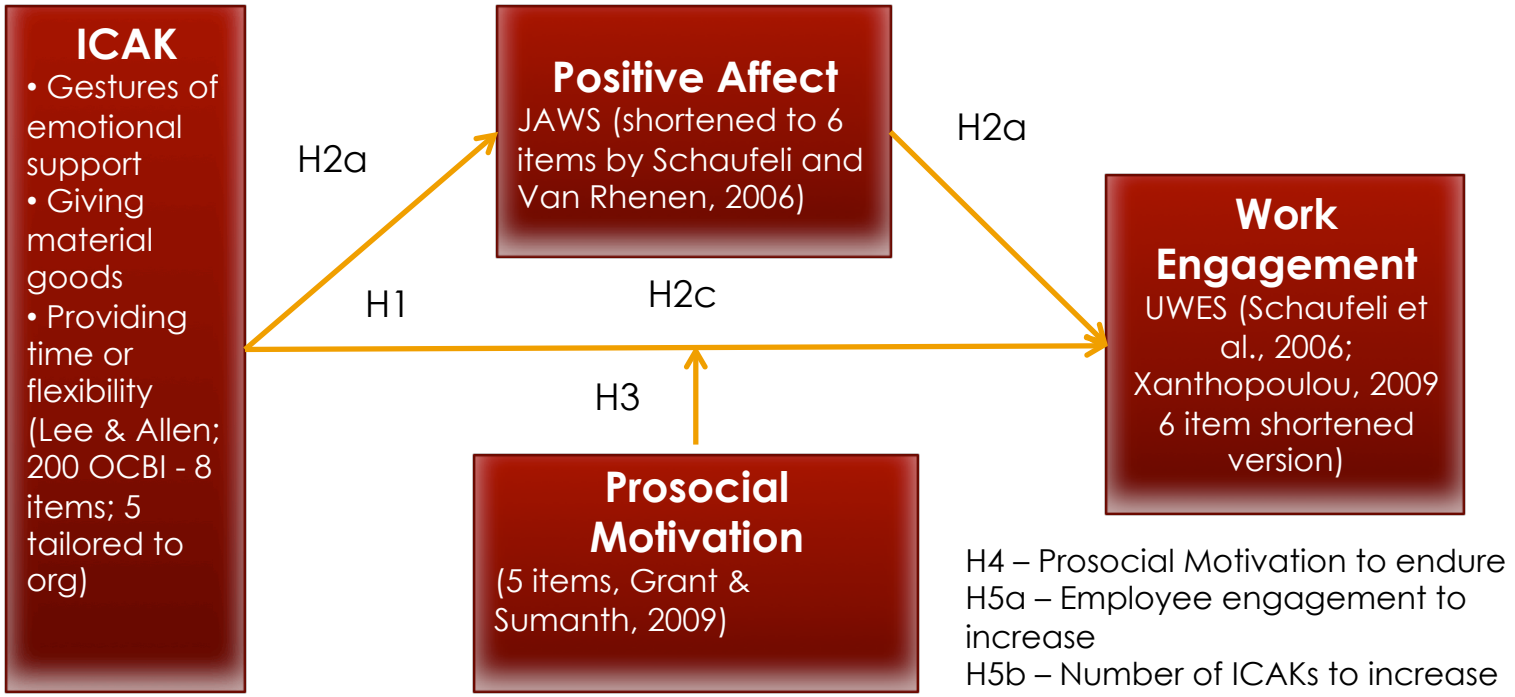
- *Population*
  - Line Workers & Sales Employees in a Customer Service Industry.
- *Sample Participants*
  - Quick-service restaurant employees (*n* = 26) in Southern California that were English or Spanish-speaking over 18 years.
  - 65% of all the restaurant's employees. Attrition: 19% of the initial sample.
  - 69.20% female and 30.80% male employees.
  - Avg. age was 25.64 years.
  - Customer-facing with most of their time in the front-of-house (FOH; 73%) or not customer-facing and worked only in the back-of-house (BOH; 27%).
- *Recruitment*
  - Flyers, in-person, and email sent by business owner invitation to info. session.
  - 15 min. info session on the study at all-staff meeting.
  - "Service employee experience"
  - Voluntary and not related to any employee bonuses.
  - Compensated their normal work wages.
  - Incentivized with a raffle for a chance to win cash prizes that ranged from $50-$150.

Methods

Construct	Definition	Measure
IV: Intentional Compassionate Acts of Kindness (iCak)	**An intentional act of kindness of which someone notices another person's need or suffering, empathetically feels for the person, and acts in a manner intended to meet the need or ease the suffering (adopted by Lilius et al., 2008).**	• iCak cards included: daily positive affect (6 items), work engagement (6 items), and iCak (13 items) measures.
DV: Employee Engagement	"A positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295).	• From participants on bi-weekly study cards: 6 adapted items of the Utrecht Work-Engagement Scale UWES (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Xanthopoulou (2009) included two items per dimension.
Mediating Variable: Positive Affect	Work-related positive emotions are described as relatively intense, short-lived affective experiences that are focused on specific objects or situations at work (Gray and Watson, 2002)	• From participants on bi-weekly study cards: Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (Van Katwyk et al., 2000; shortened to 6 items by Schaufeli and Van Rhenen, 2006).
Moderating Variable: Prosocial Motivation	Prosocial motivation is the desire to expend effort in order to benefit other people (Grant, 2008a)	• From participants on initial survey: Prosocial Motivation Scale (Grant, 2009; 5 items)

Methods

The conceptual model and measures mapped out.



H4 – Prosocial Motivation to endure
H5a – Employee engagement to increase
H5b – Number of ICAKs to increase
H5c – Positive affect to increase

Results

1. To empirically test the ICAK on employee engagement relationship

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Results

H1 | H2a-c | H3 | H4 | H5a-c

Preliminary analyses

- All variables were normally distributed.
- Variables that were relatively skewed were within an acceptable range (from .82 to 1.9), and there were no particular outliers.
- Prosocial motivation at pre-test was M = 6.59, SD = .42 and at post-test was M = 6.22, SD = .77.
- Amongst day-level variables on survey cards that were aggregated by study phase, all were normally distributed with skewness in an acceptable range of (.82 to 1.9)

Table 1. Day-level measures through T0, T1, and T2

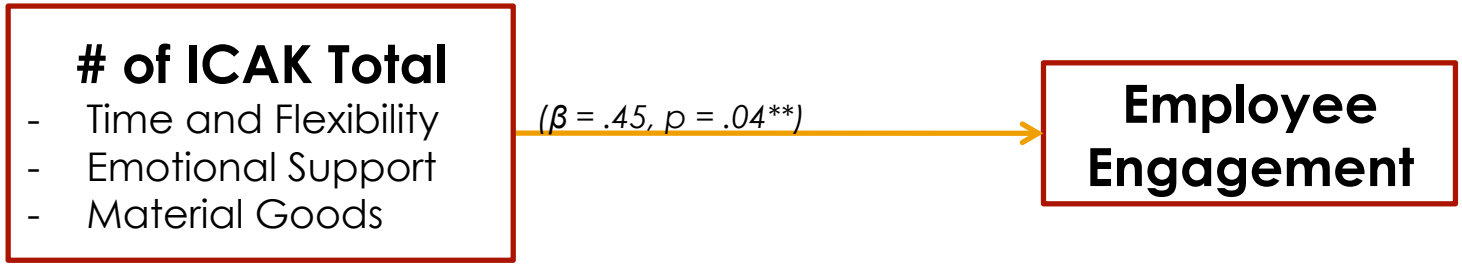
	T0									T1									T2							
Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Engagement	4.81	1.06	-							4.89	1.00	-							5.12	1.07	-						
2. Positive Affect	4.84	1.00	.88**	-						4.98	1.11	.88**	-						5.14	1.46	.95*	-					
3. Emotional Support	13.01	8.83					-			11.92	1.53					-			10.33	11.61					-		
4. Time Flexibility	11.33	5.22					.67**	-		13.60	1.50					.58**	-		11.89	10.68						-	
5. Material Goods	4.84	2.02	.70**	.62**					-	2.19	.94							-	1.36	1.58							-

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01

Results

H1: Relationship was supported at T0.

- Regression analysis controlled for age, gender, work team (FOH or BOH), tenure.

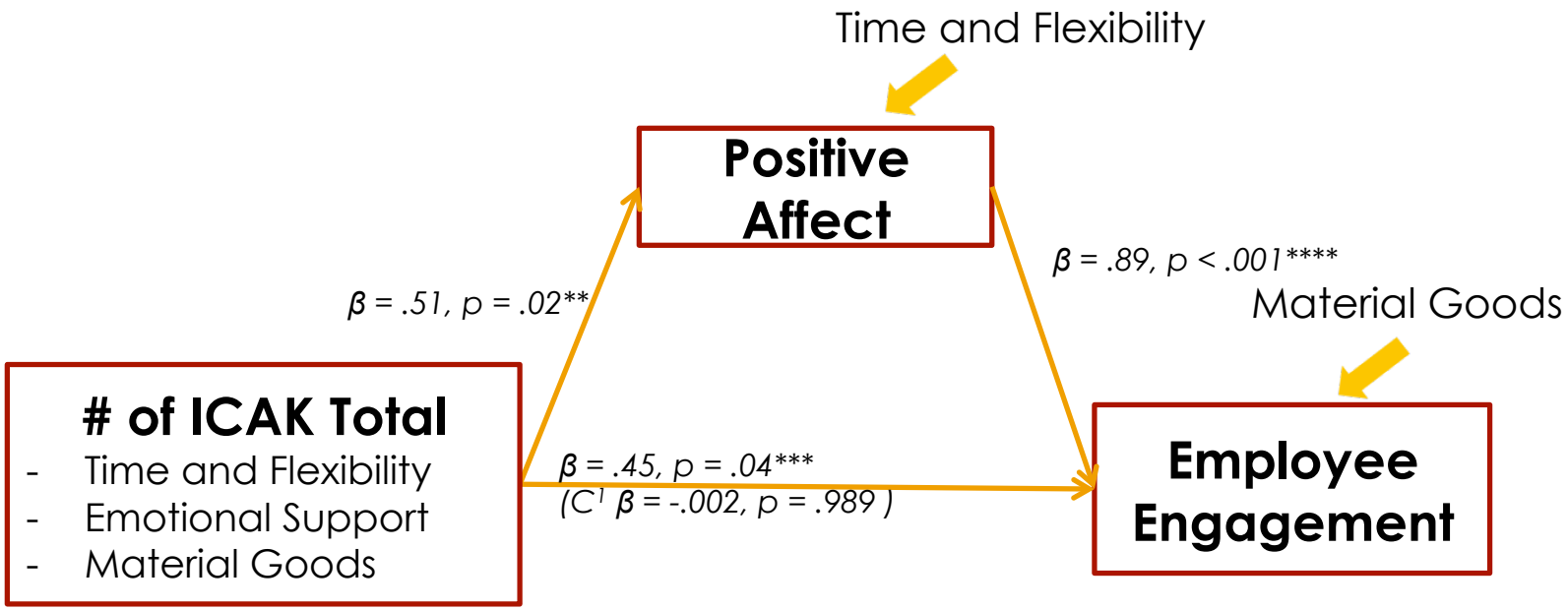


Note: p < .10, p ≤ .05**, p ≤ .01***, p < .001****

Results

H1 | H2a-c | H3 | H4 | H5a-c

H2a-c: Positive affect mediation was supported at T0.
H3: Prosocial moderation was not supported.



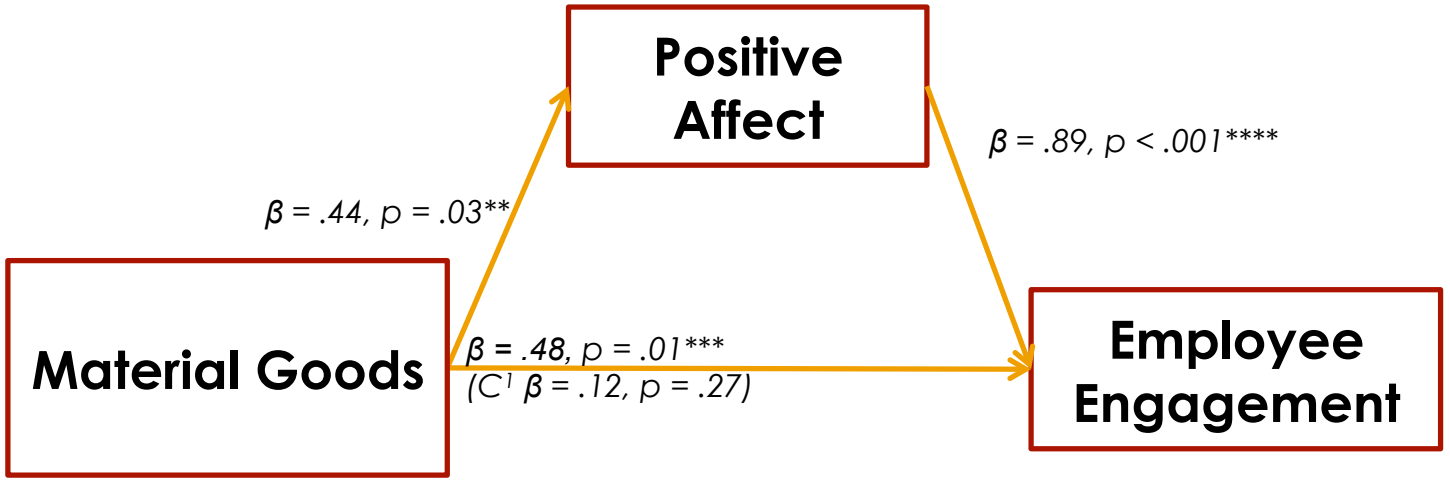
(Barron & Kearny, 1986)

Note: p < .10, p ≤ .05**, p ≤ .01***, p < .001****

Results

H1 | H2a-c | H3 | H4 | H5a-c

The same mediation was present in the relationship between material goods and employee engagement.



(Barron & Kearny, 1986)

Note: p < .10, p ≤ .05**, p ≤ .01***, p < .001****

Results

H1 | H2a-c | H3 | H4 H5a-c

Interesting results across time and different groups of employees using repeated samples t-test.

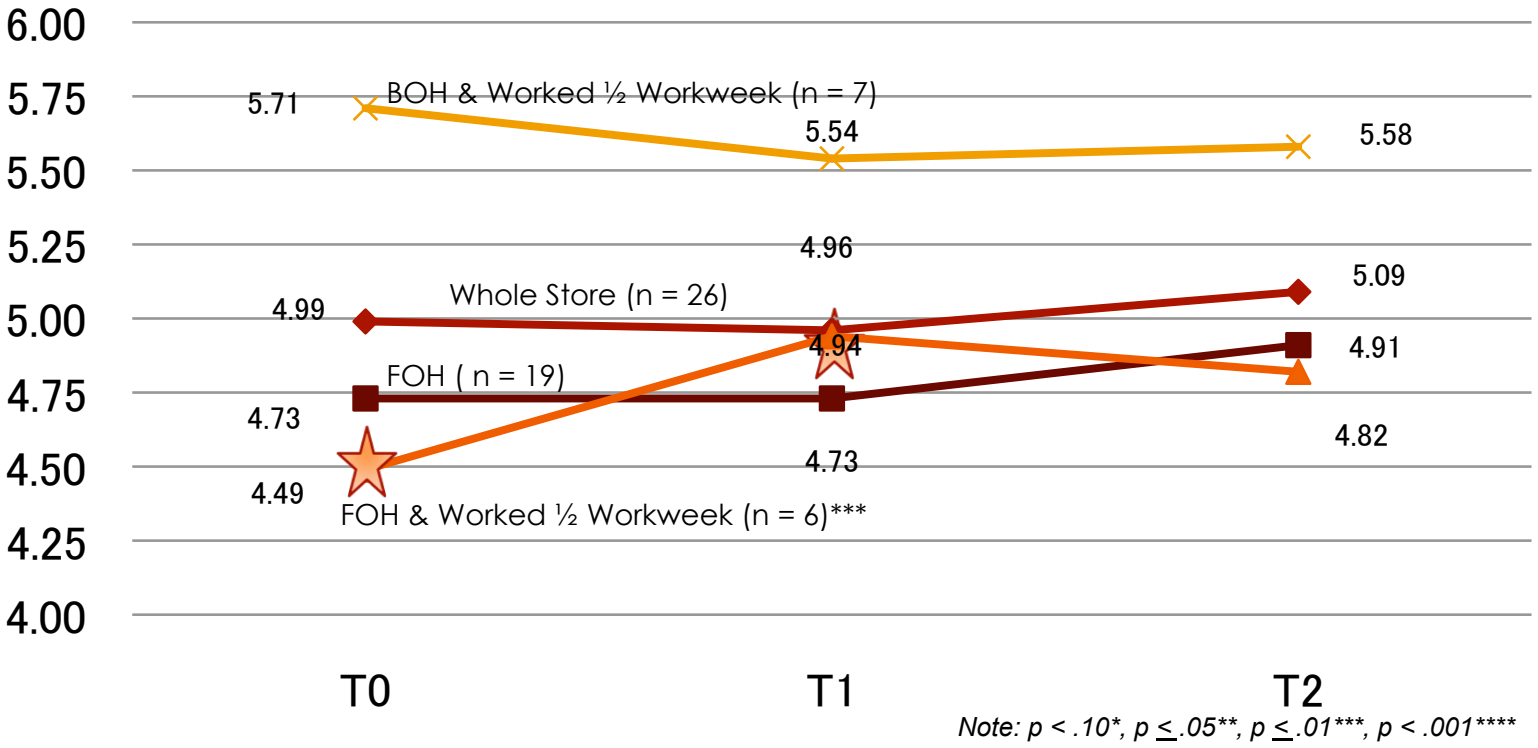
Prosocial Motivation (H4)	Employee Engagement (H5a)	# of ICAK (H5b)	Positive Affect (H5c)
• Significant decrease • Means difference of 2.25 (*t* (19) = 2.60, *p* = .02***) from pre- to post-test*	• No change in whole sample • Significant increase in • Customer-facing (FOH) & scheduled to work at least half of the workweek • Low levels of engagement at baseline	• Significant decrease in ICAK throughout study • Mean decrease of 8.06 (*t* (25) = -5.83, *p* = .007***)* • Material goods • T0 to T1 with mean decrease of 2.80 (*t* (25) = -5.83, *p* < .001) • T1 to T2 by mean decrease of 1.18 (*t* (25) = -2.30, *p* = .030)	• No change over time

Note: p < .10, p ≤ .05**, p ≤ .01***, p < .001*****

Results

H1 | H2a-c | H3 | H4 | H5a-c

Engagement increased in employees who were customer-facing (FOH) & scheduled to work at least half of the workweek from T0 to T1.

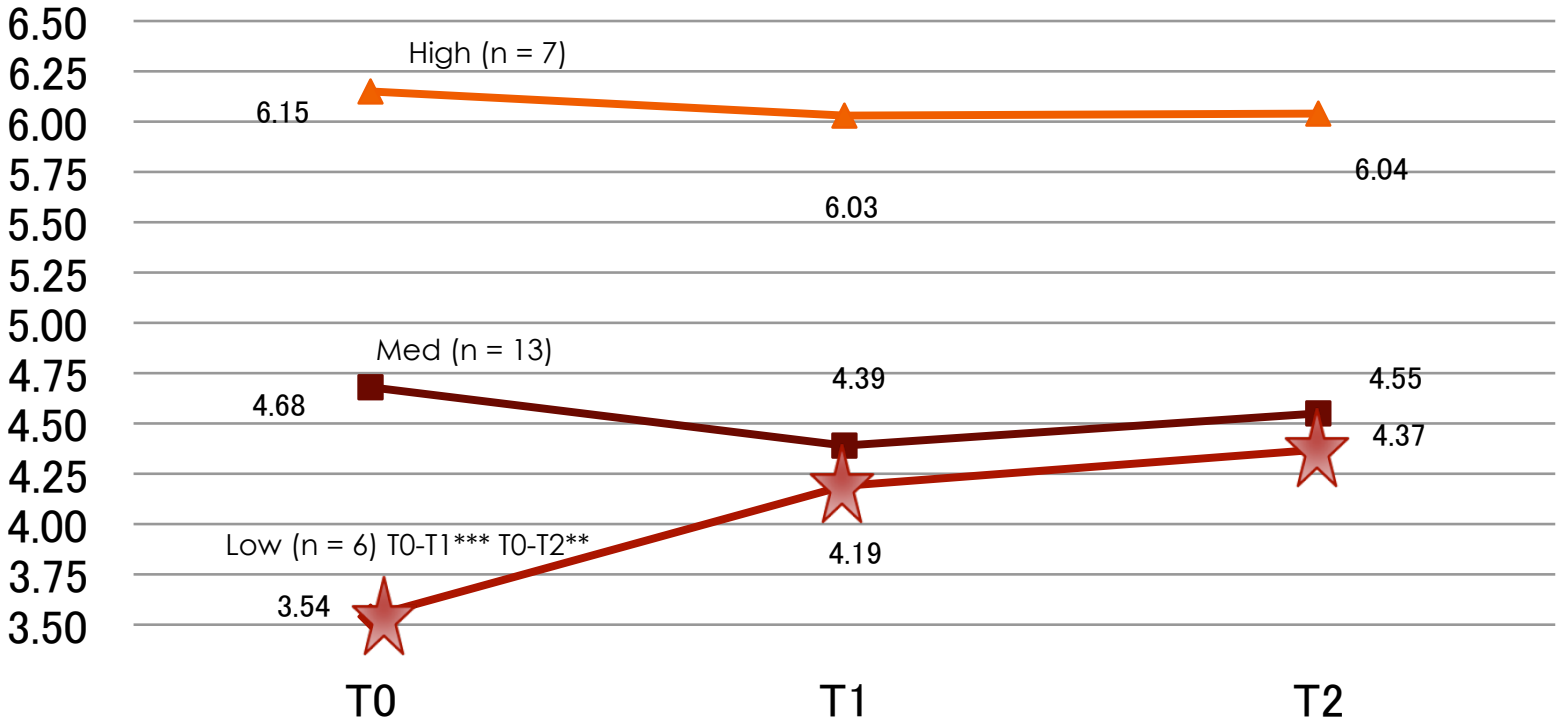


Note: p < .10, p ≤ .05**, p ≤ .01***, p < .001*****

Results

H1 | H2a-c | H3 | H4 | H5a-c

Engagement increased in employees with low levels of engagement at baseline throughout the study.



Note: p < .10, p ≤ .05**, p ≤ .01***, p < .001*****

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Discussion

We were able to support the acts of kindness on employee engagement relationship, however we had some limitations…

- Small sample size for pilot
- Not all employees within the organization participated
- May have increased extrinsic motivation and decreased intrinsic motivation toward ICAK by mandating an ICAK a shift & offering a cash incentive to participate → Decreased prosocial motivation.
  - Researchers differ on what's better counting ICAKS vs. performing ICAKS intervention (Otakeet al., 2006; Lyubomirsky, Tkach,& Sheldon, 2004; Tkach; 2005).
- We may have unintentionally stifled material good ICAKS after T0 → Lack of intervention effect on whole sample over time.
  - Intervention narrative of "1 MG ICAK a shift at most", which was implicit even in the post-test T2 phase.

Discussion

Directions for future research

- Larger sample and different sites to compare findings across groups (e.g., control, counting ICAKs intervention, performing ICAKs intervention).
- Examine counting number of ICAK vs. asking participants to perform an ICAK.
- Consider asking participants to free-hand their recollection of ICAKs throughout the day.
- Use technology instead of paper cards.
- Three instead of six weeks may suffice
- Appropriate incentives & promoting meaningfulness to keep from hindering intrinsic motivation to act proscocial (Gagne & Deci, 2005).
- Explore under what conditions positive attributes (e.g., prosocial motivation) change pre- and post-interventions.
- Learn which types of ICAKs are more likely to affect engagement in different contexts and industries, e.g., service-providing knowledge work, manufacturing, etc.

Discussion

Implications for practitioners

- Weigh potential costs to the employee and business of such interventions prior to implementation.
  - What's the ideal number of ICAKs or material goods to give away before diminishing return?
- Offer interventions to employees with low levels of engagement based on the results (Ouweneel et al., 2013)
- Tailor ICAK interventions to be most beneficial for the workplace context.

Questions?

Thank you!

Appendix

Supplementary Details

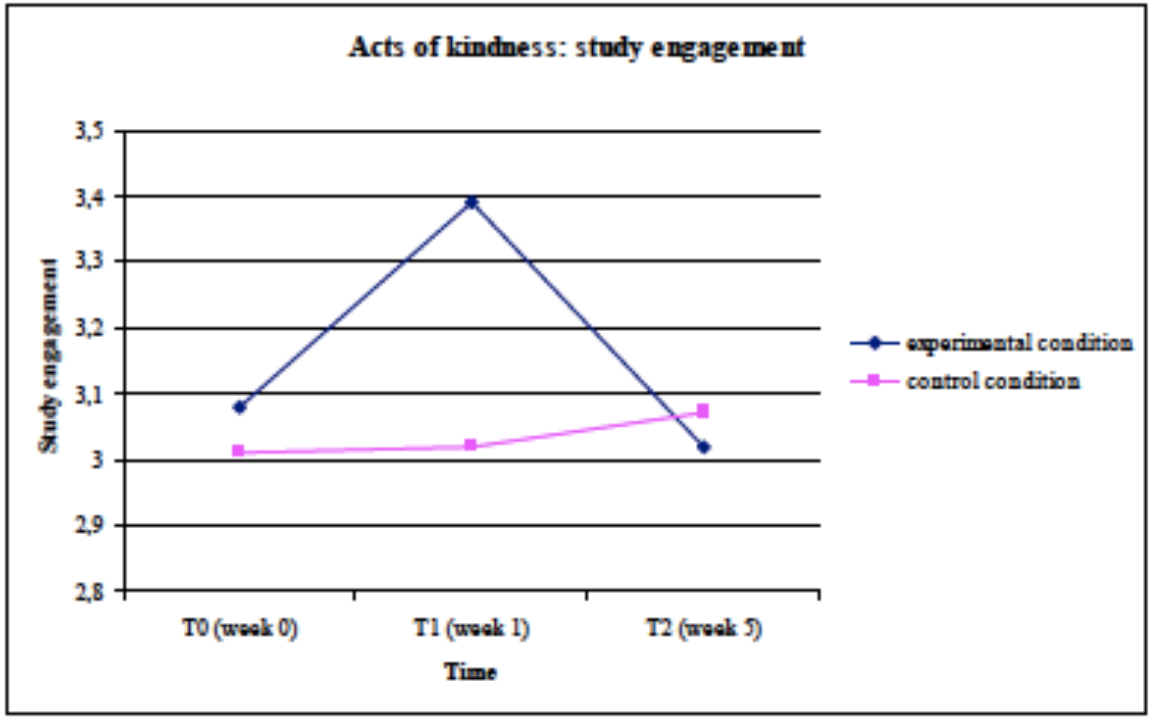
Introduction

Competition for service talent is fierce.

- **Service providers depend on their human capital to deliver quality customer service**, which leads to customer loyalty (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005) and, in turn, impacts revenue (Williams & Naumann, 2011)
- **Increasing competition** for customer service talent and retention through engagement
  - The service-providing sectors have seen an increasing trend in the last decade and will continue to rise at an escalating rate (*US Bureau of Labor Statistics,* Henderson, 2013).
  - Customer demands of standard service have elevated (American Express, 2012).
  - 2013 Fair Minimum Wage Act

Introduction

Ouweneel, E., Le Blanc, P., &Schaufeli, W. (2014). On being grateful and kind: Results of two randomized controlled trials on study-related emotions and academic engagement. *The Journal of Psychology, 148* (1), 37-60.



Methods

Average employee demographic snapshot in our sample (*n*= 26)

- Single Female
- English-speaking of Latino descent born in the USA
- 26 years old
- Some college
- 11 months tenure (in March)
- Part-time team-member who works less than 30 hours a week

Methods

Team demographic profiles

Front-of-House (73%)

- English-speaking of Caucasian descent born in the USA
- Single, 22 years old
- 2 year college degree
- 10 months tenure (in March)
- Part-time = 79% Full-time = 21%
- Team member = 79% Team leader = 21%
- Female = 79%, Male = 21%

Back-of-House (27%)

- Spanish-speaking of Hispanic descent born in USA or Mexico
- Single, 37 years old
- Some college
- 12 months tenure (in March)
- Full-time = 100%
- Team leader = 57% Team member = 43%
- Male = 57% Female = 43%

Results

Marginally Significant to Significant Findings

	r	*β*	Effect Size	*p*-value
Antecedents: Agreeableness predicts engagement		.89		.00
Antecedents: Negative Affect predicts engagement		-.38		.05
Antecedents: Conscientiousness predicts engagement		-.47		.06
Intervention: T0-T1 Change in engagement for FOH, 6+ (repeated t-test)			**η^2 = .50 (sml-mod)**	**.01**
Intervention: T0-T1 Change in engagement for Low EE baseline (repeated t-test)			**η^2 = .73 (mod-lrg)**	**.02**
Intervention: T0-T2 Change in engagement for Low EE baselines (Wilcoxon paired)			**r = .51 (lrg)**	**.08**
Distal Outcomes Trends: Engagement predicts Intent to Stay		.62		.01
Distal Outcomes Trends: Engagement predicts Team Effectiveness		.62		.02
Distal Outcomes Trends: T0-T1 Increase in Self-Rated Employee Performance (repeated t-test)			η^2 = .29 (sml)	.00
Distal Outcomes Trends: Self-rated Employee Performance correlated with Team Effectiveness	T1 & T2 = .40			< .05
Distal Outcomes Trends: Team Effectiveness correlated with Positive Affect	T1 = .43; T2 = .48			< .05