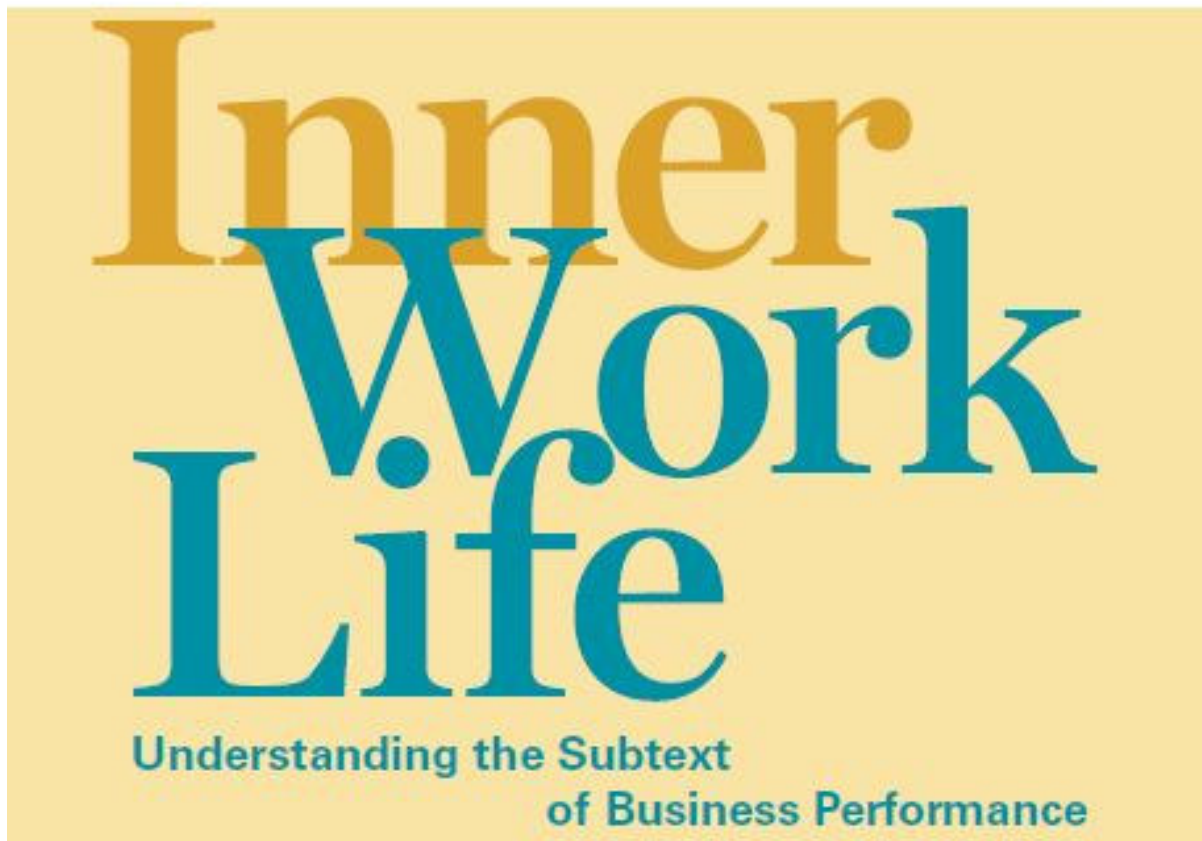


RESEARCH ARTICLE REVIEW

TINA FEICHT



Introduction

The following article reviews the paper “Inner work life” by Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer, which was published in May 2007 in Harvard business review. (Amabile und Kramer 2007). It takes the first comprehensive look at what employees are thinking and feeling as they go about their work, why it matters, and how managers can use this information to improve job performance. In brief they found that inner work life is a complex interplay between perception, emotions and motivation. Negative perceptions showed to minimize performance in the short and long run, which is why positive perceptions should be formed to improve performance. In particular this can be done by creating conditions that enable the employees to get their work done.

Link to the Article

The article can be read by the following link:

<https://hbr.org/2007/05/inner-work-life-understanding-the-subtext-of-business-performance>

The Authors



Teresa M. Amabile is the Edsel Bryant Ford Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, in Boston. Her research focusses on the question, how life inside organizations can influence people and their performance. Originally she was focusing on individual creativity, then Dr. Amabile's research expanded to encompass individual productivity, team creativity, and organizational innovation. Her current research program investigates the psychology of everyday work life: how do events in the work environment influence subjective experience ("inner work life") and performance (creativity, productivity, and commitment to the work)? (Harvard Business School) Some of her results are presented in this article.

Amabile has published several books, book chapters and a lot of Journal Articles to her research topics. All her publications can be seen here:

<http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/profile.aspx?facId=6409&facInfo=pub>



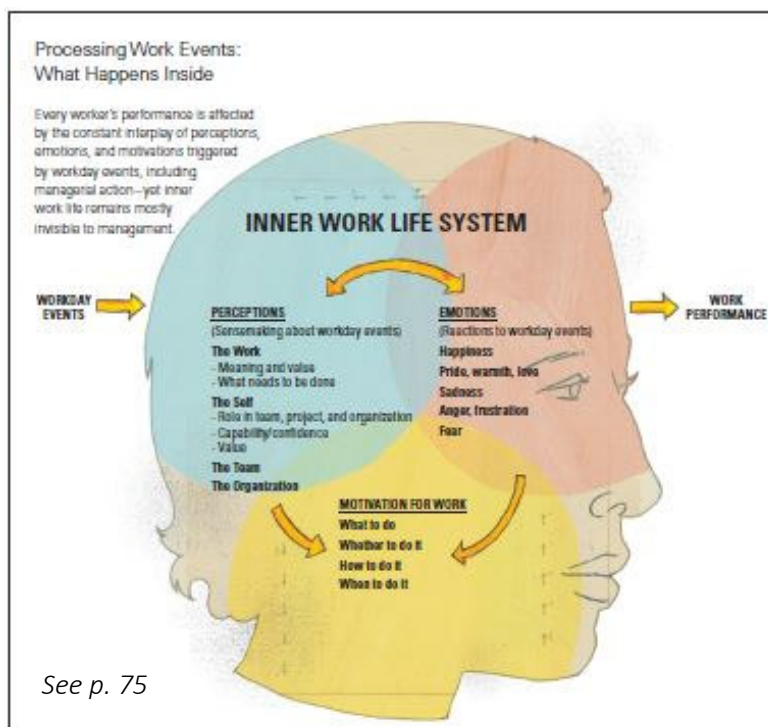
Steven J. Kramer is an independent researcher and writer in Wayland, Massachusetts. His current research interests include adult development, the meaning of work in human life, and the subjective experience of everyday events inside organizations (inner work life). Previously, he researched the perceptual and cognitive development of infants and young children. (Psychology Today)

The Study: **Inner Work Life - Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance**

If it is about knowledge work, most companies think about brain power, they recruit high- intelligent people and try to keep the energy up by offering divers compensation programs. But there is another crucial driver to performance, which is often overlooked: the inner work life of a person! An interesting

article from the year 2007 in Harvard Business Review (Amabile und Kramer 2007) addresses the importance of employees' thoughts and feelings about their work and the relation of that to job performance. With the title "Inner Work Life - Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance" the authors Amabile and Kramer investigate, how personal dynamics, caused for example by daily events, can affect work life, as people are not leaving their inner feelings at the door when entering the firm. With "inner work life" they describe "the dynamic interplay among personal *perceptions*, (...) *emotions*, (...) and *motivation* (...)" (p. 74), which remain mostly unseen by others and the individual itself.

They conducted a study with 238 professionals over three years from 26 project teams in seven companies and three industries. Study participants had to fill out daily diaries from Monday to Friday during the entire course of their project (average lengths was four months), asking about their own perception of for example work environment, mood or motivation. They had to describe an event of the workday that stood out for them. Their remarks showed, how they felt about the event. Beyond that they had to rate themselves and the other team members each month about various dimensions (e. g. creativity or work quality). Evaluations by knowledgeable people outside the team were also included. The response rate was 75%. Results show that events during the day do matter, that they affect emotion, motivation and the personal perception and that there is evidence for the interplay of those three. As neuroscience already found, emotions are connected to cognition. This means that for example decision making is connected to emotions and feelings and that this system interacts in a complex way. The same thing happens with inner work life: all components and their interaction have to be considered.



In the end, comparing the happiest to the worst days showed that an important differentiator was the sense of being able to make progress in work. If employees achieved a goal or had success, they were happy and efficient. In contrast, study participants showed setbacks in work on worse days. That's why the authors claim that inner work life is strongly linked to performance and that this link is a positive one as their performance is boosted when they

have more positive feelings throughout the work day. Furthermore positive emotion was tied to higher creativity as well motivation and collaborative and cooperative behaviour of the leaders or the organization as such. The same positive correlations could be found with the other elements of performance as productivity, commitment to the work, and collegiality.

All this remains mostly invisible to management, but affects the performance of employees. But as we spent more and more times in offices working, the inner work component gets bigger and more important. *“Because every employee’s inner work life system is constantly operating, its effects are inescapable.”* (p.83) The authors conclude, that it is a manager’s task to improve their day to day behaviour in a way that facilitates progress, enables people to move forward in their work and setting clear goals. And they are pointing out one basic thing: treating them decently as human beings. This improves the inner work and with that supports the individual worker, but also serves the organization and business. Win-win!

Cited

According to google scholar this article was cited 119 times whereas Web of Science only found 15 citations of this paper.

Other Research on that Topic & Connection to the Seminar

Needs Analysis is done to identify performance gaps. But it is not only a certain amount of skills, knowledge or behaviour missing which causes performance problems. It is also feelings and emotions that needs to be taken into account, as they are also influencing performance, as the study of Amabile and Kramer showed. For this reason, the reviewed article is an important addition to our seminar. As well as needs have to be analysed to push business, a new way of handling them is also needed.

To continue this thought we have to be aware of the fact, that time is a finite resource. There is only a finite amount that we can use for training or further education or needs analysis. But with our energy it is a different story - energy comes from body, emotions, mind and spirit. (Schwartz 2007) Schwartz and colleagues claim that if organizations want to effectively reenergize their workforces, they need to shift their emphasis from getting more out of people – by training and forcing them – to investing more in them, so they are motivated (Schwartz 2007, p. 64), which is one important factor to higher performance as shown above.

Schwartz did a study on a pilot energy management program with 106 employees of banks in 2006. The authors measured their performance after the program in contrast to a control group. He found as well,

that the intervention group worked more efficient and this increase was mainly stable for a full year after completing the program. The author states that most people realized a better performance when having positive feelings whereas they realized that they are not able to perform well or to lead effectively when not feeling well. These findings support the findings of Amabile: emotions do have an important influence on performance. As it is not possible to stay positive non-stop, it is of high importance to help employees dealing with negative emotions or stress, sys Schwartz, also supporting Amabile's thesis of the managers' new tasks. Already in 2002 Ashkanasy and colleagues (Ashkanasy and Daus 2002) called emotions "the new challenge for managers" (p.76). There is enough evidence for this link today!

Back to the importance of this link for us adult educators. First of all, the facts about the link between performance and emotions is also somehow knowledge which can be transferred by us as adult educators. This means that we can clear up the companies we work with about these connections. We can furthermore use our own knowledge to help companies who struggle with these topics by making suggestions about how a more emotional-aware culture could be implemented. We can design a learning process by teaching the participants about the importance of emotions, giving advice in this context, analyse their current situation and coach them through this process.

Second we can use this knowledge while doing a needs analysis. We know already that communication is an important key to success of a needs or performance analysis (see Rossett 2009, p. 113ff.). If we for example know that employees are very sceptical about what is coming up, we can be aware of their emotions and treat them carefully to make sure they get also emotionally integrated in a positive way. We can be a good example in our own performance.

Third we can use this knowledge for ourselves and our own work life, which means that we reflect on ourselves, reflect on our work and also about the events that happened. How did they made us feel? Is this still influencing me and should I maybe take some actions to clear things up? Dealing mindful with the own feelings is also a driver for our own performance.

Conclusion

As our (working) world gets more and more complex and we spent more and more time of our lives at work, doing mostly brainwork, it is very important to keep the own resources and energy levels in balance. This is not only important for companies and their success, but also for ourselves and our pursuit of happiness, our success in live. The latter, as we learned, also reflects our performance. Amabile and Kramer provided evidence of this connection with their study, which stimulates new approaches of shaping an integrative humanly (inner) work life.

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Pictures

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<https://www.psychologytoday.com/experts/steven-j-kramer-phd>