

How to Optimise Our Harmonious Passion at Work

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Midjourney

Bring your life - to life

“Passion is the absolute unity of individual character and the universal.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

When famous philosopher Hegel (1770–1831) wrote about passion, he argued that nothing great in the world had been accomplished without it. And yet in our common cultural understanding, the notion of passion also carries negative connotations. Passion can lead to poor decisions and

even tragedy.

Recent studies have explained this dichotomy of meaning through a *Dualistic Model of Passion*. Theorists differentiate between two types of passion, obsessive and harmonious, which are distinguishable from each other by how any specific passionate activity is internalized into one's identity.

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Obsessive passion is unconstrained and leads to a rigid persistence to perform an activity for some kind of acceptance, self-esteem, or other perceived benefit. It overpowers our identity. *Harmonious passion* results when we freely (autonomously) acknowledge that the activity is important to us. It is motivating without being uncontrollable and takes up significant space without overpowering space our identity.

“...research conducted across various age groups, genders, cultures, and activity domains has found that harmonious passion generally predicts adaptive outcomes while pursuing a passion, while obsessive passion is typically unrelated to adaptive outcomes, and can at times predict maladaptive outcome.”

Passion and Happiness

It has also been established that harmonious passion predicts positive well-being, while obsessive passion has the opposite effect.

This ties in with Sonja Lyubomirsky's early work on happiness, where she stated that 50% is determined by our genetic makeup, 40% by our activities, and 10% by our life circumstances. Though more recently, Lyubomirsky is less inclined to place exact percentages on these categories, she maintains that these three key indicators are still factors.

“As growing theory and research is revealing, the pursuit of happiness requires selecting self-appropriate and eudaimonic-type activities (rather than chasing after positive emotions directly); investing sustained (rather than desultory) effort in those activities; and also, practicing them in a varied and changing manner (rather than doing them the same way each time). By such means, people can create for themselves a steady inflow of engaging, satisfying, connecting, and uplifting positive experiences, thereby increasing the likelihood that they remain in the upper range of their happiness potentials.”

So while the *genetic component* of happiness might be challenging to shift, the important factor of *our activity* is largely within our control. And when our activity is driven by harmonious passion, our well-being can potentially be elevated to our highest happiness potential.

Optimising Harmonious Passion at Work

It's no secret that Millennials and Gen Z-ers (and upcoming Alphas) are seeking a greater sense of purpose and meaning in their work lives. This desire for alignment between their workplace's purpose and values and their own is changing organisational cultures and practices. These current generations are far less inclined to stay in a job that doesn't inspire them. Their need for high levels of engagement (in a harmonious passion or a flow state) is a key requirement for today's employees.

Yet not everyone is able to match their harmonious passions with their work life. Indeed some are struggling to connect to passion at all.

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So for those of us who are cut off from our passionate

energies, here are some tips to bring your life, to life:

- Stay anchored in the present — it's hard to feel passionate when we are focused on either the future or the past.
- Strive for flexibility — flexibility is a skill that will safeguard against the tunnel vision and rigidity of obsessive passion
- Make decisions based on purpose and values, not outcomes — by staying in touch with who you are, what you believe in, and what your core values are, the false promises of obsessive passion are less likely to take hold
- Pursue a broader context for well-being — obsessive passion is shown to be connected to strain and social isolation
- Prioritise work-life balance — harmonious passion is related to lower work-family conflict and counterproductive work behaviors than pure obsessive passion, mixed passion, and non-passion.

While harmonious passion can be life-affirming and inspiring, and spark creativity and innovation, it's important not to let it flip into its darker twin, obsessive passion.

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