

# Inner Work Life: Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance

**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.**

*by Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer*

Anyone in management knows that employees have their good days and their bad days—and that, for the most part, the reasons for their ups and downs are unknown. Most managers simply shrug their shoulders at this fact of work life. But does it matter, in terms of performance, if people have more good days than bad days?

Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer's new stream of research, based on more than 12,000 diary entries logged by knowledge workers over three years, reveals the dramatic impact of employees' *inner work lives*—their perceptions, emotions, and motivation levels—on several dimensions of performance. People perform better when their workday experiences include more positive emotions, stronger intrinsic motivation (passion for the work), and more favorable perceptions of their work, their team, their leaders, and their organization. What the authors also found was that managers' behavior dramatically affects the tenor of employees' inner work lives.

So what makes a difference to inner work life? When the authors compared the study participants' best days to their worst days, they found that the single most important differentiator was their sense of being able to make progress in their work. The authors also observed interpersonal events working in tandem with progress events. Praise without real work progress, or at least solid efforts toward progress, had little positive impact on people's inner work lives and could even arouse cynicism. On the other hand, good work progress without any recognition—or, worse, with criticism about trivial issues—could engender anger and sadness. Far and away, the best boosts to inner work life were episodes in which people knew they had done good work and their managers appropriately recognized that work.

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