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Testing the affective events theory: The mediating role of affect and the moderating role of mindfulness

Ana Junça-Silva^{1,2,3}  | Catarina Pombeira² | António Caetano^{1,3}

¹Business Research Unit—BRU (UNIDE-IUL), Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal

²Instituto Politécnico de Tomar (IPT), Tomar, Portugal

³Applied Psychology Research Center Capabilities & Inclusion - APPsyCI, Lisbon, Portugal

Correspondence

Ana Junça-Silva, Business Research Unit—BRU (UNIDE-IUL), Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Avenida das Forças Armadas, Lisbon 1649-026, Portugal.
Email: ana_luisa_silva@iscte-iul.pt

Summary

This study aims to expand the knowledge on the affective events theory by: (1) testing the mediating role of affect in the relationship between micro-daily events and well-being, (2) and analyzing the moderating role of mindfulness in this mediated relationship. To achieve these goals, we collected data with 393 working adults. The results showed that: (1) affect mediates the relationship between micro-daily events and well-being; (2) mindfulness moderates the mediated relationship between micro-daily events and well-being via affect, that is, higher levels of mindfulness are positively related to well-being in particular when the levels of positive affect are higher. These results show the importance of providing conditions for the occurrence of daily uplifts at work as these seem to lead to increases in employees' well-being. Promoting mindfulness at work also seems relevant for workers' mental health and well-being, for example, through complementary training or daily practices.

KEYWORDS

affect, affective events theory, micro-daily events, mindfulness, well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

OECD (2019) has reported that workers appear to evidence lower levels of well-being and satisfaction. These lower levels of well-being affect the individual in many ways, for example, in the daily work-related behavior and daily well-being (Junça-Silva & Lopes, 2020).

Well-being is strongly influenced by situational factors, such as micro-daily events (uplifts or hassles) occurred at work (Junça-Silva et al., 2020). The affective events theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) suggests that the work environment is fulfilled of conditions that promote the occurrence of diverse kinds of micro-daily events, triggering affective reactions which, in turn, influence work-related attitudes (e.g., satisfaction) and behaviors (e.g., performance; Ohly & Schmitt, 2015).

Despite the relevance of micro-daily events, it is also relevant that workers are aware of their occurrence (even if they are experiencing daily hassles), because it is their awareness that may help them to successfully cope with what happened. This awareness has been investigated within mindfulness studies. Several

studies have demonstrated that mindfulness is positively related to well-being (Hawkes & Neale, 2020), due the capacity of the individuals to be focused on the present moment and their acceptance of what happens. Mindfulness is related to diverse learned skills, which help employees to deal with different micro-daily events, and to better cope with work-related stressors (Donald et al., 2016).

Despite the relevance that mindfulness has for individuals (e.g., well-being; Stewart et al., 2020), there are few studies analyzing its effect on the workplace. Furthermore, although mindfulness allows the individual to better regulate affect, due to the focus on the present, no study included it in the AET. Thus, this study aims to contribute to expand the knowledge regarding this literature, by analyzing the role that mindfulness may play between micro-daily events and well-being. Therefore, we aim to: (1) analyze the mediating effect of affect on the relationship between micro-daily events and well-being; (2) analyze the moderating role of mindfulness in the relationship between affect and well-being.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | The affective events theory

The relationship that employees have with their work is of increased importance and is being noticed, not only by researchers, but also by practitioners. Researchers have noted that this relationship significantly influences employees' daily lives and several job-related behaviors, such as performance (Donald et al., 2016). Work environment is clearly important for the employees' daily life, because in it that individuals spend the most of their time.

Micro-daily events are a constant in employees' daily life at work (Junça-Silva et al., 2020). The AET has studied such events and assumes that the work environment promotes conditions for the occurrence of these events. Micro events are the tiny, little things that happen in daily life. These events are micro due to their tiny nature, making that sometimes they are almost unnoticed, and are affective because arouse, positive or negative, affective reactions, which in turn, will influence work-related attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) and behaviors (e.g., performance).

These events may be positive (daily uplifts) or negative (daily hassles). Daily uplifts are the micro-daily experiences that trigger positive affect and raises the individual's satisfaction and well-being. Finishing a task, receiving feedback about performance, accomplishing a goal, or performing pleasant tasks are examples of daily uplifts. When employees experience daily uplifts, they tend to feel positive emotions, such as pride and happiness (Basch & Fisher, 1998) leading, as a consequence, to positive behaviors at work. On the other hand, daily hassles are the tiny, little things that somehow, irritate, frustrate or distress people (Junça-Silva et al., 2020). Receiving a negative feedback, having to perform more than one task at a time, or having to deal with someone in a rotten mood are examples of daily hassles. These kinds of micro-daily events trigger negative affective reactions, such as sadness, or anger which, in turn, negatively influence their work engagement (Newman & Nezlek, 2021).

The AET also states the existence of personal factors that influence the affective reactions triggered by micro-daily events: mood and personality traits (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Accordingly, these two factors will influence the way through which individuals react to such events. For instance, if an individual is in a bad mood, then it is likely that s/he reacts more negatively to daily hassles. Or, if an individual is an optimist then s/he tends to interpret what happens in a positive manner and, as a result, the affective reactions will tend be more positive (Junça-Silva et al., 2020).

Micro-daily events influence diverse forms of work-related well-being (e.g., work engagement, satisfaction; Junça-Silva et al., 2019). When there is a positive ratio of micro-daily events, that is, when the individual experiences more daily uplifts compared to daily hassles, this tends not only, to stimulate well-being, but also to buffer the detrimental effects of daily hassles (Rueff-Lopes et al., 2017). This is because daily uplifts, by triggering positive affect, stimulate well-being and minimize the fatigue that employees may experience.

2.2 | Micro-daily events and well-being

Well-being is significantly affected by the constant affective daily fluctuations triggered by micro-daily events (Silva, & Caetano, 2013). It is subjective in nature and is highly dependent on each individual experience. For example, being well, may have different meanings and may be influenced by multiple factors, such as, personality, work, among others (Diener et al., 2017). This conception of well-being has been defined as subjective well-being.

Subjective well-being includes an affective component and a cognitive one (Diener, 1984). The affective one is related to the experience of positive affect, and the absence or low frequency of negative affect, whereas the cognitive component is referred to the individuals' life satisfaction (Diener, 1984), that is, it is related to the way through which individuals evaluate their life, or the different life domains (e.g., work). Thus, a happy individual is the one that makes a positive evaluation about life, and at the same time, experiences a positive ratio of affect (i.e., when experiences more positive affect than negative one). The preponderance of negative affect compared to the positive one, is closely related to illness, low mental health or stress (Diener et al., 2009).

On the contrary, when employees experience more negative affect at work, compared to positive one, they tend to be dissatisfied, and their well-being tends to decrease (De Carlo et al., 2014). Moreover, the experience of daily hassles, by triggering negative affect, will negatively influence well-being (Junça-Silva et al., 2017). Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1. Affect will mediate the relationship between micro-daily events and well-being.

2.3 | The moderating role of mindfulness

The concerns about employees' mental health at work have led researchers to explore strategies that may, somehow, protect and ameliorate it (Pirson et al., 2012). Mindfulness emerged, in organizational context, as a strategy to reduce potential risks to mental health. For instance, there has been an increased interest in mindfulness-based interventions applied at work (Scheepers et al., 2020). These interventions aim, not only to enhance well-being, but are also a train for the development of emotion regulation strategies to overcome daily hassles and negative affect (Michalak et al., 2020).

According to Williams (2008), mindfulness refers to the awareness that arises from paying attention to the purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment about things as they are. Thus, it consists of two main components: (1) attention/awareness of what is being perceived in the present (self-regulation of attention); (2) experiential processing without judgment, being receptive and open (orientation for the experience; Bishop et al., 2004).

Likewise, Shapiro et al. (2008) suggested that mindfulness includes three components: (1) intention (to focus attention on what happens); (2) attention (the cognitive processes involved), and

(3) attitude (such as compassion and non-judgment for the object of attention).

Thus, mindfulness predisposes the individuals to be open minded, develops their ability to construct different interpretation categories of reality, and to solve problems, and at the same time promotes adaptability to change (Langer, 1989). It also allows a great awareness of daily events, enabling the ability to be focused on what is happening, in the present, accepting it, which minimizes inadequate affective reactions.

Mindfulness helps to adapt attitudes to the moment, even when daily hassles occur. Diverse studies demonstrated that mindfulness triggers more frequently positive affect (e.g., satisfaction) and minimizes the frequency of negative affect (e.g., anxiety), leading as a result to enhanced levels of well-being and health (Junça-Silva et al., 2018; Scheepers et al., 2020). Mindfulness also helps individual to remain calm even in adverse situations, provides conditions for the development of high-quality interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and reduces the level of stress, which in turn, improves the work environment (Donald et al., 2020). Thus, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 2. The indirect relationship between micro-daily events and well-being through affect is moderated by mindfulness, in such a way that the indirect effect will be stronger for individuals with higher levels of mindfulness.

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Participants and procedure

In this study, participated 393 working adults, from different professional sectors (e.g., health). Most part participants were women (72%), the mean age was 33.37 years old ($SD = 11.18$), and the mean organizational tenure was 7.22 years ($SD = 9.51$). Of the overall sample, 75.5% had, at least, an undergraduate degree.

We contacted employees in different organizations. Then, participants were contacted via an internal email sent by the head of the human resources department of the organizations that agreed to participate in the study. The recruiting email explained the main goals of the study (to explore the effects of micro-daily events on health), gave guarantees of anonymity and provided a hyperlink that redirected the participants to the online survey. Overall, we contacted 500 participants, of which 393 returned valid responses (response rate = 78.6%).

3.2 | Measures

3.2.1 | Micro-daily events

We used the Scale for Daily Hassles and Uplifts at Work (SDHUS; Junça-Silva et al., 2020) which includes 18 items that assess the

frequency of daily hassles (10 items, e.g., “Today, I had to deal with someone in a rotten mood”), and daily uplifts (eight items, e.g., “Today, I received positive feedback on my performance”), in the last day. Participants answered to the items using a five-point Likert scale (1 never to 5 four times or more). The Cronbach's alpha was .79, and ranged between .78, for the daily uplift dimension and .79 for the daily hassle dimension.

3.2.2 | Mindfulness

This was measured by the 15-item Mindful, Attention and Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003; e.g., “I find it difficult to stay focused on what is happening in the present”). The answers were given using the five-point Likert scale (1—never to 7—always). The scale showed an α of .86.

3.2.3 | Affect

We used the 10-item Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). Five items measured positive affect (e.g., “Inspired”), and the other five measured negative affect (e.g., “Anger”). The responses were given using the five-point Likert scale (1 “never” to 5 “always”). The positive affect subscale presented an α of .80, and the negative one of .82.

3.2.4 | Flourishing

To measure well-being, we used the eight-item Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010), assessing the self-perceived success in areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism (e.g., “At my work, people respect me”). The answers were given using the five-point Likert scale (1 “totally disagree” to 7 “totally agree”). The scale showed an α of .88.

3.3 | Statistical procedures

To test our hypotheses, we created a ratio between daily uplifts and daily hassles. This ratio allows us to identify the proportionality of the daily uplifts in function of the daily hassles. That is, when the ratio is higher than one, it means that the daily uplifts occurred more frequently than the daily hassles did. We also calculated a ratio for affect.

To test hypotheses 1, we used model 4 from PROCESS. This analysis calculated the direct paths between the variables, in the form of regression weights, and the significance of the indirect path, which is the reduction of the relation between micro-daily events and well-being (H1), when the mediator (affect) is included in the model. To test H2, that is, the moderated mediation effect we used PROCESS macro, model 14 (Hayes, 2018).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Preliminary analyses

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics, correlations and reliabilities of the study variables.

4.2 | Hypotheses testing

To test hypotheses 1, we conducted a mediation through PROCESS (Hayes, 2018), model 4. Mediation exists when the independent variable (X = micro-daily events) influences the dependent variable (Y = well-being) through a mediating variable (M = affect). The total effect of X on Y represents the total effect (c). The direct effect of X on Y after adding the mediator variable (M) is c' . The effect of X on M is effect a , and the effect of M on Y (controlling the effect of X) is effect b . The indirect effect between Y and X is defined as the ab effect. In most cases, the indirect effect (ab) represents the difference between c and c' and, as such, the total effect (c) can be calculated as the sum of c and ab . As a rule, we are facing a partial mediation, when the value of the indirect effect (ab) is lower than the value of the total effect (c) with the same sign.

4.2.1 | The mediation effect of affect between micro-daily events and well-being

Hypothesis 1 assumed that affect would mediate the link between micro-daily events and well-being. The indirect effect of micro-daily events on well-being through affect was .02 ($p < .01$), with 95% CI [.01, .03], indicating a significant mediation effect. The relationship between micro-daily events and affect (a ; $B = .08$, $p < .01$) and the relationship between affect and well-being (b ; $B = .29$, $p < .01$) were significant. The total effect (c ; $B = .03$, $p < .01$) between micro-daily events and well-being was also significant. However, the relationship between micro-daily events and well-being (c' ; $B = .00$, $p > .05$), after introducing affect, was not significant, revealing a full mediation effect. Thus, H1 was supported.

4.3 | The moderated mediation effect of mindfulness

Hypothesis 2 assumed that the indirect relationship between micro-daily events and well-being through affect would be moderated by mindfulness, such that the indirect effect would be stronger for individuals with higher levels of mindfulness. To test this hypothesis, we split it in two phases. First, and as suggested by Hayes (2018), we tested the isolated moderation effect of mindfulness on the relationship between affect and well-being, through model 1 on PROCESS. Then, we tested the full moderated mediation model with PROCESS, model 14 (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017; Figure 1).

The first analysis revealed a significant interaction effect between mindfulness and affect ($B = .17$, $\beta = .04$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p < .01$). The

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations and reliabilities

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Micro-daily events	2.66	3.93	1			
2. Affect	1.98	.87	.36**	1		
3. Mindfulness	2.51	.51	-.20**	-.35**	1	
4. Well-being	3.94	.58	.18**	.44**	-.30**	1

Note: $N = 393$.

** $p < .01$.



FIGURE 1 Overview of the hypothesized moderated mediation model

TABLE 2 Conditional indirect effects at the different levels of the moderator

Mindfulness	<i>B</i>	(<i>SE</i>)	LL CI 95%	ULCI 95%
Well-being				
-1 <i>SD</i>	.17	.04	.08	.25
<i>M</i>	.26	.03	.19	.33
+1 <i>SD</i>	.35	.04	.26	.44
R^2	.25**			

Note: $N = 393$. Regression coefficients non standardized. Bootstrapped samples = 5000.

Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; LL, lower limit; SE, standardized error; UL, upper limit.

** $p < .01$.

simple slopes of the interaction between mindfulness and affect showed that, for individuals with high levels of mindfulness (more than 1 *SD* above the mean), well-being was higher for those who experience a positive ratio of affect ($B = .17$, $\beta = .04$, $p < .01$, IC 95% [.09, .25]). Moreover, in the case of individuals with low mindfulness scores (less than 1 *SD* below the mean), well-being was higher when the ratio of positive affect was positive ($B = .35$, $\beta = .04$, $p < .01$, IC 95% [.27, .43]). The same pattern was found for individuals with mean scores of mindfulness ($B = .26$, $\beta = .03$, $p < .01$, IC 95% [.20, .32]).

Then, we tested the overall moderated mediation model. The findings showed that a significant moderated mediation index of .01 with CI 95% [.002, .023]. This significant index evidence that the mediated effect (affect) is conditional upon the levels of the moderator (mindfulness). That is, the indirect effect is significant at all the three levels of the moderator (-1 *SD* ($B = .17$, $\beta = .04$, $p < .01$, CI 95% [.08, .25]); *M* ($B = .26$, $\beta = .03$, $p < .01$, CI 95% [.19, .33]); +1 *SD* ($B = .35$, $\beta = .04$, $p < .01$, CI 95% [.26, .44]; Table 2). Specifically, the indirect effect of micro-daily

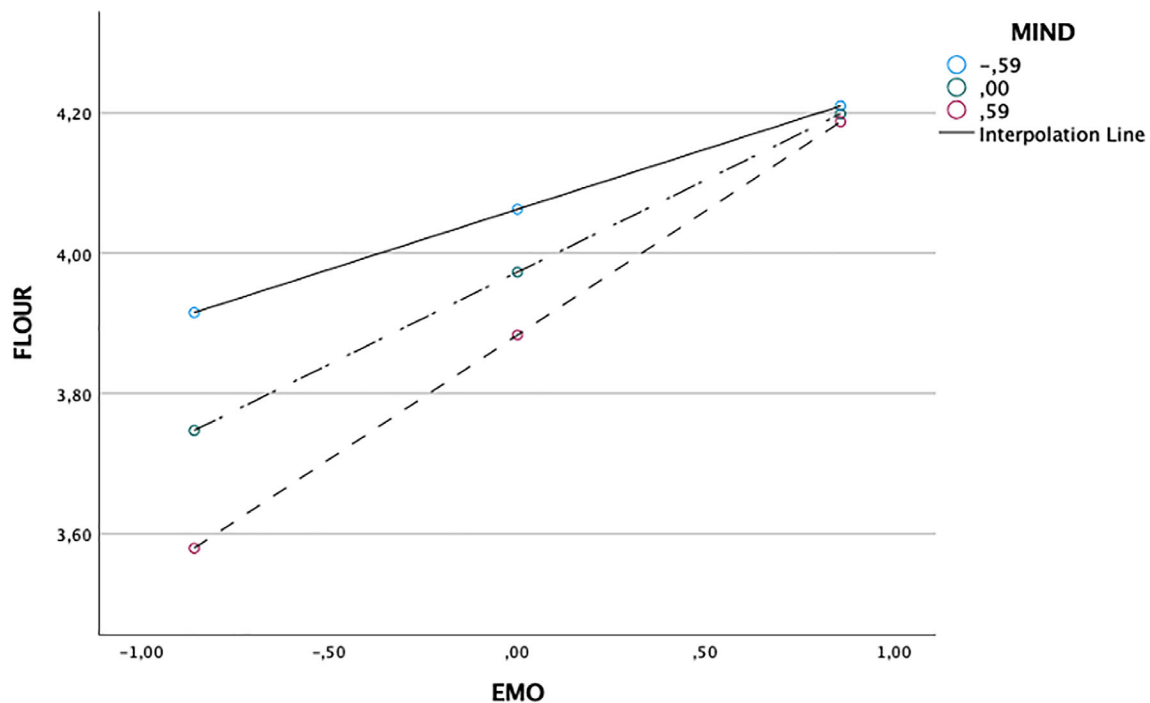


FIGURE 2 Interaction between *mindfulness* and affect predicting well-being [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

events on well-being via affect would be stronger for individuals with higher levels of mindfulness, than for those with low levels (Figure 2). Thus, our third hypothesis was supported.

5 | DISCUSSION

In this study, we aimed to analyze if mindfulness would have a significant role with the AET. In particular, we tested the AET, by analyzing the mediating effect of affect in the relationship between micro-daily events and well-being. Additionally, we explored the potential moderating role of mindfulness in this mediated relationship.

Micro-daily events are affective experiences occurred at work, in a daily basis. These affective experiences are framed within the AET. Accordingly, the work environment promotes conditions for the occurrence of diverse kinds of affective events, triggering affective reactions that, in turn, influence work-related behaviors and attitudes (Paterson & Cary, 2002). In line with the AET, the results showed that micro-daily events are closely related to affect.

Second, the findings showed that affect is a mediator of the relationship between micro-daily events and well-being. That is, the higher the ratio between daily uplifts and daily hassles, the higher the ratio of positive affect, over the negative one, which results in increased well-being. As we have already mentioned, the AET argues that, what happens at work, has a significant impact in the way people feel and react. Thus, this results is in line with the AET. Recently, there has been also some concern in trying to understand the relevance of micro-daily events for employees' health and other quality of life indicators (Junça-Silva et al., 2017). For instance, some studies have showed that daily uplifts by arousing positive affective reactions,

increase work engagement and job satisfaction (Junça-Silva et al., 2020). On the opposite, recent studies have showed the detrimental effect that daily hassles have on diverse individual outputs, namely, health, psychological well-being or life satisfaction (Braukmann et al., 2018).

The broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 1998) provides a theoretical framework to explain how positive affect leads employees to behave in a positive manner. Accordingly, experiencing positive affect (e.g., joy, gratitude, pride, among others) will enlarge, momentarily, the individuals' mind, so that they may accumulate, build and store personal resources, over time: biological (e.g., balanced heart rate); cognitive (e.g., mindfulness); psychological (e.g., well-being) and social (e.g., positive relationships with others; Fredrickson, 2013). This resources accumulation perspective is a plausible justification for the positive work-related behavior, and as such, explains why employees perform better. Moreover, Fredrickson (2013) suggests that both positive and negative affect allows the survival and development. Negative affect allows feelings of survival to be triggered (e.g., anxiety leads to fight behavior), while positive ones allow the development by expanding resources. These resources allow people to be able to face daily challenges and turn challenges into opportunities (Fredrickson et al., 2008).

Third, we tested the moderating role of mindfulness in the indirect effect of micro-daily events and well-being through affect. Our results supported this expectation, that is, the indirect effect of micro-daily events on well-being via affect was stronger for individuals with higher levels of mindfulness, than for those with low levels. Thus, for mindful individuals, well-being increased when the ratio of affect was positive. On the opposite, mindless individuals appeared to have a decreased well-being, when compared to mindful individuals, even when the ratio of positive affect was positive. As a result, as the ratios

of micro-daily events, and affect, increase, mindful workers will achieve higher scores of well-being. Mindfulness seems to exponentiate the experience of positive affective reactions to micro-daily events, so that individuals may be able to get more out of those affective experiences. Thus, mindfulness is a psychological process that allows people to be aware of events and helps them to better regulate affect, according to the micro-daily events experienced (Michalak et al., 2020).

5.1 | Limitations and future research directions

Despite the positive feature of this study, there are some limitations to acknowledge. First, the study was cross-sectional, which may have caused the common method bias, and limits the generalization of the findings. Future studies should consider the replication of this study, through a daily or longitudinal study, in order to understand the fleeting nature of micro-daily events and affect, and its effect on well-being. Second, the use of self-reported measures, may also limit the results reliability. Third, the majority of the sample was composed of women (72%). We analyzed if there would be significant differences, between men and women, in trait-based mindfulness. However, as evidenced by the *t*-test ($Z_{[1,388]} = 2.616, p = .107$), despite the differences, those were not statistically significant ($M_{\text{men}} = 2.44, SD = .54; M_{\text{women}} = 2.53, SD = .60$). So, even though the higher proportionality of women versus men, this one did not account to influence the model tested in this study. Fourth, we measured micro-daily events through its frequency. However, some daily hassles could weight more than some daily uplifts (or the other way around), even if lower in terms of frequency, because they are perceived as more relevant by the individuals. Thus, future studies should test this model with the perceived intensity of daily hassles and uplifts, or analyzing its cognitive appraisal, regarding its perceived importance.

Future studies should also study other variables within the AET. For example, it would be interesting to study mindfulness as a state, and not just as a trait. There are studies demonstrating that negative affect may lead to positive outcomes, such as creativity, performance, and the like (Akinola & Mendes, 2008). Thus, mindfulness may lead to positive effects on performance, at some point. For instance, if one is too much focused on what is happen, on the present moment, for example, in his/her task at hand, will s/he be aware of potential changes occurred around? Maybe, future studies could explore until when mindfulness leads to positive effects on performance, analyzing mindfulness as a state.

5.2 | Practical implications

The contribution of this study is important both for workers and for organizations. If the levels of mindfulness are high, there is higher satisfaction which appears to deliver higher well-being.

Managers should implement diverse practices related to mindfulness in organizations, for example, (1) placing a way of assessing applicants' mindfulness in the recruitment and selection process, and thus select mindful employees; (2) conduct monthly mindfulness seminars

and training; (3) promote the occurrence of daily uplifts; (4) create spaces for daily hassles to be shared, and act in a mindful manner towards them; (5) create quiet spaces if employees feel the need to practice mindfulness; (6) during daily work breaks, encourage employees to practice mindfulness and realize that the benefits are not only for professional life, but also for personal life.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Despite the micro-nature of micro-daily events, these appear to have macro-effects for employees, and organizations, as these findings show. Plus, having in mind that work environment is an affective context, in which individuals pass a great amount of time at work, it is likely that these situational influences affect diverse work-related outcomes, such as well-being.

In short, we can conclude that there is an influence of mindfulness in the relationship between what happens in workers' daily life, affect, well-being. Mindfulness appears to help employees to be aware of micro-daily events and to carry out a positive cognitive appraisal of those events, allowing them to increase their well-being.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Ana Junça-Silva  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6341-9771>

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