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## **A Review of Employee Well-Being and Innovativeness: An Opportunity for Mutual Benefit**

### **Abstract**

By drawing on the Job Demands and Resources Model, this theoretical article develops a framework to advance understanding of the relationship between employee wellbeing and innovativeness. Employee wellbeing is approached from burnout and work engagement perspectives. Burnout can be seen as an inhibitor of innovativeness, and work engagement as an antecedent to employee innovativeness. The promotion of work engagement can potentially set a positive wheel in motion: job-specific resources support work engagement which in turn enhances innovativeness. On the contrary, in conditions characterized by too high level of demands employees experience negative stress or even burnout, with subsequent negative effects on innovativeness. Innovativeness as such is demanding, too, and therefore taxing for the employees. In addition to understanding the dual impact of innovativeness on wellbeing, the identification of job-specific demands and resources is central to supporting employee wellbeing and innovativeness. The implications of the proposed framework for academic researchers and managers are discussed.

**Key words:** innovation, wellbeing, work engagement, burnout, Job Demands and Resources Model

## **Introduction**

To remain competitive in the global market, organizations must continuously develop innovative and high quality products and services, and renew their way of operating. In the heart of all innovation lies creative ideas and it is individual employees, who alone or in groups, generate, promote, discuss, modify and realize these ideas (Scott & Bruce, 1994). It is therefore not surprising that innovative employees are the chief currency for contemporary organizations and the question how to promote and support employees' innovativeness presents a key question that both academics and managers are facing.

Over the past year, a sizeable body of research has focused on identifying antecedents to innovative work behaviours and developing ways to better support employees in their creative endeavours (Janssen, Van De Vliert & West, 2004). These studies have focused on examining the effects of either personal and contextual factors or their interaction on innovation (for reviews, see e.g. Van Der Panne, Van Der Beers & Kleinknecht, 2003; Anderson, De Dreu & Nijstad, 2004). Many of these studies have examined the effects that isolated job features or personality characteristics exert on employee attitudes and behaviours relevant to innovation (Georgsdottir and Getz, 2004; Miron, Erez and Naveh, 2004; Ramamoorthy, Flood, Slattery and Sardesai, 2005). Although employee wellbeing has received increasing attention among scholars of human resource management and organizational psychologists and it is realized that innovativeness needs to be taken care of (Guest, 2002; Deery, 2002; Florida, 2002), innovation literature has paid surprisingly little attention to employee wellbeing and its relationship with innovativeness.

Our objective in this paper is to develop a framework for understanding the relationship between employee wellbeing and innovativeness and to explore how managers can promote employee wellbeing and innovativeness. We will start by discussing the concept of wellbeing from both burnout and work engagement perspectives by using the Job Demands and Resources Model developed by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Shaufeli (2001). We will then turn to explore the nature of innovativeness and its relationship with wellbeing. Our central argument is threefold. First, work engagement capturing a positive cognitive-affective

state of mind at work can be seen as a prerequisite for innovativeness. In contrast, employees, who suffer from the burnout symptoms, are not likely to produce creative solutions at work. Second, employee innovativeness can be supported by providing sufficient resources that foster employee work engagement and minimise the impact of potential job-specific demands. Finally, managers need to acknowledge that employee innovativeness as such can be a source of demands *or* resources. We conclude with practical implications regarding how managers can aim at supporting employee wellbeing and promoting innovativeness and directions for future research.

### **The Nature of Innovativeness**

Employee innovativeness referring to employees' propensity to innovate can be conceived as complex behaviour consisting of idea generation, idea promotion and idea realization with the aim of meeting organizational goals in novel ways (Kanter, 1988; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Individuals, alone or in groups, undertake innovative activities from the intention to derive anticipated benefits from innovative change. Creativity is central to innovativeness, but the concepts are not synonymous. Innovation can be seen as a successful and intentional implementation of creativity, which is more subjective and context specific by its nature (Miron, Erez & Naveh, 2004). Creativity as such may be limited to idea generation alone but by definition innovation produces benefits for the people involved in the innovative process (Anderson et al., 2004). Therefore, employee innovativeness requires creativity, but creativity does not always lead to an innovation.

Employee innovativeness requires that the individual is both able and willing to be innovative. With respect to abilities, above average general intellect, certain cognitive capabilities, general skills and task and context-specific knowledge, for example, facilitate innovativeness (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Taggar, 2002). Beyond knowledge and skills, innovativeness requires intrinsic motivation and a certain level of internal force that pushes the individual to persevere in the face of challenges inherent in the creative work (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Moreover, the internal force keeps the employee going even when the challenges are successfully overcome: it is about a positive tension and desire to excel. Consequently,

employees' initiative, flexibility, perseverance and willingness to go beyond their actual goal accomplishment in order to come up with novel and organizationally beneficial ideas characterise innovativeness (Georgsdottir & Getz, 2004). Often it is impossible to set goals for innovativeness, as it is so context and problem –specific. Innovativeness is therefore largely about discretionary extra role behaviours that go beyond the formal job requirements in complex and ambiguous conditions, and organizations are increasingly dependent on their employees' willingness to go the extra mile (Wolfe, 1994; Ramamoorthy et al., 2005).

### **Wellbeing at Work**

Employee wellbeing can be approached from two different perspectives, from a positive wellbeing and negative un-wellbeing approaches. Though the importance of mental health and positive wellbeing has been recognised for a long time (Jahoda, 1958), the vast majority of studies on employee wellbeing has focused on employee 'un-wellbeing', i.e. occupational stress or burnout. Recently, in line with the positive psychology movement advocated by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2000), researchers have started to pay increasing attention to positive work-related wellbeing other than lack of stress or burnout symptoms. For example, work engagement has gained popularity among researchers of work related wellbeing (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Cartwright and Holmes 2006). However, both wellbeing and un-wellbeing should be included in frameworks attempting to explain wellbeing as these two states are not antipodes but rather complement each other (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

### *Burnout*

While specific physical, affective or cognitive stressors at work such as role conflict or work overload may cause stress in the short term, burnout develops when an exposure to the stressors is prolonged (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Hakanen, 2004; Gonzáles-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2006). Burnout therefore is a serious stress syndrome, characterized by total physical and mental exhaustion, a cynical attitude to work and a decline in professional efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). As a consequence of burnout, employees withdraw from their jobs emotionally and cognitively, distance themselves

from their work and its objectives and their performance suffers (Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke, 2004). Empirical research has demonstrated that burnout affects negatively job satisfaction, organizational commitment, extra-role behaviours and in-role behaviours (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Bakker et al., 2004; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006).

### *Work Engagement*

Work engagement captures an enduring, positive and fulfilling affective-cognitive state of mind at work, characterized by *vigour*, *dedication* and *absorption* at work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Hakanen, 2004). Vigor refers to a high level of positive energy at work and willingness to invest one's efforts in the job even in the face of difficulties. Dedication in turn is characterised by inspiration, sense of significance and enthusiasm. Absorption captures employees' full concentration, which may even lead to difficulties in detaching oneself from work. Although research has indicated that burnout and engagement are independent states, they correlate negatively. Therefore, not completely, but to some extent, "burnout erodes engagement: energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness" (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, 34). Work engagement has been found to predict self-assessed health, work ability, commitment and job satisfaction, and have negative associations, for example, with turnover intentions, absenteeism and early retirement (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer & Schaufeli, 2003; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Hakanen, 2004).

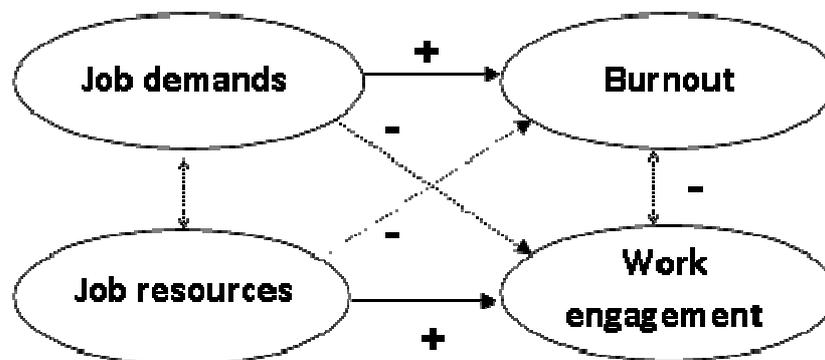
### *Wellbeing and Job Demands-Resources Model*

In line with the view that burnout and work engagement are independent, although negatively correlated states, they are evoked by two distinct processes, named energetic process and motivational process that stem from demands and resources inherent in every job (see Figure 1) (Bakker, et al., 2003). The energetic process refers to the negative demanding aspects that employees may sometimes experience as so strenuous and depleting that they lead to stress, and eventually to burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). These demands can be any physical, psychological, social or organizational aspect of the job that requires physiological or psychological effort on behalf of the employee. The demands, which are job and role specific, are hence associated

with a certain level of costs. When these costs become too high and in the absence of balancing resources, employees cannot cope with them and as a consequence, they wear out (Demerouti et al., 2001). This results in burnout and reduced work engagement.

In addition to demands, every job has certain resources – whether physical, psychological, social and organizational - that aid employees to carry out their work and that are intrinsically fulfilling and rewarding, creating a motivational process (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). These resources counterbalance the job demands and help employees to cope with the occasionally consuming aspects of work, thereby buffering against the negative effect of demands on wellbeing and the costs associated with them. The resources also help employees to fulfil their work related goals and as such stimulate personal growth and intrinsic satisfaction with work. Consequently, as empirical research suggests, job related resources are positively associated with employee work engagement and help preventing burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006) (Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Job Demands and Resources and Employee Wellbeing.*



## **The Relationship between Employee Wellbeing and Innovativeness**

### *Burnout and Innovativeness*

While a certain level of stress and pressure can drive employee to excel, long-lasting stress and burnout are bound to negatively influence employee creativity and innovativeness (Amabile, Hadley & Kramer, 2002). Employees

who suffer from burnout are likely to be detached from their work and struggle to carry out the duties that are formally required of them (Bakker et al., 2004). Consequently, they will not only be unwilling but most likely unable to innovate and invest their effort in something that is often seen as additional. For example, Cropanzano, Rupp and Byrne (2003) have shown that emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour. In line with this finding, workplaces where employees' stress levels are high have been found to be characterised by lower levels of commitment, excitement about work and motivation (Guest and Conway, 2004). Therefore, job-related demands, when enduring, exhaust employees, and thereby negatively affect their innovativeness (Figure 2).

Lack of innovativeness should, however, not only be seen as an outcome of burnout. Rather, innovativeness can turn into a source of demands in the job and thereby contribute to the development of burnout. Although the three separate stages of innovation (generation stage, promotion stage and realization stage) distinguished by the innovation literature may misleadingly suggest a straightforward process, researchers unanimously agree that innovative processes are non-linear, complex and involve several facets of the organization and its members and environment (Thamhain, 2003). Problems and incongruities characterise innovative work and one innovative course of action is always in competition with alternative courses of actions (Kanter, 1988). The complexities involved are fortified in technology-based environments, in which a large number of factors beyond organizational boundaries including, for example, collaboration with other firms and customers may contribute to innovative processes.

Innovative work is likely to load employees with extra tasks that require complex problem solving, increasing the total workload both in quantitative and qualitative terms beyond that which is regular (Janssen et al., 2004). Uncertainty about the outcomes of innovativeness and the usefulness of time and resources invested may contribute to uncertainty surrounding employee work role and tasks. For example, Groth and Peters (1999) report in their study of over 1700 individuals that fear is among the most cited barriers to creativity in organizations. Interestingly, it is not only fear of failure and rejection that is perceived to prevent innovativeness, but also fear

of success and its implications. Conflicting approaches to problem solving, competition and resistance to change that may occur in response to innovativeness constitute demands that can be exhausting to the employee (Tomkovick & Miller, 2000; Janssen et al., 2004). In other words, innovative individuals often rock the boat, interrupting organizational procedures and practices and fostering competition between different interest groups.

Creative work may therefore appear subversive and unsettling for the parties involved, because it disrupts existing patterns of routines, thought and life thereby causing insecurity and resistance to change among the persons who are affected by the innovation. Consequently, relations with co-workers may suffer (Janssen, 2003). Employee innovativeness may also constitute a threat to managers and thereby negatively influence employee-manager relationships. Managers may for example be concerned about the changes, risks and costs associated with novel ideas for which they are ultimately held responsible (Janssen et al., 2004). Managers may also be concerned with their position and power in the face of employee innovativeness. Sometimes, innovativeness can even be dysfunctional for both the innovative individuals and their employing organizations, if judged by the standards of invested effort, time and monetary constraints (Miron et al., 2004; Janssen, 2004).

Consequently, while burnout hinders innovativeness, the challenges, irregularities and novel solutions surrounding innovativeness constitute job-related demands that contribute to the level of stimulation at work (see Figure 2). While a certain level of stimulation is beneficial and may provide the extra push needed to excel, too high a level of challenge turns in the long run into a taxing demand, and subsequently to increased stress levels and burnout thereby hindering creativity.

### *Work Engagement and Innovativeness*

Turning to the positive aspect of employee wellbeing, the concept of work engagement appears particularly relevant to the promotion and support of innovativeness in organizations. When employees are positive about their work, they are in return likely to engage in activities that are beneficial for the organization on the whole (Organ, 1988). Sometimes the experience of work engagement may itself even be equal to high performance or it occurs simultaneously with innovativeness (Quinn, 2005; Amabile Barsade, Mueller

& Staw, 2005). However, Amabile et al (2005) convincingly demonstrate in their longitudinal study that the more positive the employee is about his or her work, the more likely is his or her creativity in a work setting. A study by Eisenberger, Jones, Stinglhamber, Schanok and Randall (2005) indicates that a perceived high level of challenge and the possibility to use skills predict employees' engagement in extra-role performance partially through creating a positive mood. In other words, if employees experience an appropriate level of challenge and can put their skills to full use, they are more likely to report a positive mood. Positive mood in turn promotes helping behaviours, creative thinking and suggestions that help the organization to better fulfil its objectives (George & Brief, 1992; Eisenberger et al., 2005). Similar to work engagement, flow, capturing an enjoyable peak experience has been found to be positively associated with employee initiative and intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Hakanen, 2004), which in turn are seen as prerequisites for innovative behaviour (Andersen et al., 2004). This leads us to conclude that work engagement as a positive affective-cognitive state of mind indeed functions as an antecedent to innovativeness.

Despite its undoubtedly dark side discussed earlier, innovativeness has the potential of turning into resources with subsequent positive outcomes. As Quinn (2005: 632) concludes on the basis of his study,

“high performance experience is consequential for the individuals who experience it, because when people experience high performance, they also tend to derive more joy from their work, feel like they have more control over their work, and worry less”

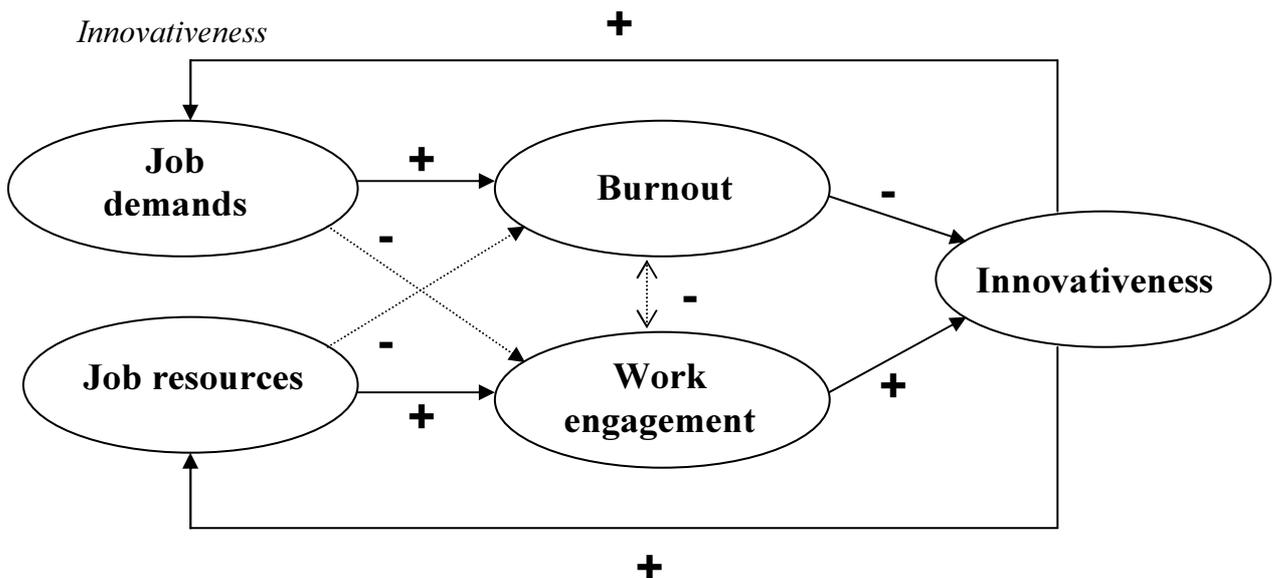
From the employee perspective, the benefits of innovation therefore go beyond economic benefits related to potential salary increases and bonuses and can include for example learning, personal growth, recognition, increased satisfaction, improved group cohesiveness and better interpersonal communication (West & Anderson, 1996; Ford & Sullivan, 2004; Andersen et al., 2004). In addition, researchers have noted that innovativeness can be seen as a coping strategy or an attempt to improve one's work environment and hence actually provides a mechanism to improve one's wellbeing (Janssen

et al., 2004). These not-always quantifiable outcomes of innovation, are valuable and should be acknowledged as such when promoting and supporting innovativeness.

In the context of creative work, the potentially positive outcomes of innovativeness present valuable job-specific resources that will further foster employee engagement in work and protect the employee from the demanding aspects of the work. For example, Thamhain (2003) points out in his analysis of an innovative work environment, that the most significant predictors of innovative performance are resources that, in the end, are derived from innovative work itself. In his study, the three most significant predictors of innovative performance were 1) professionally stimulating and challenging work, 2) opportunities for accomplishment and recognition and 3) the ability to resolve conflict and problems. Note-worthily, factors such as salary, organizational structure and the characteristics of the team and project failed to have a significant association with innovative performance.

Summarizing the relationship between work engagement and innovation (see Figure 2), work engagement as a positive affective-cognitive state of mind affects employee innovativeness positively and mediates the effects of a supportive work environment and resources on innovativeness. Innovativeness as such can provide a further resource that fosters work engagement, provided that its taxing effects are managed appropriately.

*Figure 2. The Job-Demands and Resources Model Applied to Wellbeing and Innovativeness*



## **Discussion and Implications**

In this article, we highlighted the importance of promoting employee wellbeing and innovativeness. Employee creativity and innovativeness are multifaceted and multidimensional: not something that can be kept in a box and taken out when one arrives at the office. Rather, being creative is about distinct ways of 'thinking' and 'being', which need to be cultivated and taken care of (Florida, 2002).

Following the Job Demands and Resources Model by Bakker et al. (2001), we suggested that employee wellbeing and ultimately innovativeness are influenced by two distinct processes which begin with the demands and resources specific to each job. In a workplace, where job related resources are in place and built on and where demands are kept under control, employees are likely to be positively engaged in their work and consequently display innovativeness. Innovativeness as such can function as a resource, for example, when employees are given appropriate support, when they receive positive encouragement and feedback for their creativity and when their contribution is recognised. The promotion of employee wellbeing has hence the potential of offering a win-win situation by setting the positive motivational process in motion and turning innovation into a further resource for wellbeing and innovation that benefits both the employees and the organization.

It is important for managers to identify the potential demands and resources in each job and realize their independent and interactive effects on employee wellbeing, and subsequently on innovativeness. Promoting a work environment that provides sufficient resources, meets employees' professional needs and ambitions and eliminates potential stressors may, in the end, be achieved with relatively little effort compared to reengineering work processes. It does, however, require skilful management and time for reflection: managers need to understand employees' perspectives, listen to their needs and concerns, and take care to identify what employees actually enjoy most in their jobs, and what is most demanding for them. At the same time, care must be taken not to overwhelm the employees with too difficult and too restricted tasks, or with too much control. As Tomkovick and Miller (2000: 419) conclude in their recommendations for innovation management,

'if you want to kill something, just squeeze all the joy out of it, and it will die. The reciprocal is also true. If we want innovation to flourish, we need to make work our play...or at least play at work'.

The taxing side of innovative work needs to be recognised by both practitioners and researchers: innovativeness can turn into a demand. Essentially, innovativeness is about change that involves risk-taking and that can be threatening for the parties involved. Innovativeness may hence may lead to unintended costs for the innovators involved despite their intention to produce anticipated benefits, thereby inhibiting employee wellbeing (Janssen, et al., 2004). When the negative side of innovativeness is recognized and appropriate measures are taken to, for example, ensure good relations, a trusting environment and a just reward mechanism, the demanding side of innovativeness can be managed.

Our framework depicted in Figure 2 opens a number of areas for future research. The logic pertaining to the mediating role of wellbeing from both the burnout and work engagement perspective requires empirical testing. Because the proposed framework is quite general, empirical research needs to specify demands and resources depending on the context of the empirical study. Generalizing from research on innovation promotion, time pressure and work load may be among the most commonly experienced demands that negatively influence employee innovativeness through burnout (Amabile et al., 1996; 2002). Good team-member relations and trust may in turn be among the key resources necessary for employee wellbeing and innovativeness (Amabile et al., 1996; Ramamoorthy et al., 2005). Future research should also examine more specifically the ways in which innovativeness influences employee wellbeing. Our argument was that innovativeness can potentially function as a resource or a demand. However, this is likely to depend on factors such as the moderating role of the organizational climate or other resources and demands present in the job.

## **Conclusions**

Our main purpose in this article was to provide a framework for understanding the relationship between employee wellbeing and innovativeness and provide insights into how they could be promoted. Our central argument was threefold. First, employee innovativeness is negatively influenced by burnout

and likely to occur when employees are engaged in their work. Second, innovativeness itself has to be managed as a source of demands and resources that in turn influence burnout and engagement. Third, by supporting the resources and minimizing the demands that arise from innovative work and the work environment in general, organizations have the potential of setting a positive wheel of wellbeing and innovativeness in motion for the benefit of both the employees and the organization.

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