



Review

Work engagement or burnout: Which comes first? A meta-analysis of longitudinal evidence



Laurențiu P. Maricuțoiu*, Coralia Sulea, Alina Iancu

Department of Psychology, West University of Timișoara, Romania

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Work engagement
Burnout
Meta-analysis
Review
Cross-lagged relationships

ABSTRACT

Currently, burnout (BU) and work engagement (WE) are considered different forms of workplace well-being, negatively related that might even co-occur, or as direct opposites and mutually exclusive. These contrasting views generate difficulties regarding the true nature of the relationship between the two concepts. In the present paper, we aim at clarifying this issue by testing the cross-lagged effects between BU and WE. We conducted systematic database searches using keywords relevant for WE, BU and design type (e.g., longitudinal), and we found 25 eligible research studies ($N_{\text{total}} = 13271$ participants). The selected papers a) reported a longitudinal research study; b) included measures of BU and WE, and c) reported the correlation matrix between BU and WE at all measurement moments. First, we used meta-analytical formulas to compute the averaged correlations between BU and WE. Second, we used the averaged effects to complete a correlation matrix, which was used to test the cross-lagged effects between BU and WE, using structural equations modeling. On the entire sample of studies, we found insignificant cross-lagged effects between BU and WE. However, when the time-lag between the two measurement moments was used as a moderator, significant reciprocal cross-lagged effects were found between exhaustion and WE, at 12-month time lag. Notably, it appears that the validity of causal perspective depends on the size of the time lag.

1. Introduction

Burnout (BU) and work engagement (WE) have significant implications for employee health and organizational performance (e.g., [Taris, 2006](#); [Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011](#)), therefore they represent high-interest topics for researchers and practitioners. However, because the two concepts are rather highly correlated ([Halbesleben, 2010](#)), the relationship between BU and WE has generated debates in the literature. Initially, researchers considered that WE is the opposite of BU ([Maslach & Leiter, 1997](#); [Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O'Boyle, 2012](#)), and that both concepts can be assessed using the same questionnaire. In response to this perspective, other research studies showed that BU and WE have different correlation patterns with variables of interest (e.g., job characteristics) ([Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008](#)); that WE has incremental effects over BU in longitudinal studies (e.g., [Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012](#)); or that BU and WE have different correlation patterns with personality variables such as neuroticism or extraversion ([Langelaan, Bakker, Van Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006](#)). Based on these findings, researchers concluded that BU and WE are constructs that describe connected, yet distinct forms of well-being ([Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014](#)).

In the present review, we start from the assumption that BU and WE are distinct and yet correlated forms of well-being. Following this conceptualization, some researchers suggested that the strong correlation between them (i.e., values ranging between 0.30 and 0.50, according to [Halbesleben, 2010](#)) could be the result of a causal relationship between the two forms of well-being. For example, [Van Beek, Kranenburg, Taris, and Schaufeli \(2013\)](#) suggested that highly engaged students are less vulnerable to exhaustion (a BU component), as compared with students with low engagement. Consequently, [Van Beek et al. \(2013\)](#) considered that WE is an antecedent of low exhaustion. Nonetheless, based on longitudinal designs, other researchers reported that rather BU is a significant predictor of (low) WE ([Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014](#)). To the best of our knowledge, these divergent perspectives were not previously addressed in a systematic manner. Moreover, most studies addressed the relationship between the two concepts based on a cross-sectional methodology, which makes it impossible to investigate causal relationships. Except for [Salmela-Aro and Upadyaya \(2014\)](#), longitudinal research studies focus their analyses on understanding causal relationships between well-being (BU and WE) and various outcomes (e.g., performance), and not on the reciprocal relationships between BU and WE. Therefore, we aim to clarify the

* Corresponding author at: West University of Timișoara, Department of Psychology, 4 Vasile Pârvan Blvd., Room 303, 300223 Timișoara, Romania.
E-mail address: laurentiu.maricutoiu@e-uvt.ro (L.P. Maricuțoiu).

relationship between BU and WE, using the data reported by longitudinal studies. To achieve this goal, we integrated meta-analytical calculations to combine results from different longitudinal studies and structural equation modeling procedures to test different cross-lagged models of the possible temporal order of BU and WE.

1.1. Burnout

Burnout is characterized by three dimensions (Maslach & Leiter, 1997), namely exhaustion, cynicism (or depersonalization), and inefficacy (or reduced personal accomplishment). Specifically, exhaustion refers to the feeling of being drained, emotionally and physically, having low levels of energy; cynicism is conceptualized as a detached attitude towards work or people at work. Importantly, Bresó, Salanova, and Schaufeli (2007) draw attention to the problem of the third dimension of BU, initially called personal accomplishment, due to its positively worded items, and proposed an alternative dimension, named professional inefficacy, with negatively worded items, that should be used to measure burnout. Previous meta-analyses (e.g., Lee & Ashforth, 1996) indicated that inefficacy (measured as personal accomplishment) is relatively weakly correlated with exhaustion and cynicism (correlation values around 0.35, after reliability corrections). Consequently, researchers suggested that exhaustion and cynicism constitute a general factor, called *core burnout* (Green, Walkey, & Taylor, 1991).

To summarize, burnout is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of three dimensions that are not very strongly correlated. Therefore, in the present review, we will compute separate correlation values for the relations of each BU dimension and WE.

1.2. Work engagement

WE is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). In brief, the authors characterize the three dimensions as follows: vigor is defined by an increased energy, mental resilience, and effort invested in one’s work; dedication is experienced when the individual takes pride in his or her work, perceives it as significant and feels enthusiastic about it; and absorption is defined by being deeply immersed in one’s work when the individual finds it difficult to detach of what he is working. WE is mainly measured with the UWES, a three-dimension questionnaire which encompasses 17 items referring to work or studies (Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002; Schaufeli, Martínez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002) or 9 items (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). Vigor and dedication are considered the core dimensions WE (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011), considering that in some cases the third dimension (absorption) might not be a unique dimension of WE (e.g., Schaufeli et al., 2008).

Unlike BU, the correlations between WE dimensions are positive and have large values (e.g., 0.62, 0.67, Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), therefore most researchers usually compute an overall score of WE (e.g., Mauno, 2010). Because of the large covariance between WE facets, in the present review, we use WE as an overall concept, and we will aggregate all correlations reported on the WE scales into a single correlation value.

1.3. Work engagement and burnout: conceptual, methodological and relational issues

Maslach and Leiter (1997) considered that BU occurs when WE deteriorates, and vigor, dedication, and absorption transform into exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy, respectively. Therefore, this perspective considers that WE can be measured by using reversed scores of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI, MBI-GS; 1981, 1996). These ideas were supported by the results of a meta-analysis of cross-sectional studies that

summarized the correlations between BU and WE (Cole et al., 2012). However, subsequent research and analyses demonstrated that BU and WE are distinct concepts, and cannot be measured with the same instrument, even if they are opposed to one another. Moreover, core burnout and WE components are considered opposites of each other placed on two distinct bipolar dimensions (i.e., energy —vigor and exhaustion and identification —dedication and cynicism) (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

Schaufeli and Salanova (2011) argue that when an employee does not feel burned-out, it does not automatically imply that he or she is engaged in his or her work. Moreover, the correlations between the two forms of well-being are small enough to allow for the co-occurrence of BU and WE (i.e., average uncorrected values of -0.38 between overall WE and exhaustion, Halbesleben, 2010). Therefore, WE needs to be measured in its own right, and not with BU instruments. This is important because the relationships between the two forms of well-being can be analyzed only if the WE and BU are measured independently (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). Even if the correlations between WE and BU seem to be placed in a range of -0.40 and -0.60 , Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) reported that, in some cases, we could find weaker correlations for the relationship between absorption and MBI scales, and in other cases higher correlations between UWES and inefficacy.

1.4. Engagement as an antecedent of burnout

The classical theoretical perspectives consider that, at first, people feel secure and also engaged in their jobs— when certain conditions are provided — and burnout appears when work engagement erodes mainly due to unfavorable circumstances (e.g., unfairness) (Maslach & Leiter, 1997) or experiences disillusionment and loss of significance (Pines, 1993). Importantly, previous studies showed that well-being levels could fluctuate over time (Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Feldt, & Schaufeli, 2016), therefore it is possible to move from one work-related well-being form to another. For example, an employee can move from feeling engaged to feeling *merely* satisfied or even burned-out, and also the other way around, from ill-being to well-being. Specifically, it is possible to anticipate that, depending on certain organizational conditions, WE can be an antecedent of BU (e.g., due to impaired social exchange processes, Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011).

However, recent research suggested that lack of study engagement (i.e., not enjoying one’s study activities) makes students vulnerable to exhaustion, whereas, at the opposite pole, students who experience positive and activating emotions regarding own work (i.e., high study engagement) are less prone to develop study burnout (Van Beek et al., 2013). These results indicate that the experience of well-being might prevent the individual from experiencing ill-being. We can also understand this perspective of the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998) which argues that the when experiencing positive emotions, as engagement entails, the individual might have available more options to create resources and therefore less likely to experience ill-being (e.g., burnout).

Therefore, based on these ideas, we formulated the study’s main hypothesis.

H1. Work engagement is a significant predictor of future low burnout, incremental to the auto-correlation effect of burnout.

1.5. Burnout as an antecedent of work engagement

A recent study showed that student engagement was negatively predicted by student BU: one year later students’ engagement was negatively affected by the BU the students previously experienced (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014). In their 2012 study, Hakanen and Schaufeli found that work-related well-being impacts general well-being over time and also that exhaustion and depersonalization at time 1 are negatively related to vigor and dedication at time 2 (after three

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4930040>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4930040>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)