



Areas of worklife as predictors of occupational health – A validation study in two German samples



Sarah S. Brom^{a,*}, Gabriele Buruck^{a,**}, Irén Horváth^a, Peter Richter^a, Michael P. Leiter^b

^a Department of Psychology, Technische Universität Dresden, Germany

^b Department of Psychology, Acadia University, Wolfville, NS, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 November 2014

Received in revised form 8 May 2015

Accepted 10 May 2015

Keywords:

Areas of worklife

Well-being

Burnout

Work environment

Resources

Psychosocial factors

ABSTRACT

Background/aim: Occupational health largely depends on the perceived fit between the employee's abilities and workplace demands/factors. The Areas of Worklife Scale (AWS) specifies six areas that are particularly relevant in this respect: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. The current article aimed at investigating the factorial structure and the criterion validity of the German translation of the AWS.

Methods: Data were collected in two samples. In study 1, 1455 public service workers were surveyed using the six areas of worklife and well-being. In study 2, to investigate the well-established relationship between the AWS and burnout, the scale was administered to a nursing sample ($N = 443$).

Results: High internal consistencies for all six scales were obtained in both studies. Exploratory as well as confirmatory factor analysis replicated the theoretically assumed six scale structure of the AWS. Evidence of criterion validity was found by multiple linear regression analysis with well-being as dependent measure (study 1). SEM analyses supported the hypothesized relationships between the six AWS dimensions and burnout (study 2). As predicted by Leiter and Maslach (2004, 2009), only some areas were directly associated with the health-related outcomes (well-being and burnout). In line with previous work, workload and values proved to be the most critical areas of worklife.

Conclusions: The six areas of worklife have been shown to be significant predictors of health-related outcomes. Based on the current studies, the German translation of the AWS can be proposed as a reliable and valid instrument to identify and specify critical work-related areas for occupational health.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier GmbH. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

It is debatable whether there are still “good” workplaces, or if the new challenges that arise from globalization make healthy work impossible (Beck, 2012). The highly competitive market requires cost optimization; scarce resources lead to cost cuts in particular in health care and social departments. Fewer employees have to cope with more tasks in less time (Burke & Cooper, 2008). Even though features of psychological strain (work factors such as work task, work organization and social system) have become especially

important in work design, they have rarely been included in work organizational processes. Consequences of this omission become visible not only in direct costs (e.g., absence, retirement) but especially in indirect costs for the workers such as lower quality of life (Wittchen et al., 2012).

1.1. The role of resources and stressors for occupational health

Theories of occupational stress not only address the impact of stressors due to psychosocial load, they also consider the adequacy of resources to deal successfully with the work environment (Perrewe & Ganster, 2010). In this line, the activation of employees' resources is a central building block in the development of organizations. Some definitions describe resources as an independent entity. For instance Bakker and colleagues state that “Job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are either/or: Functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Technische Universität Dresden, 01062 Dresden, Germany. Tel.: +49 0351 463 33924; fax: +49 0351 463 33589.

** Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Technische Universität Dresden, 01062 Dresden, Germany. Tel.: +49 0351 463 36894.

E-mail addresses: Sarah.Brom@tu-dresden.de (S.S. Brom), buruck@psychologie.tu-dresden.de (G. Buruck).

and psychological costs [and] stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. Hence, resources are not only necessary to deal with job demands, but they also are important in their own right” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). This corresponds with models identifying factors that contribute autonomously to healthiness, irrespective of the reduction of stressors. Examples of models that emphasize resources as predictors of work-related health outcomes are the *Conservation of Resources model* (Hobfoll, 1989), the *Stress-as-Offense-to-Self-concept* (SOS, Semmer, Jacobshagen, Meier, & Elfering, 2007), and the *Job Demands-Resources-model* (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). According to the *Conservation of Resources model* of Hobfoll (1989), individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources, including objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies. In contrast, the *SOS-model’s* starting point is self-esteem, and the importance of lack of fairness and reciprocity is derived from its contribution toward people’s self-esteem (Semmer, McGrath, & Beehr, 2005). Finally, the *Job Demands-Resources-model* (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) describes that high job demands exhaust the employees’ mental and physical resources and therefore lead to the depletion of energy and to health problems, referred to as health impairment process. In contrast, job resources foster employee engagement and extra-role performance. With different approaches and emphasis, all these models underline the importance of resources in the context of occupational health.

1.2. Another approach to occupational health: Person-Environment fit

Another approach that looks more closely into the relationship people develop with their workplace is provided by the *Person-Environment fit models* (P-E fit, e.g., Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). The person-environment fit models describe a good match between the individual and the work environment, that is present when both share the same basic features (*supplementary fit*), or an entity provides something, that is needed by the other (*complementary fit*), or both (Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2011). The findings by Oh et al. (2014) in a cross-culture meta-analysis suggest that the effects of person-organization and person-job fit are (relatively) stronger in North America and, to a lesser degree, Europe than in East Asia.

Based on the P-E-fit-approach, Leiter and Maslach (2004) proposed a framework describing the interplay of resources and stressors as the *Burnout-Engagement-Continuum*. Leiter and Maslach, pioneers in the field of burnout-research, conceptualized the relationship between individuals and their work as a continuum between two poles: the negative experience of *burnout* on the one pole and the positive experience of *job engagement* on the other pole (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). The model incorporates job-person incongruity as a result of maladjustment or -adaption of the person’s needs and expectations to the presented work or organizational characteristics. A subjectively experienced weak fit or congruency in one or more aspects of working life can operate as a stressor and thereby threaten employees’ well-being. In relation to the continuum, the model proposes that with increasing *misfit* in relevant work characteristics, the probability of suffering from burnout symptoms increases (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). In this line, a job-person mismatch is often defined as organizational-, job- or individual-weakness (Chen, Wu, & Wei, 2012).

1.3. The six Areas of Worklife

With the aim to specify work factors or characteristics, in which job-person incongruities are predictive of burnout, Leiter and Maslach (1999) reviewed theoretical and empirical literature

on job stress and burnout. Six areas of worklife that are considered most relevant for the relationship people develop with their work were identified: *workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values*. The *workload dimension* is especially important in terms of burnout development. When job demands exceed human limits, emotional exhaustion is most likely the consequence (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). For example, Kouvonen, Toppinen-Tanner, Kivisto, Huuhtanen, & Kalimo (2005) found that specifically high workload was associated with high emotional exhaustion. The *control dimension* encompasses the perceived capacity of people to influence decisions relating to their work, to exercise personal autonomy, and to gain access to resources (e.g., social support, reward) in order to complete their work. Control has been shown to buffer high work demands (e.g., de Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman, & Bongers, 2003). The *reward dimension* refers to the power of reinforcement to shape behavior and points to the extent to which rewards (monetary, social and intrinsic) are consistent with the individual’s expectations (e.g., Effort-Reward-Imbalance-model, Siegrist, 1996; Siegrist et al., 2004). When people perceive that they are neglected by the organization’s material and social reward system, they are likely to feel out of sync with its values. The overall quality of social interaction at work is assessed by the *community dimension*. Research on issues of interpersonal conflicts, informal social support, closeness, and capacity to work as a team identifies the social context as key factor for burnout (e.g., Halbesleben, 2006). The *fairness dimension* captures the extent to which decisions and resource allocation at work are perceived as fair and equitable. Literature on equity and social justice points toward the importance of the perception of equity or reciprocity (e.g., Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). Finally, the ideals and motivation that attract people to their jobs are covered by the *values dimension*. A job-person incongruence in the values dimension (e.g., due to change/modification in values) can undermine people’s engagement and even lead to counterproductive behavior. In the last decade, research discovered the value congruency to be key to engagement and burnout, respectively (e.g., Dylag, Jaworek, Karwowski, Kozuszniak, & Marek, 2013; Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009; Siegall & McDonald, 2004). However, a work setting where the employee perceives a match in all other dimensions is most likely to be consistent with the personal values.

Early models on job characteristics already identified aspects of the areas of worklife as key to health outcomes at work, e.g., the first two areas are key factors in the well-established Job-Demand-Control model (Johnson & Hall, 1988; Karasek, 1979). Interestingly, even though labeled differently, conceptually the six areas are already included in the five core characteristics of the Job Characteristics model by Hackman and Oldham (1980): autonomy represents control, feedback is an aspect of community, skill variety and task identity refer to workload, task significance points toward the importance of values at work. The mediating critical psychological states underline the importance of values and control, whereas the moderator “context satisfaction” reflects aspects of reward, social support, and fairness. Also Schaufeli and Buunk (2002) in their summary of 25 years of burnout research pointed out the following job characteristics as possible reasons for job burnout: quantitative job demands, role problems, lack of social support, lack of self-regulatory activity, and client-related demands. In sum, theoretical and empirical research underpins the importance of the six dimensions identified by Leiter and Maslach (1999). These six dimensions are assessed with the Areas of Worklife Scale (AWS, Leiter & Maslach, 1999) and have been shown to be reliable and valid for samples in the US, Canada, Finland, and Italy (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Confirmatory and criterion validity of the Areas of Worklife Scale were also confirmed for the Spanish translation (Gascón et al., 2013).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/317358>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/317358>

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