



The energy and identification continua of burnout and work engagement: Developmental profiles over eight years



Anne Mäkikangas*, Katriina Hyvönen, Taru Feldt

Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Burnout
Work engagement
Person-centered
Longitudinal

ABSTRACT

Understanding of the mutual developmental dynamics between burnout and work engagement is limited due to the lack of longitudinal studies with long follow-ups and multi-wave data. This study sought to identify subgroups of employees characterized by long-term exhaustion-vigor (energy continuum) and cynicism-dedication (identification continuum). A further important aim was to investigate differences between the identified subgroups in their experiences of progress in their personal work goals. Five-wave, eight-year follow-up data among Finnish white-collar professionals ($n = 168$) were studied using Latent Profile Analysis (LPA). The analysis yielded three exhaustion-vigor subgroups: 1) “Low stable exhaustion – high stable vigor” ($n = 141$), 2) “Fluctuating exhaustion and vigor” ($n = 19$), and 3) “Stable average exhaustion – decreasing vigor” ($n = 8$). Three subgroups were also found for cynicism-dedication: 1) “Low stable cynicism – high stable dedication” ($n = 124$), 2) “Increasing cynicism – decreasing dedication” ($n = 27$), and 3) “Decreasing cynicism – increasing dedication” ($n = 17$). Exhaustion and vigor were found to be stable and mutually exclusive experiences for the great majority of the participants. However, mean changes were also detected – especially in vigor – but these were rare. A notable finding was that the levels of and changes in cynicism and dedication showed opposite trends in each subgroup: among the majority of the participants (74%), the levels of cynicism and dedication were stable and inversely related, while among one-third their levels simultaneously changed in the reverse direction. The most successful progress in personal work goals was found in the groups described by the identification continuum, i.e., in the groups of “Low stable cynicism – high stable dedication” and “Decreasing cynicism – increasing dedication”.

1. Introduction

During recent decades, increasing attention has been paid to the relation between job burnout and its opposite positive pole work engagement (for meta-analyses, see Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O’Boyle, 2012; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). Despite several years of progress in this research domain, little is known about their mutual relation in the long term, as the few existing longitudinal studies have utilized rather short follow-up periods. In addition, the previous research has offered a rather static and generic perspective of the development of burnout and work engagement which, theoretically, should instead be regarded as progressive and dynamic (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Leiter, 1993; Maslach, 1982; Shirom, 2003) and individualized (Leiter & Maslach, 2016; Mäkikangas, Feldt, Kinnunen, & Tolvanen, 2012). These features of the current burnout-work engagement literature prompt a call for more research on the long-term developmental profiles of burnout and work engagement.

This study sought to deepen understanding of the connection between burnout and work engagement by investigating their relation over an eight-year period, using a statistically innovative person-centered approach (Bergman, Magnusson, & El-Khoury, 2003; Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2016) which captures burnout and work engagement experiences simultaneously *within* the individual over time. Investigation of change and stability profiles yields a more realistic view of the temporal and developmental dynamism of an employee’s experience of well-being. This approach also leads to a better theoretical understanding, as it enables us to identify typical and atypical long-term developmental paths and directions of change in burnout and work engagement.

This study makes three primary contributions to the existing person-centered burnout-work engagement studies (Mäkikangas et al., 2012). First, we examine the long-term development of burnout and work engagement by using a dataset with more measurements and a longer follow-up than previously. Thus, the recommended criterion for a longitudinal study, i.e., three or more measurements, is

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, P.O. Box 35, 40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland.
E-mail address: anne.makikangas@jyu.fi (A. Mäkikangas).

met (Kelloway & Francis, 2013). Second, instead of investigating the interconnections of separately analyzed burnout and work engagement profiles, long-term profiles of burnout and work engagement are assessed simultaneously (cf. Mäkikangas et al., 2012). Consequently, the present study produces a better understanding of the different naturally occurring longitudinal burnout-work engagement profiles in a given study population. Third, this study contributes to the literature by showing for the first time how employees' appraisals of their goal progress vary over time in different longitudinal burnout-work engagement profiles. Personal work goals are important from both the individual and organizational perspectives since goals guide the behavioral orientations of individuals (Pomaki, Maes, & ter Doest, 2004). Personal work goals can also reflect how employees adjust to changing work contexts, which require increasing proactivity and adaptability (e.g., Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hyvönen et al., 2016; Inkson, 2006).

In this section, the concepts of burnout and work engagement are introduced along with empirical and statistical evidence, based on both variable- and person-centered research, on their relationship. As the topic of this study is on the *long-term development* of work engagement and burnout, both the theoretical views and empirical findings relating to their separate and simultaneous long-term development are in focus. Finally, we investigate differences between the burnout-work engagement profiles in employees' appraisals of their personal work goal progress. Progress in personal work goals refers to the extent to which an individual perceives that their meaningful, personally salient work-related goals are progressing and will be realized over time (Klug & Maier, 2015; Wiese & Freund, 2005). Thus, the last part of this introduction will focus on the personal work goal literature.

2. Burnout and work engagement: concepts and associations

Job burnout has several definitions, of which the most utilized and prominent in the work psychological literature conceptualizes job burnout as a work-related stress syndrome comprising three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy (see Leiter, Bakker, & Maslach, 2014; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). Exhaustion is characterized by feelings of being depleted of one's emotional and physical resources and feelings of fatigue; cynicism is characterized by distancing oneself from one's work and holding a negative view of one's job, and reduced professional efficacy is characterized by the belief that one is incapable of fulfilling one's tasks and responsibilities at work (Maslach et al., 1996).

Several definitions have also been offered for work engagement (see e.g., Mäkikangas et al., 2012). The most commonly used of these conceptualizes work engagement as a positive, fulfilling work-related cognitive-affective state of mind, characterized by the dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Vigor refers to a high level of energy and mental resilience at work; dedication refers to a sense of meaningfulness and enthusiasm towards one's job, and absorption is characterized by a state of full concentration and immersion in one's job (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

As work engagement was conceived as the opposite pole to burnout and as a theoretical tool for understanding work-related well-being as a positive experience (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli et al., 2002), they share similar definitional roots and thus can be considered "fellow-travelers". In the circumplex model of employee well-being (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011; see also Mäkikangas et al., 2015), in accordance with their levels of pleasure and activation, burnout and work engagement are classified as opposite states of well-being. That is, job burnout is characterized by low activation and displeasure, and work engagement by high activation and pleasure. Consequently, in the theoretical sense, burnout and work engagement are seen as representing the reverse sides of employee well-being.

During the last ten years, the theoretical interest has turned to the core dimensions of burnout and work engagement and their relationship. In this more fine-grained theoretical approach – which is nevertheless rooted in empirical findings – exhaustion and vigor are seen as the two poles of the *energy* continuum, and cynicism and dedication as the two poles of the *identification* continuum (Demerouti, Moster, & Bakker, 2010; González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006; Mäkikangas et al., 2012). In practice, positioning cynicism and dedication as polar opposites indicates that employees can hold either negative or positive attitudes, but not both simultaneously, towards their work, whereas the energy continuum indicates that mental energy and resiliency and feelings of fatigue cannot be experienced at the same time.

Empirical findings have largely supported these theoretical perspectives. Total scores for burnout and work engagement have shown a negative correlation ($r = -0.55$ and -0.48) (for meta-analyses, see Cole et al., 2012; Crawford et al., 2010) and existence of the energy and identification continua has been demonstrated (Demerouti et al., 2010; González-Romá et al., 2006). However, the relationships within these continua have showed somewhat differing results. That is, the identification continuum has been found to form a strong scale (scaling coefficient 0.50 in three samples) whereas the energy continuum formed only a weak to moderate scale (coefficients 0.36, 0.39 and 0.40) (González-Romá et al., 2006). Similar conclusions could also be drawn from confirmatory factor analysis (Demerouti et al., 2010). These CFA results showed that cynicism and dedication formed a bipolar dimension, and thus represented the opposite ends of the same continuum. The results for the energy dimension, however, imply that exhaustion and vigor represented more independent states, and thus not pure opposites. That is, although they were highly negatively correlated, suggesting that employees scoring high on exhaustion, typically score low on vigor, they were not mutually exclusive in other combinations. Consequently, the research evidence suggests that the energy-identification dimension is a valuable tool in burnout-work engagement research, and thus it was also used in the present study.

However, the cross-sectional and variable-oriented investigations presented above are not informative about the possible longitudinal relation between burnout and work engagement, and how it manifests at the intra-individual level, issues which will be discussed next.

3. Theoretical and empirical perspectives for long-term development of burnout and work engagement

Despite decades of research, the temporal and developmental aspects of burnout and work engagement, that is, whether they are stable or change over time, remain controversial. Below, longitudinal perspectives on burnout and work engagement are first presented separately, after which their possible simultaneous development is discussed.

Theoretically, burnout is seen as a progressive and dynamic psychological response to job stress (Maslach, 1982; Shirom, 2003). Consequently, change patterns indicating a constant rate (i.e., linear increase or decrease), a variable rate (i.e., curvilinear pattern) or displaying combinations of rates of change and direction are all theoretically possible (see Dunford, Shipp, Boss, Angermeier, & Boss, 2012). The temporal process could also manifest as stability. Such temporal variety has been demonstrated by burnout trajectory studies (Evolahiti, Hultell, & Collins, 2013; Hultell, Melin, & Gustavsson, 2013; Mäkikangas et al., 2012; Rudman & Gustavsson, 2011). However, a recent systematic review mapping the findings of the burnout trajectory studies indicates that burnout typically develops along a stable path. Between one-third and three-quarters of the individuals studied belonged to stable burnout trajectories while only a minority experienced changes in burnout (Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2016).

Work engagement, in turn, was originally defined as a relatively stable affective-cognitive state, rather than a momentary experience

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4930041>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4930041>

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