



EFPA Work and Organization Working Group Report 2021-2023 #1

A short summary of theories and research findings related to the psychosocial work environment and 1) work-related health, 2) engagement and 3) productivity and organizational success.

For the scope of this report, we used as theoretical framework the Job Demands–Resources model (JD-R) proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2016) in line with the previous work developed by EFPA (<http://www.infocoonline.es/pdf/EFPA%20Salud%20Mental%20Trabajo.pdf>).

The JD-R model suggests that the resources in a work environment can have positive effects on employees, including motivation, well-being, and better performance. Examples of resources include social support and job control, which provide opportunities for employees to go above and beyond their minimum work requirements. In contrast, demands in the work context, such as workload and time pressure, are associated with stress, which can have negative effects on performance and well-being (Bakker et al., 2004, 2005; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The model emphasizes that resources offer potential rewards, while demands pose threats to work and personal outcomes. Demands are more likely to predict stress experiences, while resources are more likely to predict motivation. The model also highlights that resources can have a key role in buffering the negative effect job demands have on wellbeing.

1.1: a short summary of theories and research findings related to the psychosocial work environment and work-related health (by Viktoria Gorbunova¹)

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, with around 700 000 persons dying yearly (WHO, 2021). Poor psychosocial work environments, including factors like lack of support from supervisors and colleagues, job insecurity, high job demands, low job control, effort-reward imbalance, and organizational injustice, are strongly associated with suicidal ideation (Loerbroks et al., 2016; Milner et al., 2018). The strength of these relationships is affected by cultural values and societal factors (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Lester, 2013; Webster Rudmin, 2003). Some occupations, such as medical, military, and transport industry workers, have higher rates of suicidal ideation due to the high levels of work stress and easy

¹ *The text in this section was written as a part of the research project on the quality of work and its effects on health and well-being in Luxembourg (Sischka et al., 2021; Sischka et al., 2020). and is planned as a part of the future article on the relationship between working conditions and suicidal ideations (V. Gorbunova, P. Sischka, G. Steffgen).*

access to tools of suicide (Agerbo et al., 2007; Dutheil et al., 2019; Mahon et al., 2005; Mathieu et al., 2022). Agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers are also at risk due to social isolation, physically demanding work, and exposure to animal death (Klingelschmidt et al., 2018). Additionally, workers in low-paid jobs, such as laborers and cleaners, may be at higher risk due to social and economic issues associated with their jobs (Milner et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2013).

Unhealthy workplace relationships, including bullying, harassment, mobbing, and abusive supervision, are also linked to higher rates of suicidal ideation (Alfano & Fraccaroli, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Leach et al., 2017; Milner et al., 2016; Nielsen et al., 2015; Nielsen et al., 2016; Pompili et al., 2008; Sischka et al., 2020; Tan & Xia, 2021). However, these factors are often interlinked with additional work stressors, and depression and depression-related symptoms (Miller et al., 2019; Lever et al., 2019; Kostev et al., 2014; Brousse et al., 2008; Niedhammer et al., 2006; Antoniou & Daliana, 2018; Figueiredo & Ferraz et al., 2015).

Research has consistently found that depression and associated symptoms are strongly linked to suicidal thoughts and attempts (Franklin et al., 2017; Harris & Barraclough, 1997; McClelland et al., 2022). Suicide is a significant global public health concern and understanding the relationship between working conditions and suicidal ideation is crucial. Governments and organizations should implement measures to promote mental health in the workplace and prevent workplace harassment to reduce the risk of suicidal ideation among employees. It's not by chance WHO suggest as an example Japan's suicide prevention policy, where among key objectives is listed "Promoting suicide countermeasures for work-related problems even further" with such specifiers as "Promoting mental health measures in the workplace. Measures to prevent harassment." (WHO, 2019, p. 31).

1.2: a short summary of theories and research findings related to the psychosocial work environment and work engagement (by Delia Virga)

Definitions of work engagement

The term "work engagement" was originally used in the business world to describe employee engagement, although the exact origins of the concept are not clear. It was first introduced in the 1990s by the Gallup organization, and its popularity grew with the development of the job demands-resources (JD-R) framework. Work engagement is defined as a positive state of mind related to work, according to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). The concept of work engagement encompasses three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. These three dimensions are combined to create an overall measure of work-related well-being. Vigor refers to employees' energy, mental resilience, and willingness to work hard, dedication refers to enthusiasm and commitment to work, and absorption refers to concentration and focus on work tasks.

The relation between psychosocial work environment and work engagement

Several systematic reviews and meta-analyses have been carried out to identify the factors that contribute to work engagement. Many studies have shown that various job resources, such as autonomy, social support, task variety, and leadership, are positively associated with work engagement, while job demands have a negative association with it (Halbesleben, 2010; Christian et al., 2011). According to Crawford et al. (2010), challenging job demands are positively linked to work engagement, while hindrance job demands are negatively associated with it. Lichtenthaler and Fischbach (2018) found that work engagement increases as job resources increase and decreases when hindering job demands decrease

over time. Lesener et al. (2019) found that job resources lead to a consistent increase in engagement over time in line with the motivational process. Moreover, meta-analyses have shown that a proactive personality and positive affectivity have a positive association with work engagement (Young et al., 2018). Individual characteristics such as optimism, self-efficacy, and proactive personality are positively related to work engagement (Christian et al., 2011; Halbesleben, 2010).

Interventions in work engagement - meta-analysis/literature reviews

Experiencing work engagement is not only a positive experience in itself but also has a positive impact on work and good health. Engaged employees are highly committed to their organization and perform well on the job, resulting in decreased absenteeism and turnover rates and enhanced performance (Halbesleben, 2010; Christian et al., 2011). As a result, creating and maintaining a climate of work engagement has become a priority for managers, and the methods for enhancing work engagement have become a popular topic for consultants and managers (Mills et al., 2013).

In a meta-analysis of work engagement interventions, Knight et al. (2017) attempted to classify the interventions based on the job demands-resources model and found that interventions to increase work engagement in organizations could be effective, especially group interventions aimed at improving resources, work engagement, and well-being in general. A subsequent study by Virga et al. (2021) went further by including more controlled interventions and analyzing the moderators that influence the effectiveness of these trials. They classified interventions based on the practical approach and found that interventions based on cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness, soft skills development, positive psychology techniques, and job crafting interventions could all affect work engagement components.

The study found that all moderator variables analyzed had a significant impact on work engagement intervention effectiveness. For example, online delivery methods were found to be a reliable alternative to interventions aimed at large groups of employees. The study also showed that the effectiveness of interventions on work engagement decreased steeply after three months since the end of the intervention, and short interventions (i.e., up to 2 weeks) have more consistent effects on work engagement than longer interventions. Finally, interventions based on positive psychology methods and the development of soft skills were found to have significant effects on work engagement.

1.3: A short summary of theories and research findings related to the psychosocial work environment and Productivity and Organizational Success (by Roberta Fida)

For this section the working group has focused specifically on understanding the theories related to the relationship between psychosocial work environment and counterproductive work behaviors. As recently highlighted in the work and organization literature, job performance should comprise not only task performance but also counterproductive work behavior (CWB) (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015; Lievens et al., 2008). These comprise behaviors that violate organizational and social norms (Sackett & DeVore, 2002). They can target the organization (such as theft, withdrawal from work, sabotage) or individuals (such as interpersonal violence, bullying, gossiping) (Spector et al., 2006).

Instances of CWBs are present in organizations globally, as demonstrated by various scandals involving companies such as Siemens, Airbus, Boeing, and Volkswagen, resulting in significant fines (Berghoff, 2018; Bushey, 2021; Katz & Dalton, 2020). The academic community is not immune to this phenomenon either, with examples of fraud cases like Stapel's (Bhattacharjee, 2013). Studies have revealed that unethical conduct is witnessed by around 41% of US employees in their work environment (Ethics Resource Center - ERC, 2013), and more than one in three organizations have experienced incidents of unethical acts like asset misappropriation, bribery, corruption, cybercrime, and accounting fraud (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2014). These kinds of behaviors result in substantial financial losses for organizations, with an estimated 5% of revenue lost per year, amounting to a total loss of 3.6 billion, according to a recent estimate by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (2020).

Research has identified several stressors that are particularly likely to lead to CWB. These include workload, poor interpersonal relationships with coworkers or supervisors, perceived organizational injustice, and organizational constraints (Spector & Fox, 2005). According to the stressor emotion model (Spector & Fox, 2005), when employees experience these stressors, they may become frustrated, and angry which can increase the likelihood that they will engage in counterproductive behavior (Fida, Tramontano, et al., 2018; Spector & Fox, 2005). In addition, when employees are stressed, they may be less concerned about the consequences of their behavior, and therefore more likely to morally disengage (Fida, Paciello, Tramontano, Fontaine, et al., 2015).

Numerous studies in the fields of work and organizational psychology indicate that ordinary people may engage in CWB under certain circumstances, rather than just ruthless and unprincipled individuals (Bandura, 2016; Moore & Gino, 2013; Newman et al., 2020). Researchers have identified various social and psychological factors that may influence CWB and several underlying processes that may lead to the normalization of unethical behavior (Belschak et al., 2018; Chugh & Kern, 2016; Fida, Paciello, Tramontano, Fontaine, et al., 2015; Moore & Gino, 2013; Paciello et al., 2022; Searle & Rice, 2020). Moral disengagement is one such process that allows individuals to engage in misconduct without feeling guilty or needing to make amends (Bandura, 1990, 2016). This perspective suggests that adherence to norms does not always guarantee consistent moral behavior.

Moral disengagement comprises eight intercorrelated social-cognitive mechanisms that operate at different stages or loci of the moral self-regulation process. These mechanisms include moral justification, advantageous comparison, and euphemistic labeling, which help restructure the valence of the wrongdoing from harmful and wrong to good and worthy. Moral justifications sanctify wrongdoing by investing it with honorable purposes, while euphemistic labeling sanitizes it by using milder words to describe it, making it appear less repugnant. Advantageous comparison makes the wrongdoing seem more innocuous by comparing it with more reprehensible behaviors. Displacement and diffusion of responsibility are two other MD mechanisms that allow individuals to obscure their responsibility for their actions. Displacement of responsibility involves attributing the responsibility for the wrongdoing to authority figures who may have dictated or condoned it. Similarly, diffusion of responsibility allows individuals to consider the wrongdoing as dictated by the social group, thereby dispersing responsibility across group members. The distortion of consequences operates at the effect locus by minimizing or disregarding the actual consequences of the

wrongdoing. Finally, dehumanization and the attribution of blame are the two MD mechanisms operating at the victim locus. Dehumanization involves disinvesting the targets of misbehavior from human characteristics or attributing them subhuman characteristics, while the attribution of blame holds victims responsible for the misbehavior they suffered and considers them deserving of such treatment. For a more detailed description of these mechanisms, see Bandura's work on MD.

Overall, while there are many factors that can contribute to CWB, workplace stressors are an important consideration for organizations looking to prevent or mitigate this behavior. By addressing the root causes of stress in the workplace, such as improving job security, providing supportive relationships with coworkers and supervisors, and ensuring fair treatment, organizations can help to reduce the likelihood of employees morally disengaging and hence engaging in counterproductive behavior.

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