Relation between organizational identification, employee burnout and mental well-being

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Abstract. In this study, relation between employee organizational identification, employee burnout and mental well-being was explored. The main aim of this research was to investigate, whether higher level of organizational identification cause employee burnout, jeopardizing mental well-being. An online survey was created using Qualtrics and participants were recruited via Facebook and LinkedIn in May-July 2022 to measure organizational identification, burnout and mental well-being of employed people (n = 138). Results reveil that even if there is a risk of burnout, mental well-being and organizational identification are quite high. Therefore, mental well-being is not being jeopardized.

INTRODUCTION

The positive effect of organizational identification on job satisfaction is transmitted through work engagement (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015). For ages, work engagement has been seen as the positive counterpart to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). However, Schaufeli et al. (2008) proposed that work engagement is viewed as an independent phenomenon and not as the exact opposite of burnout. This leads to the assumption that at some points, highly identified employees, who are fully engaged into work related activities can start having a risk of burnout. High level of identification with the organization encourages employees to faithfully enact the associated identity, which usually translates into working hard and, thus, higher performance (Riketta & van Dick, 2005; Lee et al., 2015). However, at some point, hard work can most likely develop into an inadequate attachment in the form of workaholism, and this harmful 'addiction' may decrease employee mental well-being. Many authors have argued that over-identification may represent negative consequences (Haslam, 2004; Ashforth et al., 2008; Haslam & van Dick, 2011; van Dick & Haslam, 2012; Ashforth et al., 2013). The main aim of this research was to investigate, whether higher level of organizational identification cause employee burnout, jeopardizing mental well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the past few decades, many studies (e.g., van Dick & Haslam, 2012; Avanzi et al., 2015) have manifested that work context can have an enormous impact on employee well-being. There is a widespread opinion that employees who identify with their organizations will perform better, feel happier, will be more satisfied with their job and will have lower turnover intention (Shaikh et al., 2022). Therefore, organizational identification (OI) is considered to be one of the key concepts to explain behaviors and attitudes of employees. Organizational identification can be defined as the 'perception of oneness with or belonging to the organization' (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Besides, it is 'an affective bond with the organization' (Ouwerkerk et al., 1999). Generally, scholars tend to agree that there is a close relation between an employee's self-image and their image of the organization (Riketta & van Dick, 2005).

It has been proved that organizational identification has a strong and positive effect on job satisfaction (van Dick et al., 2008; Karanika-Murray et al., 2015). Specifically, the effect of OI on job satisfaction is transmitted through work engagement. Employees, who have a strong and positive relation with their organization are also highly engaged in their work, giving cause for job satisfaction.

Several studies have shown that organizational identification relates to reduced levels of burnout (e.g., van Dick & Haslam, 2012; Avanzi et al., 2015). Organizational identification modifies the relationship between job demands and resources, and engagement. Low engagement level of employees is more sensitive to different levels of resources and demands. On the contrary, employees with high OI levels exhibit higher levels of engagement even when the workload is high, and feedback, supervisor support and organizational support are low. According to Avanzi et al. (2015), the engagement level of highly identified employees is lower when they experience low workload levels, high feedback and supervisor support, and the impact on burnout is present only in its relationship with workload. Thus, high levels of OI minimize the impact of high workload levels on burnout.

Work engagement is often reviewed in connection with workaholism. As suggested by the COR model (Hobfoll, 1989), workaholics tend to constantly engage in work, which exhaust employees' valuable resources. While being engaged in work-related activities, employees are lacking time for recovery and restoring their resources. When the invested resources have not been restored for a longer period of time, these kind of work patterns lead to higher levels of burnout. Cheung et al. (2018) examined the relation between workaholism and burnout. Their findings revealed that workaholism is positively related to two burnout dimensions, namely, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Therefore, findings are generally in line with previous studies that documented significant relation between the two constructs (Schaufeli et al., 2009b; Moyer et al., 2017).

Ever since Leiter & Maslach (1988) proposed the term 'work engagement', it was considered as an opposite phenomenon to burnout. There were lots of debates in the literature concerning the nature of the relationship between work engagement and burnout constructs (Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996), because both constructs are generally high correlated (Halbesleben, 2010). While some scholars have argued that work engagement is a distinct construct from burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), others doubt whether work engagement is a novel and useful concept, suggesting it to be simply the opposite of burnout and thus redundant (Cole et al., 2012).

Work engagement and burnout have been linked to employee health and organizational performance (e.g., Bakker et al., 2000; Hakanen et al., 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Christian et al., 2011) and therefore constitute relevant topics for researchers and practitioners. Schaufeli et al's research (2008) demonstrated empirical distinctiveness of workaholism, burnout, and work engagement. The findings provided converging evidence that workaholism, burnout, and engagement are three different kinds of employee well-being. Schaufeli et al. (2008) proposed that work engagement is viewed as an independent phenomenon and not as the exact opposite of burnout. The scholars defined work engagement as 'a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli et al., 2008).

A seminal study by Avanzi et al. (2012) showed that organizational identification can lead to negative consequences and, as a result, to reduced employee well-being. They found a curvilinear link between OI and workaholism, meaning that workaholism decreases with growing identification at first, but when identification becomes too strong, workaholism increases. Highly identified employees are inclined to work harder to achieve organizational goals, but when they associate themselves with their organizations too strongly, they are likely to develop an inadequate attachment in the form of workaholism, and this harmful addiction may decrease their mental well-being.

According to Warwick Medical School - mental well-being is the positive aspect of mental health (Tennant et al., 2007). In 2001, the World Health Organization defined mental health as 'a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential; can cope with the normal stresses of life; can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'.

It is more than just the absence of disease. People with mental well-being feel good and function well. Some people call this positive mental health, others call it flourishing. Mental health is influenced both by external circumstances and by how individuals respond to them. People who function well respond to challenging external circumstances in a way that is resilient and enables rapid recovery. External circumstances change all the time, so mental well-being fluctuates from time to time. Mental health has a powerful influence on physical health, on learning, on productivity and on the quality of interpersonal relationships. So, promoting mental well-being is important for public health, education, the economy and society, as an example of labor migration (Saksonova & Jansone, 2021).

As shown above, higher levels of organizational identification led to higher levels of work engagement and reduced levels of burnout. However, if work engagement and burnout are not considered as opposite phenomena, it can be assumed that similar to workaholism, burnout may have curvilinear relation with organizational identification and at some levels start leading to burnout, jeopardizing mental well-being.

The present research aims to explore the relation between employee organizational identification, employee burnout and mental well-being.

METHODS

An online survey was created using Qualtrics and participants were recruited via Facebook and LinkedIn in May-July 2022 to measure organizational identification, burnout and mental well-being of employed people ($n = 138$). At first, an announcement

with an information about the survey was posted among personal networks with the link to the survey file. Unfortunately, only 41 fully completed responses were collected (167 persons viewed the survey, 48 started the survey, and only 85% completed the survey). Later, potential respondents were personally approached ($n = 163$). Their current employment status was asked, and only those, who were employed at that particular moment were informed about the aim of the research, and were asked to take part in the survey. Personal approach gave an additional 97 fully completed responses (59% of personally approached persons). 53% of all participants are male and 47% female.

Measuring Instruments

Organizational identification. Scale, developed by van Dick et al (2004) was used to measure employee organizational identification. This scale includes seven items, such as 'I identify myself as a member of organization' and 'Being a member of organization reflects my personality well'. Responses were given on a 6-point response scale: 1 = not at all; 6 = totally.

Burnout. Burnout was measured with the short version of the BAT (Burnout Assessment Tool), developed by Schaufeli et al. (2020). The short version of the BAT includes 12 items, such as 'After a day at work, I find it hard to recover my energy' and 'At work, I have trouble staying focused'. Responses were given on a 7-point response scale: 0 = never; 7 = always.

Mental well-being. The short version of Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (Stewart-Brown & Janmohamed, 2008) was used to measure mental well-being. The scale includes seven items, such as 'I've been feeling optimistic about the future' and 'I''ve been dealing with problems well'. Responses were either 'None of the Time', 'Rarely', 'Some of the Time', 'Often' or 'All of the Time'.

Control variables, like gender and age were added; as well as working arrangement and time, spent in the present company. Working arrangement means whether person works in the office, remotely or has a hybrid model (few days a week work from the office and the rest work remotely from home or other place). Participants working arrangement is following: 67% are working in the office, 10% have remote, while 22% have hybrid working arrangements (few days a week participant work from office and the rest work remotely from home). 47% of all respondents are working 3–5 years in the present company. All age groups are represented among research participants; however, these groups are represented the most: 49% fall into 25–34 years of age; 30% are 35–44 years old.

Data was cleaned, removed unfinished entries, and coded. Codes were used in order to transform descriptive information into the numeric data to be able to perform statistical analysis. Following codes were used. Gender: 1 – Male; 2 – Female. Age: 1 – 18–24; 2 – 25–34; 3 – 35–44; 4 – 45–54; 5 – 55–64; 6 – Above 64. Contract type (working arrangement): 1 – I work from office; 2 – I work remotely; 3 – I have a hybrid model (few days a week I work from office and the rest I work remotely from home). How long do you work in the present company? (time) 1 – Less than 1 year; 2 – 1–2 years; 3 – 3–5 years; 4 – 6–7 years; 5 – 8–10 years; 6 – More than 10 years.

The table below illustrates descriptive statistics of collected data regarding variables. Table shows minimum and maximum value of the the each variable, as well as mean and standard deviation.

Table 1. Collected data overview ($n = 138$)

Variable	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
OI	16	37	29.96	4.19
Burnout	1	5	3.11	1
Well-being	14.75	35	23.83	3.86

[1] Data according to authors' calculations.

RESULTS

The IBM® SPSS® software platform was adopted to perform statistical analysis. The correlation analysis was performed to identify significatnt correlations between variables. The table below illustrates results of performed Pearson correlation analysis. Both, variables and control variables were included into the correlation analysis.

As shown in the Table 2, significant correlation was detected between OI and mental well-being. As well, OI correlates with age - as older is person, as higher is organizational identification. Significant correlation was detected also between burnout and working arrangement. People, who usually work in the office (this working arrangement is coded 1) are more at risk of a burnout, than the ones who are working remotely (this working arrangement is coded 2) or having hybrid working arrangement (this working arrangement is coded 3). Average burnout score of people, working in the office - 3.34; and, according to the BAT manual - average score over 3.26 show very high risk of a burnout. Additionally, people working in the office have lower level of organizational identification (average 29.97). People, having a hybrid working arrangement have significantly lower risk of a burnout with an average score 2.60.

Table 2. Corellation analysis

Variable	OI	Well-being	Burnout	Age	Arrangement	Time
OI	1.00	0.62**	0.07	0.20*	0.02	0.08
Wellbeing	0.62**	1.00	0.18*	0.10	-0.03	-0.01
Burnout	0.07	0.18*	1.00	0.10	-0.33**	-0.04
Age	0.20*	0.10	0.10	1.00	-0.11	0.16
Arrangement	0.02	-0.03	-0.33**	-0.11	1.00	0.24**
Time	0.08	-0.01	-0.04	0.16	0.24**	1.00

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); [1] Data according to authors' calculations.

To determine nonlinear relationship between OI, burnout and mental well-being, regression analysis were performed.

As significant correlation between OI and well-being was detected, the same showed computed regression analysis. The results of the computed regression analysis are presented in the Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

The results of the computed regression analysis are presented in figures 1 and 2. Figs 1–2 illustrate significant correlation between OI and well-being, already detected, while performing correlation analysis. When burnout rate is low, OI and mental well-being are quite high. When the risk of burnout becomes moderate, both, OI and mental-wellbeing drop down. But, when there is a high risk of burnout, both, OI and mental-wellbeing bounce back at the high level.
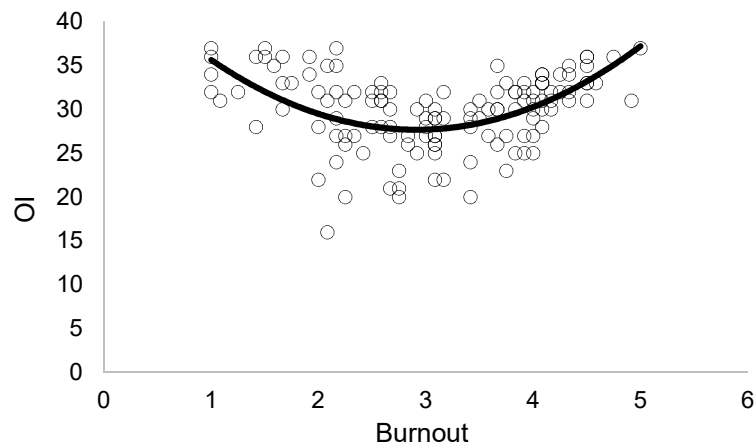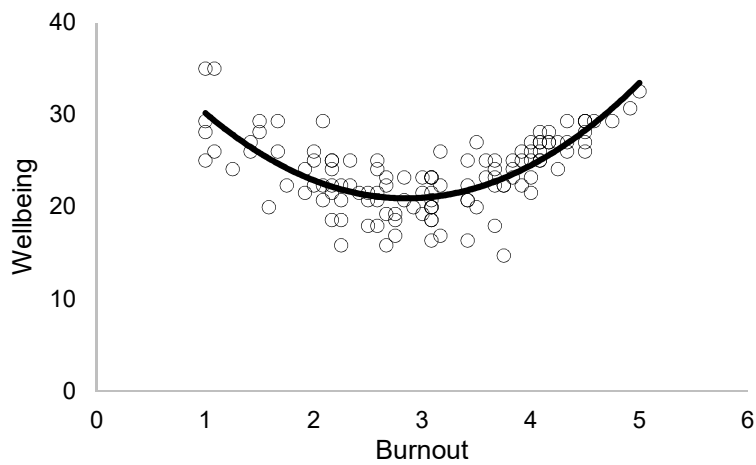
Figure 1. Relation between Burnout and OI.

Figure 2. Relation between Burnout and Mental Well-being.

DISCUSSION

The most surprising aspect of the findings is the fact that at very high risk of burnout mental well-being also gets higher, similarly to the OI. Demands-Resources Theory suggests that burnout occurs when there is an imbalance between the demands and resources attained from work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Work demands are those work factors that require constant physical or mental effort and are associated with certain physiological costs and psychological costs (for example, subjective fatigue, reduced concentration and redefinition of work requirements). General job demands include overload, emotional labor, lack of time, or interpersonal conflicts. When recovery in the face of such demands proves inadequate or insufficient, a state of physical and mental exhaustion is activated. Therefore, it was assumed, that higher levels of organizational identification may cause employee burnout, jeopardizing mental well-being.

The findings of the present research might be explained by the fact that work engagement and burnout are not considered as opposite phenomena. According to Trógolo et al. (2020), at the construct level, burnout and work engagement do not represent opposite sides of a single employee well-being construct, but rather different constructs. When considering key aspects of work engagement and burnout, energy and exhaustion appear to be empirically distinguishable constructs. In practice, this means that feeling cheerful at work does not mean the absence of fatigue, and vice versa. Indeed, workers can feel both energized and exhausted, as evidenced by daily diary studies (Mäkikangas et al., 2014). When people engage in work related activities, they associate themselves with the organization and their mental well-being and organizational identification get higher as they get satisfaction from the work done. Engaged employees 'have high levels of energy and mental resilience, are willing to invest effort, have persistence, are involved in their work, experience enthusiasm and pride, and identify strongly with their work' (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Employees with strong organizational identification become more motivated to engage in in-role and extra- role duties, such as organizational citizenship behavior, to fulfill the goals and benefits of their organizations in such organizations, where organizational identification increases due to a strong ethical work climate (Teng et al., 2020). As stated by Avanzi et al. (2012), highly identified employees are inclined to work hardest to achieve organizational goals, but when they associate themselves with the organization too strongly, they are likely to develop a maladaptive attachment in the form of workaholism. Therefore, these people have a very high risk of burnout. Management can also shape employees' OI by engaging in fair practices and upholding their end of the psychological contract (i.e., employees' beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement with their employers. Central to the concept of psychological contracts is reciprocity: when management shows concern for the welfare of employees, employees' expectations about what they ought to provide the organization in return tends to increase. Thus, when management shows concern for employees, employees increase their OI, and this implicit contract is fulfilled (Weisman et al., 2022). Realizing this, organizational leaders should be responsible and thoughtful in their approach to managing employees, as employees with high organizational identification may be especially blinded and susceptible to the negative effects of highly demanding work cultures (Bednar et al., 2020).

It was widely discussed in the literature, whether link between organizational identification and burnout is negative or positive. A longitudinal study found that employees who identified more with their work group were less likely to experience burnout than their peers with less identification (Haslam et al., 2009). Additionally, a meta-analysis of 102 effect sizes across 58 independent samples (N = 19,799) showed a positive association ($r = .21$) between organizational identification and health (psychological and physiological health, as well as burnout and perceived stress levels) (Steffens et al., 2017). However, we cannot clearly say that the literature contains unambiguous data on an exclusively positive relationship between organizational identification and employee well-being. Thus, among the 102 effect sizes included in the meta-analysis of the relationship between organizational identification and health mentioned above, 32 effect sizes show no significant relationship, and 4 show a negative relationship between them. O. Herrbach on a sample of engineers recorded a positive correlation between the identification and experience of negative emotional states (Herrbach, 2006); M. Galand and S. Jones analyzed a mixed sample of employees from

different organizations and recorded a negative association of identification with stress (Galang & Jones, 2016); E. Pisarski and colleagues studied a sample of Australian nurses and found that the stronger the identification with the team, the more often there were problems with physical health, although the correlation was small (Pisarski et al., 2008); R. Zhang and colleagues analyzed bank employees and managers and found a positive correlation of identification with stress (Zhang et al., 2011).

This research contributes to the discussion regarding relation between organizational identification and burnout. There were lots of debates in the literature concerning positive and negative relation between those two constructs. Numerous studies have shown that organizational identification is negatively related to burnout (Ferris et al., 2016; Avanzi et al., 2018; He et al., 2018), whereas others (e.g. Ashforth et al., 2013) manifests positive relation. In 2015 Avanzi et al. assumed that the link between identification and burnout may be curvilinear, representing non-linear effect. The present research provides a proof, clearly stating curvilinearity of the relation between organizational identification and burnout.

It was assumed, that higher level of organizational identification cause employee burnout, jeopardizing mental well-being, as the core component of burnout is sense of emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1982). In fact, findings reveal that indeed as higher is organizational identification as higher is risk of burnout, but mental well-being is not being jeopardized. When burnout grows, individuals may distance themselves from the source of the problem - work (Caprar et al., 2022).

Another contribution is related to the scientific discussion regarding work engagement and burnout concepts. Employees who have a strong and positive bond with their organization are also highly engaged in their work, energized in and dedicated to their work (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015). Findings of this research reveal that relation between organizational identification and burnout is curviliniar. At the very high level of organizational identification employees start experience a very high risk of a burnout. This may happen only if work engagement is considered as a distinct construct from burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and not simply as the opposite of burnout.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the relation between employee organizational identification, employee burnout and mental well-being was explored. It was assumed that higher level of organizational identification cause employee burnout, jeopardizing mental wellbeing. Results of this study clearly state that even if there is a risk of burnout, mental wellbeing and organizational identification are quite high. At this point, work engagement and satisfaction could also be on a high level, leading to positive consequences. Employees might be fully engaged into working activities, getting satisfaction from work done, along with recognition and praise. At the same time, they might experience stress and exhaustion. High risk of a burnout may signal that with the time this positive effect may become negative. When employees see organizational goals as their own, they might spend more time and effort, reaching these goals, consuming valuable resources and devoting less time to recover. Over a time, this strategy might become too exhausting and lead to a complete burnout.

Employees, who are strongly identifying themselves with the organization and are fully engaged into organizational life, might not recognize they start overworking and spend too much effort performing working activities. Supervisors, managers and HR department representatives should critically evaluate employee performance and keep balance, encouraging employees following working schedule, not overworking and take vacations to recover valuable resources.

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