

GENERATING ENERGY: INVESTING IN PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, AGENCY, & SUPPORT

Employees are any organization's greatest asset; they are the feet on the ground, providing quality services and actively improving stakeholder outcomes. When employers are committed to developing resources, employees feel dedicated to their organization, resulting in higher engagement in work (Ogbonnaya & Valizade, 2018). A primary way to invest in employees is by attending to the areas of **(1) job design**, **(2) agency**, **(3) well-being**, and **(4) professional growth**. Addressing these factors provides a buffer that protects employees from burnout even when the demands of their job are high (Albrecht et al., 2018). These aspects fuel a passion for the work. In addition, they generate positive energy and perceptions of the organization, resulting in goodwill towards leadership.

1. Consider job design

Job design ensures that the work done in a particular role provides an opportunity for job satisfaction. Job design is an energy-generating resource when employees feel they are provided opportunities to use their expertise to complete tasks, to make decisions about how they do their work, and to access the knowledge and tools necessary to the practice. A motivating factor is when a job's activities and outcomes align with the employee's preferences and values (Albrecht et al., 2018; Walden et al., 2017). Specifically, the extent to which a person feels they are expressing their true self at work is the strongest buffer against burnout (van den Bosch et al., 2018). These expectations are best met when connections as to how one's work affects others within and outside the organization are clearly stated. Another factor directly linked to employee motivation is when feedback about the effectiveness of completed work is embedded into the act of doing the work (Oldham & Hackman, 2010).

2. Give agency

Fortunately, the field of job design has been shifting its paradigm towards flexibility where roles overlap and shift from one project to the next (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). This paradigm shift fosters self-expression in how employees carry out their roles and still meet the organization's expectations (Toth et al., 2020). Such flexibility may include employee discretion in scheduling their work and the processes they use to complete it. Employees who feel they can influence their work environment contribute directly to positive energy and willingness to work toward organizational goals (Oldham & Hackman, 2020; Albrecht et al., 2018; Toth et al., 2020). Also noteworthy is that agency can be given but may not be used if employees do not possess competencies in agency skills (Akkermans et al., 2013). One agency-supporting competency is the ability to reflect on personal motivators such as values, passions, and skills that are assets or skills that may need development. Another agency-supporting competency is awareness of the presence and value of a professional network. This includes the employee's ability to build key relationships for gathering feedback and for connecting with those who listen to and advocate for the employee's ideas and insights (Akkermans et al., 2013).

3. Support well-being

Among the most vital resources and protections against a demanding work environment are a sense of being supported and of possessing psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2007; Akkermans et al., 2013). These two factors are interconnected in that a supportive work environment conserves personal and psycho-emotional resources such as a sense of hope, optimism, compassion, resilience, and self-efficacy. The effect created by the harmony between collegial support and psychological well-being is organization-based self-esteem which strongly mediates job demands and can be characterized as a sense of being a meaningful member of the organization. Such feelings of belonging result in higher employee engagement and job satisfaction, while unmediated demands predict adverse psychological well-being (Toth et al., 2020; Luthans et al., 2007; Albrecht et al., 2018). Social resources for well-being include supportive colleagues, positive relationships with supervisors, perceptions of the availability of supervisors, as well as feelings of being heard, safety, mutual understanding, and trust (Akkermans et al., 2013; Walden et al., 2017; Willner, 2020; Toth et al., 2020).

4. Sustain professional growth

Career competency is interconnected with a sense of well-being, agency, and job design. Employees must feel competent in their roles to be well matched to their roles (Walden et al., 2017; Akkermans et al., 2013). They must feel confident in their knowledge to exercise agency in their roles. When employees are well suited in these ways, they are more likely to possess psychological capital that protects them from a sense of being overwhelmed and stressed (Toth et al., 2020). Likewise, when a work environment provides agency, social support, and opportunities for professional growth, these factors in and of themselves are stimulants for employees to become more competent in their careers and engaged in their work (Akkermans et al., 2013). When organizations consistently provide training and opportunities to gain and use new skills and knowledge, this signals to employees that they are valued and fuels positive energy toward doing the work (Ogbonnaya & Valizade, 2018).

References

- Akkermans, J., Schaufeli, W. B., Brenninkmeijer, V., & Blonk, R. W. B. (2013). The role of career competencies in the job demands — resources model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 83(3), 356–366.
- Albrecht, S., Breidahl, E., & Marty, A. (2018). Organizational resources, organizational engagement climate, and employee engagement. *The Career Development International*, 23(1), 67–85.
- Luthans, F., Avolio, B.J., Avey, J.B. And Norman, S.M. (2007). Positive psychological capital: Measurement and relationship with performance and satisfaction. *Personnel Psychology*, 60: 541-572.
- Oldham, G. R., & Hackman, J. R. (2010). Not what it was and not what it will be: The future of job design research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31(2/3), 463–479.
- Ogbonnaya, C., & Valizade, D. (2018). High performance work practices, employee outcomes and organizational performance: A 2-1-2 multilevel mediation analysis. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(2), 239–259.
- Toth, I., Heinänen, S., & Nisula, A.-M. (2020). Personal resources and knowledge workers' job engagement. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 28(3), 595–610.
- van den Bosch, R., Taris, T. W., Schaufeli, W. B., Peeters, M. C., & Reijseger, G. (2018). Authenticity at work: A matter of fit? *The Journal of Psychology*, 153(2), 247–266.
- Walden, J., Jung, E. H., & Westerman, C. Y. (2017). Employee communication, job engagement, and organizational commitment: A study of members of the millennial generation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 29(2-3), 73–89.
- Willner, T., Lipshits-Braziler, Y., & Gati, I. (2020). Construction and initial validation of the Work Orientation Questionnaire. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 28(1), 109–127.