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ELABORATING THE JOB DEMANDS AND RESOURCES MODEL OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

In my theoretical paper, I seek to elaborate the existing job demands and resources (JD-R) model of employee engagement (EE) by extending it through the work-life balance (WLB) concept. This elaboration of the central model of EE is necessary due to the rapid developments in ICT technology, which have dramatically changed working conditions. Employees can work remotely, and independently from the physical and social work environment of an office. It is possible to accomplish most of one's work at any place and at any time. This flexibility in working conditions has both positive and negative impacts on the work-life balance, engagement, and aspects such as family, health, well-being, and motivation of employees. My approach has four phases. First, I highlight the need for contributions and discuss the benefits and drawbacks of work flexibility. Then I present the main concepts and subsequently propose and describe the elaborated model of JD-R that is the main contribution of this paper. Finally, I discuss the novelty, value contribution, limitations, and theoretical implications of this paper, as well as proposing future research directions.

Keywords: Employee engagement (EE), work-engagement (WE), work-life balance (WLB), job demands and resources (JD-R) model.

1. INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR CONTRIBUTION

In this conceptual paper, my goal is to elaborate the central model, job demands and resources (JD-R) model of employee engagement (EE) or work engagement (WE), by extending it through the work-life balance (WLB) concept. Albrecht (2010, 14-17) indicates several key areas for further research in the field of EE. He argues that ‘the JD-R model (*Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, 2008*) provides a useful unifying platform to examine the nomological net around engagement’ and further he adds that ‘future research and theorizing might usefully be focused on elaborating the JD-R model to accommodate additional variables and additional complexity’ (*Albrecht, 2010, 14*). This will be my main contribution to the existing knowledge about EE.

There have been already several extensions of the JD-R model and the EE construct, which include different contextual factors. Rothmann and Baumann (2014) for example examined the psychological conditions of work-home/home-work interactions on EE. They focus on the three psychological conditions of personal engagement at work identified by Kahn (1990) namely on meaningfulness, availability and safety. Their study shows ‘that psychological meaningfulness and availability as well as work-life balance accounted for a large proportion of the variance in employee engagement’, and they ‘are important psychological conditions to consider in promoting the engagement of employees’ (*Rothmann et al., 2014, 525 and 527*). As a future research need they suggest the need ‘to better understand the pathways to work-life balance and employee engagement’ and the relations of these concepts (*ibid: 527*). Consequently, there is a need for such a contribution.

However, to my knowledge, the WLB concept has not yet been related to JD-R. Concurring with Albrecht (2010), the JD-R model needs to be extended and more broadly conceptualized ‘to more explicitly acknowledge contextual factors such as organizational leadership, organizational strategy, organizational vision and values, organizational culture, organizational structure and human resources (HR) systems’ (*ibid.: 14*). I argue that the elaboration of the central model of EE is also necessary because, due to rapid developments in ICT technology, working conditions have changed dramatically (*Primecz et al., 2016*). *Is it possible to be engaged at work and disengaged off the job in the current changing context of work?* Employees can work remotely, independently

from the physical and social work environment. It is possible to accomplish most of one's work at any place and at any time. This flexibility in working conditions has positive and negative impacts on the work-life balance, engagement, and aspects such as family, health, well-being, and motivation of employees.

Benefits of flexible working on WLB can be viewed from the individual, organizational and societal points of view. I will focus on what flexible working means for individual employees and for the employer. For the individual working flexibly and remotely it means savings on commuting time and costs, comfort, autonomy on deciding when to engage in work activities, scheduling work tasks flexibly, and deciding about being available for work independently. Benefits for the organization are savings on the costs of physical office facilities (renting, electricity, heating, cleaning, etc.), saving time and costs on business trips through on-line meetings. Dizaho et al. (2017) studied how to achieve WLB through flexible work schedules and arrangements. They determined that 'Flexi-time, working from home, part time, job sharing and teleworking have been depicted as effective strategic approaches of achieving work life balance' (ibid.: 455). They conclude that organizations can benefit from WLB achieved through flexible work scheduling by 'increased productivity, loyalty, satisfaction, increase in morale, and attitude and behaviours of employees'. They emphasize the WLB benefits for employees, as well as 'increasing flexibility, increase in family and leisure time, childcare privileges, less work life conflict, reduced burnout, and improved emotional, physical and psychological wellbeing' (2017, 462).

Drawbacks of the work flexibility on WLB for the individual could be weakening family relations (children, spouse, and parents), feelings of being a '*bad mother or father*', suffering social relations, less time for friends and hobbies, and a decrease in motivation. Furthermore, constantly being connected to work could lead to health problems, stress, burnout, ambiguity, addiction, and workaholism. Thinking constantly about work-related issues, inability to turn off engagement, inability to relax, and feeling constant pressure could lead to the '*absent presence*' syndrome for employees (Middleton, 2008). Similarly, Primecz et al. (2016, 79) conclude that while ICT provides an opportunity for flexible work it creates new problems for individuals such as 'overwork, obsession with work (and technology itself), mental and physical exhaustion and burnout'. On the other hand, the drawbacks of flexible working for organizations are potential

crises in the role of management, loss of control of working hours, and difficulties in scheduling work that requires physical presence (healthcare, service providers, etc.). In addition, the negative impacts could be leadership crises, difficulties in leading, trying to inspire workers you do not actually meet, communication difficulties (IT, ICT problems), machine-human interactions, machine-machine interactions (the human touch is missing), difficulties in creating a unified vision of the organization, involvement, commitment, motivation difficulties, and feelings of not belonging.

Based on the above arguments about the changing context of work conditions and the needs for future research indicated in the EE literature, I argue that the JD-R model of EE needs to be extended through the WLB construct. Broadening existing knowledge and providing better understanding of the emerging EE concept are the contributions of my paper. Next, I will present the concepts of EE, JD-R, and WLB. Then, I will describe the elaborated model of JD-R, followed by conclusions and a discussion.

2. APPROACH AND CONSTRUCTS

My approach is theoretical. As I have indicated in the introduction, the changing work conditions, flexibility in the work place, space, and time influence the work-life balance and employee engagement, both positively and negatively. Nowadays it is possible to accomplish most of one's work at any place and time. The JD-R model argues that high job demands and low job resources or low job demands and high job resources cause health, motivational, engagement, and well-being problems for employees. On the contrary, when job demands and resources are in balance it results in a positive impact on employees, work engagement, and organizational performance. Therefore, my argument is that if the JD-R model would integrate the work-life balance (WLB) concept, the imbalance or balance between job demands and resources would show more explicitly, which would lead to well-being, motivation, work engagement, and increased organizational performance. This elaboration of the existing JD-R model is my objective in this paper. Next, I present the building concepts of my proposed model, namely EE or WE, the JD-R model, and WLB.

2.1. Employee engagement or work engagement

Employee engagement (EE) is a relatively recent concept. Dagher et al. (2015) provide a comprehensive overview of the historical evolution of the EE construct. They discuss the historical roots and evolution of EE and its three dimensions, i.e. vigor, dedication, and absorption. In their literature review they present the most common fourteen definitions of EE (ibid.: 240) from 1990 to 2009. However, they argue that ‘the definition and meaning of employee engagement is unclear and vague and has been interchangeably misused with many different terms’ (ibid.: 237).

Employee engagement has been defined in multiple ways but there are similar characteristics in these definitions. The definitions of EE emphasize the physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement (Kahn, 1990, 700). The drivers of EE are positive intrinsic motivation, enthusiasm, passion, commitment, satisfaction with work, and individual involvement. Employee engagement is ‘a positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption’ (Schaufeli et al., 2002, 74). The definition of Bakker and Demerouti (2008) is the most relevant to the objective of this paper. They write that ‘Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities, and they see themselves as able to deal with the demands of their jobs.’ In my proposed model, in addition to the physiological (i.e., behavioral), cognitive, and affective dimensions of EE, I emphasize its psychological and social dimensions.

Like Dagher et al. (2015), Jakubik and Vakkuri (2015, 8-9) explore the theories, definitions, models, and drivers of EE. They argue that because the EE construct is relatively new there are several theories related to this concept. They mention the following four:

1. The *job demands and resources model* of Bakker and Damerouti in Bakker (2010, 240) examines how job resources (such as autonomy, support, and feedback) and personal resources (such as self-efficacy, optimism, and reliance) directly influence work engagement, something that influences outcomes (e.g., in-role performance, extra-role performance, creativity, financial results).

2. Hobfoll's (2002) *theory of conservation of resources* seeks to answer how employees strive to gain and protect resources, and why employees perform more effectively when they have access to a range of resources.
3. The *self-determination theory of motivation* by Deci and Ryan in Meyer et al. (2010, 68) focuses on explaining why the experience of employee engagement requires the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy, relatedness).
4. Blau's *social exchange theory* (1964) shows how the provision of valued resources results in employees developing a felt obligation to reciprocate with pro-social attitudes and engagement-related behaviors.

In addition to the above four main theories, there are several other theories that are relevant to EE. For example: the social identity theory of Tajfel (1974); the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions by Fredrickson (2001); the job characteristics theory of Hackman & Oldham (1980); work psychology and positive organizational studies (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003; Dutton and Ragins, 2007); the theory of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991); motivational theories; social intelligence (Goleman, 2006); the 'becoming to know' framework that is based on the practice view of knowledge creation (Jakubik, 2011); action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2007); and appreciative inquiry (Preskill and Catsambas, 2006; Reed, 2007). In this paper, however, I focus only on the first main theory, namely on the JD-R model, because it is considered as the most general one and it is what would specifically need further elaboration.

According to Jakubik and Vakkuri (2015) employee engagement has several drivers: affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, and job attitude (Newman et al., 2010); organizational resources, job resources (e.g., autonomy, feedback, support), and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism, resilience) (Bakker, 2010, 46, 48, 54); energy, enthusiasm, vigor (ibid.). These factors are important for individual employees vis-à-vis their feeling of engagement.

Several authors argue that a high level of EE enhances business performance. Bakker (2010) and others (e.g., Fleck and Inceoglu, 2010, 33) explore EE's impact on organizational performance. Employee engagement has several dimensions. Schneider, Macey, Barbera, and Young (2010)

propose that engagement has both psychological (trust, safety, feelings) and behavioral components. 'While other situational job resources, such as autonomy, supervisory coaching, performance feedback, and personal resources, like optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem can predict engagement (Bakker et al., 2008), they fail to capture the psychological experiences employees have that most significantly impact their engagement in workplaces' (Schneider et al., 2010, 159 quoting Bakker et al. 2008) (Jakubik and Vakkuri, 2015). I argue that in addition to the psychological and physiological dimensions of EE it is necessary to include the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions as well.

2.2. The job demands and resources model

The job demands and resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) is one of the key models of EE (or WE). The three main assumptions of the model according to Mauno et al. (2010, 112-113) are as follows:

Assumption 1: Psycho-social characteristics of any work can be characterized by two main factors: job demands and job resources. "Job demands" refer to those aspects of a job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort'. "Job resources" refer to those aspects of a job that are functional in achieving work goals, may reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, and stimulate personal growth, learning and development' (Mauno et al., 2010, 112). In the proposed elaborated model of this paper, I extend and explain these two factors, both from individual employees' and organizations' perspectives.

Assumption 2: The JD-R model is characterized by two basic processes, i.e. health and motivational (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). The health process is related to employees' physical, cognitive, emotional, and social resources to meet job demands. The other process is the motivational process of employees. This is characterized by extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors. The model proposed in this paper opens up both the organizational and individual health and motivational processes.

Assumption 3: The JD-R model assumes the negative impacts of the lack of resources. I argue that this imbalance between job demands and resources could lead to both positive and negative

work outcomes, and could thus influence EE both positively and negatively. In my proposed JD-R model, I clearly show the need for balance between job demands and resources by extending the existing model through the work-life balance concept that I will present next.

2.3. Work-life balance

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) is defined in different ways. In their review paper, Dizaho et al. (2017, 457) refer to WLB definitions by Dundas (2008), Greenhaus et al. (2003), and Hudson (2005). Dundas focuses on 'efficiently managing the pressures between paid employment and all additional activities'. Greenhaus et al. associate WLB of individuals with 'even dedication to work and other non-work' activities. For Hudson (2005, 3) WLB of individuals is a 'satisfactory level of participation or "fit" between numerous roles'.

Similarly, Helmle et al. (2014, 114) argue that 'work-life balance has been defined multiple ways'. They refer to definitions of WLB given by Clark (2000), Grzywacz and Carlson (2007), and Greenhaus and Allen (2010). Clark's (2000) definition is related to the satisfaction of individuals so they can function with minimum conflicts at home and work. Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) define work-life balance as 'the accomplishment of role-related expectations ... in the work and family domains'. Work-life balance defined by Greenhaus and Allen (2010) is 'the extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are compatible with the individual's life role priorities'.

Concurring with Greenhaus et al. (2003), Parkes and Langford (2008, 267) define WLB 'as an individual's ability to meet both their work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities'. In their quantitative study of 16,000 employees, Parkes et al. (2008, 275-276) focus on the connection of WLB and EE. However, their quantitative research resulted in a weak correlation (0.21) between WLB and EE. They conclude that 'work-life balance was more important for engaging full-time and contract employees than part-time and casual employees, and for parents ... than non-parents ... work-life balance was more strongly predictive of engagement for couples than singles ... and work-life balance was less important for engaging employees under 30 than for older age groups' (Parkes et al., 2008, 276). These are important

and relevant points for this paper because WLB traditionally has been examined only as a concept related to individual employees' resources and organizations' demands.

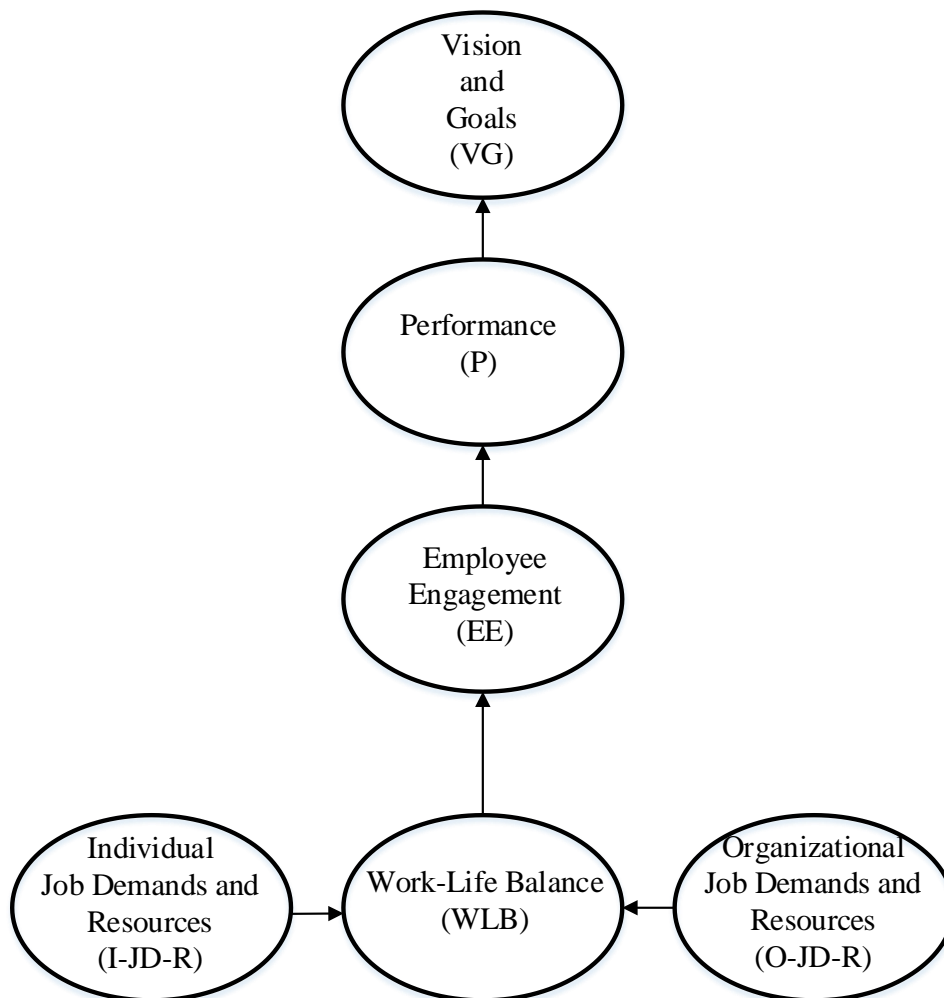
In their interesting research, Robak et al. (2016) examine how the size of organizations influences WLB. By referring to Kirchmeyer's (2000) definition of WLB, they assume that 'WLB can be understood as an equal distribution of time, energy and engagement in all the areas of life' (Robak et al., 2016, 88). Their goal is to identify the main factors that influence the WLB in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The main WLB influencing factors are open internal relations of personnel, a professional environment, flexible forms and systems of work, informal support from colleagues, superiors' readiness to provide support to employees in difficult life situations, and ability to present personal and professional needs to the employer. Regarding this paper, in addition to identified relevant factors, the style of management and leadership as an influencing factor of WLB is important.

In brief, the concept of WLB, like EE, has multiple definitions. These are, however, quite similar and they are related to life satisfaction, job satisfaction, family satisfaction, commitment, dedication, and engagement. Factors that influence WLB include job involvement, flexibility at work, spousal support, work-home/home-work conflict, and communication processes (Helmle et al., 2014). However, Rothmann and Baumann (2014, 527) recommend that 'managers and employees should become aware of the concepts of engagement and work-life balance, and the relation of the concepts'. As future research, they suggest 'to explore the work-life balance and employee engagement between different gender roles, cultures, and hierarchies within a company. ... further research is warranted at both the individual and the organisational level to better understand the pathways to work-life balance and employee engagement' (ibid). My objective is to answer their call for future research and propose an elaborated model of JD-R in the next section.

3. PROPOSED AND ELABORATED JD-R MODEL

The main contribution of my conceptual paper is the elaborated job demands and resources model (*figure 2*) of employee engagement. I decided to present the model building in two phases first, the core (*figure 1*) and then the more detailed, elaborated model.

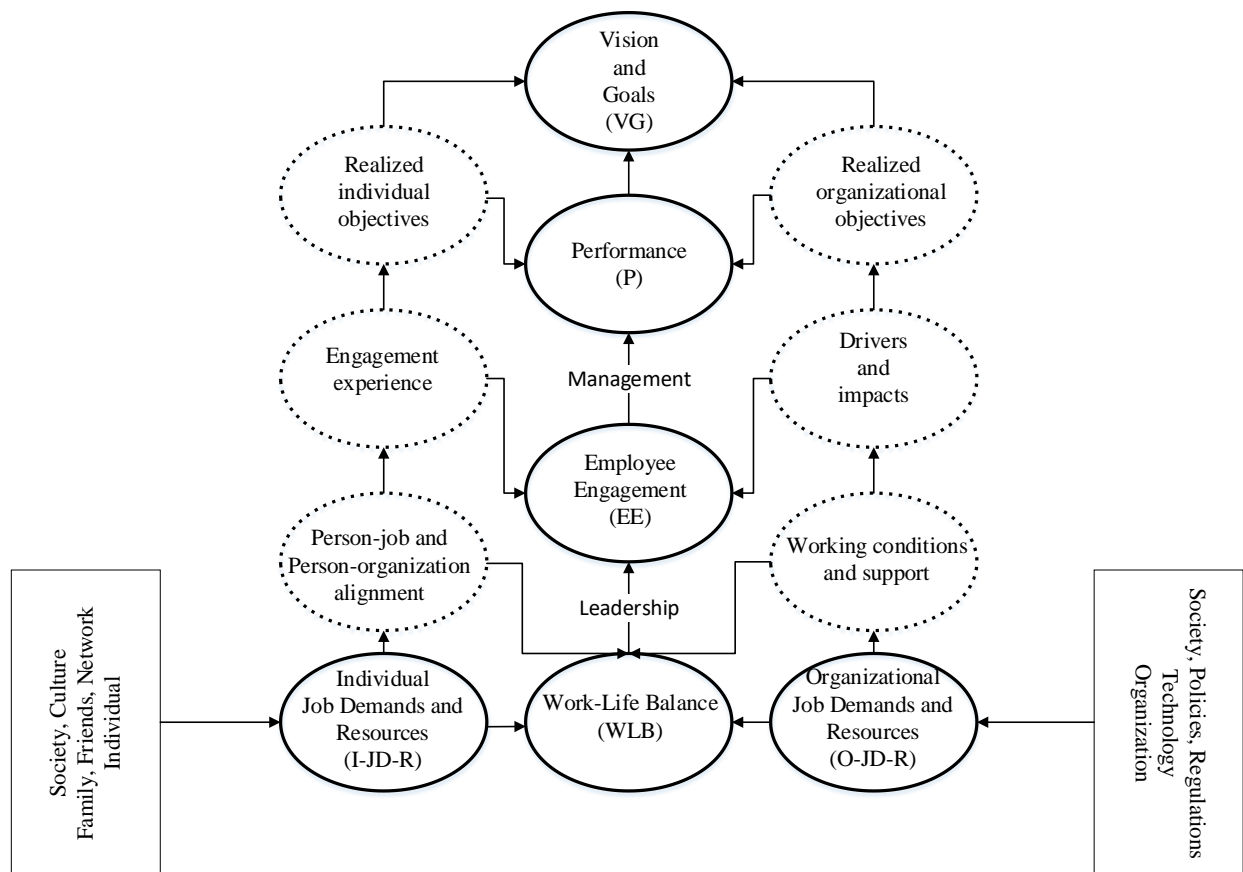
Figure 1: Extended Job Demands and Job Resources (JD-R) Model



Source: created by the author

In *figure 1*, I illustrate the core of the model, which consists of individual and organizational job resources and job demands (i.e., I-JD-R and O-JD-R) that lead to employee engagement (EE) through work-life balance (WLB). Placing WLB between the I-JD-R and O-JD-R is an important step in the model's extension because it makes explicit the need for balancing job resources and demands. When employees are engaged at work (EE), it leads to performance (P) and to achievement of both employees' and organizations' visions and goals (VG).

Figure 2: Elaborated JD-R Model of Employee Engagement



Source: created by the author

The second step in my model building is the further elaboration of *figure 1* that I present in *figure 2*. It is important to understand what helps both individuals and organizations to achieve their vision and goals (VG). Therefore, the foundation of this process is job demands and resources. First, I describe the I-JD-R and then, the O-JD-R shown in *figure 2* above.

3.1. Individual job demands and resources

Obviously, one needs to understand that individuals do not exist without their social networks, family and friends, and that they are all part of the society and culture. With this, I want to underline the importance of the social context for an individual employee's job demands and resources. Individual job demands and resources have a social, cognitive, emotional, behavioral and psychological character.

Purpose, motivation, personality, resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem of the individual employee lead to person-job and person-organization alignment. Selecting the right organization and job is a demand and resource for the individual and it has an impact on WLB.

When this alignment is achieved, the employee becomes proactive, takes extra-role activities, shares his or her knowledge, and is willing to help other colleagues. It means that with these extra physical and cognitive efforts, and with the support of family and leaders, the employee reaches a high level of engagement. This experience is an emotional state when the employee feels energetic and ready to make an extra effort in his or her job. Alignment, absorption, identification, vigor, dedication, excitement, feeling of belonging, and making a difference are characteristics of this experience.

Individual goals and objectives include a meaningful contribution, job satisfaction, belonging, learning, and career development. Moving toward realizing these individual objectives is achieved when employees have feelings of safety, recognition, meaningfulness, and an opportunity to develop their skills.

3.2. Organizational job demands and resources

Job demands and resources of organizations influenced by their micro and macro environment, as well as by society. Values, culture, ethical principles, policies, and regulations, as well as an educational and technological infrastructure, all have an impact on vision and goals (VG), working conditions, and the support that organizations can provide for employees. If the organization can create a safe and trustworthy work climate, provide autonomy, flexibility, remote work opportunities, coaching, and well-being, it can be considered an employee-friendly organization. All these working conditions and support reinforce WLB.

To engage employees at work (EE) is also a challenge for leadership. A leader's role in this is to inspire, motivate, and encourage employees by providing them autonomy and involvement in decision-making. Jakubik (2016) argues that 'The task of managers and leaders is to engage knowledge workers at work by providing them meaningful work in which they are able to thrive' (ibid.: 103). Further, she adds that 'the role of people management and leadership becomes pivotal in the knowledge economy' (ibid.). It is a challenging task, however, when leaders and managers need to motivate employees whom they do not meet face to face due to flexible and remote working opportunities.

Employee engagement (EE), when achieved, has mainly positive drivers and a positive impact on organizational performance (P). When employees are engaged it results in low staff turnover, employee retention, low absenteeism, corporate responsibility, open communication, a feeling of belonging, meaningfulness of job contributions, fewer faulty products, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. All these lead to performance (P) and realized organizational objectives.

Realized organizational objectives, i.e. goals and vision (GV) include financial goals, productivity, market share, good product and service quality, good reputation, image, and relationship capital.

After presenting the proposed, elaborated JD-R model of EE (*figure 2*), I now turn to the conclusions and discussion.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of my conceptual paper was to answer the calls for future elaboration of the JD-R model of EE (*cf. Albrecht, 2010; Baumann and Rothmann, 2014*). The novelty of my elaborated model is that I demonstrate how both the individual JD-R *and* the organizational JD-R relate to employee engagement through the work-life balance construct. Furthermore, my proposed model (*cf. figure 2*) shows how EE leads to higher performance and the achievement of goals and vision. In addition, as I argued in the introduction, my contribution is needed because of the intense positive and negative changes in the working context and in work conditions due to the development of technology. I believe that in the future, when many work activities are performed by robots, my contribution to better understanding the key role of WLB in achieving individual and organizational goals and vision will become even more crucial.

This paper has several theoretical contributions. Firstly, the main contribution of my conceptual paper is the elaborated job demands and resources model (*figure 2*) of employee engagement. It contributes to a better understanding of the JD-R model by extending it through the WLB concept and showing the connection between WLB and EE (*cf. Rothmann and Baumann 2014; Parkes and Langford 2008*). The model demonstrates how and why WLB connects I-JD-R and O-JD-R with EE. Secondly, broadening existing knowledge and providing a better understanding of the emerging EE concept are the contributions of my paper. Thirdly, I have contributed to the three main assumptions (*cf. Mauno et al., 2010*) of the JD-R model as follows:

1. Work-life balance traditionally has been examined only as a concept related to individual employees' resources and organizations' demands. In the proposed elaborated model of this paper, I have extended and explained job demands and resources, both from individual employee's and the organization's perspectives.
2. The model proposed in this paper opens up both the organizational and individual health and motivational processes.
3. In my elaborated JD-R model, I have showed clearly the need for a balance between job demands and resources by extending the existing model through the work-life balance concept.

As is the case with every paper, this one has its limitations. The elaboration of the JD-R model is based only on the need for future contributions and future research, as expressed in the EE and WLB literature. Its contribution is only theoretical. Therefore, the proposed model would need empirical validation. In addition, I look forward to receiving the comments, constructive feedback, and suggestions of research scholars interested in the EE, JD-R, and WLB topics involved in my proposed model.

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