

**Investigating the experiences and  
consequences of employee well-being within  
the South African financial services industry**

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Thesis submitted for the degree *Doctor* of Philosophy in  
Industrial Psychology at the North-West University

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Graduation May 2018

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## COMMENTS

The reader is reminded of the following:

- The *editorial style* of this manuscript follows the guidelines of the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (SAJIP).
- The *referencing* in this thesis follows the format prescribed by the Publication Manual (6<sup>th</sup> edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA). These practices are in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom) to use the APA style of referencing in all scientific documents as from January 1999.
- The *thesis* is presented in the *research article* format, consisting of six chapters.
- Chapter 2 was accepted for publication in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*.
- Chapter 5 was accepted for publication in *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- God, my Saviour and Creator: Thank you for the talents and abilities that You blessed me with. May my life always be a song to bring honour and glory to You.
- Prof. Leon de Beer: You are an amazing supervisor. Your valuable insights and wisdom guided me through this process, and I am immensely thankful for this. I truly enjoyed every part of this journey!
- Afriforte, and specifically Prof. Ina Rothmann: Thank you for your professional data management services during my research. Prof. Ina Rothmann, a special word of thanks to you for introducing me to Prof. Leon de Beer who agreed to be my supervisor – it was a good partnership.
- My fiancé, Jean Benade: Thank you for your incredible support throughout this journey. You cheered me on, and encouraged me, every step of the way. I look forward to spending many laid-back and relaxed weekends with you.
- My family: My parents Mike and Fransa, and siblings, Ilouise and Stephan, thank you for all your support and prayers, I appreciate you! To my two grandmothers, Cecile Burger and Louise Gauché, I think you were my biggest fans in this process, thank you for all the prayers and messages of encouragement.
- The leaders in the organisation I work for: Savina Harrilall and Brand Pretorius, thank you for granting me the opportunity to conduct my studies while employed in the business. Savina, thank you for listening and giving advice when balancing studies and work was tough. I appreciate you.
- Dr. Lizelle Brink: Thank you for your help and guidance with the two qualitative articles (Chapters 2 and 5). I appreciate all the feedback and input you provided.
- Cecilia van der Walt: Thank you for the language editing tended to for this thesis.

## DECLARATION

I, Cecile Gauché, hereby declare that “Investigating the experiences and consequences of employee well-being within the South African financial services industry” is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and relevant literature references as cited in the manuscript.

I further declare that the content of this research was not and will not be submitted for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Cecile Gauché

November 2017

## DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



23 October 2017

I, **Ms Cecilia van der Walt**, hereby confirm that I took care of the **editing** of the **thesis** of **Ms Cecile Gauche** titled ***Investigating the experiences and consequences of employee well-being within the South African financial services industry.***

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## SUMMARY

**Title:** Investigating the experiences and consequences of employee well-being within the South African financial services industry

**Keywords:** Employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, job demands, job resources, personal resources, objective performance, customer satisfaction index, financial industry

Employee well-being impacts on the performance of employees, success of organisations, as well as on experiences of customers. The business landscape is characterised by increasing mandates for higher productivity, more outputs, and greater savings – all contributing to increased demands being experienced by employees. Understanding the impact of demands and resources on the experiences of burnout and work engagement of employees is a critical priority for organisations in order to create an environment that facilitates optimal performance (internally and externally) and promotes employee well-being. The job demands-resources (JD-R) model is a prominent work stress model used as a framework for understanding employee well-being, and the consequences thereof for organisations. The JD-R model comprises two processes – a health impairment process as well as a motivational process, by means of which the impact of demands and resources is understood.

The general objective of the study was to investigate employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, performance ratings and customer satisfaction index ratings in the financial services industry. The specific objectives of the research were: 1) to conduct a literature review on employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, job demands-resources model, job performance, and customer satisfaction ratings; 2) to explore how employees identified as being at risk of burnout, experience demands; 3) to investigate the longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings; 4) to investigate the impact of work engagement and burnout on customer satisfaction index ratings; 5) to explore the experiences of resources as seen from the perspective of at risk employees, and 6) to present and discuss conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the findings.

The first study focused on exploring the experiences of demands amongst employees identified as being at risk of burnout. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research design

was implemented in a financial services organisation based in South Africa ( $n = 26$ ). A phenomenological approach was taken, and data were analysed using thematic analysis. The results identified three themes: job demands, life demands, and health concerns. It was determined that participants experienced demands within the work domain as well as in the life domain, demonstrating burnout to be a multi-domain phenomenon.

In the second study a longitudinal design ( $n = 155$ ) was adopted to investigate the relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings over time. Employees completed surveys at two time-points, one year apart, and performance ratings coincided with these timeframes and were also obtained for both time-points. Results indicated that work engagement positively predicted acceptable and good performance ratings over time. Burnout was not found to predict performance ratings negatively over time, but did approach statistical significance in predicting bad performance, and was therefore also interpreted.

Thirdly, the impact of work engagement and burnout on customer satisfaction index ratings done by customers of employees were investigated. A quantitative research approach was followed and confirmatory factor analysis was conducted within a structural equation modelling framework ( $n = 132$ ). The study was conducted in a call centre environment. Results showed work engagement to be related to better customer satisfaction ratings; no significant relationship was found between work engagement and bad customer satisfaction ratings. No significant relationships were found in the study between burnout and customer satisfaction.

In the fourth study the focus was to consider employee well-being by exploring job and personal resources from the perspective of at risk employees. This objective was achieved by taking a phenomenological approach with a case-study design as research strategy ( $n = 26$ ). Results revealed that participants experienced job resources as well as personal resources as influencing their well-being. The role of job resources was explained by mentioning received job resources as well as the lack of job resources. Participants further acknowledged that used personal resources as well as a lack of personal resources play a role in well-being.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, conclusions were drawn, the practical and managerial implications of the research studies were discussed and recommendations were made to organisations as well as to scholars in the interest of their future academic studies.

## OPSOMMING

**Titel:** ‘n Ondersoek na die ervarings en gevolge van werknemerwelstand binne die Suid-Afrikaanse finansiële dienste-industrie

**Sleutelwoorde:** Werknemerwelstand, uitbranding, werkbegeesterdheid, werkseise, werkhulpbronne, objektiewe prestasie, verbruikertevredenheid-indeks, finansiële industrie

Werknemerwelstand het ‘n impak op die prestasie van werknemers, die sukses van organisasies, sowel as op die ervarings van verbruikers. Die besigheidslandskap word gekenmerk deur stygende mandate vir hoër produktiwiteit, meer uitsette, en groter kostebesparings, wat alles daartoe bydra dat werknemers hoër werkseise ervaar. Dit is belangrik vir organisasies om die impak van eise en hulpbronne op werknemers se ervarings van uitbranding en werkbegeesterdheid te verstaan, om in staat te wees daartoe om ‘n omgewing te skep wat optimale werksprestasie (intern en ekstern) sowel as werknemerwelstand fasiliteer. Die werkseise-hulpbronnemodel is ‘n prominente werkstresmodel wat gebruik word as ‘n raamwerk om werknemerwelstand te verstaan, asook die gevolge daarvan vir organisasies. Die werkeise-hulpbronnemodel is saamgestel uit twee prosesse – die gesondheidsbelemmerende proses en die motiveringsproses, aan die hand waarvan die impak van eise en hulpbronne verstaan word.

Die oorkoepelende doel van hierdie studie was om werknemerwelstand, uitbranding, werkbegeesterdheid, prestasiegraderings, en verbruikertevredenheid-indeks in die finansiële industrie te ondersoek. Die spesifieke doelwitte van die navorsing was: 1) om ‘n literatuurstudie te doen van werknemerwelstand, uitbranding, werkbegeesterdheid, werkeisehulpbronne-model, werksprestasie, en verbruikertevredenheid-indeks; 2) om die ervarings van eise onder werknemers wat geïdentifiseer is as risiko’s vir uitbranding, te ondersoek; 3) om die longitudinale verhouding tussen uitbranding, werkbegeesterdheid, en objektiewe prestasiegraderings te ondersoek; 4) om die impak van werkbegeesterdheid en uitbranding op verbruikertevredenheid-indeksgraderings te ondersoek; 5) om die ervarings van hulpbronne vanuit die perspektief van werknemers wat die risiko loop om uitbranding te ervaar, te ondersoek; en 6) om samevattinge, beperkings te bespreek, aanbevelings te maak en gevolgtrekkings te formuleer.

Die eerste studie het daarop gefokus om werknemers wat geïdentifiseer is as moontlike risiko's vir uitbranding se ervarings van werkseise, te bestudeer. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering is gevolg om hierdie doelwit binne 'n finansiële-dienste-organisasie in Suid-Afrika te bereik ( $n = 26$ ). 'n Fenomenologiese benadering is gevolg en data is geanaliseer aan die hand van tematiese analise. Die resultate het drie temas uitgelig: werkseise, lewenseise en bekommernisse oor gesondheid. Daar is vasgestel dat deelnemers hoë werkseise ervaar het beide in die werksfeer en in die lewensfeer; dit dui daarop dat uitbranding 'n veelvoudigesfeer-verskynsel is.

In die tweede studie is 'n longitudinale ontwerp ( $n = 155$ ) gevolg om die verhouding tussen uitbranding, werkbegeesterdheid, en objektiewe prestasiegraderings oor tyd heen te ondersoek. Werknemers het opnames voltooi gedurende twee geleenthede – een jaar uitmekaar – terwyl prestasiegraderings wat ooreenstem met die tydlyn ook verkry is vir beide geleenthede. Resultate het aangedui dat werkbegeesterdheid aanvaarbare en goeie prestasie graderings oor tyd positief voorspel het. Daar is nie bevind dat uitbranding prestasiegraderings oor tyd heen nie negatief voorspel nie; dit het egter statistiese beduidendheid genader in die voorspelling van slegte prestasie en is gevolglik ook geïnterpreteer.

Derdens is ondersoek ingestel na die impak van werkbegeesterdheid en uitbranding op graderings van verbruikertevredenheid-indeks, soos aangedui deur verbruikers na hul interaksies met werknemers. 'n Kwantitatiewe navorsingsbenadering is gevolg en 'n bevestigende faktoranalise is binne 'n strukturele vergelykingsmodelleringsraamwerk uitgevoer ( $n = 132$ ). Genoemde studie is gedoen binne 'n kontaksentrum-omgewing. Resultate het gewys dat werkbegeestheid verwant is aan beter verbruikertevredenheid-graderings. Geen beduidende verhouding is gevind tussen werkbegeesterdheid en slegte verbruikertevredenheid-graderings nie. Beduidende verhoudings tussen uitbranding en verbruikertevredenheid is nie in die studie gevind nie.

In die vierde studie was die fokus daarop gerig om werknemerwelstand te oorweeg deur werk- en persoonlike hulpbronne te ondersoek, vanuit die perspektief van werknemers wat geïdentifiseer is as diegene wat die risiko loop om uit te brand. Hierdie doelwit is bereik deur 'n fenomenologiese benadering met 'n gevallestudieontwerp as navorsingstrategie ( $n = 26$ ). Resultate het onthul dat deelnemers die invloed van beide werk-en persoonlike hulpbronne op

hulle welstand, ervaar het. Die rol van werkshulpbronne is verduidelik aan die hand van werknemers se beskrywings van die hulpbronne wat ontvang is, asook van die hulpbronne wat ontbreek het. Deelnemers het verder erken dat gebruikte persoonlike hulpbronne sowel as afwesige persoonlike hulpbronne 'n rol gespeel het in hulle welstand.

In die slothoofstuk is gevolgtrekkings gemaak, die praktiese en bestuursimplikasies van die navorsingstudie bespreek en aanbevelings is gemaak vir organisasies asook vir en studente in belang van hul toekomstige akademiese studies.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## **Introduction**

Having productive employees is critical to the success of any organisation. In recent years the business landscape has changed significantly – better products, enhanced technologies, and faster turnaround times have turned the dice for the way in which business is done and has changed the level of outputs expected from employees (Evenstad, 2015). One of the biggest challenges for organisations nowadays is to understand the impact of these demands on the well-being of employees and the consequences of employee burnout and work engagement on performance, internal and external to the organisation. High demands and lack of resources have been found to negatively impact on employee health (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014), as well as on organisational outcomes (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003). Understanding the impact of demands (job and personal) and resources (job and personal) on the experiences of well-being from the perspective of employees at risk of burnout, allows organisations to prioritise well-being and create an environment in which employees can function optimally. Employees suffering from burnout, i.e. high levels of exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996), have been portrayed in literature as being unable to deliver on performance expectations (Taris, 2006), and that burnout also impacts organisational outcomes negatively (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002). High levels of work engagement, typically reflected by vigour, dedication and absorption (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008) have been found to positively influence employee performance (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011) and organisational outcomes (Craig & DeSimone, 2011). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a theoretical framework which will be used in the study to portray the impact of burnout and work engagement through two psychological processes, i.e. the health impairment process and the motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Evidence of the impact of employee well-being on performance and customer satisfaction remains limited, specifically within the South African context.

The purpose of this thesis was firstly to explore the experiences connected to demands from the perspective of employees at risk of burnout. Secondly, it was to determine the impact of employee well-being (burnout and work engagement) on the performance of employees internal to the organisation. Thirdly, the focus was on investigating the relationship between burnout, engagement, and the satisfaction of customers external to the organisation. Finally,

the focus was shifted back to employees by exploring job and personal resources that are available and/or lacking in terms of their (un)well-being.

This first chapter contains the problem statement and highlights what each of the four studies focused on. The research questions, research objectives, research methods, and ethical considerations are presented thereafter. A layout of the chapters is lastly provided.

## 1.1 Problem statement

The world of work is characterised by increasing demands and higher expectations, especially in the economic climate of the last decade. Employers as well as employees are expected to deliver more, to be more present and to provide better service despite the constant pressures that continue to increase on a daily basis. The challenge is that these pressures are affecting the well-being of employees (e.g. increasing risk of burnout), making it increasingly difficult for them to deliver on expectations (De Beer, Pienaar, & Rothmann Jr., 2016).

Burnout is a metaphor used to describe a state of mental tiredness (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and was first used in the 1970s by Freudenberger who defined burnout as “a state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by one’s professional life” (Bakker et al., 2014). Burnout was originally considered to only occur in people-oriented, human services occupations (Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993), but over time it became clear that burnout also occurred in other fields (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Burnout is a syndrome comprising exhaustion, cynicism, and a lack of professional efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou and Kantas (2003) described exhaustion as the result of extreme physical, affective and cognitive strain that continues over a prolonged period of time, due to exposure to particular working conditions. Cynicism reflects indifference or a distant attitude towards work in general, and professional efficacy encompasses both social and non-social aspects of occupational accomplishments (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). However, evidence is accruing that lack of professional (in)efficacy plays a more divergent role as compared to exhaustion and cynicism (see De Beer & Bianchi, 2017; Mészáros et al., 2014; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Lee & Ashforth, 1996) - indicating exhaustion and cynicism to be the core components of the burnout syndrome (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005).

Research studies have provided strong evidence that job demands are a predictor of burnout (e.g. De Beer et al., 2016; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). The term *job demands* refers to the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that necessitate constant physical and/or psychological (emotional and cognitive) effort or skills which can lead to particular physiological and/or psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). A study undertaken by Alarcon (2011) confirmed the key role that job demands play in predicting burnout, but Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) found that burnout can also be predicted by a lack of job resources. The term job resources refers to the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that (1) are functional in achieving work goals; (2) contribute to lower job demands and the accompanying physiological and psychological costs; or (3) stimulate personal growth, and development (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004). Job resources have been found to be strong predictors of work engagement within the South African context (De Beer, Rothmann Jr., & Pienaar, 2012).

Work engagement is positioned as the positive antipode of burnout and is defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). Engaged employees identify with their work and view it as challenging; they also have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work (Bakker et al., 2014). Vigour is illustrated through vitality, mental resilience and the drive to persevere despite challenges faced. Dedication is characterised by a strong sense of involvement in one’s work, accompanied by a feeling of meaning, enthusiasm, and challenge. Absorption is demonstrated by being so content and immersed in one’s work that time flies by. Work engagement has been argued to be an amalgamation of the vigour and dedication components as a singular variable (De Bruin & Henn, 2013; De Bruin, Hill, Henn, & Muller, 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Therefore, absorption has been presented to be a result of experiencing engagement at work (cf. Langelaan, 2007). Vigour and dedication have been considered the direct opposites of exhaustion and cynicism, respectively the two core components of burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Engaged employees tend to enjoy their work and willingly put in extra effort (Bakker et al., 2014). Job resources have been found to be the most important predictors of work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Christian et al., 2011). Job resources are those aspects of the job that contribute towards the achievement of work goals, reduce job demands, or stimulate personal growth (Bakker et al., 2014), e.g. supervisor support, role clarity and opportunities to learn.

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model is a unified model of employee well-being that explains how burnout (job strain) and work engagement (betterment) may result from the two specific sets of work characteristics which exist in every organisation, i.e. job demands and job resources (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009). According to Schaufeli and Taris (2014) the JD-R model is recognised as one of the prominent work stress models. The popularity of this model is attributed to various factors. One factor being that the JD-R model states that employee well-being is the effect of a balance between positive (resources) and negative (demands) job characteristics, and the fact that the JD-R model is more flexible and does not restrict itself to specific job demands or job resources. The model thus, theoretically, allows for any demand and any resource to affect employee health and well-being through burnout and work engagement if it is included in the model. The JD-R model depicts two processes, a *health impairment* process and a *motivational* process. The health impairment process is illustrated through high job demands which deplete employees' physical and mental resources, leading to a reduction in energy and eventually to health problems (Bakker et al., 2014; De Beer et al., 2012). The motivational process is powered by the availability of job resources; these resources play a motivational role as they contribute to employees' growth and development and are instrumental in achieving work goals (Schaufeli et al., 2009). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007) the JD-R model can be used to improve employee well-being and performance. This model will be used as a theoretical framework for this current study.

The aim of the overall study will be to explore the experience of employee well-being amongst identified high burnout-risk employees, and also to explore the impact burnout and work engagement can have on objective performance ratings and customer satisfaction index (CSI) ratings in the financial services industry. The overall study is divided into four study components.

In the *first study*, the focus was on following up on identified burnout-risk employees in a financial services organisation in order to explore their experiences of demands, qualitatively. The researcher was guided by the health impairment process of the JD-R model to explore and understand the demands of at risk employees. It is important to acknowledge that when investigating demands, job demands and life demands alike should be considered (Bianchi, 2016). Job demands are typically viewed as physical, social, or organisational facets of the job that requires continuous physical and/or psychological effort (Bakker & Demerouti,

2007), e.g. work overload and emotional demands (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Numerous quantitative studies over the past decades have shown job demands to have a significant negative impact on employee well-being (e.g. Alarcon, 2011; De Beer et al., 2016). The results of a study among 109 nurses by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2000) confirmed the strong effects of job demands on increases in exhaustion and disengagement respectively. Burnout levels of athletes have been studied by Gustafsson, Hassmén, Kenttä and Johansson (2008) who, by following a qualitative approach, found burnout to be a complex interaction of multiple stressors (e.g. “too much sport”), inadequate recovery and frustration from unfulfilled expectations.

The impact of life demands on employee well-being was also explored in this study as it is argued that chronic, unresolvable stress is not limited to the work domain (Bianchi, Truchot, Laurent, Brisson, & Schonfeld, 2014). The experiences of life demands and impact thereof on burnout are much less researched than the field of job demands. However, some evidence does exist in literature showing life events such as divorce, personal illness, and illness or death of a family member, to have an impact on the experience of burnout (Dyrbye et al., 2006). Thuynsma and De Beer (2016) also found that generic life factors such as satisfaction with life, explained significant amounts of variance in the burnout construct, and suggested for burnout to be considered a multi-domain phenomenon which is not solely restricted to the domain of work.

In literature, burnout has been linked to physical as well as psychological ill-health problems. Schaufeli et al. (2009) found that burnout predicted registered sickness duration and frequency. In an epidemiologic sleep research study, Doi (2005) found that job-related conditions (e.g. job stress, social support, job dissatisfaction, workload, shift schedules) was one of the risk factors associated with sleep problems. Burnout has also been shown to be associated with sleep disturbances in South Africa (De Beer, Pienaar, & Rothmann Jr., 2014). The experiences of job and life demands from the perspective of employees being at risk of burnout, as well as the impact thereof on their physical and psychological health, therefore is important and was explored in this first study. A qualitative research approach was followed as it is beneficial in that it allowed a deeper insight into the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002).

*The second study* investigated the longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings of employees (as rated by their supervisor) in a financial services organisation. The importance of employee performance in achieving organisational outcomes is understood and appreciated by most managers as well as academic scholars. Researchers (e.g. Bakker et al., 2004; Taris, 2006) highlighted the need for more studies around the relationship between burnout and job performance pointing out that the few studies reporting on it in the literature thus far have shown inconsistent relationships between burnout and performance. Cropanzano, Rupp and Byrne (2003) emphasised this need by pointing out that theoretical models leaned more towards investigating the consequence of emotional exhaustion (one of the dimensions of burnout) for the individual employees and their families (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), with a lesser focus on the effect of emotional exhaustion on organisationally relevant criteria such as job performance (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Cropanzano et al. (2003) investigated the relationship of emotional exhaustion and effective work behaviours (e.g. job performance and organisational citizenship behaviour) and discovered that job performance was predicted by emotional exhaustion. The challenge with the afore-mentioned study as well as others (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998) is that they only investigated the relationship between performance and a single dimension of burnout – exhaustion. Bakker et al. (2004) presented this as one of the contributors to inconclusive research findings concerning the relationship between burnout and performance. In addition to this, several studies failed to find relationships between burnout and objective performance, even when including not only exhaustion, but also depersonalisation and (reduced) personal accomplishment as dimensions measured in the study (Wright & Bonnet, 1997; Parker & Kulik, 1995). Wright and Bonnet (1997) found a negative relationship between only one component of burnout (emotional exhaustion) and job performance (depersonalisation and personal accomplishment showed non-significant relationships). This strongly emphasises the need for more research on the relationship between burnout, work engagement and job performance. Demerouti, Bakker and Leiter (2014) proposed that a potential reason for research thus far having found only low to moderate associations between burnout and performance, to be that employees use adaptive strategies which assist them in maintaining performance at acceptable levels despite them experiencing burnout. The results of their study confirmed the value of using selective optimisation with compensation strategies to manage feelings of burnout – which may buffer or enhance (depending on the use of the specific strategy) the negative impact of burnout on performance as rated by supervisors. However, it is pointed out as a limitation by Demerouti

and colleagues that it can be argued that better performance can also be as a result of lower levels of burnout and the use of more successful strategies, since a positive spiral of good performance leads to feelings of higher efficacy and of support by the organisation (Salanova, Schaufeli, Xanthopoulou and Bakker, 2010).

Performance is a complex phenomenon that can be understood by investigating different aspects thereof. In exploring the relationship between burnout and performance, Bakker et al. (2004) distinguished between in-role and extra-role performance and found job demands to be the most important (negative) predictors of in-role performance through their relationship with the exhaustion component of burnout, and job resources to be the most important (positive) predictors of extra-role performance through their relationship with the disengagement dimension of burnout. Bakker and Heuven (2006) investigated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and cynicism dimensions of burnout and in-role performance, and found a significant negative relationship between burnout and in-role performance. In-role performance is described as the formal deliverables and behaviours expected which directly contribute to organisational objectives (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). In their study conducted on work engagement a quantitative review and test of its relations with task and contextual performance, Christian et al (2011) defined engagement as “a relatively enduring state of mind referring to the simultaneous investment of personal energies in the experience or performance of work” (p. 95). They discovered supporting evidence that engagement is related to job performance and that it seems to demonstrate incremental validity over job attitudes in predicting performance. They also found engagement to be equally strongly related with task performance and contextual performance (Christian et al., 2011). This conclusion is contradictory to the belief that engagement is predominantly associated with extra-role behaviour (e.g. Macey & Schneider, 2008). Christian et al. (2011) highlighted the need for more research concerning the distinctive role that engagement plays in predicting job performance.

Another complexity to bear in mind is that this research on performance is often based on self-reported data, with participants judging their own performance – which can be assumed to be biased. The shortcomings of subjective data are explored by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff (2003) who highlighted the risk that associations between concepts are inflated due to factors such as halo effects, negative affectivity, and the wish to provide consistent answers. With the aim of eliminating overstated relations between concepts, Taris

(2006) investigated whether burnout was related to objective performance (e.g. supervisor's feedback) and found the clearest pattern to be the dimension of exhaustion, which showed high correlations with in-role performance; inconsistent patterns were however found for results concerning depersonalisation and personal accomplishment. Taris (2006) also highlighted the need for future studies to focus more strongly on indicators of job performance, and to employ longitudinal designs. Therefore the focus in this second study was centred on determining the longitudinal impact of burnout and work engagement on the performance of the employee from the perspective of the manager internal to the organisation, by means of a more objective performance rating. A literature review showed a paucity of longitudinal research on this topic, also within the South African context.

*The third study* focused on the relationship between burnout, work engagement and customer satisfaction index ratings in a financial services organisation. Constant innovation of systems, processes, products and technologies make it increasingly challenging for businesses to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, and make the focus of creating a truly customer-centred business so much more critical. Understanding the impact of burnout and work engagement on organisational outcomes and business deliverables such as customer service and satisfaction, is therefore of vital importance to organisational stakeholders. Schneider, Macey, Barbera and Martin (2009) confirmed this need by stating that work engagement is critical for companies to compete on customer satisfaction and differentiate themselves in financial and market performance.

Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) expressed the need for empirical evidence linking the job performance/burnout relationship to other organisational outcomes (e.g. client satisfaction) which will help to unravel the complex and noteworthy role that burnout plays in the performance of individuals and organisations. Menguc, Auh, Fisher and Haddad (2013) pointed out that the majority of research studies thus far have explored the consequences of engagement from an internal perspective, focusing on how engagement affects employee performance. The study conducted by Menguc et al. (2013) set out to explore employee engagement from an external perspective to understand how employee engagement affects customers' perceptions of the service performance they had received; the study found work engagement to be positively related to customers' evaluation of service employee performance.

By contributing to this limited field of research the third study investigated whether burnout and work engagement can be used to explain the level of customer satisfaction index ratings given to call-centre employees in a financial services organisation. Call-centre employees' main tasks involve interaction with customers, and service quality strongly depends on the quality of these interactions. Currently very little is known about the consequences of work engagement for service climate. Service climate is described as the collective view held by employees around the expected practices, procedures, and behaviours which are rewarded and encouraged by the organisation, in relation to customer service and customer satisfaction quality (Schneider, White & Paul, 1998). When employees are highly engaged and share the same perspective about the service climate the assumption is a favourable performance with customers, which in turn will lead to better employee performance (Salanova, Agut & Peiro, 2005). Unfortunately empirical evidence supporting this effect is still limited. However, Salanova et al. (2005) aimed at exploring this assumption and found organisational resources and work engagement to predict service climate, which in turn predicted employee performance and customer loyalty.

Harter et al. (2002) also highlighted the need to study data at a business-unit level and listed several advantages for doing this, e.g. this is the level at which employee survey data are typically reported. They also highlighted that business-unit-level research provides opportunities for establishing linkages to outcomes that are directly relevant to most businesses. In a meta-analysis based on 7,939 business units in 36 companies it was found that levels of employee satisfaction and work engagement were positively related to business-unit performance, e.g. customer satisfaction and loyalty (Harter et al., 2002). In the last-mentioned study the need was once again highlighted for future research with the aim of further exploring to what extent objective business indicators (e.g. customer satisfaction, etc.) are predicted by the JD-R model.

Strict monitoring of operational measures, identified as being critical to the success of the business (e.g. turnaround time and customer satisfaction indexes), forms an important part of call-centre operations in the financial services sector. For the current study, a customer satisfaction index (CSI) was applied in which CSI scores reflected ratings given by customers based on service experiences through electronic and/or telephonic interactions. This information was used to explore the differences in external perspectives of customers based on burnout and work engagement levels.

The *fourth study* explored the experiences of job and personal resources of at risk employees. That is, resources which were available, and those that were lacking with a view to support employees in dealing with the various demands experienced, and to empower them to deliver good performance and meet customer expectations, organisations should ensure the availability of sufficient and relevant resources. Job resources (e.g. performance feedback, support from colleagues, and supervisory coaching) have been found to buffer the effect of job demands (Bakker et al., 2014), as well as lead to work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In a study about chronic job burnout and daily functioning, Bakker and Costa (2014) concluded that employees with high levels of burnout need support from others to change their working conditions and health status. Putnik, De Jong and Verdonk (2011) used a qualitative approach to study the process of help-seeking among human service professionals with burnout, and discovered that these individuals internalised the ideal image of their professional role and in striving to keep that ideal image, took longer to seek help for the challenges they experienced. The availability of job resources should allow employees to better cope with the demands experienced in the workplace, and contribute to better overall employee well-being.

It is important to recognise and consider the influence of both job resources as well as personal resources on the experiences of well-being of at risk employees. The impact of personal resources on the well-being of employees was also explored in this study. Personal resources can be described as characteristics of the individual which are associated with resilience and the ability of the individual to positively influence their circumstances (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, and Jackson (2003). These positive evaluations of ‘self’ have been identified to contribute to desirable outcomes such as goal setting, motivation, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction (Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004). By engaging with the identified burnout risk employees, a better understanding was created for each affected employee around the concept of burnout and the implications of this on the employee’s effective functioning (both within a personal as well as in an organisational environment). The focus was on exploring well-being from the perspective of the employee and was done by following a qualitative research approach. Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) listed ‘the role of social support’ as one area that needs to be explored further in future research. Putnik et al. (2011) confirmed this by expressing the need for more information about the role of the social environment in supporting individuals to understand the signs and size of their problems. Organisations (e.g. human resources managers or occupational health

professionals) should actively contribute to the prevention and decline of burnout, which requires giving consideration to the organisational context as well as to the individual needs of employees (Kompier, Cooper & Geurts, 2000).

In summary, this thesis investigated employee well-being from three important angles. Firstly, the experiences of well-being from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout was investigated by focusing on demands (job and personal) in the context of employee well-being. Secondly, a study investigated the impact of burnout and work engagement on the performance of the employee internal to the organisation by means of a more objective performance rating, i.e. supervisor ratings of performance. Thirdly, a study included a view from an external perspective by investigating the impact that employee burnout and work engagement had on the level of service provided by employees as rated by the customer in a call centre environment. In the final study the focus shifted back to the experiences of well-being from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout, by exploring their available and lacking resources (job and personal)

Based on the problem statement above, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How are employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, job demands, job resources, personal resources, objective performance and customer satisfaction ratings conceptualised within the literature?
2. What demands are experienced from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout – more specifically:
  - How do they perceive their well-being?
  - What factors contribute(d) to their state of well-being?
3. What is the relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings, over time?
4. What is the impact of employee burnout and work engagement on a customer satisfaction index as rated by clients?
5. What job and personal resources are experienced by at risk employees – more specifically:
  - What resources in their work environment contributed to their well-being?
  - What resources in their personal lives contributed to their well-being?
6. What recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

## 1.2 Research objectives

The research objectives can be divided into a general objective and specific objectives.

### **1.2.1 General objective**

The general objective of this study was to investigate employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, performance ratings and customer satisfaction index ratings in the financial services industry.

### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

- To conduct a literature review on employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, job demands-resources (JD-R) model, job performance, and customer satisfaction ratings.
- To explore the experiences of demands amongst employees identified as being at risk of burnout.
- To investigate the longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings.
- To investigate the impact of work engagement and burnout on customer satisfaction index ratings.
- To explore the experiences of resources from the perspectives of at risk employees.
- To present and discuss conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the findings.

## 1.3 Expected contributions

### **1.3.1 Contribution for the individual**

This study empowers researchers and practitioners to better understand the experience and consequences of employee well-being and the performance of employees within the financial services industry. This enables them to provide more effective support and guidance to these individuals and contributes to the knowledge base for researchers and practitioners in the creation of a workplace that allows for optimal and effective functioning of the workforce to the mutual benefit of all involved.

### **1.3.2 Contribution for the organisation**

This study creates a better understanding of the impact of employee well-being and subsequent effective functioning of employees in organisations. This knowledge assists organisations in creating an environment that will allow employees to function more optimally and deliver the best possible performance results to the benefit of the organisation, e.g. increased productivity, better customer service, and ultimately higher profitability.

### **1.3.3 Contribution to Industrial/Organisational Psychology Literature**

This study enriches the knowledge base available to future researchers and practitioners in the field of industrial/organisational psychology by providing a better understanding of the experience and impact of employee well-being and subsequent performance of employees within the South African context, specifically the financial services industry. This knowledge empowers industrial/organisational psychologists to provide effective and pertinent support to employees affected by burnout and contributes to the field of knowledge with regard to creating a working environment which will allow employees to function optimally and deliver on the strategic intent of the organisation.

## **1.4. Research method**

This thesis is presented in the form of four research articles, each consisting of its own literature review and empirical study.

### **1.4.1 Literature review**

The literature review focused on employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, job demands, job resources, personal resources, job demands-resources (JD-R) model, job performance and customer service/satisfaction. Various sources were consulted to gather information. Several research database engines were used: Google Scholar, EbscoHost and LexisNexis. As part of this search some of the following journals were consulted: *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *South African Journal of Psychology*, *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Psychology in Africa*,

*European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, Journal of Managerial Psychology, Stress and Health, Burnout Research, Work and Stress, Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, International Journal of Stress Management, Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology, Journal of Organisational Behaviour, Journal of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour, Journal of Applied Psychology, Anxiety, Stress & Coping, Journal of Personality Assessment, Journal of Psychosomatic Research Journal of Social Issues, Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, Psychology & Health, Journal of Health Psychology.*

## **1.4.2 Research design**

The thesis consisted of four studies, each presented in the form of a chapter in article format. The research design, approach and research method is discussed for each study.

**1.4.2.1 Study 1 and study 4:** A consistent research design, approach and method were applied for the two qualitative studies with the nature of the questions differing, which is presented below.

**Study 1: Exploring demands from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout: A qualitative study**

**Study 4: Managing employee well-being: A qualitative study exploring job and personal resources of at risk employees**

### **1.4.2.1.1 Research approach**

For studies one and four, a qualitative design was implemented seeing that employees were interviewed. Selecting a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain deeper insight into and understanding of how the employees experience work-related well-being and the effects thereof on the employees. The value of qualitative research is that it creates rich and contextually sensitive data with the goal of building local knowledge (Maracek, 2003). The studies were executed by adopting a phenomenological approach. Specifically, a qualitative phenomenological approach was taken which assumes that the researcher strives to depict a

phenomenon in the most accurate way, refraining from emphasising a preconceived idea of the phenomenon (Converse, 2012; De Vos, Delpont, Fouché, & Strydom, 2011). It further assumes that the researcher strives to understand the construct which is being studied, and therefore aims at understanding and describing the meaning of the particular phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (De Vos et al., 2011). Specifically, these studies were grounded on the social constructivism paradigm. Constructivists believe that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, rather than it being an externally singular entity (Hansen, 2004). "Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2013, p. 37) and the goal of the research becomes to portray a reflection of the participants' views of the situation being studied. The subjective meanings of individuals are formed and influenced by the environment in which they operate (including historical and cultural norms), as well as via their interactions with others (Creswell, 2013). Ponterotto (2005) highlighted the centrality of the interaction between the researcher and the individual being studied as a distinguishing characteristic of constructivism, and pointed out that only through this interaction deeper meaning can be uncovered. The researcher's own personal, cultural and historical experiences thus influence his/her interpretation (Creswell, 2013), and it is important for the researcher to be aware of and acknowledge this. It is through these interactions between the researcher and the individual(s) being studied that the researcher made sense of the meaning others held, and in the process obtained the needed findings (Ponterotto, 2005; Creswell, 2013).

#### **1.4.2.1.2 Research strategy**

In order to achieve the objectives of studies one and four a case-study strategy was followed. A qualitative case-study approach enabled the researcher to explore in detail the experiences of the individual/s within the particular context, using phenomenological methods (Willig, 2013). It allowed the researcher to explore individuals or organisations, relationships, communities or programmes (Yin, 2003), and assisted in explaining the motivation, experiences and behaviours of research participants (Willig, 2013). The focus of study one was centred on exploring demands from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout, while the focus of study four was on managing employee well-being by exploring the extent of job and personal resources availability to at risk employees.

#### **1.4.2.1.3 Research method**

The research method, for studies one and four, consisted of the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, research procedure, data collection methods, data recording, strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity, data analysis, and reporting style.

#### **1.4.2.1.4 Research setting**

The research was conducted within a specific business unit/division of a South African based financial services organisation. An annual climate survey was introduced as part of the people management strategy in the specific business unit just over two years ago (2014 onward). The financial organisation functioned with a decentralised operating model, i.e. every business unit aligned its strategy to the overall business strategy and hence determined its own people management strategy. The specific business unit had undergone significant changes in the period preceding the climate survey, and the decision to roll out the climate survey across the specific business unit was made part of a diagnostic process to determine how employees were doing; whether they were coping, and to identify critical areas that should be focused on as part of the people management strategy for the division. The particular business unit consisted of approximately 300 employees who were employed in one of the following areas: multiple call centres (e.g. sales, client services, and claims) as well as organisational support departments such as finance, actuarial, information technology and human resources. Positions in the business unit ranged from operational positions (e.g. call centre advisers) to senior management.

The particular business unit was based in Gauteng and interviews were conducted in the office building of the particular business unit to ensure both privacy and convenience for all. The nature of the discussions were semi-structured and care was taken to ensure that interviews took place in a relaxed and comfortable environment; private meeting rooms were booked to contribute to the level of safety and comfort experienced by the individuals during the discussions.

#### **1.4.2.1.5 Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

The researcher was part of the organisational development team, as an organisational development consultant, who implemented the annual organisational climate surveys (2014-2015) with the buy-in, support and permission from top management. Therefore the first role of the researcher was that of a planner - how the data was going to be collected, the sampling techniques and aspects of data analysis. The semi-structured interviews were set up with the aim of exploring and understanding the current well-being of individuals identified as being at high risk of burnout, and of understanding aspects contributing to the current state of well-being of these individuals, and interventions or support required to bring about change. The researcher prepared for the interviews by creating an interview guideline to use throughout all of the interviews and by reading through the individual human factor benchmark feedback reports on the individuals. The interpretive nature of qualitative research typically requires the researcher to be involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants (Creswell, 2013); the researcher fulfilled the role of an interviewer, active listener as well as facilitator during the discussions. As an organisational development consultant the researcher was also responsible for making referrals to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) in cases where individuals needed further support from a clinical psychologist or other relevant professionals. The researcher captured detailed notes of the experiences shared by participants during the interviews and transferred these notes onto a secure (password protected) electronic spread sheet. During the next phase the researcher fulfilled the role of data analyst as well as data interpreter by gathering the data, and analysing and interpreting it. The researcher made use of independent people in the same field of study to act as co-coders during data analysis; this contributed to ensuring an accurate analysis and truthful representation of the data. Finally, the researcher fulfilled the role of report writer, by writing up and presenting the data in a scientific manner in the form of a research article. The researcher strove to remain objective throughout the research process to not let her own values and ideas shape the interpretations formed during the study (Creswell, 2013) or influence the conduct of the research or the findings derived from the research.

#### **1.4.2.1.6 Sampling and procedure**

The sample comprised employees working for a financial services organisation. The population consisted of approximately 300 employees from operational areas (of which the

majority were call centre personnel) and support areas (e.g. finance, actuarial). The project formed part of the annual organisational climate survey implementation. Much work was done in advance to ensure that the survey was set up and positioned effectively to all employees, e.g. positioning of the survey with leadership, staff awareness sessions and different forms of communication sent out to inform the working population that it was time for the annual climate survey. Employees were reminded that participation was voluntary and confidential. The survey was rolled out in the environment on a yearly basis and the employee participation rate ranged from 89% - 92% over the two years that the survey was implemented. The work that was done around the positioning of the survey (and the manner in which the survey results were used to provide feedback and to identify interventions for improvement after year one) contributed to building trust in the process and assisted in increasing the overall participation rate during year two of the survey. It is assumed to also be a result of the confidential and professional manner in which the organisational development team had implemented these projects and assisted employees and managers in addressing organisational climate issues in the past.

For studies one and four, a combination of purposive and convenience sampling was used. Purposive sampling selects participants according to criteria of relevance to the research question being studied (Willig, 2013); for both studies the criteria used to select participants were employees from the population group referred to above who were identified as being at risk of burnout by using the OHFB system (normed). The convenience sampling aspect of the sampling was decided on due to the voluntary decision, and convenience and availability of the participants (Creswell, 2013). All OHFB surveys were completed online through a secure encrypted connection. Upon completion of the survey the OHFB immediately and automatically compared the results of the employee to the OHFB's South African norm in order to determine each individual employee's burnout-risk level. The norm is based on at least 50,000 employees in South Africa from various economic sectors. The participants were prompted to indicate whether they would grant the organisational development team (of which the researcher formed part) permission to contact them to discuss their results – if permission was granted, they were contacted based on their provided employee number. If permission was denied, the process of further follow-up ceased and the individual results were sealed. All employees, regardless of risk status, were aware that they could contact the organisational development team or the employee assistance programme (EAP) at any stage for assistance and/or intervention regarding any aspect of their work-related or personal well-

being status. No adverse incidents occurred that should have been reported and the project was deemed successful.

#### **1.4.2.1.7 Data collection**

By conducting semi-structured interviews the researcher explored the experiences of work-related well-being from the participants' viewpoints. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to build rapport, have more flexibility regarding matters being discussed, and entering into novel areas, which tends to produce richer data (Smith, 2007).

The interview guidelines used in the qualitative interview phase are provided below. These questions served to guide the interview rather than dictate it as the researcher needed the flexibility to respond to the answers given by the participants in order to explore matters raised during the interview. The points listed below each question are examples of sub-questions (probing questions) used for further probing for more detailed or 'richer' responses from the participants after the primary question had been posed. In both studies the first three interviews were considered pilot interviews to observe whether the questions were understood and had provided the information required. These interview questions were deemed appropriate after the initial interviews and were continued with:

#### ***Study 1 interview questions:***

Question 1: Tell me about your personal well-being?

- How are you currently doing?
- How are you feeling?
- Are you experiencing any concerns regarding your physical health?
- Are you experiencing any concerns regarding you psychological health?

Question 2: What factors contributed to your current state of well-being?

- What impact did this have/is this having on you?
- Are things happening in your personal/family life that is contributing to the stress and/or exhaustion you are experiencing?
- Are things happening in your work life that is contributing to the stress and/or exhaustion you are experiencing?

#### ***Study 4 interview questions:***

Question 1: What resources in your work environment play a role to contribute to your well-being?

- What support are you currently receiving in the workplace and from whom?
- What support would you have liked to receive in the workplace that you are currently not receiving?
- Are things happening in the work environment that helps you to cope better when there is a lot expected of you?
- Are there things that you would have liked to happen/be available in the work environment as it would have helped you to cope better with all the demands?

Question 2: What resources in your personal life play a role to contribute to your well-being?

- What are you currently doing to help yourself to cope better with the demands expected from you?
- What action/s can you take to help yourself to improve your well-being when things are tough?
- What support are you receiving/not receiving which impacts your well-being?

#### **1.4.2.1.8 Recording of data**

Data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews which resembled a conversation with a theme. The researcher recorded *detailed* notes of the experiences shared by participants during the in-depth interviews and captured these notes onto a secure (password protected) electronic (Microsoft Excel) spread sheet. Due to the sensitive nature of the interviews and the experience of the researcher with such interviews within the organisation, the responses of the participants were not recorded, since they generally feel more at ease without a recording of their voices. Hence the focus was centred on recording the data by means of detailed note taking. At the end of each interview the researcher confirmed that the notes recorded were in line with what the participant meant when answering the questions.

#### 1.4.2.1.9 Data analysis

Upon completion of all interviews with identified research participants, the researcher started a process of familiarisation with the data. A thematic analysis (TA) approach was followed. TA is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), and is recognised for its theoretical flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig 2013). TA can be applied to a wide range of research topics, and allows for studying people’s perspectives and ways of thinking about specific social phenomena (Willig, 2013). Through the process of TA the aim is to look for themes that emerge from the data as being important in describing the phenomenon being studied (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Clarke and Braun (2013) attributed the usefulness of this method to the following characteristics: it can be used with a wide range of research questions, it serves to analyse different types of data, it can be used with small or large data-sets, and it can serve to produce theory-driven or data-driven analyses. The six phases of TA as identified by Clarke and Braun (2013) guided the researcher for this study, and are presented as follows: i) familiarisation with the data, ii) coding, iii) searching for themes, iv) reviewing themes, v) defining and naming themes, and vi) writing up.

The first phase of TA is *familiarisation with the data* and is common to all forms of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase the researcher immersed herself in the data by reading and re-reading through the text to become intimately familiar and comfortable with the content of the dataset. Familiarisation also allowed the researcher to start identifying and noting potentially interesting features of the data relevant to each research question (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

Familiarisation was followed by the process of *coding* and involved “working through the text, ideally line-by-line, in order to identify meaning units, and labelling these with a code that captures the meaning identified” (Willig, 2013, p. 189). Codes are used to identify features of the data (semantic content or latent) that the researcher identifies as interesting and potentially relevant to the broad research question guiding the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Semantic codes are more inductive and summarise the surface meaning of the data while latent codes tend to dig deeper to identify ‘hidden meanings’ (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The researcher worked through a process of manually coding the data with the assistance of co-coders to ensure an accurate and enhanced process of code identification. While coding

the researcher and co-coders ensured that equal attention was given to each data item, and aimed to identify interesting aspects of the data that may form potential patterns (themes) across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher also remained conscious of the fact that the same segment of text can be given more than one code.

*Searching for themes* is the third phase of TA and involved an analysis of the identified codes to determine how the different codes could be combined to form an overarching theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes thus capture cluster of codes, and a higher level of analysis is consequently reflected in themes (Willig, 2013). “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The researcher and co-coders actively worked towards constructing themes in this phase, and applied their own analytical judgement to identify themes that were important and meaningful for answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013). The researcher also consciously strove to not construct themes which simply are a reflection of the researcher’s interview questions (Willig, 2013).

This was followed by the next phase of TA which consists of *reviewing themes*. Reviewing themes involved two focuses: 1) determining that the themes identified ‘work’ in relation to the coded data; and 2) ensuring that the identified themes ‘work’ in relation to the whole dataset (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The researcher did a final check of the entire dataset to determine this. During this phase the researcher checked that each theme tells a convincing and compelling story about the data, and began to define the boundaries of each individual theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2014). A thematic ‘map’ was generated to reflect the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher also identified whether it was necessary to collapse themes, split themes, or discard themes altogether and started the process of theme development again in cases where it was required (Braun & Clarke, 2006); this phase ended with a final set of themes.

During the ‘*defining and naming themes*’ phase the researcher generated clear definitions and names for each of the themes identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is the phase during which the “most substantive, interpretive analytic work is done, where the researcher produces detailed and complex definitions of each theme, which capture its shape and texture and how it relates to other themes” (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The researcher selected the data

extracts to be used in the final report, conducted and wrote a detailed analysis for each individual theme, as well as described the ‘story’ told by each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2014). Lastly, the researcher constructed a concise and informative name for each theme.

During the last phase of TA ‘writing up’, the researcher strove to tell the rich and complex story of the data by combining analytic narrative and data abstract, and aimed at doing it in such a manner that it would convince the reader of the validity of the interpretations (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

However, it is important to remember that qualitative data analysis is an interactive practice in which the various stages were interrelated and should not be seen as a linear model (Creswell, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Therefore the process was flexible and dynamic.

#### **1.4.2.1.10 Strategies to ensure quality data**

Rigour refers to the level of trust or confidence that exists in the results or finding(s) of a qualitative research study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Different frameworks establishing rigour exist in the literature. For purposes of this study the four constructs of trustworthiness as proposed by Guba (1981) was considered, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

##### *Credibility*

Credibility (similar to internal validity in quantitative terms) refers to ensuring that the phenomenon being studied has been accurately recorded (Shenton, 2004) and requires checking that the data captured accurately reflects the views and information shared by all participants involved in the study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher strove to ensure that participants’ views and answers to research questions were accurately captured and presented in a meaningful manner.

### *Transferability*

Transferability refers to external validity and “the extent to which the study may, or may not, have applicability beyond the specific context within which the data were generated” (Willig, 2013, p. 493). To ensure transferability, sufficient contextual information concerning the research setting and fieldwork should be provided to allow the reader to determine whether the case could be applied to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2004). The research process, context and participants were described comprehensively to contribute to establishing transferability.

### *Dependability*

Dependability (similar to reliability in quantitative terms) occurs when the research trail used can be followed by another researcher (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Through meticulous reporting of the processes within the study the researcher contributes to dependability by enabling readers of the research report to have an accurate and thorough understanding of the research methods and their effectiveness (Shenton, 2004). Dependability aims at creating an audit trail enabling future researchers to repeat the study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher strove to present the studies in a manner that would allow the reader to see and understand the process followed with a view to make decisions and interpretations.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability (similar to objectivity in quantitative terms) refers to keeping an openness and awareness to the study and to how the results are unfolding (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011) to help the researcher maintain an objective view and to not be influenced by preconceptions and personal biases. Credibility, transferability and dependability contribute to achieving confirmability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher made every effort to ensure objectivity and to be aware of own predispositions during the study.

#### **1.4.2.1.11 Reporting style**

Different approaches can be followed for writing up qualitative research. “A qualitative research report should contain information about the rationale of the study (including

references to relevant literature), about how it was carried out (including both data collection and analysis), what was found and what these findings may mean (including their implications for theory and practice)” (Willig, 2013, p. 224). Various tables with comprehensive descriptions were used to report on research findings, including themes and subthemes.

#### **1.4.2.2 Study 2: Investigating the longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings: A cross-lagged model**

##### **1.4.2.2.1 Research approach**

For this study, a quantitative research approach specifically a longitudinal design – was followed with data collected over time (Creswell, 2013), i.e. measurement took place at two points in time. This allows the researcher to investigate changes in variables over time or to determine causal evidence for relationships.

##### **1.4.2.2.2 Research participants and procedure**

The research was conducted within a specific business unit/division of a South African based financial services organisation. An annual climate survey was introduced as part of the people management strategy in the specific business unit just over two years prior to the inception of the study. The financial organisation functioned with a decentralised operating model, i.e. every business unit aligned its strategy to the overall business strategy and hence determined its own people management strategy. The specific business unit had undergone significant changes in the period preceding the first climate survey, and the decision to roll out the climate survey across the specific business unit was made part of a diagnostic process to determine how people were doing, whether they were coping, and to identify critical areas that need to be focused on as part of the people management strategy for the division. The particular business unit consisted of approximately 300 employees who were employed in one of the following areas: multiple call centres (e.g. sales, client services, and claims) as well as organisational support departments such as finance, actuarial, information technology, human resources etc. Positions in the business unit ranged from advanced operational positions, e.g. call centre advisers to senior management.

The climate survey was rolled out for the first time in the business unit in 2014, with the second climate survey being rolled out a year later in 2015. A convenience sample ( $n = 250$ ) was used for purposes of this study as participants were chosen based on convenience, i.e. they were employed in close proximity and easily accessible, in the business unit, at both points in time when the climate survey project took place. Participants were requested to provide consent on both occasions that their data may be used for research purposes.

#### **1.4.2.2.3 Measuring instruments**

*Demographic characteristics:* Only basic demographic characteristics of the participants were reported. This is necessitated by the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2008) for publications and due to the non-probability sampling method employed, i.e. to be transparent when disseminating the research results by providing the basic sample composition to consider the extent and applicability of the generalisation of the results (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). The demographic characteristics reported were: age (mean; standard deviation), gender and ethnicity.

*Burnout risk* was measured using a 9-item scale from the Organisational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB). The OHFB is based on the South African Employee Health and Wellness survey (SAEHWS) and is a normed survey for the South African context which has been shown to measure burnout, when operationalized by its core constructs, indiscriminately from the Maslach Burnout Inventory's core components (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) when applied as a latent variable in a recent technical report (De Beer, 2015). Exhaustion and mental distance (cynicism) were measured: Exhaustion: ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) by five items, e.g. 'I feel tired before I arrive at work'; Mental distance (Cynicism): ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ) by four items, e.g. 'I am uncertain whether my work is important'. In the context of article one, the absence of instruments with clear cut-off's for burnout risk within the South African context, the selection of the OHFB was considered acceptable as it identifies burnout risks based on normed scores of over 50 000 employees that have participated in South Africa.

*Work engagement* was measured using the 8-item scale of the OHFB. Specifically, a single work engagement variable was constituted with its core components: vigour was measured with 4 items (e.g. 'I am full of energy in my work') and dedication was measured with 4 items (e.g. 'I find my work is full of meaning and purpose'). All items were measured on a 7-

point Likert scale ranging from Never to Always. The work engagement construct has shown acceptable reliability within the South African context (e.g. De Beer et al., 2012).

*Performance ratings* were based on objective data from ratings allocated by supervisors of the employee based on the employee's yearly performance review – in a consultative process with the employee. These ratings are categorised in four different ways: 1) Non-performance, 2) Under performance, 3) Good performance, and 4) Excellent performance. This was therefore a single categorical outcome variable for each employee in the dataset.

#### **1.4.2.2.4 Statistical analysis**

All statistical models were investigated with Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Specifically, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling methods (SEM) were applied. The following fit indicators were considered for models: The comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). For the CFI and TLI values of 0.90 or above are the general rule of thumb, and for the RMSEA a value of below 0.10 is generally acceptable, although smaller than 0.08 is preferred. Furthermore, correlations were also generated between variables. Effect size considerations for correlations were considered medium ( $r \geq 0.30$ ) and large ( $r \geq 0.50$ ) (Cohen, 1988).

CFA was conducted to constitute the factors, i.e. a measurement model was established based on the factors under investigation: Burnout, work engagement and performance rating. Then, a cross-lagged auto-regressive structural model was specified in order to investigate the relationships in the model. This type of model controls for the variable effects on itself over time as well as with the variables of interest. The focus was on the standardised regression (beta) coefficient's size, direction and statistical significance. Relationships were considered statistically significant at the 95% level, i.e.  $p < 0.05$ . See Figure 1 below for the model.

#### **1.4.2.3 Study 3: The impact of work engagement and burnout on a customer satisfaction index in a call centre environment**

#### **1.4.2.3.1 Research approach**

Then, in study three, a cross-sectional research design was implemented (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zeichmesiter, 2003), i.e. data were analysed at only one point in time in order to address the research objectives.

#### **1.4.2.3.2 Research participants and procedure**

The research was conducted within a specific business unit/division of a South African based financial services organisation. An annual climate survey was introduced as part of the people management strategy in the specific business unit over two years. The financial services organisation functioned with a decentralised operating model i.e. every business unit aligned its strategy to the overall business strategy and hence determined its own people management strategy. The specific business unit went through significant changes in the period preceding the first climate survey, and the decision to roll out the climate survey across the specific business unit was made as part of a diagnostic process to determine how people were functioning; whether they were coping and to identify critical areas that needed to be focused on as part of the people management strategy for the division. The particular business unit consisted of approximately 300 employees employed both in operational and support areas.

For purposes of this study a convenience sample ( $n = 132$ ) was used, i.e. individuals employed in the various call centre areas were included as participants in the study. Participants were requested to provide consent that data may be used for research purposes during the completion of the climate survey.

#### **1.4.2.3.3 Measuring instruments**

*Demographic characteristics:* Only basic demographic characteristics of the participants were reported. This is necessitated by the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2008) for publications and due to the non-probability sampling method employed, i.e. to be transparent when disseminating the research results by providing the basic sample composition to consider the extent and applicability of the generalisation of the results (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). The demographic characteristics reported were: age (mean; standard deviation), gender and ethnicity.

*Burnout* risk was measured using a 9-item scale from the Organisational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB; Afriforte, 2013). The OHFB is based on the South African Employee Health and Wellness survey (SAEHWS) and is a normed survey for the South African context which has been shown to measure burnout, when operationalized by its core constructs, indiscriminately from the Maslach Burnout Inventory's core components (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) when applied as a latent variable in a recent technical report (De Beer, 2015). Exhaustion and mental distance (cynicism) were measured: Exhaustion: ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) using five items, e.g. 'I feel tired before I arrive at work'; Mental distance (Cynicism): ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ) using four items, e.g. 'I am uncertain whether my work is important'. In the context of article one, the absence of instruments with clear cut-offs for burnout risk within the South African context, the selection of the OHFB was considered acceptable as it identifies burnout risks based on normed scores of over 50 000 employees who have participated in South Africa.

*Work engagement* was measured using the 8-item scale of the OHFB (Afriforte, 2013). Specifically, a single work engagement variable was constituted with its core components: vigour was measured using 4 items (e.g. 'I am full of energy in my work') and dedication was measured using 4 items (e.g. 'I find my work is full of meaning and purpose'). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Never to Always. The work engagement construct has shown acceptable reliability within the South African context (e.g. De Beer et al., 2012).

*Customer satisfaction index* (CSI) scores were based on a single item from ratings received from customers after interactions with call centre advisers. Customers were requested to rate interactions with call centre advisers to reflect the level of satisfaction experienced based on the service received from the specific adviser by completing a survey that was sent to the customer. The options available to the customer for rating the service received from the adviser included the following: awesome, good, acceptable, bad and very bad.

#### **1.4.2.3.4 Statistical analysis**

All statistical models were investigated with Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Specifically, structural equation modelling methods (SEM) were applied. Mplus was specifically chosen as it has the ability to model normal continuous data as predictors with

count data as outcome variables in the same model (Kelloway, 2015). This is the case for the current study's dependent variables which are by definition count data. Count data can be described as non-negative integer values (e.g. 0, 1, 2, ... ) which are zero-inflated, i.e. a lot of 0 values are present in the data and the data is therefore usually positively skewed (Heck & Thomas, 2015; Kelloway, 2015). To this end the regression method in this model was the Poisson regression. The Poisson distribution can be thought of as an approximation to the binomial distribution for *rare* events (Heck & Thomas, 2015). The significance and direction of the Poisson regression estimates were considered in order to answer the research question, i.e. whether burnout and work engagement present significant increases or decreases in the customer satisfaction index ratings by customers for the employees.

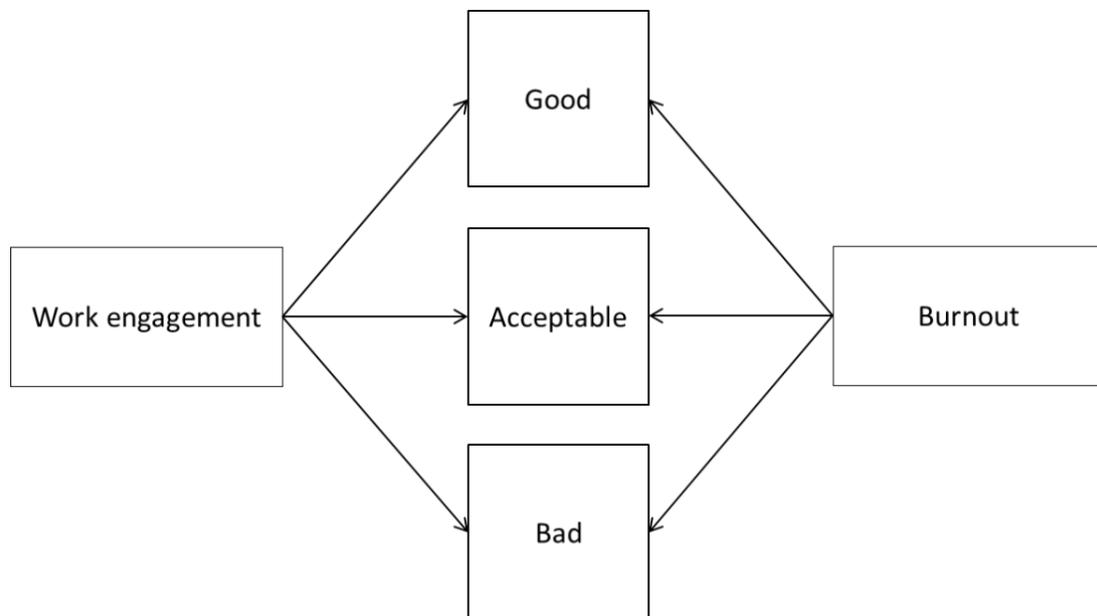


Figure 2. *The structural model for study 3 with Poisson regressions*

### 1.4.3 Ethical considerations

Research has an ethical as well as a moral dimension and often requires a balance between two values: the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the rights of the individuals being studied (Neuman, 2003). As part of doing research, specifically in behavioural and social sciences where people's involvement is vital to the success of the study, the researcher has an ethical responsibility towards the population in order to minimise any discomfort or harm. Broom (2006) emphasises that maintaining high ethical standards is of critical importance in social

research for a number of reasons: it protects participants and researchers; it improves the quality of the data retrieved; and ensures that future researchers will also have access to participants within the community.

In order to ensure that this research project was dealt with in an ethical manner and that the dignity, rights and well-being of participants were considered, the project was guided by the following principles:

- Privacy and confidentiality: the identity of all research participants was and will be protected and the information collected dealt with in a confidential manner. Unique numerical identifiers were used to ensure anonymity of all participants. Therefore, if the data should ever be compromised, the intruder would not be able to identify any group or individual within the organisation and would also struggle to identify what data has been found due to the cryptic manner in which items were specified.
- Voluntary participation: it is known in the organisation, and was also clearly communicated to all employees that their involvement in the project was voluntary and free from any coercion, which means they could decide not to participate and to end their involvement at any point in time. Therefore only completed surveys could be included in the study and the incomplete had to be discarded.
- Informed consent: obtained from the organisation where the data was collected with the agreement that all data will be treated in a confidential manner and that the results of the study will be shared with the company *after conclusion* of the entire study. The survey was done electronically (web-based) and the terms and conditions had to be accepted in order to continue with the study.
- Do no harm: the employee assistance programme (EAP), with the applicably qualified professionals, were and are available to all employees in the event of any unforeseen circumstance that might have arisen during the research project. No adverse incidents were reported.
- Data security: data collected for the study is kept confidential in a securely managed data warehouse with state of the art security measures (e.g. 24 hour monitoring of networks by IT security experts) – similar to the banking environment.

## 1.5. Division of chapters

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Exploring demands from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout
Chapter 3	Investigating the longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings: A cross-lagged model
Chapter 4	The impact of work engagement and burnout on a customer satisfaction index rating in a call centre environment
Chapter 5	Managing employee well-being: A qualitative study exploring job and personal resources of at risk employees
Chapter 6	Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

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**CHAPTER 2**  
**RESEARCH ARTICLE 1**

# Exploring demands from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout: A qualitative study<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

**Orientation:** The well-being of employees is influenced by demands experienced by them. Currently, limited information exists on how demands are experienced by employees and the impact thereof on their well-being.

**Research purpose:** To explore how employees, that were identified as being at risk of burnout, experience demands.

**Motivation for the study:** Burnout has become an occupational health concern. However, little is known about the experiences of individuals identified as being at risk of burnout. This study aimed at addressing that gap by exploring how employees identified as being burnout risks, experience well-being.

**Research design, approach and method:** Interviews were conducted with 26 employees that agreed to participate in the study. A phenomenological approach was adopted, with a case study design as the research strategy.

**Main findings:** Three major categories were identified: job demands, life demands, and health concerns. It was evident that participants were experiencing demanding conditions in both their work and personal lives, indicating burnout to be a multi-domain phenomenon.

**Practical/Managerial implications:** Professionals and managers should take note of these results to assist and support employees that are identified as being at risk of burnout.

**Contribution/Value-add:** This study contributed important information related to demands as experienced by employees that had been identified as being at risk of burnout.

**Keywords:** Employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, job demands, life demands, health concerns, qualitative research design, phenomenological approach

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<sup>1</sup> Accepted for publication in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*.

## Introduction

Employees form a critical resource in enabling organisations to deliver on strategic intent and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (cf. Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2015). Overall, employee well-being (life evaluation, emotional health, physical health, healthy behaviour, work environment, and basic access) has been found to predict future employer outcomes related to health, productivity, and retention (Sears, Shi, Coberley, & Pope, 2013). It could be argued that this should make the well-being of employees a critical focus area for organisations, yet this is seldom the case. In the current economic climate employees are often expected to deliver more outputs with fewer resources, often expressed by the mantra: “Do more with less” (Evenstad, 2015). This leads to increased pressure experienced by employees, negatively affecting their well-being into an eventual state of burnout (De Beer, Rothmann Jr., & Pienaar, 2012; Steinhardt, Smith-Jaggars, Faulk & Gloria, 2011).

Burnout is an occupational concern which negatively impacts the health of employees as well as work-related outcomes in organisations (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014). Burnout can be described as a psychological syndrome characterised by exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Anand and Arora (2009) described employees who are suffering from burnout as being emotionally exhausted, detached from their clients and work (cynicism/depersonalization), and feeling unable to achieve their goals (professional inefficacy). Strong empirical evidence exists that implies inordinate job demands as an important predictor of burnout (Alarcon, 2011; De Beer, Pienaar, & Rothmann Jr., 2016; Lee & Ashforth, 1996).

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model is a theoretical framework that can be used to explain not only the impact of job demands, but also the impact of job resources on work-related well-being (consisting of burnout and work engagement) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) and comprises two processes, i) a health impairment process and ii) a motivational process (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). While the motivational process indicates that job resources lead to organisational commitment via work engagement (De Beer et al., 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), the health impairment process holds that high job demands (e.g. workload and emotional demands) drain employees’ mental and physical resources leading to the depletion of energy

(Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and also to psychological and physical health problems (Bakker et al., 2014; De Beer et al., 2016). For purposes of the current study, the research focused on the health impairment process of the JD-R model as foundation to explore demanding aspects of employees' lives.

However, when investigating demands experienced by employees, it is important to consider job demands as well as life demands (Bianchi, 2016). Dybre et al. (2006) confirmed that despite the notion that burnout is mainly linked to work-related stress, a strong relationship also exists between personal life events and professional burnout - highlighting the importance of investigating both job and personal demands in creating a better understanding of burnout as experienced by employees. The impact of job demands on burnout has been explored by various researchers (e.g. Alarcon, 2011; Seidler et al., 2014), and typically include aspects such as work overload, emotional demands, work-home interference, role ambiguity, role conflict, role stress, stressful events, and time pressure (Faúndez, Monte, Miranda, Wilke & Ferraz, 2014; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Schaufeli et al., 2009). In investigating the impact of life demands on burnout, life events have been found to have an impact on burnout risk - e.g. divorce, personal illness, illness or death of a close family member, marriage, birth, and adoption of a child (Dybre et al., 2006).

In the literature, burnout has been linked to both psychological and physical ill-health symptoms. The relationship between burnout and depression is frequently explored in literature (Bianchi, Schonfeld, & Laurent, 2015); burnout has been reported to predict symptoms of depression (Ahola, 2007; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012) and life dissatisfaction (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). Thuynsma and De Beer (2016) also found symptoms of depression and satisfaction with life (coupled with job demands) to explain significant amounts of variance in the burnout construct. Burnout has been demonstrated to also lead to poor physical health including sleep disturbances, headaches, respiratory infections, and gastrointestinal infections (Kim, Ji, & Kao, 2011) as well as musculoskeletal problems (Armon, Melamed, Shirom, & Shapira, 2010). Kivimäki and Kawachi (2015) reported in a review of evidence from 27 cohort studies, of more than 600 000 individuals, that work stressors such as job strain and long working hours are associated with a moderately elevated risk of incident coronary heart disease and stroke. In addition thereto the same study also indicated an association between work stress and type-2 diabetes (Kivimäki & Kawachi, 2015). Research within South Africa has shown that burnout is linked to self-reported

treatment for diabetes (De Beer et al., 2016). Hence it is clear that a link exists between burnout and health.

Although previous studies have produced a long list of possible predictors of burnout, a complete understanding of the process and experience of burnout is still lacking (Ten Brummelhuis, Ter Hoeven, Bakker, & Peper, 2011), specifically also within the South African context.

### Research purpose and objectives

A need exists for integrative research in the field of organisational psychology to combat the risk of unreliable results associated with continued compartmentalisation of occupational and non-occupational domains in research on burnout (Bianchi, 2016). This qualitative study set out to explore the demanding aspects in the lives of employees that were identified as being at risk for burnout. Having a more comprehensive understanding of burnout experienced by employees, and the role of job and personal demands, will enable organisations to better support employees, contribute to the creation of an environment that will allow employees to function optimally, and simultaneously contribute to the field of organisational research.

### Literature review

#### **Job demands and burnout**

The term *job demands* refers to those physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (emotional and cognitive) effort or skills and are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and have been found to be strong predictors of burnout (e.g. De Beer et al., 2016; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Examples of job demands can include high work pressure, an unfavourable physical work environment, emotionally draining interactions, risk and hazards, physical demands, complexity of work, and cognitive demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011; Sawang, 2012). Numerous quantitative studies over the past decade have shown job characteristics (e.g. job demands) to have a profound impact on employee well-being (e.g.

job strain and burnout). A study by Schaufeli et al. (2009) revealed that an increase in job demands (emotional demands, overload, and work-home interference) predicts burnout. In a study among nurses, Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2000) confirmed the strong effects of job demands (positive effect) on exhaustion (this said study also confirmed the mediating role of burnout between working conditions and life satisfaction). Furthermore, Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) supported the positive relationship between job demands and burnout, and further suggested a differentiation between job demands based on the nature of the demand (challenges vs. hindrances). Understanding the different demands present in a working environment (and the impact thereof) is critical for organisations so as to determine appropriate strategies to navigate the employee well-being landscape.

In a qualitative study aimed at obtaining a more in-depth understanding of how nurses experience long-lasting stress and burnout, changes and reorganisations were highlighted by participants as stressors (Billeter-Koponen & Fredén, 2005); the process of decision-making in the areas where reorganisation occurred without consideration for the knowledge and experience of nurses, despite the fact that decisions have a significant impact on their daily work, were specifically pointed out. Athlete burnout was also studied in which a qualitative approach was followed by Gustafsson, Hassmén, Kenttä and Johansson (2008) who found athlete burnout to be a complex interaction of multiple stressors (e.g. “too much sport”), inadequate recovery and frustration from unfulfilled expectations. A qualitative research approach is beneficial in that it allows a deeper insight into the issues being studied (Patton, 2002) from the perspective of employees, as also was case in the current study.

### **Life demands and employee well-being**

In addition to dealing with job demands, employees are also required to deal with demands of life in general. Bianchi, Truchot, Laurent, Brisson, and Schonfeld (2014) argued that the burnout phenomenon cannot be solely confined to work because chronic, unresolvable stress is not limited to work, and should therefore be considered a multi-domain syndrome. In investigating burnout among medical students, Dybre et al. (2006) considered “negative” life events (divorce, personal illness, illness in a close family member or significant other, death of a close family member) as well as “positive” life events (marriage, birth, adoption of a child) to determine the impact thereof on burnout, and found personal life events (e.g. personally experiencing a major illness, and number of negative personal life events

experienced within the previous 12 months) to be strongly related to the experience of professional burnout among medical students. Similarly, Thuynsma and De Beer (2016) found that generic life factors such as satisfaction with life explain significant amounts of variance in the burnout construct, and as a result suggested that burnout be considered a multi-domain phenomenon and not be solely restricted to the domain of work. According to Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, and Mansfield (2012), satisfaction with life is a complex function of an individual's contentment with the different domains influencing his or her life, e.g. family, leisure, health, and work. In a study amongst international humanitarian aid workers personal life events were found to be associated with burnout; participants experiencing crucial personal stressors prior to deployment (e.g. having been in a serious car crash or having had a serious illness) tended to be at an increased risk for burnout, while participants that had a history of domestic violence or similar experiences before deployment were at a higher risk for psychological distress (Cardozo et al., 2012). In the literature, burnout has also been associated with family-related features; having children has been associated with greater emotional exhaustion and lower personal achievement (Ayala & Carnero, 2013).

Striving for an optimal balance between work and home has become increasingly challenging (Nam, 2014; Sturges, 2012). The economic climate necessitates more dual income earning households, and technology allows us to be constantly connected through smart phones, laptops, emails, and social networks, making it difficult to separate the boundaries between work and home (Derks & Bakker, 2014; Green, 2002; Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2005; Wright et al., 2014). Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker and Schaufeli (2005) realised the need for distinguishing between work and home domains in the explanation of burnout. The study they conducted confirmed a three-factor structure of job and home demands (consisting of quantitative demands [overload], emotional demands, and mental demands), and found job demands as well as home demands to have a direct and indirect effect (through work-home interference and home-work interference respectively) on burnout (Peeters et al., 2005). Work-home interference (WHI) describes a process of negative interaction between work and home domains (Van Hooff, Geurts, Kompier & Taris, 2006).

A review of the literature has revealed a paucity of studies exploring the impact and contribution of life demands in the context of burnout, specifically also within the South African context. It is believed that the qualitative approach of this study will contribute to a

better understanding of demands as experienced by employees identified as being at risk of burnout.

### **Consequences of the health impairment process on well-being**

De Beer et al. (2016) found supportive evidence for the causal relationship in the health impairment process. That is, work overload at time one predicted burnout at time two, which, in turn predicted psychological ill-health symptoms at time three. A meta-analytical study by Nahrgang et al. (2011) also supported the health impairment process; job demands (risks, hazards, and complexity) were found to impair employees' health and were positively related to burnout. Similarly, Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola (2008) also found evidence of partial mediation for burnout between job demands and psychological ill-health, with two waves of data.

Previous work-based studies have revealed that burnout is related to undesirable organisational outcomes such as absenteeism-related incidents, reduced commitment and reduced work performance (Bakker et al., 2014). Burnout has been associated with a range of psychological and physical health problems, including predicting absence duration (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2009), presenteeism (Demerouti, Le Blanc, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Hox, 2009), sleep disturbances (De Beer, Pienaar, & Rothmann Jr., 2014; Doi, 2005; Peterson, Demerouti, Bergström, Samuelsson, Åsberg & Nygren, 2008), and self-reported depression, anxiety, memory impairment, and neck-and back pain (Peterson et al., 2008). This is further supported by De Beer et al. (2014) that found a positive relationship between job burnout and self-reported treatment for depression, diabetes, hypertension and irritable bowel syndrome. Furthermore, employee burnout has been linked to medical aid provider expenditure in that an employee group scoring high on burnout, visited a doctor (general practitioner) more often, and the medical aid provider expenditure was nearly double that of the low burnout group, on all the variables (De Beer, Pienaar, Rothmann Jr., 2013).

Moreover, in the literature burnout has also been linked to depression. Different views currently prevail in the research on whether burnout should be seen as a distinct entity, or viewed as a symptom of depression (Bianchi et al., 2015; Thuynsma & De Beer, 2016). Evidence for the singularity of the burnout phenomenon is inconsistent (Bianchi et al., 2015).

A three-wave study conducted by Hakanen and Schaufeli (2012) supported that burnout predicted depressive symptoms (and not the other way round) and life dissatisfaction from time one to time two, and from time two to time three. Thuynsma and De Beer (2016) found evidence that burnout could be distinguished from symptoms of depression, and that job demands, symptoms of depression, and satisfaction with life all explained significant amounts of variance in the burnout construct. The key-point to take note of from these debates is the strong overlap that exists between symptoms of burnout and symptoms of depression (Bianchi, Boffy, Hingray, Truchot & Laurent, 2013; Bianchi et al., 2015), and the consequent negative impact thereof on the well-being of employees. However, current research practice still indicates that burnout and depression are considered separate entities.

The present study aimed at contributing to a better understanding of the experiences of employees identified as burnout risks and the implications thereof on the effective functioning of employees (both within their personal and organisational environment). In order to achieve this aim, a qualitative research approach was followed.

## **Research design**

The research design comprises three parts: the research approach, research strategy, and research method.

### **Research approach**

The study was qualitative in nature. This approach allowed the researcher to gain deeper insight into and understanding of the way employees identified as being at risk of burnout, experienced demands. Qualitative research allows for a close fit between the data and what people actually say and do (Taylor, Bogdan, & De Vault, 2015) and produces rich and contextually insightful data (Marecek, 2003). A phenomenological approach contributed to the understanding of everyday experiences of participants and allowed the researcher to gain deep insight into the manifestations of reality (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2005) while refraining from placing emphasis on a preconceived idea of the phenomenon (Converse, 2012). This approach allowed the study to reflect an accurate and authentic description of experiences and views as shared by participants.

The study was grounded within the social constructivism paradigm. The social constructivist worldview considers the specific contexts in which people live and work, and the aim of the research is to be guided as much as possible by the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivists believe that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, and cannot be seen external to the individual (Hansen, 2004). Through interactions between the researcher and individuals being studied, the researcher made sense of the views others constructed within their minds, while being aware of and acknowledging own personal, cultural and historical experiences (Creswell, 2013). Ponterotto (2005) highlighted the centrality of the interaction between the researcher and the individual being studied as a distinguishing characteristic of social constructivism, and pointed out that only through this interaction deeper meaning can be uncovered.

### **Research strategy**

The researcher employed a case study strategy to achieve the objective of the study. Case studies are formed to “richly describe, explain, or assess and evaluate a phenomenon” (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015, p. 25) and helps to explain the motivation, experiences and behaviours of research participants (Willig, 2013). In this current study the researcher aimed at exploring the experience of demands from the perspectives of employees identified as being at risk of burnout within the organisation. A single case study strategy was employed in which the organisation represented the unit of analysis where the phenomenon of burnout was studied. The case study approach allowed for an intensive and deeply focused exploration of the identified research topic (Willig, 2013).

### **Research method**

The research method consisted of the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, research procedure, data collection methods, data recording, strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity, data analysis, and reporting style.

## **Research setting**

The research was conducted within a specific business unit/division of a South African based financial services organisation. The specific business unit introduced an annual climate survey as part of the people management strategy in the particular business unit just over two years ago (2014 onwards). The financial organisation functioned with a decentralised operating model, i.e. every business unit aligned its strategy to the overall business strategy and hence determined its own people management strategy. The specific business unit underwent significant changes in the period preceding the climate survey, and the decision to roll out the climate survey across the specific business unit was made part of a diagnostic process to determine how employees were doing, whether they were coping, and to identify critical areas that should be focused on as part of the people management strategy for the division. The particular business unit had departments ranging across various functions including multiple call centres (e.g. sales, client services, and claims) as well as organisational support departments such as finance, actuarial, information technology and human resources. Roles in the business unit ranged from operational positions (e.g. call centre advisers) to senior management. The particular business unit had a headcount of approximately 300 employees and is based in Gauteng province in South Africa. Interviews were conducted in the office building of the particular business unit to ensure both privacy and convenience for all; private meeting rooms were booked to contribute to the level of safety and comfort experienced by the individuals during the discussions.

## **Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

It was required of the researcher to fulfil various roles during the course of the research study. The first role of the researcher was that of a planner (how the data was going to be collected, the sampling techniques and aspects of data analysis) as the researcher was part of the organisational development team that had implemented the annual organisational climate surveys (2014 – 2015) with the buy-in, support and permission from top management.

Next, the researcher fulfilled the role of interviewer, active listener as well as facilitator during the discussions as the interpretive nature of qualitative research typically required the researcher to be involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants (Cresswell, 2013). The semi-structured interviews were set up with the aim to explore and

understand the experiences of well-being of individuals identified as being at high risk of burnout, as well as to explore the demands contributing to the state of their current well-being. The researcher prepared for the interviews by creating an interview schedule to use throughout all of the interviews and by reading through the individual human factor benchmark feedback reports of the individuals. As an organisational development consultant the researcher was also responsible for making referrals to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) in cases where individuals needed further support from a clinical psychologist and/or other relevant professionals. During the data-analysing phase the researcher as well as two co-coders (in the same field of study, already at PhD level) fulfilled the role of gathering, analysing and interpreting the data; this was done in order to ensure an accurate analysis and truthful representation of the data. Finally the researcher fulfilled the role of report writer, by writing up and presenting the data in a scientific manner in the form of a research article. The researcher made every effort to remain objective throughout the research process to not let her own values and ideas shape the interpretations formed during the study (Cresswell, 2013) or influence the conduct of the research or findings derived from the research.

### **Sampling and procedure**

The population comprised approximately 300 employees working for a financial services organisation. The project formed part of the particular business unit's annual organisational climate survey implementation, and the population included employees from operational areas (of which the majority were call centre personnel) as well as support areas (e.g. finance, actuarial). Much attention was given to the setup and effective positioning of the survey, which included positioning of the survey with different levels of leadership, face to face engagement with staff, and different forms of communication sent out to inform all employees of the purpose and process of the annual climate survey. Included in the communication sent out to position the purpose of the survey, employees were also reminded that participation would be voluntary and the results would be dealt with confidentially. Only permanent employees employed by the particular business unit at that point in time could participate in the survey. The annual survey was first rolled out in the environment two years ago (in 2014) and the employee participation rate ranged from 89% to 92% over the two years during which the survey was implemented. The increased overall participation rate during year two of the survey is contributed to the work done around the positioning of the

survey, as well as to the manner in which the survey results were used to provide feedback and to identify interventions for improvement after year one. It is assumed to also be a result of the confidential and professional way in which the organisational development team has implemented these projects and assisted employees and managers in addressing organisational climate issues in the past. Informed consent was obtained from the employees and organisation for using the survey results for research purposes. Only employees identified as being at risk of burnout, and that granted the organisational development team permission to access their survey results, were contacted for potential participation in the interviews.

A combination of purposive and convenience sampling was done in the study. Purposive sampling selects sample units based on particular features or characteristics which allows for detailed exploration and understanding of particular themes the researcher intends to study (Richie & Lewis, 2003). The criterion used to select participants in the present study was employees from the population group referred to above that were identified as being at risk of burnout, by applying the second annual organisational climate survey (2015). The Organisational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB) survey is a normed survey for the South African context, based on at least 50,000 employees in South Africa from various economic sectors. The climate survey (OHFB) included a burnout module from the South African Employee Health and Wellness Survey (SAEHWS) which has been validated for the South African context (e.g. De Beer et al., 2012). The items form a total score for burnout (Cronbach's alpha coefficient for implementation was 0.89; acceptable) based on its core components (exhaustion and cynicism; De Beer & Bianchi, 2017). The convenience sampling aspect of the sampling was done due to the voluntary decision, convenience and availability of participants (Cresswell, 2013). All OHFB surveys were completed online through a secure encrypted connection. Upon completion of the survey the OHFB system automatically compared the results of the employee to the OHFB's South African norm in order to determine the employees' burnout risk level. The participants were prompted to indicate whether they provide permission to the organisational development team (of which the researcher formed part) to access their results and to contact them to discuss their results. If permission was granted, at risk participants were contacted based on the employee number provided. In cases where permission was denied the process for further follow-up ceased and the individual results were sealed. Forty-nine employees were identified as being at risk of burnout by means of the OHFB survey (when compared against the norm within the South

African workforce they scored above the norm and were therefore considered to be potential participants); thirty-four of those employees granted permission to the organisational development team to access their results, and a total of 26 employees agreed to participate in an interview. Participants completed a biographical questionnaire which provided the research team with the following information. Of all the participants 14 (54%) were female and 12 (46%) male. The largest proportion of participants were White people ( $n=13$ ; 50%), while 7 (27%) were Black African people, 5 (19%) Indian people, and (1) 4% Coloured people. The average age of the participant group was 31.08 years ( $SD = 5.94$ ), specifically the majority of participants were between the ages of 25 and 35 years ( $n = 17$ ; 65%), while 3 (12%) were younger than 25 years, and 6 (23%) were between the ages of 35 and 45 years.

All employees, regardless of risk status, were aware that they could contact the organisational development team or the employee assistance programme (EAP) at any stage of the survey for assistance and/intervention regarding any aspect of their work-related or personal well-being status. No adverse incidents occurred during or after the implementation of the survey or research that needed to be reported, and the project execution was deemed successful.

### **Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences of work-related well-being from the participants' viewpoints. This method allows for the researcher to build rapport, gain a better understanding of the participants' beliefs concerning a particular topic, have greater flexibility of matters discussed, and tends to produce richer data (De Vos et al., 2005; Smith, 2007). The interview guideline used in the qualitative interview phase is presented below. It is important to note that these questions served to guide the interview rather than dictate it as the researcher needed the flexibility to respond to the answers given by the participant in order to explore matters raised during the interview. Sub-questions (probing questions) were used to further probe for more detailed or 'richer' responses from the participants when required. The first three interviews were considered pilot interviews during which the researcher observed whether the questions were understood by participants and whether they provided the information required. It was confirmed that the interview questions were well-comprehended by participants and that they were comfortable with the questions posed. These interview questions were consequently deemed appropriate after the initial interviews and were continued with:

Question 1: Tell me about your personal well-being?

- How are you currently doing?
- How do you feel?
- Are you experiencing any concerns regarding your physical health?
- Are you experiencing any concerns regarding your psychological health?

Question 2: What factors contributed to your current state of well-being?

- What impact did this have/is this having on you?
- Are there things happening in your personal/family life that are contributing to the stress and/or exhaustion you are experiencing?
- Are there things happening in your work life that are contributing to the stress and/or exhaustion you are experiencing?

### **Recording of data**

The researcher collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews which resembled a conversation with a theme. During the in-depth interviews the researcher captured *detailed* notes of the experiences and perspectives shared by participants and captured these notes in a secure (password protected) electronic (Microsoft Excel) spread sheet. The researcher was conscious of the sensitive nature of the interviews and was guided by previous experience with such interviews in the organisation, which led her to not record the participants seeing that they generally feel more at ease without a recording of their voices. Indeed, it is important that the data recording strategies fit the setting and participants' sensitivities (De Vos et al., 2005). The focus was therefore on recording data by means of detailed note taking. At the end of each interview the researcher confirmed that the notes captured accurately reflected what the participant meant when answering the questions. This was done by sharing the notes captured during the discussion with participants via e-mail; the e-mail served to confirm the accuracy of the notes captured as well as to once again emphasise the availability of further support if needed by the participant. This process already allowed the researcher to immerse herself in the data. The only biographical information reported was the mean age, gender and ethnicity of participants.

## **Data analysis**

Upon completion of the data collection process the researcher started to familiarise herself with the data. A thematic analysis (TA) approach was followed to assist the researcher in identifying, analysing and reporting themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allows for studying participants' perspectives and ways of thinking about specific social phenomena (Willig, 2013), and assisted the researcher in searching for themes that emerged from the data that served the important goal of describing the phenomenon being studied (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). TA is an attractive approach as it can be used with a wide range of research questions, it serves to analyse different types of data, can be used with small or large data-sets, and can serve to produce theory-driven or data-driven analyses (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The following six phases of TA as identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) guided the researcher during the execution of this study: i) familiarisation with the data, ii) coding, iii) searching for themes, iv) reviewing themes, v) defining and naming themes, and vi) writing up.

### *Step 1: Familiarisation with the data*

All data collected during the interviews were captured in an electronic (Microsoft Excel) spread sheet. This formed one large dataset to which the researcher referred during the process of data analysis. The researcher immersed herself in the data by allowing sufficient time for reading and re-reading through the text. It was important for the researcher to ensure that she becomes intimately familiar and comfortable with the content of the dataset. This allowed the researcher to start identifying and noting potentially interesting features of the data relevant to the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2014) and assisted the researcher in returning to in later phases.

### *Step 2: Coding*

Once the researcher had familiarised herself with the data she started the process of coding, which involved working through the text, line-by-line, as a process to identify units of meaning, and label each with a code that captured the meaning identified (Willig, 2013). The researcher together with two co-coders (from the same field of study) worked through a process of manually coding the data to ensure an accurate and enhanced process of

identification of codes. Responses to two interview questions were analysed for this particular article. The first question focused on understanding the personal well-being of participants, while the second question explored factors which contributed to current state of well-being. Care was taken to ensure that every data item in the dataset was coded and it was borne in mind that individual extracts of the data could be coded as many times as relevant (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three categories were subsequently identified in this phase and were labelled *job demands*, *life demands*, and *health concerns*.

### *Step 3: Searching for themes*

In this phase the researcher and co-coders actively worked towards constructing themes by analysing the identified codes to ascertain how the different codes could be clustered together to form overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this active process of applying own analytical judgement, and searching for themes that are significant and meaningful to answering the research question, a conscious effort was made to not simply construct themes which are a reflection of the researcher's interview questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013). Themes were identified by reviewing responses from participants pertaining to three identified categories (job demands, life demands, and health concerns); sub-themes, and keywords describing sub-themes, were also captured in a separate document as the researcher proceeded with the analysis of the data.

### *Step 4: Reviewing themes*

During this phase the identified themes were reviewed to ensure that it 'works' in relation to the coded data, as well as to the entire dataset (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The researcher spent a considerable amount of time on ensuring that each theme told a compelling story about the data, and worked on defining the boundaries of each individual theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2014). Where it was required the researcher also collapsed and split themes, and discarded insignificant themes. Before concluding this phase the researcher read through the entire dataset once again to ensure that all responses had indeed been coded and to ensure that she was comfortable with the process of reviewing the themes. The phase was ended by confirming a final set of themes.

### *Step 5: Defining and naming themes*

The researcher further refined the themes by spending time on identifying the essential aspects underlying each theme and writing up a detailed analysis for each theme (see findings). The aim of this analytical process of refinement was to produce detailed definitions of each theme, which captured its shape and texture and showed its relation to other themes (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Sub-themes were also refined during this phase and descriptive keywords for sub-themes were finalised. At conclusion of this process the researcher was able to capture the themes, sub-themes, and descriptive keywords by using a few clear and concise sentences (see findings). Lastly the researcher formulated a clear and informative name for each theme.

### *Step 6: Writing up*

During the final phase of TA the researcher wrote up the data in such a manner to clearly and accurately present her findings of the data. By combining analytical narrative and data abstract the researcher aimed to contextualise the findings and also to reinforce the validity of the interpretations (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

It is important to mention that this was a flexible and dynamic process in which the various stages were interrelated, and should not be seen as a linear model (Creswell, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2013).

### **Strategies for ensuring quality data**

The level of trust that exists in the findings of a research study is very important. For purposes of this study the four constructs of trustworthiness as proposed by Guba (1981) were considered, which included credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

#### *Credibility*

Credibility is the alternative to internal validity in quantitative terms (De Vos et al., 2005). The researcher strove to ensure that participants' views and responses to the phenomenon being studied were accurately captured and presented in a meaningful way with the aim of

establishing credibility (Shenton, 2004; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher managed to establish a truthful account of the perspectives of demands as experienced by participants by sharing the captured notes with participants and confirming the accuracy and truthful representation thereof.

### *Transferability*

Transferability is established by comprehensively describing the context and setting within which the research was conducted, to allow the reader to determine the extent to which the case could be applied to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2004). In order to achieve this outcome, the researcher took great care in meticulously describing the research process, context, and participants in the present study under review. This contributed to creating a clear picture for the reader of the context and setting of this study.

### *Dependability*

Dependability aims to create an audit trail that enables future researchers to repeat the study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher took care to present the study in such a manner that it allows the reader to see and understand the research process followed to make decisions and interpretations. This was done through meticulous reporting of the processes within the study as well as of the research methods used. By doing this the researcher was able to vividly present the research process and methodology followed in this study in order to create an audit trail which can be used by future researchers to repeat the study.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability is similar to objectivity in quantitative terms, and requires the qualitative research to be reflective and to maintain a sense of awareness and openness to the study and unfolding results (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher made a conscious effort to let participants lead the direction of the interview and to follow up by posing clarifying questions where it was required (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). While conducting this study, every effort was made by the researcher to keep an open mind with regard to how the results were unfolding and not to let her personal values and biases affect the research. The researcher

strove to authentically capture the perspectives of participants in terms of their experiences of demands in this study.

### **Reporting style**

Upon completion of the data analysis, themes and sub-themes for each of the three identified categories (job demands, life demands and health concerns) were reported in table format. Descriptive keywords for each sub-theme were also added to the table to further enhance understanding and clarity of the data.

### **Ethical considerations**

Research has an ethical-moral dimension and many ethical issues involve a balance between two values: the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the rights of those being studied (Neuman, 2003). In order to ensure that the research project was dealt with in an ethical manner, and that the dignity, rights and well-being of participants were considered, the researcher was guided by the following principles:

*Avoidance of harm:* The researcher took care to ensure that no participants were harmed during the research process. A comfortable and private meeting room was used for the interviews to contribute to creating an environment in which participants could feel safe and secure. The researcher started the interviews by welcoming participants in a friendly and open manner, and by positioning the expectations and outlining the interview process. Throughout the interviews participants were treated in a respectful and humane manner. The researcher also took care to ensure that participants in no way felt manipulated to share information they were uncomfortable to share, by allowing participants to lead the interview and following up with safe (neutral) questions where required. The organisation's employee assistance programme (EAP) service provider was also briefed prior to the roll-out of the programme to ensure applicably qualified professionals were available to all employees in the event of any unforeseen circumstances that might have arisen during the execution of the project. No adverse incidents were reported.

*Confidentiality and privacy:* Care was taken by the researcher to safeguard the privacy and identity of participants. All collected information was dealt with in a confidential manner and

unique numerical identifiers were used to ensure the anonymity of all participants. Therefore, if the data should ever be compromised the intruder would not be able to identify any group or individual within the organisation and would also struggle to identify what data had been found due to the cryptic manner in which items were specified.

*Informed consent:* The researcher obtained informed consent from both the participants and the organisation at which the data was collected with the commitment that all data would be treated in a confidential manner. Results of the study will be shared with the organisation *after conclusion* of the entire study. The survey completed by participants was electronic (web-based) and terms and conditions had to be accepted in order to continue with the study.

*Voluntary participation:* In positioning the project to employees in the organisation, it was clearly communicated that involvement in the project was voluntary and free from any coercion. Participants could therefore decide whether or not they wanted to participate in the project and could end their involvement in the project at any point in time. As a result, only completed surveys could be included in the study and incomplete surveys had to be discarded. Where individuals gave permission for the organisational development team to view their results, individuals at risk of burnout were invited to participate in an interview. Participation in the interviews was voluntary in nature, and only participants who were willing to partake were interviewed.

*Security of data:* Data collected for the study is kept confidential in a securely managed data warehouse with state of the art security measures (e.g. 24 hour monitoring of networks by IT security experts) – similar to the banking environment.

## Findings

The main purpose of this study was to explore demands from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout. The findings of the study were structured into categories, themes, and sub-themes. The three categories identified for structuring the data were job demands, life demands, and health concerns. Tables containing themes, sub-themes and descriptive keywords were used to present the data within each category.

## **Category 1: Job demands**

Participants were asked to describe factors which contributed to their current state of well-being and through the process of data analysis ‘job demands’ was identified as a category. It was evident from the results that most of the participants experienced job demands as a factor impacting upon their well-being. All responses related to job demands were grouped together in this category.

Table 1 indicates the themes, sub-themes, as well as descriptive keywords, which were extracted from the data for the category *job demands*. Themes identified in this category included change management, cognitive demands, emotional demands, job dissatisfaction, job expectations, job insecurity, remuneration, work overload, and work-life balance.

*Change management:* A lack of communication as well as uncertainty around the reasons for the changes being made contributed to job demands experienced by participants. Change in leadership and change of manager also added to the job demands participants experienced.

*Cognitive demands:* Participants identified the number of things they needed to remember as well as being very busy as factors adding to their mental load; the experience of having too many things to remember added to the cognitive demands experienced by participants

*Emotional demands:* The experience of participants having to regulate their emotions as a result of getting worked up about things that should not affect them was another of the job demands identified by participants. They also identified having to deal with difficult clients that were irate and shouted over the phone, as well as having to deal with a high emotional load, as aspects which contributed to job demands.

*Job dissatisfaction:* Unhappiness in one’s role was identified as one of the factors that contributed to the level of job demands experienced by participants.

*Job expectations:* Participants named job expectations as adding to the demands experienced in their jobs. This included the experience of role ambiguity, role change, role conflict, role overload, person-job (mis)fit, over-commitment, and having to train team members. Furthermore it also included not being able to deliver on expectations.

Table 1

*Category 1: Job demands*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Descriptive keywords</b>
Change management	Change of manager	Change of manager in team.
	Lack of communication	Does not get communicated properly and positioned on why changes are made.
	Leadership	Leadership changes in area.
	Uncertainty	Why are these changes being made?
Cognitive demands	Mental load	Too many things to remember; very busy with a lot of things; working with a lot of detail and doing the same things over and over.
Emotional demands	Emotion regulation	Gets worked up about things that should not affect one; internalises when things go wrong that is not one's fault and beats oneself up over it.
	High emotional load	Working in a high emotional load environment; emotional load is high; emotionally drained.
	Difficult clients	Clients are often irate and shout over the phone.
Job dissatisfaction	Unhappiness in role	Unhappy in one's role.
Job expectations	Not delivering	Ability to cope and manage the same output; output is lower.
	Training team members	Readying a team member to second in charge and worried that not enough was done enough to prepare that team member.
	Role ambiguity	Challenges and frustrations with having two managers in the department with different expectations and ways of working.
	Role change	Moving into a new role; experienced some stress in role moving from one department to another, and had some uncertainty and feeling a bit out of one's depth.
	Role conflict	Conflicting demands
	Role overload	On top of work pressures – pay for performance, sales targets, systems etc.;

	Person-job (mis)fit	The picture that was painted when being recruited and how it unfolded was vastly different; disappointed that the role did not turn out to be what was expected.
	Over-commitment	Over-committed because does not want to let the business down.
Job insecurity	Quantitative job insecurity	Does not feel secure in job, constantly working in fear of losing job.
Remuneration	Pay for performance (PFP)	A lot of PFP changes made in department which negatively impacts salaries; uncertainty around PFP and not knowing what one will earn each month; Finances also gets affected by changes made in department as it directly affects one's salary; business case for change in PFP made but has a significant impact on one's salary; concerned about how much one will earn to support oneself and one's family when one goes onto PFP; PFP model does not reward one and it has a negative impact; uncertainty related to one's remuneration on the work-front.
Work overload	Long hours	Working long hours; working so hard (most days from 6 am – 6 pm); working extremely long hours, caught in belief that no other option than to do that to try and get everything done; but admittedly comes with a cost in that one is here every day at 5:30 am, leaves late and is also here on the weekends; put in a lot of extra hours to find out how everything works; workload is very high and works until 11/12 every night; works longer; have to work late every day in order to meet targets and perform; perceived workload to be very high.
	High workload	Swamped at work; high volume of claims to deal with; workload is very high; oftentimes feels overloaded; a lot happening in the workspace from a quantity perspective; works longer and harder.
	Workaholism	Placing a lot of pressure on oneself to out-perform; always available; feels guilty when off sick.
Work-life balance	Work-family conflict	Work impacts on one's family; unable to set boundaries in terms of work.
	Family-work conflict	Bring family to work on weekends in order to get work done.

*Job insecurity:* Feelings of insecurity around job (constantly working in fear of losing the job) was identified as a theme contributing to job demands.

*Remuneration:* Participants identified the pay for performance (PFP) remuneration structure as impacting on job demands. Included in this theme was changes to the PFP model that negatively impacted salaries, uncertainty around what one would earn each month, and whether this would be enough to support oneself and one's family.

*Work overload:* Participants mentioned working long hours and dealing with high workload as factors contributing to job demands. Workaholism was also identified which included feelings of always having to be available, and feeling guilty when off sick.

*Work-life balance:* Job demands were experienced by participants in having to deal with work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

## **Category 2: Life demands**

Participants did not only experience job demands, but also highlighted life demands in describing factors which contributed to their state of well-being. *Life demands* was consequently identified as a second category in which all responses relating to life demands experienced by participants were grouped together.

Table 2 includes responses extracted from the data relating to life demands experienced by participants. Below are the descriptors of life demands as provided by the various participants.

*Family demands:* Participants experienced life demands in having to deal with various family-related demands. Illness of a family member as well as death of a family member was identified as types of family demands. This was further experienced in matters of pregnancy and parenting, as well as work-to-family conflict where it was necessary to bring family to work over weekends to get work done. Participants were also faced with challenges in relationships, and retrenchment of family members. Being dependent on family (and wanting independence) as well as having the responsibility of being the support structure added to demands experienced by participants.

Table 2  
*Category 2: Life demands*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Descriptive notes</b>
Family demands	Death	Dad passed away.
	Dependent on family	To get independence from family.
	Illness of family member	Mother has been in and out of hospital over last couple of months, unsure of reason for illness.
	Parenting	Small baby of under a year; raising kids from two families; different parenting styles is a challenge; feel extremely stressed every second weekend when having all of the kids; stresses about December holiday coming up - going away with all the kids to visit family; also a new father - daughter is 8 months old.
	Pregnancy	34 weeks of pregnancy and has been having a difficult time; had a few miscarriages; 8 months pregnant with second baby after 10 years and is physically a difficult pregnancy
	Relationship	Divorced from wife; relationship with fiancé ended; experiences challenges in marriage; having an impact on marriage; focus on creating a connection between father-daughter which is strained;
	Retrenchment	Husband is facing possible retrenchment.
	Support structures	Had to be strong for mother and sister; from an emotional and financial perspective mother relies on a lot of support (not really other family members that can support); only person working and need to look after family (send money home and brother at university)
Financial demands	Work-to-family conflict	Have to bring family to work on weekends to get work done.
	Debt	Currently under debt review.
	Expenses	Feels like things are spinning out of control, unable to pay all the bills; still need to pay own bills.
	Medical expenses	High medical bills.
Personal demands	Relocation	Financial stressors around moving house and relocation.
	House hunting	Battling to find a house.
	Studying	Started studying again after years.

*Financial demands:* Financial demands of participants added to life demands experienced. Forming part of financial demands were expenses (not being able to pay bills), including medical expenses, debt, as well as financial stressors around relocation.

*Personal demands:* Personal demands such as house hunting and studying were identified as life demands experienced by participants.

### **Category 3: Health concerns**

Participants were asked to share information about their personal well-being, including concerns regarding their physical and psychological health in order to aid the researcher in gaining a comprehensive understanding of participants' state of well-being at the time of the study (see Table 3). The following themes were extracted from the data: physical health and psychological distress.

*Physical health:* Participants identified various factors related to their physical health. This included having a health scare as well as surgery, broken bones, hernia (which contributed to sleep problems), manic depression, depressive disorders, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

*Psychological distress:* Participants experienced psychological distress which relates to health concerns. This referred to situations in which participants experienced feelings of anxiety, cynicism, despondence, exhaustion (mental), frustration, guilt, irritability, and being forgetful and flustered. Participants also shared feeling overwhelmed, on the verge of a breakdown and hating work. Other aspects highlighted by participants as health concerns included (impaired) cognitive ability, and feeling preoccupied and stagnant.

Table 3

*Category 3: Health concerns*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Descriptive notes</b>
Physical health	Surgery	Went in for a knee (leg) operation.
	Broken bones	Broke ankle.
	Health scare	Had to deal with the possibility of having cancer.
	Hernia; Sleeping problems	Sleeping problems due to hernia.
	Manic depression	Diagnosed as bi-polar and on medication.
	ADHD	Diagnosed with ADHD.
Psychological distress	Depressive disorder	Using anti-depressants for years.
	Anxiety	High anxiety; anxious because he is alone at home; increasing anxiety levels.
	Breakdown	On the verge of a breakdown; world "comes crashing down".
	Cognitive ability (impaired)	Impact on cognitive ability due to hernia and pregnancy.
	Cynicism	Sees everything negatively; has a whatever attitude.
	Despondent	Behaving differently because of despondence.
	Exhaustion (mental)	Mentally tired; tired with work in general.
	Forgetful	Forgets important things; forgets small things.
	Flustered	When failing to meet standards gets completely flustered; gets flustered.
	Frustration	Frustrated at how communication happens; feeling frustrated at colleagues; frustrated with lack of career progress.
	Guilt	Feeling guilty due to not being at work; felt guilty for being sick; feeling bad due to delegating work.
	Hates work	Hates coming to work – takes 30 minutes to walk from the basement to desk.
	Irritability	Makes errors and is more irritable; irritated.
	Overwhelmed	Feeling overwhelmed; holding too many ropes together in life.
	Preoccupied; stagnant	Preoccupied and feels stuck.
	Self-inflicted pressure	Self-inflicted pressure to try to deliver at the same standard.
	Self-talk (negative)	Self-talk is negative and not used to this.
Shock; disappointment	Shocked and disappointed when called into a meeting to be told of negative influence.	

## **Discussion**

### Outline of the findings

The general objective of the study was to explore demands from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout. The three categories that emerged from the data provide valuable insight into the experiences of demands from the perspective of employees. Responses from participants provided strong evidence for the notion that the experience of burnout is influenced by job demands as well as life demands. This supported Bianchi et al.'s (2014) argument for an integrative view of health which stated that burnout should be viewed as a multi-domain syndrome, and cannot be restricted to work-related stress. Participants also highlighted health concerns experienced, which included concerns around both physical health and psychological distress in sharing their experiences of demands. Subsequently the three categories that emerged from the research results are discussed.

### **Job demands**

The first category identified from the findings pointed to job demands experienced by participants. Strong empirical evidence exists in the literature that supports the view that excessive job demands is a key predictor of burnout (Alarcon, 2011; Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke, 2004; De Beer et al., 2016; Demerouti et al., 2001). Participants viewed *change management* as a form of job demands and experienced it due to a lack of communication from management's side, uncertainty about why the changes were made, as well as changes in leadership. Rumbles and Rees (2013) point out that organisations tend to communicate change badly, and do very little to protect the well-being of employees and to manage stress in times of change.

*Cognitive demands* was also identified as a theme which contributed to the experience of job demands. Participants experienced cognitive demands in the number of things they had to remember which subsequently added to a high mental load. According to a study by Nahrgang et al., (2011) overall complexity of work (aspects of the job that require mental effort such as cognitive demands, task complexity and ambiguity) as a job demand, is the second largest predictor of burnout. In the operational as well as support areas of the

organisation at which the study was conducted, the reality was that employees were often expected to deal with more than one matter simultaneously. Certain roles (e.g. actuarial and finance positions) also required employees to deal with high levels of complexity, and expectations of what needed to be delivered within certain roles were subject to change in alignment with changes to business priorities. This made a higher cognitive load likely.

Findings of the present study showed *emotional demands* to be the third theme extracted from the data under the category job demands. Castanheira and Chambel (2013) supported this finding by providing statistical evidence for the positive relationship between emotional dissonance (the requirement to display unfeared emotion) and burnout. Participants in this study highlighted the need to regulate emotions and “not getting worked up about things that should not affect one” as one of the contributing factors towards experiencing emotional demands. Not taking cognisance of this stressor and not providing employees with coping skills or an opportunity to debrief from high emotional demands can cause a risk to the well-being of employees, specifically in occupations such as call centres, where dealing directly with customers is a daily requirement of the job. Lings, Durden, Lee and Cadogan (2014) also confirmed that different socio-emotional demand constructs act to increase burnout symptoms when displayed emotions are incongruent with felt emotions or with service norms.

*Job expectations, job dissatisfaction, and job insecurity* all emerged as themes within the job demands category, with job expectations being the theme coming through more often and having various sub-themes feeding into it. A study by Faúndez et al. (2014) confirmed the influence of role ambiguity and role conflict on burnout; both were identified as sub-themes under job expectations by participants in the present study. Anand, Nagle, Misra and Dangi (2013) found organisational role stress (including role expectation conflict, role overload, and personal inadequacy) to be significantly related to depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion dimensions of burnout. *Job dissatisfaction* as a theme reflected unhappiness of employees in current roles. Previous research has confirmed an association between staff burnout and outcomes such as job satisfaction and intention to leave the organisation (Skirrow & Hatton, 2007). *Job insecurity* spoke to employees that did not feel secure in their jobs, and could potentially also lead to employees exiting the organisation in pursuit of more job security and stability. Bosman, Rothmann, and Buitendach (2005) as well as Kozak,

Kersten, Schillmöller, and Nienhaus (2013) supported the significant impact of job insecurity on personal burnout.

Another finding of the study was the impact of *remuneration*, specifically pay for performance (PFP), as a demand experienced by participants. Participants highlighted changes made in the remuneration model as well as the uncertainty around how much one would earn, as elements contributing to stress experienced. A study by Nieuwenhuijsen, Bruinvels, and Frings-Dresen (2010) found a high effort-reward imbalance to predict the incidence of stress-related disorders. The central principle of the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Model is that an imbalance between (high) efforts and (low) rewards leads to (sustained) strain reactions (Van Vegchel, De Jonge, Bosma & Schaufeli, 2005).

Participants also experienced *work overload* (long hours, high workload and workaholism) as a theme contributing to demands. This result was in alignment with previous studies which found work overload to predict burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; De Beer et al., 2016). The reality of high workloads and the risks associated therewith causes various challenges for organisations as the current economic climate necessitates a large number of organisations to expect employees to deliver greater outputs with fewer resources (Evenstad, 2015) in order to ensure profitability and sustainability of business.

Work overload led into the next theme identified by participants which was work-life balance and included work-family conflict and family-work conflict. Karatepe (2013) also found employees who have high workloads and are unable to establish a balance between work (family) and family (work) roles, to be emotionally exhausted. Various research studies have been done around this topic, investigating the impact of work-family conflict on burnout (Hall, Dollard, Tuckey, Winefield & Thompson, 2010), and confirming the positive association of family on work conflict with burnout (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010).

### **Life demands**

The results indicated that not only job demands were experienced by participants, but also life demands. The second category is thus a reflection of the life demands as shared by the participants. Literature confirmed that burnout has been associated with non-occupational factors such as personal and stressful life events (Dyrbye et al., 2006; Peeters et al., 2005;

Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016). Participants cited family demands, financial demands, and personal demands as themes contributing to the experience of life demands.

Family demands included the sub-themes death, dependence on family, illness of a family member, parenting demands, being pregnant, relationship challenges, retrenchment of a family member, support structures, and work-to-family conflict. In a study by Dybre et al. (2006) which confirmed the impact of personal life events on professional burnout, the number of “negative” personal life events experienced (e.g. divorce, illness of a close family member and death of a family member) were specifically highlighted.

Financial demands referred to in this study included matters of debt, expenses (the inability to pay bills), medical expenses, and financial stressors around moving from house and relocation. A study by Starrin, Aslund and Nilsson (2009) confirmed that the greater the financial stress and the more experiences of having been shamed, the greater the risk for psychosocial ill-health (anxiety, depression, and reduced psychological well-being). Considering the impact of financial stress (coupled with shaming) on the well-being of employees, it becomes critical for organisations to look into ways in which to support employees in managing their finances and achieving financial wellness.

Personal demands experienced by participants in this study included house hunting and studying. Moving into a new house (Raviv, Keinan, Abazon, & Raviv, 1990) as well as studying (Robotham & Julian, 2006) have been shown in literature to be sources of stress. Specific references to the relationship between financial demands and burnout, as well as between personal demands (house hunting and studying) and burnout could not be found in the literature, and could be recommended as potential focus areas for future studies.

### **Health concerns**

Health concerns was the third category that emerged from the data during the data analysis phase and provided a reflection of the perspectives of participants pertaining to physical and psychological health concerns. This category contributed to creating a thorough understanding of the experiences of well-being from the perspective of participants. Two themes were identified within the health concerns category, namely physical health and psychological distress.

*Physical health* included sub-themes such as a health scare, surgery, broken bones and sleeping problems, as well as manic depression, depressive disorder, and ADHD. Various studies have examined the relationship between burnout and depression and have yielded mixed results on whether burnout should be viewed as a distinct phenomenon or as a symptom of depression (Bianchi et al., 2015; Thuysma & De Beer, 2016). Burnout has been reported to predict symptoms of depression (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012) and Thuysma and De Beer (2016) have found depressive symptoms (coupled with job demands and satisfaction with life) to explain significant amounts of variance in the burnout construct. A study by De Beer et al., (2014) also found a positive relationship between burnout and self-reported treatment for health conditions, with the relationship to depression being the strongest. Therefore, being aware of the close relationship between burnout and depression will empower individuals with the knowledge to seek professional help earlier and receive correct treatment.

Burnout has been demonstrated to also lead to other physical health concerns such as sleep disturbances, headaches, respiratory infections, and gastrointestinal infections (Kim et al., 2011). Although the focus in literature was mainly on the impact burnout has on the health of individuals (as a result of the health impairment process), it might be necessary to also consider that existing health-related concerns such as indicated in the current study (e.g. health scare and surgery), could play a contributing role to the development of burnout. Literature provided evidence for this downward spiralling effect on employee well-being (e.g. Bowen, 2013).

The psychological distress theme included multiple sub-themes ranging from anxiety, frustration, irritability and guilt, to cynicism, despondence and negative self-talk. Previous research studies provided support for the notion that burnout plays a role in the development of psychological distress (Kozak et al., 2013). A study by Sánchez-Moreno, Roldán, Gallardo-Peralta, and de Roda (2014) showed a strong association between burnout and psychological distress, and furthermore confirmed that it is the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout that shows stronger correlations with lack of health or well-being in the particular study. The study by Sánchez-Moreno et al., (2014) was conducted among social workers and the afore-mentioned results therefore indicated the fundamental role of emotions within professions where managing of emotions form an integral part of daily professional life (e.g. social work). This highlighted an important consequence for the current study, as

various roles within the operational areas, e.g. call centre advisers, required of participants to manage their emotions as an integral part of conducting daily work. Sánchez-Moreno et al., (2014) confirmed the importance of informal social support as a variable negatively related to distress.

### Practical implications

The study strengthened the view that aspects from occupational as well as non-occupational domains of life impact upon the experience of burnout. The results of this study assisted in creating awareness among employees and organisations alike of the way in which various factors impact on and contribute to employees' experiences of demands and well-being. It also created an enhanced understanding of the physical as well as psychological health concerns experienced by participants at risk of burnout.

Using this insight might assist organisations in revising the way in which employee support is viewed in organisations, and could potentially contribute to a different approach around aspects such as the structuring of roles, employee communication, and management of change. It could also serve as motivation to equip employees with relevant skills to deal more effectively with aspects contributing to the experience of demands such as high emotional load and work overload.

### Limitations and recommendations

The present study was however not without limitations. It is important to emphasize that the findings of this study were related to employees in a financial services organisation in South Africa and it cannot be assumed that it would be applicable to all other settings and organisations. The aim of qualitative research is however to produce rich and contextually insightful data with the goal of producing local knowledge (Marecek, 2003). The researcher has also taken care to ensure that she carefully described the research process, context, and participants in the present study to ensure transferability.

The researcher relied on self-reported data as source of information for the study (surveys completed by participant and data collected from interviews with participants); this method of data collection might hold limitations as participants might choose to only reveal certain

information about themselves, and their answers are reliant on self-insight and perceptions. However, since the goal of the study was to explore the experiences of demands from the perspectives of participants, the researcher is confident that the most suited method of data collection was used. Another potential limitation could be that participants might have felt hesitant to share certain information due to the sensitive nature of the topic being discussed, as well as the fact that the researcher was not able to record the interviews verbatim due to the sensitive nature of the topic. However, the researcher felt comfortable that she managed to create a satisfactory level of safety to allow open and honest feedback to be shared by participants. The researcher also believed that she was able to take detailed and accurate notes of information shared by participants during the interviews, and was able to confirm accuracy of notes with participants afterwards.

For future research it is recommended that the study be supported by the collection of quantitative data. A longitudinal study exploring demands from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout over a period of time, will also add to an enhanced understanding around changes in the experience of burnout over time, and factors contributing to the experiences of burnout over a period of time.

It is also recommended that future research can focus on exploring ways in which organisations can support employees with a view to assist them in dealing better with demands experienced, and to provide employees with training to equip them in dealing better with challenges faced in work and life. This could include training to empower employees with skills to effectively raise concerns regarding demands being experienced in the workplace, and help employees to explore alternative ways of achieving desired results through open and candid dialogue. Other training interventions could potentially include stress management and conflict management.

A further recommendation would be for future studies to explore areas of positive deviance; thus looking into areas in the business context in which a lower incidence of employees being at risk of burnout, and exploring the factors present in the environment that could contribute to this outcome. These findings could then be used in driving the appropriate changes in environments with a high incidence of employees at risk of burnout, in order to create a less stressful environment for employees in which to work.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that the experience of demands from the perspective of employees that are at risk of burnout falls within the domains of both work and life. The results of the study provided a reflection of both physical and psychological health concerns experienced by employees at risk of burnout. Employees remain one of the most valuable, if not the most valuable resource for organisations. Not considering the management of the well-being of employees as a key determinant of the success of a business could be to the detriment of organisations – as research also increasingly indicates. It is therefore encouraged that findings of the current study be considered by organisations and the relevant professionals when determining the most suitable manner in which to provide on-going support to employees.

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**CHAPTER 3**  
**RESEARCH ARTICLE 2**

# **Investigating the longitudinal relationships between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings: A cross-lagged model**

## **Abstract**

**Orientation:** Understanding the impact of burnout and work engagement on the performance of employees is important as it strengthens the business case for overall employee well-being to be prioritised in organisations.

**Research purpose:** The objective of this study was to investigate the relationships between burnout, work engagement, and objective performance ratings (by supervisors) over time – a one-year lag.

**Motivation for the study:** Currently limited empirical evidence exists regarding the longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement, and work performance, specifically within the South African context.

**Research design, approach and method:** A longitudinal design was followed. Surveys were conducted at two time-points by employees and performance ratings for the employees were also available for the two time-points ( $n = 155$ ).

**Main findings:** The authors hypothesised that burnout would predict performance ratings negatively over time. The findings of the structural equation modelling rejected this hypothesis but approached statistical significance and was also interpreted. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that work engagement positively predicted performance ratings over time. Statistically significant results were found in support of this second hypothesis.

**Practical/Managerial implications:** Organisational stakeholders are encouraged to take note of the effect of work engagement on work performance, over time. It is also important to consider the potential negative effect of burnout on performance. Attaining a better understanding of factors influencing work engagement can contribute to creating an environment that allows for higher performance of individuals, and ultimately greater success of organisations.

**Contribution/Value-add:** This study provided important information related to employee motivation and performance ratings over time, within the South African context.

**Keywords:** Burnout, work engagement, performance, performance ratings, job demands, job resources, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modelling

## Introduction

Optimal employee well-being has been found to be a predictor of organisations' productivity and retention outcomes, together with well-being improvement solutions that have been identified as opportunities to significantly impact bottom and top-line business performance (Sears, Shi, Coberley & Pope, 2013). Topcic, Baum and Kabst (2016) highlighted the importance of understanding the impact of the environment on the stress experienced by individuals. High-performance work practices (HPWP), which refer to attempts to enhance human capital and organisation-level performance by applying a set of human resource management work-practices, are generally viewed as yielding beneficial outcomes (Jiang, Lepak, Hu & Baer, 2012). However, evidence to the contrary also exists in literature, highlighting the potential downside to HPWP (Jensen, Patel & Messersmith, 2013; Kroon, Van de Voorde, & Van Veldhoven, 2009). With the important and noteworthy impact of employee well-being, the business case for attaining a more comprehensive understanding of employee well-being, and the aspects thereof impacting on employee performance, becomes increasingly stronger.

The impact of job demands and resources on the well-being of employees has been investigated in numerous studies over the past decade (e.g. De Beer, Pienaar & Rothmann Jr., 2014; Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The job demands-resources model, first introduced in literature by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli in 2001, provides a balanced view in explaining both negative and positive aspects of occupational well-being (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001). The health impairment and motivational processes outlined in this model are used to explain the impact of demands and resources on the well-being of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The health impairment process depicts a psychological process in which high job demands are associated with health problems via burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer & Schaufeli, 2003) while the motivational process highlights the impact of the availability of job resources on positive organisational outcomes such as organisational commitment through work engagement (Jackson, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2006).

Work performance has been identified as a multifaceted construct of which the meaning has changed significantly over the last few decades (Griffin, Neal & Parker, 2007). Traditionally

work performance was evaluated by measuring outcomes achieved of a clearly-specified job, by carrying out the specified behaviours of the job (Campbell, McCloy, Oppler & Sager, 1993; Murphy & Jackson, 1999). However, business is no longer usual (DeLisle, 2015), and the changing nature of work requires traditional views around work performance to be challenged (Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999). Many organisations are starting to change elements of their formal performance management systems and have begun to introduce upskilling and development of people, as well as change enablement to drive more effective performance management behaviour (e.g. more agile goals, stronger collaboration, and real-time feedback) (Adler et al., 2016).

Despite the reasoning by researchers that a negative relationship should exist between burnout and performance, the evidence from previous studies has been ambiguous (Halbesleben, 2003; Bakker, Demerouti & Sanz-Vergel, 2014). The emotional exhaustion component of burnout has been found to be both positively and negatively related to various performance measures (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007), with the same contradictory results also found for the personal accomplishment dimension (Demerouti, Verbeke, & Bakker, 2005; Balogun, Hoerberlein-Miller, Schneider, & Katz, 1996). Various reasons can be argued as potential explanations for the inconsistent findings. Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) proposed that one such reason could be that some studies only examine the relationship between performance and one dimension of burnout, e.g. exhaustion. Another potential reason presented is that the manner in which performance is measured is often based on self-reported data, with participants judging their own performance. The risk here is that relationships between concepts can be inflated due to self-serving biases and factors such as halo effects, negative affectivity, and the wish to provide consistent answers (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). Results from a study by Swider and Zimmerman (2010) found the relationship between burnout and work performance to be consistently stronger when the performance ratings were not self-reported. The inconclusive nature of the results on investigations of the relationship between burnout and work performance emphasises the need for more research on this topic. Upon a review of the current research literature it was also found that limited empirical evidence exists on the longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement, and work performance, specifically also within the South African context.

However, more consistent results have been found for the predictive relationship between work engagement and work performance (Bakker, 2009; Bakker, 2011; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2009). In a study by Christian Garza and Slaughter (2011) results revealed that work engagement is positively related to work performance; this led them to conclude that employees with high work engagement can be expected to deliver outputs with greater efficiency and effectiveness. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) reviewed studies on work engagement and concluded that engaged workers are more creative, more productive, and have a higher willingness to go the extra mile. Engaged employees have therefore also been found to receive higher performance ratings from colleagues for in-role and extra-role performance (Bakker et al., 2004), demonstrating more organisational commitment. In a study among school principals and teachers, Bakker, Gierveld, and Van Rijswijk (2006) confirmed significant (positive) relations between work engagement scores of principals, and the manner in which teachers rated the performance and leadership of principals; in the afore-mentioned study engagement was also related to creativity as well as enhanced problem-solving abilities.

The focus of this study will be on determining the longitudinal impact of burnout and work engagement on the performance of employees from the perspective of the manager internal to the organisation, by means of more objective performance ratings by supervisors. This introduction is followed by a literature review, the research methodology, and a discussion of the results which will include limitations and recommendations.

## Literature review

### **Work performance and performance ratings**

Three outcomes often used to measure workplace productivity are work performance, absenteeism, and job-related accidents (Blum, Roman, & Martin, 1993). Of these three, work performance remains the most difficult to assess (Kessler et al., 2003). Performance is a complex phenomenon that requires exploration of different dimensions thereof in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding. It has been suggested in literature that accomplishment (productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency) and workers' response to their jobs (satisfaction, absence rate and turnover rate) are criteria that can be applied to evaluate

work performance (Szilagyi & Wallace, 1990). Another aspect that has been investigated in an attempt to understand work performance is the impact of ‘perceiving goals as invariable’. ‘Perceiving goals as invariable’ refers to the extent to which employees experience goals in the performance management system as signifying absolute standards that need to be met without exception, as opposed to being able to consider other factors that might be deemed more important (Kuvaas, Buch, & Dysvik, 2016). In the afore-mentioned study a negative relationship was found between perceiving goals as invariable and work performance, and the relationship was mediated by job autonomy. This highlighted the importance of autonomy, a job resource, which points to taking into account evolving and/or situational factors when conducting work, and the positive impact thereof on employee performance (Kuvaas et al., 2016).

To explore the concept *work performance* it was approached from another angle, namely by differentiating between in-role and extra-role performance. In-role performance is described as the formally required outcomes and behaviours that directly contribute to the organisational objectives (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994), whereas extra role performance is described as discretionary efforts by the employee aimed at directly promoting the effective functioning of an organisation, without necessarily directly influencing a person’s target productivity (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994). Griffin et al. (2007) proposed a model of work performance whereby context shapes and constrains the behaviours that will be valued in the organisation; uncertainty and interdependence were identified as two general features of context which organisations need to manage in order to be effective.

For a long time performance ratings were viewed as being the most prevalent way of measuring work performance (DeNisi, 2006; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Viswesvaran, Schmidt, & Ones, 1996). Although ratings can be obtained from various sources (e.g. self, subordinates, peers, customers, supervisors), supervisor ratings were viewed to be the preferred source of such ratings (Cascio, 1991), and were also found to have a higher reliability than peer ratings (Viswesvaran et al., 1996). One example of a scale that has been used to measure supervisor ratings is the 10-item scale validated by Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009) which was positioned to capture both how much effort employees put into their jobs and the quality of the output. However, in the last few years a debate surfaced around the pros and cons of retaining performance ratings, and dissatisfaction with the performance management and appraisal processes are noted to be at an all-time high (Adler et al., 2016).

One of the challenges faced when evaluating work performance of employees is that certain dimensions of performance are easier to observe and consequently easier to evaluate, than others. Dimensions such as administrative and communicative competence, and leadership, have long since been found to be more difficult to evaluate than for example dimensions such as output and errors (Wohlers & London, 1989). Further arguments constructed for eliminating performance ratings include the disagreement between multiple raters evaluating the same performance, as well as failure to develop acceptable criteria for evaluating ratings (Adler et al., 2016). This highlights the challenges faced around ensuring accuracy and consistency in the manner that performance ratings are allocated, and in which overall work performance is measured.

Despite the challenges identified above the reality remains that work performance still needs to be evaluated and performance ratings remain a popular measure to do so – as also used in this study in the form of rating by supervisors of employees. Adler et al. (2016) captured the argument that performance is always measured in some way, and that being difficult to accurately estimate cannot be used as an excuse not to do so. The measurement of individual performance continues to be a critical component of evaluating and achieving organisational success (Adler et al., 2016), and even in cases where organisations are alleging that performance ratings have been rejected, some type of conventional rating scale are still being used (Blume, Baldwin, & Rubin, 2009; Chattopadhyay & Ghosh, 2012; Vaishnav, Khakifirooz, & Devos, 2006). Even if not an exact science and acknowledging the challenges faced in this regard, performance ratings by supervisors (or other sources that is well-informed about the job e.g. peers) still provide valuable input to be considered together with qualitative data in an attempt to measure employees' individual performance as well as impact on organisational performance (Adler et al., 2016). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that even though challenges are acknowledged around the use of performance ratings in the performance management process, it remains an important and vital factor to be considered in the evaluation process.

### **The relationship between burnout and performance**

Burnout is described in literature as a psychological syndrome in reaction to chronic work stressors (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) and is most widely explained by the sub-concepts of exhaustion, cynicism, and a lack of professional efficacy (Schaufeli, Leiter,

Maslach, & Jackson, 1996). Although the concept of burnout originated within the human services sector (Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993), it is now widely accepted that burnout occurs across sectors (Van den Broeck et al., 2017), highlighting again the importance of understanding the impact of job characteristics on the well-being of employees, as well as understanding the impact of burnout and work engagement on performance of employees internal to the organisation. Various studies in literature have explored the impact of these concepts on the well-being of employees (Lewig, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Dollard, & Metzger, 2007; Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, Luyckx & De Witte, 2012). Exhaustion and cynicism are argued by many researchers to be the central components of burnout, with professional efficacy playing a more divergent role (Bakker et al., 2004; De Beer & Bianchi, 2017). Furthermore, De Beer and Bianchi (2017) presented evidence that burnout should be considered as a single variable composed of exhaustion and cynicism items – the current study adhered to this principle and considered burnout as a single factor.

Research studies aimed at investigating the impact of burnout on job performance have not yet yielded conclusive and universal results (Bakker et al., 2014). Taris (2006) reviewed 16 studies to determine if burnout was related to objective performance, and discovered that the clearest pattern was reflected in the dimension of exhaustion, which correlated strongly (negatively) with in-role performance. However, the same review uncovered more complex results around depersonalisation and personal accomplishment, showing inconsistent patterns across the studies (Taris, 2006). The relationship between burnout (exhaustion and cynicism components) and in-role performance has also been analysed by Bakker and Heuven (2006) who found a negative and significant relationship between burnout and in-role performance. In a study exploring the relationship between burnout and performance, Bakker et al. (2004) distinguished between in-role and extra-role performance and found job demands to be the strongest predictor of in-role performance via the exhaustion component of burnout, while job resources was the strongest predictor of extra-role performance through the relationship with the disengagement dimension of burnout. Swider and Zimmerman (2010) also found the type of job performance to affect the strength of the relationship between burnout and work performance, with burnout having a larger effect on contextual performance than on task performance.

A few challenges have been identified as contributing to the complexities faced in this field of research. One such challenge is that burnout has also been found to predict increased job

demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; De Beer, Pienaar, & Rothmann, Jr., 2013); thus not only did work pressure predict exhaustion, feeling exhausted also predicted subsequent levels of work pressure in a reciprocal relationship. This is likely caused by exhausted employees requiring more time to complete tasks, being more prone to make mistakes, and less able to mobilize resources (Bakker & Costa, 2014). Demerouti, Bakker, and Leiter (2014) also proposed another reason for research having found only low to moderate associations between burnout and work performance, is that employees use adaptive strategies to assist them to maintain performance at acceptable levels despite experiencing burnout.

*H<sub>1</sub>*: Burnout predicts increased performance ratings negatively, over time.

### **The relationship between work engagement and performance**

Work engagement was introduced in an extended version of the JD-R model by Schaufeli and Bakker in 2004 as the positive counterpart of burnout (cf. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and refers to a positive, full-filling work-related state of mind which is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Work engagement tends to be strongly related to motivational outcomes such as organisational commitment, retention and task enjoyment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker et al., 2014) and has also been found to increase task resources via personal resources (Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2007). Job resources have been found to be the most important predictors of work engagement, with previous research studies also linking work engagement to job performance (Christian et al., 2011).

Empirical evidence exists in literature indicating work engagement to be positively related to work performance (Demerouti and Bakker, 2006; Bakker et al., 2006). In an insightful piece on building engagement in the workplace, Bakker (2009) reviewed existing literature and proposed four reasons for engaged workers to be more productive: (1) often experience positive emotions, which help them to explore new ideas and build resources, (2) experience better health, which allows them to devote high levels of energy to their jobs, (3) create their own personal and job resources through feedback and support, and (4) convey their engagement to others, which contributes to increasing team performance. Job resources have been described as playing an extrinsic motivational role, as they ignite a willingness in employees to spend compensatory effort, which contributes to reducing job demands and

fostering goal attainment (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). A study by Lorente, Salanova, Martínez, & Vera (2014) found perceived job resources and work engagement to mediate the relationship between perceived personal resources and self-rated job performance. Job resources have also been found to initiate a motivational process that lead to work engagement and positive organisational outcomes, including enhanced performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) also found work engagement to be positively related to in-role and extra-role performance.

The exposition shows that various studies exist in literature in which the relationship between work engagement and performance has been explored. The challenge remains that different measures of performance are utilised in these studies, and that limited data exist on the longitudinal impact of work engagement on performance.

*H<sub>2</sub>*: Work engagement predicts increased performance ratings positively, over time.

## **Research method**

### Research approach

A longitudinal survey design was used to achieve the research objectives (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2003). Electronic surveys were completed by employees throughout a financial services organisation at two points in time (2014 and 2015). Longitudinal designs are advantageous for a variety of reasons: it allows the researcher to use time as an independent variable (Wright, 2007), and allows for within-person variance which is the change in individuals over time (this is different from cross-sectional research, which seeks between-person variance) (Avey, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2008).

### Participants

A common longitudinal sample of employees ( $n=155$ ) of different ages and backgrounds was constituted at convenience – since the project was entirely voluntary. Only the common sample was used as participants had to consent, on both occasions, to their data being used in the final dataset, in line with ethical requirements for this study. Confidentiality of the

participants was assured and the data was prepared in an anonymous fashion and password-protected.

Only basic demographic information was reported: The majority of the sample was female, 85 (54.84%), while 70 (45.16%) were male. The average (mean) age of the participants was 33.37 years (SD = 6.55 years). The sample comprised White employees (n = 73; 47.10%), followed by Black African employees (n = 41; 26.45%), Indian employees (n = 31; 20.00%) and Coloured employees (n = 10; 6.45%).

### Measuring instruments

*Demographic characteristics:* Only basic demographic characteristics of the participants were reported. This was necessary due to the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2008) for publications and due to the non-probability sampling method employed, i.e. to be transparent when disseminating the research results by providing the basic sample composition to consider the extent and applicability of the generalisation of the results (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). The demographic characteristics reported were: age (mean; standard deviation), gender and ethnicity.

*Burnout risk* was measured using a 9-item scale from the Organisational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB; Afriforte, 2013). The OHFB burnout scale is based on the South African Employee Health and Wellness Survey (SAEHWS; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2007) and is normed for the South African context. The OHFB has been shown to measure burnout, when operationalised as a single latent variable by the items of its core constructs (De Beer & Bianchi, 2017), indiscriminately from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (De Beer, 2015). Exhaustion and mental distance (cynicism) were therefore the core components measured: Exhaustion: ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) by five items, e.g. 'I feel tired before I arrive at work'; Mental distance (Cynicism): ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ) by four items, e.g. 'I am uncertain whether my work is important'. In the context of article one, the absence of instruments with clear cut-off's for burnout risk within the South African context, the selection of the OHFB was considered acceptable as it identifies burnout risks based on normed scores of over 50 000 employees who had participated in South Africa.

*Work engagement* was measured using 6 items from the OHFB. Specifically, a single work engagement variable was constituted with its core components: vigour was measured using four items (e.g. ‘I am full of energy in my work’) and dedication was measured using four items (e.g. ‘I find my work is full of meaning and purpose’). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Never to Always. The work engagement construct has shown acceptable reliability within the South African context (e.g. De Beer, Rothmann, & Pienaar, 2012).

*Performance ratings* were based on objective data from official ratings given by supervisors of the employee based on the employee’s yearly performance review – in a consultative process with the employee. The ratings for this single-item scale were categorised in four different ways: 1) Non-performance, 2) Under performance, 3) Good performance, and 4) Excellent performance.

### Research procedure

The research study was conducted in a financial services organisation as part of the particular business unit’s annual climate survey. The business unit consisted of support areas (actuarial, finance, information technology, and human resources departments) as well as operational areas comprising various call centres (e.g. sales, client services, and claims). The climate survey was first rolled out in the business unit in 2014, with the second survey rolled out at the same time one year later. Careful attention was given to effectively position the survey in the business by using various communication channels (e.g. face-to-face contact sessions and emails) to ensure adequate understanding. It was also emphasised on both occasions that participation in the survey was voluntary and results would be treated in a confidential manner. Participants completed the survey online through a secure encrypted connection. Upon completion of the survey the OHFB system automatically compared the results of participants to the OHFB’s South African norm in order to determine employees’ burnout risk level. All employees, regardless of risk status, could contact the organisational development team or employee assistance programme (EAP) throughout the process to attain support with regard to work-related or personal well-being matters. The business unit attained a participation rate ranging between 89% and 92% in the two years that the survey was conducted. The increased overall participation rate was attributed to the effective positioning

of the survey as well as the manner in which the survey results were used to inform interventions implemented in the area after year one. The confidential treatment of results and support provided to employees also contributed to this outcome. Timelines of the performance review process within the organisation coincided with both climate surveys. Performance ratings were loaded onto the human resources management system by supervisors, and a final report containing all performance ratings were generated upon completion of the process. Informed consent was obtained from employees as well as the organisation for survey results and performance ratings to be used for research purposes.

### Statistical analyses

Structural equation model (SEM) methods were implemented with Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). First, a measurement model was specified with confirmatory factor analysis (Brown, 2015) to obtain factor scores for the *latent* variables, i.e. burnout and work engagement. This was considered necessary due to a smaller sample size to lessen the number of parameters in the eventual structural model, i.e. to ensure more accuracy in the estimation process (see Figure 1). For the measurement model, the weighted least squares estimation process was used (mean- and variance adjusted; WLSMV) as the items were of an ordered categorical nature. No item parcelling methods were used and the observed indicators (items) were parameterised to their corresponding indicators over time, i.e. to indicate to Mplus that this was the same item at two time-points – ensuring measurement invariance. The following fit indices were considered for the measurement model: Comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), Root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). For the CFI and TLI values of 0.90 and above are considered acceptable (Van de Schoot, Lugtig, & Hox, 2012), and for the RMSEA values of below 0.10 are considered adequate (Cudeck & Browne, 1993). The cut-off for item loadings were 0.50 and a correlation matrix was also generated to determine the relationships between the variables. The effect sizes for correlations were considered medium at  $r \geq 0.30$  and large at  $r \geq 0.50$  (Cohen, 1988). A test for measurement invariance was also conducted to ascertain equivalence of measurement in the sample at both time-points, this was done with maximum likelihood estimation with the configural (similar factor structure), metric (similar loading patterns) and scalar (similar item intercepts – difficulty perception) options within Mplus (Van de Schoot et al., 2012).

The factor scores from the CFA estimation were then saved and captured on a new dataset that was combined with the performance ratings data for estimation in a structural model. Due to the continuous nature of the factor scores, the structural model was estimated with maximum likelihood estimation (ML). Dummy variables were specified in Mplus for the performance ratings. It is important to note that although a necessary lower end of the scale, non-performance obtained no values in the data set for any employee and was discarded for further analysis. Therefore, the dummy variables were: *Under-performance*, *good performance* and *excellent performance*. These dummy outcome variables at time two were then regressed on their corresponding variables (at time one) as well as on burnout (T1) and work engagement (T1). Burnout (T2) and work engagement (T2) were also regressed on their respective corresponding counterpart-variables at time one (burnout T1; work engagement T1). This then constituted the cross-lagged structural model in order to investigate the relationships from burnout and work engagement at time one to the performance rating variables, over time (see Figure 1), whilst controlling for the variables over time. For this model, the same fit indices were considered, with the addition of another fit statistics due to the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method for the continuous factor score values: The CFI, TLI, RMSEA and Standardised root mean residual (SRMR). Values for SRMR are considered acceptable at 0.08 and below (Van de Schoot et al., 2012). To support or reject hypotheses, the direction and significance of the standardised beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficients were considered. Statistical significance was set at the 95% level, i.e.  $p < 0.05$ .

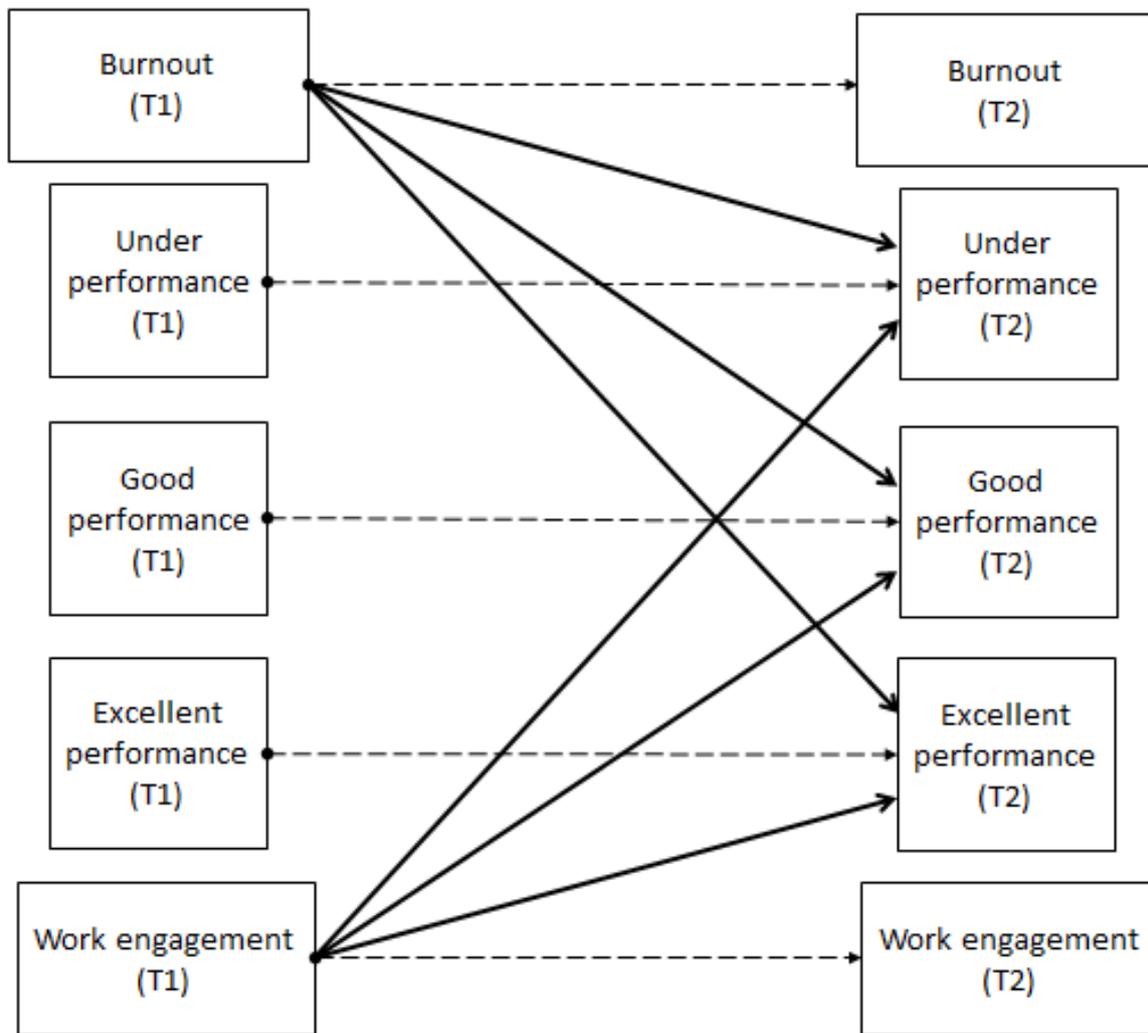


Figure 1. *The cross-lagged structural research model for the study*

## Results

### Measurement model fit and factor loadings

Results of the SEM analyses showed that the CFI (0.93) and TLI (0.93) surpassed the rule of thumb of 0.90 (Hoyle, 1995) for an indication of good model fit. Additionally, the RMSEA value of 0.09 was below the guideline of 0.10, which indicated acceptable model fit (Cudeck & Browne, 1993). Some researchers might question the RMSEA value, but simulation study research has shown that a universal cut-off value for RMSEA is ill-advised; especially with smaller sample sizes and that other fit indices should be considered in conjunction with the RMSEA – which has been done here instead of forcing model modification to artificially

increase fit (Chen, Curran, Bollen, Kirby, & Paxton, 2008). Based on the consideration of all the fit statistics, it was considered acceptable to continue with the interpretation of the results.

Table 1 below presents the factor loadings for the burnout and work engagement variables.

Table 1

*Standardised loadings for the latent factors*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Loading</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b><i>R</i><sup>2</sup></b>
Burnout (T1)	EX1_T1	0.78	0.03	0.001	0.61
	EX2_T1	0.72	0.03	0.001	0.52
	EX3_T1	0.66	0.04	0.001	0.44
	EX4_T1	0.71	0.03	0.001	0.50
	EX5_T1	0.81	0.03	0.001	0.66
	MD1_T1	0.84	0.02	0.001	0.71
	MD2_T1	0.94	0.02	0.001	0.88
	MD3_T1	0.79	0.03	0.001	0.62
Work engagement (T1)	MD4_T1	0.67	0.03	0.001	0.45
	VI1_T1	0.83	0.02	0.001	0.69
	VI2_T1	0.87	0.02	0.001	0.76
	VI3_T1	0.83	0.02	0.001	0.69
	WD1_T1	0.85	0.02	0.001	0.72
	WD2_T1	0.87	0.02	0.001	0.76
Burnout (T2)	WD3_T1	0.84	0.02	0.001	0.71
	EX1_T2	0.77	0.03	0.001	0.59
	EX2_T2	0.72	0.03	0.001	0.52
	EX3_T2	0.65	0.04	0.001	0.42
	EX4_T2	0.70	0.03	0.001	0.49
	EX5_T2	0.80	0.03	0.001	0.64
	MD1_T2	0.83	0.02	0.001	0.69
	MD2_T2	0.93	0.02	0.001	0.86
Work engagement (T2)	MD3_T2	0.78	0.03	0.001	0.61
	MD4_T2	0.66	0.03	0.001	0.44
	VI1_T2	0.87	0.02	0.001	0.76
	VI2_T2	0.91	0.02	0.001	0.83
	VI3_T2	0.87	0.02	0.001	0.76
	WD1_T2	0.88	0.02	0.001	0.77
	WD2_T2	0.91	0.02	0.001	0.83
	WD3_T2	0.88	0.02	0.001	0.77

*Notes:* S.E. = Standard error; All *p*-values < 0.001; *R*<sup>2</sup> = explained variance by latent variable in the indicator

Table 1 shows that the burnout and work engagement items loaded significantly on their respective factors at both points in time (T1 average  $\lambda = 0.80$ , SD = 0.08; T2 average  $\lambda = 0.81$ , SD = 0.09) and that the latent constructs explained significant amounts of variance in all the corresponding items (T1 average  $R^2 = 64.80\%$ , SD = 12.07%; T2 average  $R^2 = 66.53\%$ , SD = 14.25%). Furthermore, the standard errors of the loadings and explained variances alike were small - indicating accuracy of the estimation process.

Table 2

*Reliabilities and correlation matrix for the latent variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Burnout (T1)	(0.89)			
2. Burnout (T2)	0.44 <sup>a</sup>	(0.89)		
3. Work engagement (T1)	-0.84 <sup>b</sup>	-0.42 <sup>a</sup>	(0.92)	
4. Work engagement (T2)	-0.33 <sup>a</sup>	-0.85 <sup>b</sup>	0.54 <sup>b</sup>	(0.94)

Notes: Cronbach's reliability coefficients in brackets on the diagonal; All correlations statistically significant  $p < 0.001$ ; a = Medium practical effect; b = Large practical effect

All the constructs presented acceptable Cronbach's reliability coefficients, i.e.  $\alpha$ 's  $> 0.70$ . The correlation table shows that burnout (T1) was correlated with a medium effect size ( $r = 0.44$ ) with burnout (T2). Burnout at time one and time two, was highly negatively correlated to work engagement (T1) and work engagement (T2) at the corresponding time-points ( $r = -0.84$ ;  $r = -0.85$  - large effect). Furthermore, work engagement (T1) was negatively correlated with burnout (T2) - a medium effect size ( $r = -0.42$ ). Similarly, burnout (T1) was correlated negatively with work engagement (T2) – also with a medium effect size ( $r = -0.33$ ).

**Measurement invariance over time**

Table 3 presents the results of the measurement invariance testing based on time-point.

Table 3

*Results of the invariance testing based on time-point*

<b>Models compared</b>	$\Delta\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Metric against configural	17.068	13	0.196
Scalar against configural	37.468	26	0.068
Scalar against metric	20.874	13	0.076

Notes:  $\chi^2$  = change in chi-square; *df* = degrees of freedom; *p* = significance

The results show that strong measurement invariance was evident, i.e. configural, metric and scalar invariance. This indicated that the burnout and work engagement constructs were measured equivalently for the participants at both the time-points.

**Structural model**

The factor scores from the CFA output were combined into a new dataset with the dummy variables based on the performance ratings and a structural model was specified and estimated with ML (see Figure 1). The estimation revealed the following fit indices for the model: CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.09; SRMR = 0.05 - indicating an adequate model fit (explained earlier). Table 4 presents the regression results.

Table 4

*Regression results for the cross-lagged structural model*

<b>Structural path</b>	$\beta$	S.E.	<i>p</i>
Burnout (T1) → Burnout (T2)	0.39*	0.06	0.001
Work engagement (T1) → Work engagement (T2)	0.43*	0.06	0.001
Under-performance (T1) → Under-performance (T2)	0.18*	0.07	0.006
Good performance (T1) → Good performance (T2)	0.16*	0.06	0.005
Excellent performance (T1) → Excellent performance (T2)	0.15*	0.06	0.015
Burnout (T1) → Under-performance (T2)	-0.14	0.13	0.276
Burnout (T1) → Good performance (T2)	-0.23	0.13	0.076
Burnout (T1) → Excellent performance (T2)	0.21	0.13	0.110
Work engagement (T1) → Under-performance (T2)	-0.19	0.13	0.149
Work engagement (T1) → Good performance (T2)	-0.18	0.12	0.168
Work engagement (T1) → Excellent performance (T2)	0.26*	0.13	0.044

Notes:  $\beta$  = Standardised beta coefficient; S.E. = Standard error; *p* = Two-tailed statistical significance; \* = Significant

As depicted in Table 4, all the variables contributed significantly to their corresponding variable over time. Specifically, the strongest predictive relationships were for the corresponding burnout ( $\beta = 0.39$ ) and work engagement ( $\beta = 0.43$ ) variables, over time. In terms of the research hypotheses,  $H_1$  was rejected; the predictive relationships from burnout T1 to all the performance dummy variables were non-significant, over time: Under-performance ( $p = 0.276$ ), good performance ( $p = 0.76$ ) and excellent performance ( $p = 0.110$ ). However, it is important to note that even though non-significant in the traditional sense ( $p > 0.05$ ), the relationship from burnout T1 to good performance T2 was negative ( $\beta = -0.23$ ;  $p = 0.076$ ) over time. In terms of  $H_2$ , the hypothesis was partially supported as work engagement T1 only showed a significant positive relationship to excellent performance T2, over time ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ).

## **Discussion**

### Outline of the results

The objective of the current study was to investigate the relationships between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings (by supervisors), over time. Understanding the relationships between these factors will emphasise the importance of overall employee well-being to organisations, and will contribute towards making wellness interventions a higher priority for organisations. When businesses are empowered with knowledge of the impact of burnout and work engagement on work performance over time, it strengthens organisations' ability to predict performance results based on overall employee well-being, as well as enables organisations to proactively take action to implement interventions in areas where burnout risks are identified.

The findings of the current study with more objective performance rating by supervisors also reflected the dynamics of past research, i.e. the literature review revealed studies exploring the impact of burnout on work performance continues to yield inconclusive results (Taris, 2006; Bakker et al., 2014). Specifically, burnout showed no significant relationship to performance ratings over time (rejecting  $H_1$ ). However, in light of arguments against using stringent criteria for rejection of hypotheses (e.g. Schmidt & Hunter, 1997), it should be noted that the relationship between burnout and good performance was negative ( $\beta = -0.23$ ;  $p$

= 0.076), and given a larger sample size may have crossed the threshold of significance. It is also deemed important to consider that if logically reasoned through employees identified as being at risk of burnout (experiencing high levels of exhaustion and cynicism) are theoretically unlikely to be able to continue delivering good performance over a prolonged period of time; thus, even if no significant relationship was found in the present study, intuitively the point does call for further deliberation. The existing body of literature comprises multiple studies investigating the relationship between burnout and various components of performance (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti et al., 2014; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). The inconsistency of research findings is illustrated in studies such as those conducted by Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) who found one component of burnout (emotional exhaustion) to be both positively and negatively related to burnout, with the same contradictory results found for the personal accomplishment dimension (Demerouti et al., 2005). Taris' (2006) critical review on this topic revealed the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout to be strongly correlated (negatively) with in-role performance, while evidence for the relationships between depersonalisation, personal accomplishment, and performance was inconclusive. Demerouti et al.'s (2014) hypothesis concerning adaptive strategies being applied by employees to deliver performance in line with expectations despite experiencing burnout should also be noted as a potential reason contributing to questionable results. Herein it is illustrated that the need continues to exist for more clarity on the topic of burnout and the impact thereof on work performance, over time.

Support for the relationship between work engagement and work performance was found in this study through the significant positive relationship found between work engagement (T1) and excellent performance (T2) (supporting H<sub>2</sub>). This finding is in line with previous results where work engagement has been found to predict higher self-reported in-role performance, as well as higher supervisor-rated and co-worker-rated in-role performance (Bakker et al., 2014). Work engagement has also been found to be positively related to extra-role performance (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), as well as to contribute to increased team performance (Bakker, 2009). The high energy and self-efficacy being experienced by engaged employees (Schaufeli, Taris, Le Blanc, Peeters, Bakker, & De Jonge, 2001) empower them to shape the manner in which experiences impact on their lives, and allow them to craft personal positive feedback around appreciation and success (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). These dynamics build a case for engaged employees to be likely to own

and drive their own success, resulting in higher individual and organisational performance. However, the literature review revealed a scarcity of studies investigating the relationship between work engagement and work performance over time. The current study contributed to that need; results were also in alignment with the results from the longitudinal study by Schaufeli et al. (2009) which confirmed a positive gain spiral.

Demerouti and Cropanzano (2010) concluded that performance cannot be seen as a constant construct as there are various underlying psychological processes connecting burnout and work engagement to different performance dimensions. It is believed that the complexities inherent in the performance construct and specifically the manner in which performance is measured, contributes to the challenges that researchers are faced with. Various arguments exist in literature for performance ratings to be eliminated and reasons for this argument include the challenges of disagreement between raters, weak criteria for evaluating ratings, and contextual factors influencing performance ratings (Adler, 2016). It can thus be argued that performance ratings do not accurately reflect actual work performance and could be a large contributor to inconclusive results being obtained in research when reviewing the relationships between burnout, work engagement, and work performance. Finding ways of improving performance ratings becomes important in order to contribute to higher levels of accuracy and to allow for more conclusive results to be obtained in future studies on this topic.

### Limitations and recommendations for future research

The present study was not without limitations. It must be borne in mind that using single-source data has been criticised because of potential contamination due to common method variance (Jian et al., 2012). The present study made use of self-report data for overall well-being indicators (burnout and work engagement) gathered through a web-based design that could have further contributed to common method variance. However, Reio (201) argued that due to the measurement being spread out over time (longitudinal design) it minimizes the likelihood of common method variance. It is also suggested for future research to replicate the current study by also including information on overall employee well-being and performance from other sources, e.g. interviews or 360 performance feedbacks.

It is further deemed important to note the variety of components being measured in research studies when evaluating performance, e.g. task and contextual performance, in-role and extra-role performance, supervisor-rated performance, and self-rated performance (Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti et al., 2014; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Taris, 2006).

Due to the question around the extent to which performance ratings were an accurate reflection of actual performance could also be viewed as a limitation to the present study. Various concerns around the practice of performance ratings have been noted in the study (e.g. failure to develop adequate criteria for evaluating ratings, poor relationship between performance of ratees and the ratings they receive, and contextual effects on ratings) (Adler, 2016). However, eliminating performance reviews is probably also not the answer and Industrial and Organisational Psychologists need to partner with business to investigate ways of implementing performance management more effectively. Higher confidence in accuracy of performance ratings could probably be attained through approaches such as more regular discussions (creating more data points), and combining input from multiple raters (e.g. self, supervisor, colleagues, and stakeholders). Higher quality performance ratings could contribute to a stronger correlation between employee burnout, work engagement, and work performance, and it is recommended that this be investigated in future studies.

Several previous research studies have explored the concepts burnout, work engagement, and work performance. However, a scarcity of information exists regarding the longitudinal relationship between these indicators, specifically within the South Africa context. In terms of generalizability of these findings, it is important to recognise that the current research was conducted within the South African context, specifically in the financial services industry. Therefore blanket generalisation is cautioned.

### Recommendations for management

The current study supported the hypothesis that work engagement predicts higher work performance of individuals as rated by supervisors in the organisation, over time. It would thus be recommended for managers to attain a better understanding of factors influencing and contributing to enhanced engagement in the workplace. Evidence exists in literature that job resources are strongly correlated with work engagement (Christian et al., 2011). Acquiring

more knowledge on the topic of job resources, and interacting with employees to understand the impact and role of various job resources on engagement levels would be beneficial to managers and organisations. Job resources have also been found to have a buffering effect on job demands with the additional benefit of lowering burnout in an organisation (Bakker et al., 2014). Conducting a climate survey is one approach that can be followed by organisations to attain a better understanding of the perceptions and experiences that exist around job resources in an organisation. These results can also be used to inform high impact interventions that could be implemented to contribute to enhanced employee engagement.

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**CHAPTER 4**  
**RESEARCH ARTICLE 3**

# **The impact of work engagement and burnout on a customer satisfaction index in a call centre environment: A structural model**

## **Abstract**

**Orientation:** Customer satisfaction is an essential objective of call centre operations and key to the success of business. Currently limited information exists on the impact of employee well-being (burnout and work engagement) on customer satisfaction – specifically in call centres.

**Research purpose:** The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of work engagement and burnout on a customer satisfaction index in a call centre environment.

**Motivation for the study:** Customer satisfaction is a key outcome required of call centre operations, yet limited data exists on the impact of employee burnout and work engagement on a customer satisfaction index in a call centre environment.

**Research design, approach and method:** A quantitative approach was followed by considering data from call centre agents ( $n = 132$ ) at one point in time. Structural equation modelling methods were applied to analyse the data.

**Main findings:** The study concluded that burnout did not have a significant relationship with better customer satisfaction ratings; thus rejecting hypothesis 1. However, hypothesis 2 was partially supported as work engagement was associated with better customer satisfaction ratings.

**Practical/Managerial implications:** This study contributed to creating awareness amongst employees and managers about the impact of work engagement on organisational outcomes such as customer satisfaction. Addressing work engagement will promote the creation of a workplace that is conducive to optimal employee well-being.

**Contribution/Value-add:** The study contributed to the limited academic knowledge available on the impact of employee well-being on customer satisfaction ratings in a call centre environment.

**Keywords:** Burnout, work engagement, customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction index, job demands, job resources, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modelling

## **Introduction**

The impact of customer satisfaction on the achievement of strategic business objectives has been recognised by organisations in the last few decades (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilić, 2011; Craig & DeSimone, 2011; Gruca & Rego, 2005), and has been found to be positively associated with market share, repurchase, and positive word of mouth (Keiningham, Perkins-Munn, & Evans, 2003). Continuous innovation of processes, systems, products, and technologies make it increasingly challenging for businesses to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Liu, 2013), and makes the focus on creating a truly customer-centric experience much more critical (Sheth, 2001). Tough economic times further contribute to increased demands and pressure placed on employees to exceed customer expectations and reach business targets. The challenge with this is that employees, who play a pivotal role in the creation of customer satisfaction, are placed under increasing pressure, which can affect the overall well-being of employees if not managed correctly and ultimately impact on their ability to deliver upon expectations (Schneider, Macey, Barbera, & Martin, 2009; Singh, 2000). The risk inherent in this is that a downward spiral can be created for employees and organisations alike if the well-being of employees is not considered. Poor working conditions and burned-out employees are associated in literature with reduced productivity, poor work performance and sickness absence – all of which consequently impact on financial business outcomes (Schaufeli, 2017; Taris, 2006).

Awareness of the impact of customer satisfaction on business success started to feature more prominently in literature during the nineties (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994; Anderson, Fornell, & Rust, 1997). Strong empirical evidence exists supporting that organisations elicit sought-after behaviours, e.g. improved loyalty, better receptivity to cross-selling efforts, and positive word-of-mouth referrals, by satisfying customers (Anderson, 1996; Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant 1996). General customer service seems to be influenced by a set of variables, e.g. price, product performance, and service (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Brown & Maxwell, 2002), and is dependent on value as perceived by the customer (Upal & Dhaka, 2008), i.e. the perception of quality in relation to price, or ratio of value received relative to expenses incurred (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991). According to Zameer, Tara, Kausar, and Mohsin (2015) customers' perceptions of quality, benefit and money related to the organisation or services, impact how they perceive value. Yadav, Rai, and Srivastava

(2014) confirmed the relationship between perceived customer value and customer satisfaction, whereby perceived customer value leads to customer satisfaction. Research conducted on determinants of customer satisfaction in call centres revealed the following aspects to be impactful: (1) service quality and performance indicators, (2) managerial strategies and human resource (HR) policies, and (3) system performance and employees' performance (Chicu, Ryan, & Valverde-Aparicio, 2016). Service quality is understood as the overall impression of a customer's judgement with regard to the service provided (Culiberg & Rojšek, 2010), and is influenced by expected service and perceived service (Hussain, Nasser, & Hussain, 2015). Strong evidence exists in literature regarding the positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Edward, & Sahadev, 2011; Hussain et al., 2015; Yadav & Rai, 2015).

Schaufeli (2017) positioned the job demands-resources (JD-R) model as an integrative conceptual framework that can be used for monitoring workplace conditions with the aim to prevent burnout and increase work engagement. The JD-R model proposes working conditions to consist of both job demands and job resources (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), and in essence integrates two psychological processes: a health impairment process, and a motivational process. The health impairment process portrays how high job demands (e.g. work overload, emotional demands) exhaust employees' resources (e.g. mental, physical) and consequently contributes to the exhaustion of energy (burnout), and ultimately to health problems (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The motivational process on the other hand highlights how abundant resources impacts upon positive organisational outcomes (e.g. organisational commitment) via work engagement (De Beer, Rothmann Jr., & Pienaar, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The present study used the JD-R model as foundational framework to investigate the impact of burnout and work engagement on the satisfaction of customers.

Burnout has been found to negatively affect service quality (Singh, 2000), and various research studies have confirmed the negative relationship of burnout with customer satisfaction (Garman, Corrigan, & Morris, 2002; Söderlund, 2017; Yagil, 2006). Burnout has been conceptualised in literature as a breakdown in the relationship between employees and their work (Rona, Burdett, & Khondoker, 2017). Call centre agents are known to be at risk of developing burnout due to the nature of the roles they tend to fulfil, i.e. low levels of job autonomy, high levels of monitoring, and lack of support from team leaders (D'Alleo &

Santangelo, 2011; Holman, 2002). Call centre work also requires a high degree of personal contact with the public, and agents are confronted with angry and dissatisfied customers (Kjellberg et al., 2010); these emotionally intense interpersonal interactions with customers have been shown to lead to emotional exhaustion (Morris & Feldman, 1997). Hock (1988) described burnout in a customer service occupation to unfold as a gradual decrease in concern for customers and co-workers, a loss of positive feelings, sympathy, and respect for clients, which culminate in a blame-the-victim philosophy. The scarcity of studies investigating the impact of burnout on customer satisfaction in a call centre environment served as motivation for research conducted in the present study.

In addition to predicting burnout, the JD-R model has also been used to predict connectedness (Lewig, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Dollard, & Metzger, 2007), task enjoyment and organisational commitment (Bakker, Van Veldhoven, & Xanthopoulou, 2010), as well as work engagement (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007). In defining work engagement, Schneider et al. (2009) differentiated between feelings of engagement which refer to the heightened state of energy and enthusiasm associated with work and the organisation, and engagement behaviours which are exhibited in the service of accomplishing organisational goals. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) highlighted four reasons why engaged employees perform better, which include: (1) positive emotions, (2) good health, (3) ability to mobilise resources, and (4) crossover of engagement among team members, which all increase performance. Research on consequences of work engagement has highlighted its relationship with positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, low turnover intention, low absenteeism, and high organisational commitment and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014; De Beer et al., 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker (2004); Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). Salanova, Agut, and Peiró (2005) argued that when employees experience high levels of engagement and share a united view about service quality in the business, it could be expected that they will deliver high performance to customers, who should then in turn report favourable employee performance. The impact of work engagement on customer satisfaction, however, remains a poorly researched field of study. In a study by Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) positive relationships were found between employee satisfaction and engagement, and meaningful business-unit outcomes, i.e. customer satisfaction and loyalty, productivity, profitability, turnover, and safety.

Grandey, Foo, Groth, and Goodwin (2012) have reported the negative consequences of burnout and (lack of) work engagement to be well-documented at individual level. Employee burnout and work engagement have also been found to impact on work performance of employees, internal to the organisation. The impact of employee well-being (burnout and work engagement) on the experiences of customers external to the organisation is, however, much less researched (Harter et al., 2002; Salanova et al., 2005). The current study therefore investigated the impact of employee well-being on customers' satisfaction, external to the organisation, specifically within a call centre environment – by considering their rating of satisfaction with the call centre agent. The remainder of the article comprises a literature review, research methodology, presentation of results, a discussion of limitations and recommendations for future research.

## Literature review

### **Customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction index ratings in call centres**

Fornell (1992) described customer satisfaction as a function of three indicators: (1) general satisfaction, (2) confirmation of expectations, and (3) the distance from the customer's hypothetical ideal product (or service). Customer satisfaction is thus articulated as a function of pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase perceived performance of the respective product or service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). A distinction has been drawn in literature between two conceptualisations of customer satisfaction which include: transaction-specific and cumulative (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993). Transaction-specific customer satisfaction referred to a post-choice evaluation or judgment based on a particular product or service encounter (Fornell et al., 1996; Oliver, 1980), whereas cumulative customer satisfaction is seen as depicting the overall valuation of customers based on the complete purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over a period of time (Anderson, 1996). Through a review of existing literature, Chicu et al. (2016) identified the following as determinants of customer satisfaction in call centres: managerial strategies (customer orientation approach, production line approach, off-shoring contract), HR practices (training, job design, job discretion, team-working, salaries), HR outcomes (burnout, absenteeism, turnover, employee satisfaction), employee behaviour (customer orientation,

responsiveness, use/no use of scripts, ambidextrous behaviour), employee productivity (key performance indicators), and service quality (metrics and other).

Call centres have become key to operations within many organisations as it represents the central place of communication between companies and their customers (Aksin, Armony, & Mehrota, 2007; Cheong, Kim, & So, 2008). Feinberg, Hokama, Kadam, and Kim (2002) estimated that over 70 per cent of all customer contact takes place through call centres (based on estimates at the Centre for Customer Driven Quality). Deloitte Consulting LLP (2013) reported more recently that call centres continue to grow both in size as well as in strategic importance, and reported that 62% of organisations viewed customer experience provided through call centres as a competitive differentiator. In a call centre environment the type of communication that takes place between a call centre agent and customer is mainly via telephone (it can also include some level of electronic communication via email or text message) and entails a verbal interaction of short duration; the relationships that develop are formed with a large number of customers, and often the call centre agent is expected to deal with difficult (and/or upset) customers (D'Alleo & Santangelo, 2011). In a call centre setup, the interaction between a call centre agent and a customer is seen as the service from the customer's point of view, and is therefore a critical determinant of customer satisfaction (Bitner et al., 1990).

Various customer satisfaction indices have been developed over the last few decades in an attempt to understand the role and impact thereof on business performance (Gruca & Rego, 2005; Fornell, 1992). In a study conducted by Dean (2004) to understand customer expectations of service quality in a call centre environment, the following were included as measures: customer orientation, service quality predictions, and the adequate level of service expectations. Cheong et al. (2008) identified the percentage of calls blocked (where a busy/engaged tone was received), the average speed of answer, and service level (percentage of calls answered within a specified number of seconds) as critical factors that determined customer satisfaction within a call centre environment. Hussain et al. (2015) point out that the service quality procedure known as SERVQUAL is generally used for assessing the evaluation of service; SERVQUAL comprises five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility, and empathy. The literature review reflected that a variety of factors contribute to a customer's evaluation of the overall service experience. The question posed by the current study was whether the level of employee well-being (burnout and work

engagement) of the individual call centre agent influenced the overall level of satisfaction experienced by the customer. In the present study customer satisfaction was measured by means of the ratings allocated by customers in response to interaction/s with the particular call centre agent.

### **The relationship between burnout and customer satisfaction**

D'Alleo and Santangelo (2011) explained burnout as an individual's response to a situation that is perceived as intolerable, i.e. the individual perceives an unbridgeable gap between the number of requests from target users and his/her mental and behavioural resources available to be able to respond to such requests. Burnout is traditionally described as a chronic work-related state of mind characterised by low energy levels (exhaustion), lack of enthusiasm (depersonalisation/cynicism), and doubting one's own competence (personal efficacy) (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996). The inclusion of reduced personal/professional accomplishment/efficacy as part of the burnout construct is questioned by some researchers due to accumulating evidence that shows it plays a more divergent role than exhaustion and cynicism (De Beer & Bianchi, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). De Beer and Bianchi (2017) also suggested that burnout should be operationalized as a single score based on the items of exhaustion and cynicism, and this recommendation has been implemented in this study.

Empirical evidence exists linking burnout to various physical and psychological health problems including depression (Ahola, 2007; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012), sleep problems (Kim, Ji, & Kao, 2011) and more recently linking it to risk health behaviours (e.g. higher fast-food consumption, infrequent exercise, higher alcohol consumption and more frequent medications [pain killers]) (Alexandrova-Karamanova et al., 2016). Burnout has also been linked to undesirable organisational outcomes such as absenteeism-related incidents, lower organisational commitment, intentions to leave and reduced work performance (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Bakker et al., 2014; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004).

Given this, it could be reasoned that it is unlikely that employees with high levels of burnout would be able to provide the level of service expected by organisations to create positive experiences for customers with whom they interact in service encounters. Lower levels of

energy and presence of negative emotions (e.g. frustration, tension) are likely to be picked up by customers, impacting upon their customer service experience; this notion has been referred to as emotional display behaviours (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). Söderlund (2017) investigated employee display of burnout in the service encounter and the impact thereof on customer satisfaction, and found customer satisfaction to reduce given employee display of burnout symptoms. A study by Yagil (2006) supported this by showing high levels of burnout by the service provider (employee) to be related to lowered levels of customer satisfaction with service. Employees' state of burnout has also been found to affect customer satisfaction with service in the health care industry (Garman et al., 2002). High levels of burnout in physicians and nurses were also found to be related to poor patient (client) satisfaction (Argentero, Dell'Olivo, & Ferretti, 2008). Furthermore, depersonalisation has been described in literature as a process whereby employees detach from their job and start to develop an uncaring or callous attitude towards their job and those associated with their job (e.g. customers and colleagues) (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004), and is traditionally considered the second core component of burnout (see De Beer & Bianchi, 2017). In cases where employees have detached from work and customers - and where customers are increasingly seen by employees as 'objects' (due to depersonalisation) - it would make sense to infer that this would negatively impact on the experience of the customer, and ultimately on the customer satisfaction rating. A critical review by Taris (2006) found some support for the notion that high levels of depersonalisation are associated with poor performance (in-role performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, and customer satisfaction), but concluded that more evidence is needed to ascertain this relationship. More recently Demerouti, Xanthopoulou, and Bakker (2017) found that when employees are cynical about their work, they are more likely to exhibit negative (re)actions towards their customers, which translates into lower customer satisfaction. Upon a review of the literature no studies could be found by the researcher that investigated the impact of burnout on customer satisfaction, specifically within a call centre environment.

H<sub>1a</sub>: Burnout has a negative relationship with better (acceptable and good) customer satisfaction ratings.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Burnout has a positive relationship with a worse (bad) customer satisfaction rating.

## **The relationship between work engagement and customer satisfaction**

The JD-R model was extended to include work engagement by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), and is positioned within the model as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind embodied by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, Bakker, 2002). Engaged employees have been found to identify with their work and have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work (Bakker et al., 2014). Job and personal resources have been found to be strong predictors of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; De Beer et al., 2012). Job resources typically include aspects such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, autonomy, and opportunities for growth and development (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007), while personal resources refer to aspects of the self that are generally linked to resilience (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Research has shown that job resources play a motivational role as they nurture employees' learning and development as well as contribute to achieving work goals (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Engaged employees have been found to exhibit more creativity and productivity, together with an enhanced willingness to go the extra mile (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Work engagement has also been found to be positively related to work performance (Demerouti & Bakker, 2006); supporting evidence for this has also been presented in the current dissertation in Chapter 3 (see p. 85). Furthermore, in a study by Salanova et al. (2005) organisational resources and work engagement were found to predict service climate, which in turn predicted employee performance as well as customer loyalty. Service climate describes the collective view of employees of the practices, procedures, and behaviours that are incentivised, encouraged, and expected by the organisation in relation to customer service and customer service quality (Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998).

Earlier research conducted by Rust and Zahorik (1993) portrayed service quality as the final outcome of customer loyalty and retention, which tends to result in increased profits for the organisation over time. Harter et al. (2002) investigated employee satisfaction and engagement and the impact thereof on customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee turnover, and accidents, and found the correlation between employee engagement and business outcomes to be meaningful and of practical significance. Research conducted by Accenture Consulting (Craig & DeSimone, 2011) highlighted that, from a strategic perspective, one of the most compelling reasons to ensure high work engagement is the positive contagious effect (i.e. carryover effect) it has on customer engagement. A study by

Bakker, Emmerik, and Euwema (2006) supported the notion that engaged employees communicated their optimism, positive attitudes, and pro-active behaviours to their fellow employees which creates a positive spiral of success (positive contagion). Elfenbein and Ambady (2002) have shown that receivers' accuracy in identifying the sender's emotional state in 'the happiness dimension' is greater than for other states, such as: anger, fear, and surprise. Based on the above it could then be reasoned that engaged employees contribute to a culture of pro-active behaviour and good performance in organisations, which should promote an enhanced customer experience and consequently higher levels of customer satisfaction.

H<sub>2a</sub>: Work engagement has a positive relationship with better (acceptable and good) customer satisfaction ratings.

H<sub>2b</sub>: Work engagement has a negative relationship with a worse (bad) customer satisfaction rating.

Lastly, a key finding by Chicu et al. (2016) was that customer satisfaction does not feature among the main aims of research in the context of call centres, despite the reality that by its very nature the purpose of call centres is to provide a satisfactory service to customers (Chicu et al., 2016). Söderlund (2017) also concluded that research investigating the impact of burnout on customer satisfaction is limited, and even more so in a call centre environment. Understanding the impact of employee well-being on customer satisfaction becomes even more critical in light of the influence thereof on business performance. No studies could be found on this topic conducted within the South African context while conducting the literature review of the present study. This article will therefore focus on the impact of burnout and work engagement on a customer satisfaction index in a call centre environment in a South African context.

## **Research method**

### Research approach

A quantitative approach was followed in this study (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005). Specifically, a cross-sectional survey design was used, which means that the data is

considered at one point in time (Creswell, 2013). This type of design is indicated to ascertain correlational relationships between variables at a specific moment in time and can be used to support or reject applicable hypotheses (Levin, 2006). Ratings attributed to each participant were combined in the dataset based on good, average and bad ratings by customers as count data. Count data is indicated when values take non-negative integer values and the value is derived from counting whole numbers as opposed to ranking (Heck & Thomas, 2015).

## Participants

Purposive and convenience sampling were used in the study. Participants were selected according to criteria of relevance (Willig, 2013), i.e. they had to be employed in one of the call centres of the business unit where the study was conducted. Convenience sampling was used due to the voluntary decision, convenience and availability of participants (Creswell, 2013). A total of 132 employees participated in the study; this represented 66% of the total number of call centre advisers employed by the business unit at that point in time. Only basic demographic data was reported. The sample was representative of different ages and backgrounds. The majority of the sample was female, 76 (57.57%), while 56 (42.42%) were male. The average (mean) age of participants was 31.36 years (SD = 6.29). The sample comprised Black African employees ( $n = 56$ ; 42.42%), followed by White employees ( $n = 36$ ; 27.27%), Indian employees ( $n = 29$ ; 21.97%), Coloured employees ( $n = 10$ ; 7.58%), and one participant who reported race as Other ( $n = 1$ , 0.76%).

## Measuring instruments

*Demographic characteristics:* Only basic demographic characteristics of the participants were reported; this included ethnicity, gender, and age (mean; standard deviation). This is required according to the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2008) for publications and due to the non-probability sampling method used. Providing the basic sample composition ensures transparency when disseminating the research results, which allow the reader to consider the extent and applicability of the generalisation of the results (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012).

*Burnout* ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) risk was measured with the 9-item scale from the Organisational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB; Afriforte, 2013) 9-item scale. The OHFB burnout scale is based on the South African Employee Health and Wellness Survey (SAEHWS; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2007). This scale, normed for the South African context, has been shown to measure burnout when operationalized as a single latent variable by the items of its core constructs (De Beer & Bianchi, 2017), indiscriminately from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (De Beer, 2015). The core components measured were therefore exhaustion and mental distance (cynicism) items. Exhaustion: ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) was measured by five items, e.g. 'I feel tired before I arrive at work'; Mental distance (Cynicism): ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ) was measured by four items, e.g. 'I am uncertain whether my work is important'. The selection of the OHFB was considered acceptable as it identifies burnout risks based on normed scores of over 50 000 employees who have participated in South Africa.

*Work engagement* ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) was measured with 9 items from the OHFB (Afriforte, 2013). For this scale a single work engagement variable was constituted with vigour and dedication items as its core components (as was done with burnout). Both components were measured with four items. Vigour included items such as 'I am full of energy in my work', while dedication was measured through items such as 'I find my work is full of meaning and purpose'. These items were all measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale which ranged from Never to Always. The work engagement construct has been found to show acceptable reliability within the South African context (e.g. De Beer et al., 2012).

*Customer satisfaction index* ( $\alpha =$  not applicable) was measured with single item ratings which were received from customers after interactions with call centre advisers. Customers were requested to complete an electronic survey to rate their interactions with call centre advisers as a reflection of the level of satisfaction experienced based on the service received from the specific adviser. These ratings were reworked into good (awesome, good), acceptable and bad (bad, very bad) for the current study due to sample size and estimation complexity.

## Research procedure

Research was conducted in a financial services organisation as part of the particular business unit's annual climate survey. The area where the research was conducted comprised various

call centres including claims, client service, and sales call centres in addition to support departments (e.g. finance and human resources); for the present study only call centre advisers were included as participants. Employees received the OHFB survey link electronically and could choose to participate in the survey. The purpose of the annual climate survey, as well as the voluntary nature of participation, were clearly positioned and explained to all employees. Throughout the survey process, and on-going afterwards, all employees had access to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to obtain psychological support if required. Customer satisfaction index scores were extracted from the line of business system for the comparative period. Customer satisfaction index scores were then matched with employee burnout and work engagement data based on unique numerical identifiers. Confidentiality of all participants was ensured throughout the process and will continue to be maintained. Permission to use the data for research purposes was obtained both from the participants and the organisation itself.

### Statistical analysis

Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) was used to perform the statistical analyses. Specifically, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; Brown, 2015) was applied to create latent factor scores for the burnout and work engagement scales with the mean and variance adjusted weighted least squares estimation method (WLSMV). The fit of CFA was considered with the following fit indices: Comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the Weighted root mean residual (WRMR – for categorical data). Acceptable values for CFI and TLI are 0.90 and above (Van de Schoot, Lugtig, & Hox, 2012); the WRMR is considered to be acceptable if its value is below a value of 1.00. Discriminant validity was considered problematic for a correlation above 0.85 as per the guideline of Brown (2015). An exploratory structural equation model (ESEM) was also tested in order to investigate model fit and the acceptability of parameters. ESEM can be seen as a combination between exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and CFA which allows for small cross-loadings across variables from other factors, and this is considered advantageous because in reality it is unrealistic to expect the cross-loadings of items from other factors on another factor to be exactly 0.00 (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2009).

For the structural model, the factor scores based on the best fitting CFA or ESEM model will be used in conjunction with the count data of the customer satisfaction index ratings for each employee. Maximum likelihood estimation will be used due to the continuous nature of the factor scores and the ability to estimate models with count data outcomes. It should be noted that estimating count models is complex and computationally demanding. Furthermore, count models do not provide classic fit indices such as the CFI or TLI – so fit of the model cannot be reported. But upon model convergence, the focus will be on the statistical significance of the regression estimates of the structural paths as well as their sizes and directions. It is important to note that in this instance Poisson regression is used due to the zero-inflated nature of the data (Heck & Thomas, 2015). Figure 1 below provides a representation of the hypothesized structural model.

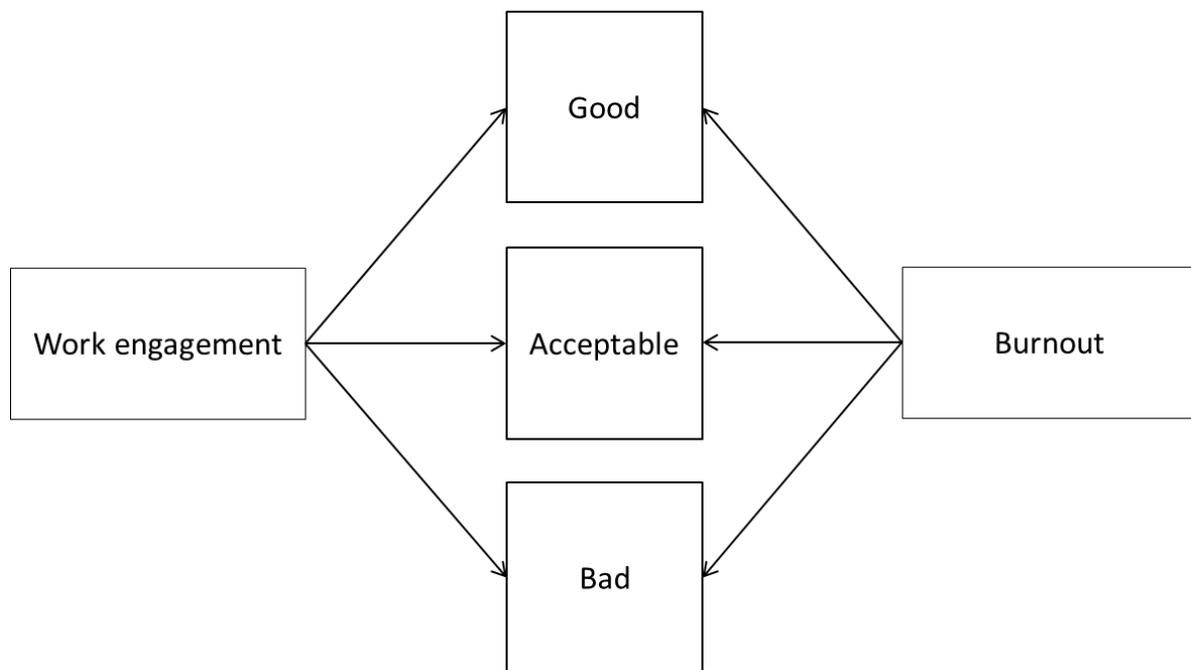


Figure 1. *Hypothesised structural model for the study*

## **Results**

### **Factor score model fit: CFA and ESEM**

Results from the estimation of the factor models are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Fit statistics for the two estimated factor models*

<b>Model</b>	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<b>CFI</b>	<b>TLI</b>	<b>WRMR</b>
1: CFA	610.850*	134	0.924	0.913	1.260
2: ESEM	426.320*	118	0.951	0.936	0.874

Note: \* = chi-square values cannot be directly compared as with maximum likelihood estimation.

Both the models fit the data when considering the CFI and TLI values which were all above 0.90. However, when considering the WRMR value it is clear that the ESEM model performed better. Furthermore, the CFA model revealed a large correlation value between burnout and work engagement ( $r = 0.86$ ; large effect) which was a discriminant validity concern. The correlation of burnout and work engagement in the ESEM model was much less concerning ( $r = 0.65$ ; large effect) and did not elicit any discriminant validity concerns. Given the evidence of the fit indices and inspection of the correlation parameter it was decided to continue with the structural model based on the factor scores provided by the ESEM model.

**Structural model**

The count data (customer satisfaction ratings) were combined with the factor scores of the ESEM to estimate the structural model. As mentioned previously, this estimation process does not provide any fit indices. The results of the standardised Poisson regressions are given in Table 2 and Figure 2 below.

Table 2

*The Poisson regression results for the structural model*

<b>Regression path</b>	$\beta$	<b>S.E.</b>	<i>p</i>
Burnout → Good	-0.19	0.42	0.635
Burnout → Acceptable	0.55	0.44	0.209
Burnout → Bad	-0.85	0.96	0.377
Work engagement → Good	0.98*	0.08	0.001
Work engagement → Acceptable	0.83*	0.29	0.005
Work engagement → Bad	0.52	1.57	0.739

Note: \* = Statistically significant

Table 2 reports that burnout showed no significant relationship to any of the customer satisfaction ratings ( $p$ 's > 0.05), rejecting all of hypothesis 1. Work engagement did not show a significant relationship to a bad rating ( $p = 0.739$ ), but showed two statistically significant positive relationships with good ( $\beta = 0.98$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and acceptable ( $\beta = 0.83$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ) ratings – supporting hypothesis H<sub>2a</sub>.

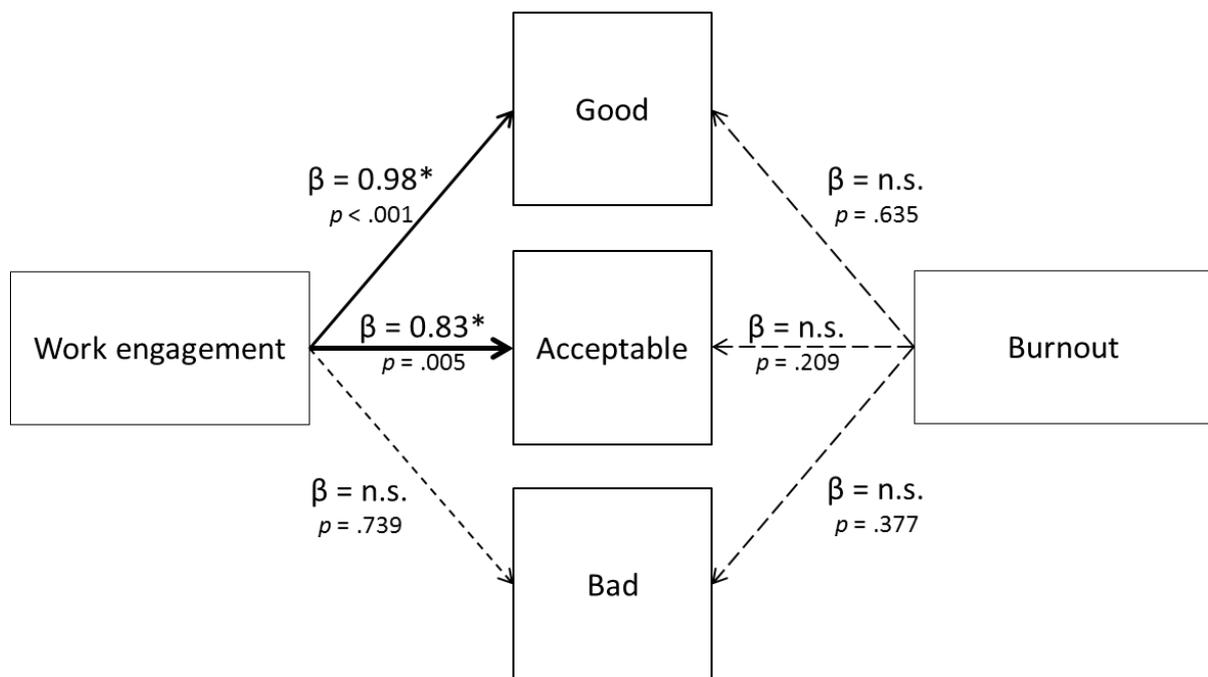


Figure 2. *The results of the structural model*

## Discussion

### Outline of the results

This study investigated the impact of burnout and work engagement on a customer satisfaction index in a call centre environment. Customer satisfaction is acknowledged as a vital component in the achievement of business objectives (Gruca & Rego, 2005), and various businesses make use of call centres as a hub where interactions with customers take place (Aksin et al., 2007; Deloitte Consulting LLP, 2013). The call centre model has been developed with customer satisfaction as a central outcome of its operations. The paradox that exists, however, is that customer satisfaction is not included in the primary aims of research in the context of call centres, as confirmed by Chicu et al. (2016). A review of the literature further revealed that limited empirical evidence exists on the impact of burnout and work

engagement on customer satisfaction in call centres. The present study was conducted with the aim of contributing to that field of research.

The findings of the current study did not provide support for hypothesis 1 which stated that burnout has a negative relationship with better customer satisfaction ratings – thus rejecting  $H_{1a}$  and  $H_{1b}$ . Results revealed that burnout showed no significant relationship to any of the customer satisfaction ratings ( $p$ 's  $> 0.05$ ). The paucity of studies performed on the impact of burnout on customer satisfaction in call centres makes it difficult to relate the findings back to previous research studies. Evidence does however exist in literature confirming the negative impact of burnout on employee health (physical and psychological) (Ahola, 2007) as well as employee performance (Taris, 2006). Considering the afore-mentioned statements it would make sense to reason that employee burnout should also have a negative impact on the experiences of the customer. One potential reason for the absence of such findings in the current study could be that burned-out employees have learnt to regulate their emotions when interacting with customers, despite feelings of exhaustion and cynicism. In service occupations, such as call centres, display rules for positive expression are often seen as an explicit part of the job (Diefendorff, Richard, & Croyle, 2006). Employees are coached and supervised for welcoming and enthusiastic displays, which is related to better customer satisfaction and service quality ratings (Pugh, 2001). Unfortunately this often happens at the cost of the employee as well as the organisation. Goldberg and Grandey (2007) found that in cases where positive-display rules (e.g. hide frustration, be friendly and excited) governed behaviour, participants tended to experience more exhaustion and were more likely to make administrative mistakes than their counterparts who were allowed display autonomy. Positive-display rules should thus not be seen as a solution to the prevention of employee burnout from negatively impacting customer satisfaction. Participants in the present study were also remunerated on a pay-for-performance model which is believed to possibly have contributed further to employees' regulation of display-emotions to prevent it from negatively impacting on their performance (which is impacted by customer satisfaction ratings), as this would have directly negatively impacted on their remuneration. The challenge around this is that burnout symptoms are likely to increase when displayed emotions are not consistent with emotions experienced or service norms required (Lings, Durden, Lee, & Cadogan, 2014), which is likely to increase demands experienced by employees.

The current study found support for the positive relationship between work engagement and higher customer satisfaction ratings (supporting H<sub>2a</sub>), but no relationship to a bad customer satisfaction rating (rejecting H<sub>2b</sub>). Work engagement showed a strong significantly positive relationship with good ( $\beta = 0.98$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) as well as with acceptable ( $\beta = 0.83$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ) customer satisfaction ratings. These findings are consistent with results from previous studies in which work engagement was found to positively impact on organisational outcomes, e.g. customer satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002). It is also aligned to results from studies which examined related concepts such as the positive impact of work engagement on service climate and customer loyalty (Salanova et al, 2005). The stronger ability of customers to pick up on employees' emotions in the happiness dimension compared to states of anger or fear, (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002) is believed to have further contributed to a significant positive relationship between work engagement and higher levels of satisfaction experienced by customers.

A further point to be made when discussing the findings of the current study is to consider the manner in which customer satisfaction was measured. The reality is that often customers' experiences are also influenced by factors external to the call centre adviser they have interacted with (Chicu et al., 2016), e.g. technological challenges such as having to transfer customers between departments, and slow system responses. Various indices exist which are used in the measurement of customer satisfaction in call centres. Refining the measurement approach to better understand the different factors impacting on customer satisfaction and the weighing of each will allow researchers to more accurately determine the impact of employee well-being (burnout and work engagement) on overall customer satisfaction experienced. Unfortunately in the current study the CSI measure utilised did not allow for that differentiation as only a single rating allocated by the customer was used in the calculation.

### **Limitations and recommendations for future research**

The present study is not without limitations. The first limitation to note is that the cross-sectional research design only provided a snapshot of the particular time-frame chosen, and it should be considered that results could have looked different if another time-frame had been selected (Levin, 2006). A suggestion for future research is to employ a longitudinal research design and investigate the impact of burnout and work engagement on customer satisfaction ratings over time. This should contribute to strengthening the business case for organisations

to prioritise employee well-being, as well as to empower organisations to predict future customer satisfaction ratings based on current employee burnout and work engagement levels. Second, causality could not be inferred due to the cross-sectional nature of the data. Therefore, measuring burnout and work engagement on more occasions could benefit future researchers in investigating this topic. The manner in which customer satisfaction was measured is viewed as another limitation. A single rating allocated by the customer was used to measure customer satisfaction. This made it impossible for the researcher to determine the extent to which the interaction with the employee contributed to this rating. A suggestion for future research would be to refine the customer satisfaction measurement index to allow for a distinct rating reflecting the level of customer satisfaction based on the specific experience of interacting with the call centre employee, in addition to further measures on aspects such as technological support, and satisfaction with answer to query.

A final limitation that should be noted is the fact that not all data can be viewed as equal in this study, i.e. certain transactions will take longer to be finalised than others due to the nature of the transaction (e.g. waiting for feedback from a service provider in order to approve a claim submitted by a customer). This could contribute to the level of satisfaction experienced by a customer. The impact hereof on the data is an aspect that was beyond the control of the researcher in the current study. It is recommended for future studies to consider including additional measures e.g. number of days to resolve query, in an attempt to equalise data.

### **Recommendations for management**

Customer satisfaction is becoming increasingly important to organisations in the achievement of business objectives (Keiningham et al., 2003). The current study provided support for the hypothesis that work engagement predicts good and acceptable customer satisfaction ratings. It would thus be recommended for management to understand the impact of demands (job and personal) as well as resources (job and personal) on work engagement levels of employees in an organisation. This could be done through an annual climate survey, focus-group discussions with employees, and on-going authentic dialogue between leaders and employees. Developing interventions aimed at improving employee work engagement can contribute to creating a positive spiral of success for employees, the organisation, and ultimately customers. It is believed that actively shaping a culture where employee well-

being is appreciated and prioritised by management would further contribute towards creating a competitive advantage for organisations.

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**CHAPTER 5**  
**RESEARCH ARTICLE 4**

# Managing employee well-being: A qualitative study exploring job and personal resources of at risk employees<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

**Orientation:** Job and personal resources influence the well-being of employees. Currently limited information exists in literature concerning the manner in which employees identified as at risk of burnout experience resources.

**Research purpose:** To investigate the experience of job and personal resources as seen from the perspectives of employees identified as at risk of developing burnout.

**Motivation for the study:** Employees are expected to deliver on high demands in the workplace impacting on their well-being. Empirical evidence on the integrative role and influence of job and personal resources on the well-being of employees in the South African context is currently limited. Attaining a better understanding of the manner in which at risk employees experience resources can empower organisations to actively work towards creating an environment that allows for optimal employee well-being.

**Research design, approach and method:** A phenomenological approach was taken to conduct a study in a South African based financial services organisation. Purposive and convenience sampling was done, and 26 employees participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection method, and thematic analysis was applied.

**Main findings:** Employees identified as being at risk of burnout acknowledged both job and personal resources as factors influencing their well-being. Participants in this study elaborated on received job resources as well as lacking job resources. Information was also shared by participants on personal resources by describing used personal resources as well as lacking personal resources.

**Practical/Managerial implications:** Knowledge gained from the study will contribute to empowering organisations to better understand the impact of resources (or a lack thereof) on the well-being of employees, and to allowing organisations to adapt workplace resources to ensure adequate and appropriate resources to facilitate optimal employee well-being.

**Contribution/Value-add:** This study contributes to the limited research available in the South African context regarding the experience of job and personal resources from the perspective of at risk employees. The study may also assist organisations in creating a workplace where employees feel supported and empowered with appropriate resources to deliver on expected demands.

**Keywords:** Employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, job resources, personal resources, thematic analysis

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<sup>2</sup> Accepted for publication in the *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*.

## Introduction

Employees are faced with the reality of having to deal with various job and life demands on a daily basis and are continuously required to find ways to cope with these demands (Thuynsma & De Beer, 2016). Supporting evidence for this has also been presented in the current dissertation in Chapter 2 and published in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being* (Gauche, De Beer, & Brink, 2017). Employees become burnout risks and burnt out as a result of high demands that exhaust physical and mental resources and lead to a depletion of energy (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014) through a process widely referred to in literature as the health impairment process (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Burnout can be described as a psychological syndrome comprising exhaustion, depersonalisation/cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment in response to chronic work-related strains (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). However, evidence is accumulating that reduced professional accomplishment plays a more divergent role than exhaustion and cynicism (De Beer & Bianchi, 2017; Mészáros, Ádám, Szabó, Szigeti, & Urbán, 2014) – indicating exhaustion and cynicism to be the core components of the burnout syndrome (cf. Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). In order to support employees in dealing with the various demands experienced, and to prevent burnout from occurring, organisations should strive towards providing resources that will support employees in delivering upon expectations.

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model is a theoretical framework used to understand the impact of demands and resources on the well-being of employees (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009). The model assumes that employee health and well-being result from a balance between positive (job resources) and negative (inordinate job demands) job characteristics and identifies two processes, i.e. the *health impairment process* of burnout (as referred to above) and a *motivational process* (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The motivational process highlights the availability of job resources, which leads to work engagement and organisational commitment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). However, job resources also have a buffering effect on job demands and consequently the burnout process itself (Bakker et al., 2014). According to Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001), job resources can be explained as being the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that (1) are functional in achieving work goals; (2) reduce job demands and the psychological

and physiological costs associated therewith; or (3) encourage personal growth and learning. Previous studies have found job resources to have positive relationships with work engagement (e.g. De Beer, Rothmann Jr., Pienaar, 2012; Schaufeli, & Bakker, 2004), as well as negative relationships with burnout (Crawford, Le Pine & Rich, 2010). Job resources therefore play a motivational role as they foster employees' growth and development, and support the achievement of work goals (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann (2011) found job resources (knowledge, autonomy, supportive environment) to motivate employees and to impact positively on work engagement. Job resources can also affect employee well-being states negatively if unavailable, similar to the impact that job demands may have – the lack of a needed job resource can therefore function similarly to a job demand (cf. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

However, studies on the JD-R model have mainly focused on work characteristics (job demands and job resources), and the role of employees' personal characteristics (personal resources) as important determinants of burnout have been largely neglected (Huang, Wang, You, 2016; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007).. Hence it is also important to consider the impact and role of personal resources on the experience of well-being of employees identified as being at risk of burnout, since the said resources provide additional sources of coping that individuals possess (or lack). Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, and Jackson (2003) describe personal resources as elements of the self that are generally linked to resilience and point to individuals' sense of ability to control and impact on their environment successfully. A study on the role of personal resources showed that self-esteem and optimism influence the health impairment process, with optimism also influencing the motivation process (Huang et al., 2016). Buruck, Dörfel, Kugler, and Brom (2016) investigated the role of emotional regulation skills as personal resources in enhancing well-being at work, and found that well-being can be improved by training specific personal resources.

Therefore it is evident from the literature that resources, job resources as well as personal resources, may play an important role in employee well-being.

## Research purpose and objectives

Organisations have a responsibility towards the organisational context but also to the needs of the employees in order to attempt to reduce distress and prevent the occurrence of burnout (Kompier, Cooper, & Geurts, 2000). This qualitative study aimed at exploring resources from the perspectives of employees identified as being at risk of burnout. This knowledge will empower organisations to potentially adapt the workplace resources to ensure adequate and appropriate support to employees in an attempt to reduce and prevent the occurrence of burnout – by managing these risks more effectively.

## Literature review

### **Job resources and employee well-being**

The effect of job resources on the well-being of employees is often described in literature by highlighting the impact thereof on the health impairment and motivational processes, within the context of the JD-R model (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009). The JD-R model is considered to be a leading job stress model in literature for a variety of reasons, one of them being that it does not restrict itself to specific job demands or job resources, but assumes that any demand and any resource may affect employee well-being (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). In previous research studies, job resources have been represented by a variety of different concepts, including: advancement, appreciation, financial rewards, goal clarity, information, job challenge, leadership, opportunities for professional development, participation in decision-making, procedural fairness, quality of relationship with supervisor, social support from colleagues, social support from supervisor, supervisory coaching, task variety, and team cohesion (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Job resources are positively valued and fulfil basic psychological needs, such as the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness – in line with the self-determination theory (Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Several studies have shown job resources (e.g. autonomy, performance feedback, opportunities for development, and social support) to mitigate the impact of job demands on strain, including burnout (e.g. Schaufeli &

Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Ten Brummelhuis et al. (2011) examined burnout as a longitudinal process and found a decrease in job resources (social support at work, job autonomy, participation in decision-making, information) to play a significant role in the increase in baseline burnout over a two-year period. A study by De Beer et al. (2012) also found a negative relationship between job resources (growth opportunities, supervisor and colleague support, role clarity, and communication) and burnout within the South African context – indicating that job resources play an important role in buffering burnout.

The availability of job resources allows employees to better cope with the demands experienced in the workplace, contributing to improved employee well-being. In a systematic review of literature, Nieuwenhuijsen, Bruinvels, and Frings-Dresen (2010) confirmed this potential of preventing stress-related disorders by improving the psychosocial work environment as evidence was found that low job control, low co-worker support, low supervisor support, low procedural justice, and low relational justice predicted the incidence of stress-related disorders. This also supports the notion that a ‘lack of job resources’ contributes to demands experienced by employees.

Job resources have also been found to have an important influence on work engagement (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Work engagement has been positioned in literature as the positive antipode of burnout and is defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). Engaged employees identify with their work and view it as challenging; they are willing to invest extra effort and have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014). The motivational process is strongly driven by the availability of job resources; these resources contribute to employees’ growth and development by being instrumental in achieving work goals (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009).

A study by Bakker (2011) posits that job and personal resources are the main elements influencing work engagement, and highlights that these resources gain their salience in the context of high job demands. The study also underlined the value of highly engaged workers by pointing out that they tend to be more productive, more open to new information and more willing to put in extra effort, all of this being likely to contribute to the success of the

organisation. In a meta-analytical study by Nahrgang et al. (2011), job resources were found to motivate employees, and related positively to work engagement; a supportive work environment was also found to be the most consistent job resource in terms of explaining variance in burnout, engagement and safety outcomes measured in the study. Job resources have also been found to lead to organisational commitment through work engagement within the South African context (De Beer et al., 2012). Therefore, job resources have a dual function; supporting (buffering) employees' demands, impacting positively on motivation (positively on work engagement and negatively on burnout) and also positively on organisational outcomes (e.g. commitment, performance and retention).

### **Personal resources and employee well-being**

It is important to recognise and consider the influence of job resources and personal resources on the experiences of well-being from the perspective of employees, as research on burnout from the viewpoint of personal resources has remained scarce (Garrosa, Rainho, Moreno-Jiménez, & Monteiro, 2010). A recent research paper by Bianchi, Truchot, Laurent, Brisson, and Schonfeld (2014) argued that the burnout phenomenon cannot be solely confined to work - as chronic, unresolvable stress is not limited to work, and that burnout should therefore be considered a multi-domain syndrome. Similarly, Thuynsma and De Beer (2017) also found burnout to be a multi-domain phenomenon within the South African context. This argument highlights the importance of understanding resources within the work as well as personal context.

Personal resources are typically described in literature as positive self-evaluations that are associated with resilience and the individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact on their environment successfully (Hobfoll et al., 2003). Such positive self-evaluations tend to contribute to goal setting, motivation, performance, job satisfaction, life satisfaction and other desirable outcomes (Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004). Personal resources have been represented by different concepts in the literature, e.g. emotional and mental competencies, hope, intrinsic motivation, need satisfaction, optimism, organisation-based self-esteem, resilience, self-efficacy, and value orientation (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Ouweneel, Le Blanc, and Schaufeli (2012) concluded that personal resources, in the context of work, represent the positive cognitive evaluations of one's future in work (i.e. hope and optimism) and of oneself as an employee (i.e. self-efficacy), which can influence how engaged

employees are. Schaufeli and Taris (2014) also stated that personal resources matter, but that one needs to be cognisant of the fact that different types of explanatory models can be used to specify the role of personal resources. Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) investigated the role of personal resources (self-efficacy, organisational-based self-esteem, and optimism) in the JD-R model and found personal resources to influence the relationship between job resources and work engagement, suggesting that job resources may also foster the development of personal resources. Personal resources have also been found to directly impact on well-being in an academic environment; emotional and mental competencies contributed to the prediction of burnout and engagement over time (Prieto, Soria, Martínez, & Schaufeli, 2008). A study on work-life spill-over and crossover effects has also shown home resources to have a positive influence on job performance (Demerouti, Bakker, & Voydanoff, 2010).

Various ‘coping strategies’ are applied by individuals as means of personal resources supporting them in dealing with demands experienced in the workplace. A study by Garrosa et al. (2010) provides evidence that when adequate coping strategies are adopted, burnout levels are more likely to reduce. In the afore-mentioned study, social support, active coping and avoidance were included as types of coping strategies; active coping and social support were found to be negative predictors of burnout dimensions, and active coping had an inverse temporal effect on depersonalisation and lack of personal accomplishment (Garrosa et al., 2010).

In a study exploring informal social support structures and relationships, Huynh, Xanthopoulou and Winefield (2013) investigated the effect of non-work resources (e.g. family/friend support) on the relationship between ‘fire-fighters’ volunteer demands (emotional demands and work-home conflict) and burnout and organisational connectedness. Results of the study indicated that family/friend support buffered the relationship between volunteer demands and organisational connectedness. Specifically, results indicated that when volunteer fire-fighters were confronted with emotionally charged situations and did not receive family / friend support (lacking resources), it was harder for them to stay connected to volunteering. The study further showed that high levels of family/friend support may turn the negative relationship between emotional demands and organisational effectiveness into a more positive one. These results are important as it suggests that support from family and friends (received resources) are critical in coping with demands and may protect from burnout, while helping them to stay connected to volunteering. A study focused on family-to-

work conflict also found non-work resources that stem from both the family (e.g. spouse support) and community (e.g. friend support) to complement work resources in increasing family to work facilitation (a form of synergy in which resources associated with one role enhance participation in the other role, or make it easier) (Voydanoff, 2005).

The impact of personal resources on the well-being of employees has been less researched than the impact of job resources on well-being, specifically also within the South African context. Sánchez-Moreno, Roldán, Gallardo-Peralta, and Roda (2014) highlighted the value that will be added by qualitative research designs to allow for an improved understanding of the experience that individuals themselves have of burnout. The present study set out to contribute to this need, by following a qualitative research approach to add to the body of knowledge in understanding the experience of both job and personal resources, both received and lacking, from the viewpoint of employees identified as being at risk of burnout.

## **Research design**

The research design consists of the research approach, research strategy, and research method.

### **Research approach**

A qualitative research approach was followed in this study. Qualitative research is oriented to collect data that provides contextual information and contributes towards creating a deeper understanding of the phenomena (Sanders, Cogin, & Bainbridge, 2014); it is interested in understanding how people make sense of the world and how they experience events (Willig, 2013). In the present study it allowed the researcher to explore the experience of resources and the influence thereof on burnout from the viewpoint of employees identified as being at risk of burnout.

A phenomenological approach assisted the researcher in making sense of everyday experiences without pre-supposing knowledge of those experiences (Converse, 2012). Descriptions of the phenomenon being studied were gathered from participants by the researcher, who strived to set aside any prior thought or conceptions in order to remain open

to the perceptions and experiences shared by participants (Flood, 2010). The researcher in the current study applied deliberate effort to keep an open mind and to remain objective in order to understand the experiences shared by participants from their points of view.

The social constructivism paradigm guided the researcher to consider the specific context within which people lived and worked, and to make sense of the views participants constructed in their minds (Creswell, 2013). A distinguishing characteristic of constructivism is that findings are jointly created through interactive dialogue and interpretation between the researcher and participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Throughout the interactions the researcher made a conscious effort to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the research topic being studied, while remaining aware of and acknowledging own personal, cultural and historical experiences. The nature of social constructivism implies that individual constructions are elicited and refined through interactions between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This paradigm effectively guided the current study as it allowed findings to be created through multiple interactions in which individual constructions were shared between participants and the researcher.

### **Research strategy**

A case study strategy was employed to achieve the objective of the study. Case study research grants the researcher the opportunity of deeply exploring and disentangling a complex set of factors and relationships (Easton, 2010; Willig, 2013), albeit in one or a small number of instances. In the present study a single case study strategy was followed, where the organisation represented the unit of analysis where the phenomenon was studied. The exploration and description of the case was done through detailed and in-depth data collection methods which involved collecting contextually rich information (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2005).

### **Research method**

The research method consists of the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, research procedure, data collection methods, data recording, strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity, data analysis, and reporting style.

## **Research setting**

The research setting for the present study was a specific business unit/division of a South African based financial services organisation. The particular business unit went through a period of significant changes, and consequently made the decision to roll out a climate survey across the specific business unit as part of a diagnostic process to understand how employees were doing, and to identify vital areas that should be focused on as part of the people management strategy for the division; the annual climate survey was rolled out in the business unit for the first time in 2014. At the time that the research was conducted the financial organisation functioned with a decentralised operating model i.e. every business unit aligned its strategy to the overall business strategy and hence was responsible for determining its own people management strategy. The particular business unit had a headcount of approximately 300 employees who were appointed in departments ranging across various functional areas including operational call centres (e.g. claims, client services, and sales) as well as support departments such as actuarial, information technology, finance, and human resources. Roles in the business unit ranged from operational positions (e.g. call centre advisors) to senior management. The office of the particular business unit is based in Gauteng province in South Africa, and all interviews were conducted in the office building of the particular division; to ensure privacy and convenience for all – private meeting rooms were booked for the interviews.

## **Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

The researcher's function is to use his or her skills to represent, in a systematic and accessible fashion, a clear picture of what is happening in the slice of social reality they have chosen to study (Willig, 2013). In order to do this, it was required of the researcher to fulfil various roles in the course of the research study. As the researcher formed part of the organisational development team who implemented the annual climate surveys (2014 – 2015) in the business unit, the first role of the researcher was that of planner; this required of the researcher to plan how the data would be collected, the sampling techniques to be used, as well as planning around aspects of data analysis. The researcher took care to ensure that all of this was done with the necessary support and approval from top management in the business.

The researcher also fulfilled the role of interviewer, active listener and facilitator during the discussions. Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research the inquirer tends to be involved in a constant and intensive experience with participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher prepared for the interviews by creating an interview guideline to use throughout all the interviews and by reading through the individual human factor benchmark feedback reports of the individuals. The researcher was also responsible for sending through referrals to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) in instances where further support was required from a clinical psychologist and/or other relevant professionals; this formed part of the responsibilities of the researcher as a member of the organisational development team that was responsible for rolling out the climate survey in the organisation.

Next, the researcher together with two co-coders (in the same field of study) fulfilled the role of gathering, analysing, and interpreting the data; this was done to ensure that the experiences of participants were presented in an accurate and truthful manner. The final role fulfilled by the researcher was that of report writer. The researcher was responsible for writing up and presenting the data in a scientific manner in the form of a research article. The researcher took care throughout this process to not let her own beliefs, values, and experiences influence the interpretations formed and findings derived during the study (Cresswell, 2013).

### **Sampling and procedure**

The research study was conducted within a specific business unit of a financial services organisation as part of the business unit's annual climate survey. The population comprised approximately 300 employees that included employees working in various call centres (e.g. claims, client services, and sales) as well as employees from support areas such as actuarial, finance, information technology, and human resources. The survey was rolled out for the first time in the business unit in 2014 with a participation rate of 89%, which increased to a participation rate of 92% in 2015; for purposes of the present study only the 2015 survey results were utilised. The organisational development team took specific care to ensure that the survey and the purpose thereof were effectively communicated to everyone in the business unit; this included positioning of the survey with different levels of leadership, face-to-face engagement with staff, as well as various forms of electronic communication that was sent out to staff. The communication also emphasised that participation in the survey was voluntary and that survey results will be treated in a confidential manner. Only permanent

employees who were employed by the particular business unit at that point in time were eligible to participate in the survey. It is believed that the increased participation rate during year two of the survey could be attributed to the effective positioning of the survey, the manner in which the survey results were used in the previous year to provide feedback and identify relevant interventions for improvement, as well as the confidential and professional manner in which the organisational development team delivered on these projects. Informed consent was obtained from the organisation as well as employees to use the survey results for research purposes.

For purposes of this study a combination of purposive and convenience sampling was decided on. In the case of purposive sampling the researcher critically thinks about the parameters of the population and then chooses the sample accordingly (De Vos et al., 2005); thus it entails a random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic the researcher wants to study (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). In the present study participants were selected who were identified as being at risk of burnout by using the annual organisational climate survey, within the business unit where the study was conducted. Convenience sampling is a popular sampling technique and was used in that participants were selected based on their accessibility and/or proximity to the research (Bornstein, Jager, & Putnick, 2013). The Organisational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB) survey is a normed survey for the South African context, based on at least 50,000 employees in South Africa from various economic sectors; the survey was completed online through a secure encrypted connection by all participants. The OHFB system compares the results of participants with the OHFB's South African norm in order to determine employees' burnout risk level; this happens automatically as soon as an individual has completed the survey. Upon completion of the survey participants were asked whether they grant permission to the organisational development team (of which the researcher formed part) to access their results and to contact them to discuss their results. If permission was granted, at risk participants were contacted, based on the employee number provided. In cases where permission was denied the process for further follow-up ceased and the individual results were sealed. The employee assistance programme (EAP) as well as the organisational development team were available at all times to provide support to all employees, regardless of risk status; the availability of these support structures were communicated across the business unit, to all employees. No adverse incidents occurred during or after the implementation of the survey or

research that should be reported. The project execution was deemed successful by all relevant stakeholders.

In the present study forty-nine employees were identified by means of the OHFB survey as being at risk of burnout; thirty-four of those employees granted permission for their results to be accessed by the organisational development team, and a total of twenty-six employees agreed to participate in an interview. Participants completed a questionnaire to provide biographical information in terms of race, gender, and age. The majority of participants were White (50%), with 27% being African, 19% Indian, and 4% Coloured. Just over half of the participants were female (54%), with 46% being male. The majority of participants were between the ages of 25 and 35 years (65%), while 12% were younger than 25 years, and 23% were between ages 36 and 45 years. The researcher was satisfied that the participants were representative of a diverse population group in terms of race, gender, and age.

### **Data collection**

An interview guideline was developed by the researcher to facilitate the process of data collection and provide a framework for the researcher to use during the qualitative interviews. The researcher started with three pilot interviews to determine the appropriateness of the research questions, and to ensure comprehension of all questions by participants. Once the suitability of the interview questions were confirmed the researcher proceeded with the rest of the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, which created flexibility and allowed the researcher freedom to seek clarification on matters that arose during the discussion (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Participants were encouraged to speak freely and openly, and share their perspectives and experiences with regard to the research topic being discussed (Willig, 2013). The interview guideline presented below reflects the interview questions as well as sub-questions (probing questions) used in the interviews; the sub-questions served to probe for further detail and richness in responses from participants where it was required.

Question 1: What resources in your work environment play a role to contribute to your well-being?

- What support are you currently receiving in the workplace and from whom?

- What support would you have liked to receive in the workplace that you are currently not getting?
- Are there things happening in the work environment that helps you to cope better when there is a lot expected of you?
- Are there things that you would have liked to happen/be available in the work environment as it would have helped you to cope better with all the demands?

Question 2: What resources in your personal life play a role to contribute to your well-being?

- What are you currently doing to help you cope better with the demands expected off you?
- What action/s can you take to help you improve your well-being when things are tough?
- What support are you receiving/not receiving which impacts your well-being?

### **Recording of data**

During the semi-structured interviews the researcher took detailed notes of the perspectives and experiences shared by participants. The researcher was guided by her previous experience of such interviews and was conscious of the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed, which consequently led her to decide not to use an electronic recording device to record the interviews with participants. De Vos et al. (2005) emphasised the importance of data recording strategies fitting the setting and sensitivities of participants. As a result the focus was centred on recording data by means of detailed note-taking. Upon completion of each interview the researcher took care to capture the detailed notes made during the interview on a secure (password protected) electronic (Microsoft Excel) spread sheet. At the end of each interview the researcher confirmed that the notes captured was an accurate reflection of what the participant meant when answering the questions. This served to confirm accuracy of the notes captured, as well as to again emphasise the availability of further support to participants should it be required. Through this process, the researcher had the opportunity of already immersing herself in the data. Participants also completed a biographical questionnaire providing information on gender, race, and age.

## **Data analysis**

Once the data collection process was concluded, the researcher proceeded to further immerse herself in the data in order to ensure she was familiar with and well informed about the data collected. A thematic analysis (TA) approach was followed to recognise and analyse patterns of content and meaning in the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013). TA is a method well-suited for varying needs and requirements of research projects, including health and wellbeing research (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The outcome of a thematic analysis highlights the most salient constellations of meanings present in the dataset (Joffe, 2012) and allows for studying participants' perspectives and ways of thinking about specific social phenomena (Willig, 2013). The researcher followed the six steps of TA as identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the data for this article:

### *Step 1: Familiarisation with the data*

As part of the data collection all interviews were transcribed in an electronic (Microsoft Excel) spread sheet which formed one large dataset which the researcher consulted during the data analysis phase. For the researcher to become intimately familiar with the data she allowed herself adequate time to read and re-read through the text. This allowed her to become further immersed in the data. The focus on familiarisation with the data made it possible for the researcher to start noting initial analytic observations which were relevant to the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

### *Step 2: Coding*

The process of coding involves working through the text line by line to identify units of meaning and labelling these with a code that captures the meaning identified (Willig, 2013). Responses from two research questions were analysed for this article. The first question concerned resources in the work environment which contributed to employees' well-being, whereas the second question focused on resources in participants' personal lives which played a role in influencing their well-being. The researcher and two co-coders (from the same field of study, already at PhD level) worked through a process of manually coding the data to ensure that suitable and accurate codes were identified. To achieve this outcome, equal attention was given to all raw data, and the researchers double checked the coding

process to ensure correctness and efficiency of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher and co-coders were cautious to ensure that each data item in the dataset was coded, and data that may have seemed insignificant at the time was not disregarded.

### *Step 3: Searching for themes*

A theme refers to a specific pattern of meaning discovered in the data (Joffe, 2012). It is described as “a particular, recognisable configuration of meaning which co-occur in a way that is meaningful and systematic rather than random and arbitrary” (Willig, 2013, p. 181). During this phase the researcher and co-coders actively applied own analytical judgement to search for themes that were significant and meaningful to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By reviewing responses from participants pertaining to the two identified categories (job resources and personal resources) the researcher and co-coders were able to identify themes and sub-themes. Keywords describing sub-themes were also noted in a separate document as the researcher proceeded through analysing the data.

### *Step 4: Reviewing themes*

During this step the researcher reviewed all the themes originally identified to confirm that it ‘talks’ to the coded data as well as to the entire dataset (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Each theme was reviewed in order to ensure that it creates insight about the data, and in cases where it was required the researcher made alterations, e.g. collapsed and split themes. The researcher also worked on defining the boundaries of each individual theme. To finalise this phase the researcher read through the complete dataset once more to ensure that the process of reviewing themes was satisfactory and that all responses were coded. The final set of themes was confirmed before the researcher moved on to defining and naming the themes.

### *Step 5: Defining and naming themes*

Themes are further refined by conducting and writing a detailed analysis of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to capture the ‘essence’ of each theme and to show how it relates to other themes (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The researcher worked on identifying the crucial aspects comprising each theme and wrote up a detailed analysis and definition for each theme (see findings). The researcher also refined the sub-themes and finalised the descriptive key

words for each sub-theme during this phase. Lastly, a clear and explanatory name was formulated for each theme.

#### *Step 6: Writing up*

During this phase the researcher clearly and accurately wrote up the data to explain her findings to the reader; she strove to do this in a logical and systematic manner. The researcher combined analytical narrative and data abstract to contextualise the findings and also to strengthen the validity of the interpretations (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

Throughout the TA process the researcher remained conscious of the fact that it is a flexible and dynamic process, and that it should not be viewed as a linear model (Cresswell, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Therefore the researcher took care to remain open and adaptable throughout the data analysis process. When new information emerged which required the researcher to move back to a previous phase(s), this was done so as to ensure that all information was considered and integrated at all times throughout the process.

#### **Strategies to ensure quality data**

Establishing trustworthiness of a research study is of critical importance. For the present study the researcher was guided by the constructs *credibility*, *dependability*, *transferability*, and *confirmability* to prove trustworthiness (Guba, 1981).

#### *Credibility*

Credibility is similar to internal validity in quantitative terms (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011), and is reflected in the researcher's ability to represent the multiple realities of informants as adequately as possible (Krefting, 1991). The researcher established credibility by sharing with the participants the notes captured and ensuring that participants acknowledged the findings (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) and confirmed the accuracy and truthful representation thereof. The researcher also made use of co-coders within the field of Industrial Psychology to ensure that the experiences of participants were captured and presented in an authentic manner.

### *Transferability*

Transferability refers to the ability of research findings or methods to be transferred from one group or setting to another (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011), and is equivalent to external validity in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the present study the researcher established transferability by thoroughly and methodically describing the context and population being studied, as well as the process of data collection, data analysis, and writing up of the findings. This detailed and vigorous presentation of the research context, process and findings contributed to establishing transferability.

### *Dependability*

Dependability refers to the meticulous noting of the purpose of the study, how participants were selected to form part of the study, the process of data collection and analysis, as well as the interpretations of the research findings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). These actions, as performed by the researcher of the current study allowed her to ensure that a logical and consistent process was followed throughout the study. It also contributed to creating a clear audit trail that could be followed by future researchers to repeat the study.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability refers to the traditional concept of objectivity (De Vos et al., 2005) and requires a conscious effort on the part of the researcher to follow rather than lead the direction of the interview. Throughout the study the researcher actively focused on remaining open to the study and unfolding results, and to not let her own preconceptions and beliefs influence the results of the study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). It remained an objective for the researcher throughout the study to authentically capture and present the perspectives of participants shared in the study.

### **Reporting style**

A table format was used to report the themes as well as the sub-themes for both of the categories identified, - namely job resources and personal resources. A column containing

descriptive keywords was also included in the tables to allow for an enhanced understanding of the data and to add to clarity for the reader.

### **Ethical considerations**

It is important to ensure that any research study is guided by ethical rules and principles to contribute to the protection of research participants, the development of trust with participants, and to promote the integrity of the research (Creswell, 2013; Israel & Hay, 2006). In the present study, the researcher was guided by the following principles to ensure that the research project was conducted in an ethical manner.

*Informed consent:* The researcher obtained permission from the organisation to utilise the project data as part of a research study, prior to commencing with the research; the researcher committed to treat all data in a confidential manner, and also to share the results of the study with the organisation upon conclusion of the entire study. All participants completed the survey electronically (web-based) and were required to accept terms and conditions (which included granting informed consent) in order to proceed with the survey.

*Privacy and confidentiality:* The researcher maintained complete confidentiality with regard to all information concerning participants that was obtained during the research process (Willig, 2013), and will continue to maintain the same level of confidentiality in future. Anonymity of participants was established by using unique numerical identifiers which will also contribute to uphold confidentiality should the data ever be compromised by an intruder.

*Voluntary participation:* It was clearly communicated to all employees in the specific business unit that their participation in the project was voluntary, and that they could decide not to participate at any point in time without fear of being penalised (Willig, 2013). The researcher consequently only included completed surveys in the research study, and discarded any incomplete surveys. Only individuals at risk of burnout, who granted permission to the organisational development team to access their results, were invited to participate in an interview. It was emphasised again that participation in the interviews were voluntary, and thus only participants who had agreed to partake were interviewed.

*Avoidance of harm:* It was important to the researcher that all participants were protected from harm throughout the entire study. Interviews were conducted in private and comfortable meeting rooms where participants were welcomed in a friendly manner and the interview process and expectations were shared. Care was taken to ensure that participants were treated with dignity and respect throughout the entire process, and that at no point they felt manipulated to share information they were uncomfortable to share. The researcher ensured that the availability of the organisation's employee assistance programme (EAP) was well-communicated to all employees throughout the entire process. No adverse events were reported.

*Security of data:* The data collected for the study is kept confidential in a securely managed data warehouse with state of the art security measures (e.g. 24 hour monitoring of networks by IT security experts).

## **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore resources from the viewpoint of employees identified as being at risk of burnout. Categories, themes, and sub-themes were used to structure the findings of this study. Descriptive keywords were also included to further support the findings of the study. Results were divided into two categories. Category 1 included job resources whereas category 2 reflected personal resources. Tables were used to present themes, sub-themes and descriptive keywords within each category. Refer to Tables 1 and 2.

### **Category 1: Job resources**

Two main themes were recognised within category 1, namely: i) Received resources and ii) Lacking resources. Various sub-themes were identified under each of the two main themes. The sub-themes within *received job resources* were as follows: career opportunities, coaching, colleagues support, communication, leave, referral (professional support) and supervisor support.

Table 1

*Category 1: Job resources*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Descriptive keywords</b>
Received resources	Career opportunities	Moving from one department to another; accompanied expert in the field on surveys to get some exposure.
	Coaching	Reflect on three things to do next year; put a personal development plan in place and to work on it to address the gaps; trying strategies with coach; identified two colleagues that needs to have crucial conversations with; speak to team manager who can help address the issue; make a deliberate effort to contribute at the larger forums (and contract with her colleagues/team manager for support); “helicopter” coaching; take responsibility for part in relationship; committed to changing; assist with experiential learning; refrain from negative internalization; better stakeholder expectation management; pairing up with “buddy” who can become reality check; have a clarification and expectation discussion with team manager; shadow coaching; committed to not delaying delegation; following up; reduction of overtime; discussed moving from one department to another.
	Colleague support	Had to ask for lot of assistance from team members; relationship in the team improved a lot.
	Communication	Received clarity on the future of automation.
	Leave	Take some leave; negotiate with team manager for time off; on leave from next week.
	Referral (Professional support)	Requested referral to see someone; has a need to see a psychologist; meet with a psychologist to get support on an emotional level; see a psychologist to help unpack everything and get support on high levels of stress; seeing someone to give guidance and to provide tools on how to deal with challenges; marriage counselling and weekend breakaways; details of wellness provide; psychologist for therapy; need to see a psychiatrist also; expressed thanks for time taken to follow up on survey results; gratitude and thankfulness to the company for caring and support provided; admitted that feels lighter because of knowing had to do something but that it helps having someone else help realise what that is.

	Supervisor support	Has a good relationship with team manager and all other managers in the department; support from team manager; support from manager (discussion if unsure and guidance); team manager very supportive and tries to alleviate emotional burden; team manager helps to create some structure into way of work as to not get overwhelmed; ask for assistance from team manager; comfortable to speak to manager; in a better space with direct manager; shared with head of area that will assist into looking into and assisting with issue.
Lacking resources	Colleague support	Colleague has a problem with everyone and everything; certain people don't carry their weight and they only are accountable for themselves and feel nothing towards the business; negative impact of that colleague-relationship; frustrated at colleagues; impacts interaction.
	Communication	Applied for position and have not received feedback; things constantly change in the department, don't get communicated properly; feels disconnected from business decisions that are taken.
	Financial assistance (Studies)	Applied for study assistance years ago, was not approved.
	Growth opportunities	More skilled and is doing the same job as rest of call centre employees in spite of this; moved into automation, thought progressing but constantly being pulled back; thought of leaving department but no positions available; not getting support for career growth as would have expected; perception of stagnated growth and development.
	Leave	Taking leave is difficult, have to take calculated risks of when one can take leave so that it won't affect performance negatively; didn't have an opportunity to take leave last year.
	Management style	Perception that team manager allows certain misconduct; when manager says it is open to give feedback and engage, that it is a lie and it is taken by management as a complaint or negatively.
	Recognition	Sometimes feels the nature of the job is that it is not appreciated and recognised.
	Role clarity	No clarity with regard to roles and responsibilities.
	Supervisor support	Team manager sees us struggle with conversion and six months down the line has not helped; does not have a good relationship with team manager.

*Career opportunities:* Participants perceived job resources in the opportunities to move from one department to another, as well as by gaining on-the-job experience (this was done in that participants were afforded the opportunity of accompanying an expert in the field and observing and learning what this specialised role entailed). This exposure provided participants with new knowledge and insights that positively contributed to their career development journey.

*Coaching:* Participants experienced coaching as a job resource through experiential learning which provided them with the opportunity of obtaining knowledge in a desired professional field, through the support and guidance from a subject matter expert. Coaching was also experienced by participants through assistance provided to help them to apply techniques to reframe negative thought patterns, and encourage them to engage in constructive conversations aimed at resolving areas of concern. Sharing of advice and input around effective management of expectations held by stakeholders were also experienced by participants as coaching received. Additional keywords used to describe coaching included establishing a personal development plan for addressing gaps, “helicopter coaching” and shadow coaching.

*Colleague support:* Another resource named by participants was colleague support. This was experienced in asking team members for assistance when an employee was new in a role and/or required assistance with understanding how everything works. Participants also experienced colleague support as a job resource through improved relationships in the team.

*Communication:* Communication was experienced as a resource as it aided in creating clarity around business decisions. Thus the organisation ensured the effective and efficient flow of information to different departments and teams.

*Leave:* The opportunity to take leave and have some time off from work was experienced by participants as a job resource.

*Referral (Professional support):* Participants experienced the availability of professional support as a job resource. This included requests to see a psychologist to receive support on an emotional level, to help unpack everything and get support regarding high levels of stress, seeing someone to give guidance and provide tools on how to deal with challenges, and

marriage counselling. Participants also expressed gratitude and thankfulness to the company for caring and support provided.

*Supervisor support:* Good relationships with supervisors and managers were acknowledged. Participants experienced managers as supportive and trying to alleviate emotional burdens, and commented on being comfortable to speak to managers.

The *second theme* identified within the category of job resources was ***lacking job resources***. Sub-themes under lacking resources included colleague support, communication, financial assistance (studies), growth opportunities, leave, management style, recognition, role clarity, and supervisor support.

*Colleague support:* Participants experienced a lack of resources through the negative impact of colleague relationships; this included occurrences of people not carrying their weight and being accountable only for themselves and not caring for the business.

*Communication:* Feelings of being disconnected from business decisions that are taken and poor communication around changes in the department impacted on communication and contributed to lacking resources.

*Financial assistance (studies):* The rejection of the application for study assistance (financial) was experienced as a lacking resource.

*Growth opportunities:* Participants were faced with challenges around not receiving support for career growth, as well as not being able to find suitable vacant positions in line with career aspirations when considering leaving the department.

*Leave:* Participants highlighted challenges around not being granted the opportunity of taking leave. In areas where employees worked on a pay-for-performance salary structure performance (and consequently remuneration) is negatively affected when employees are not at work, making it difficult for employees to take leave.

*Management style:* Perceptions that misconduct was allowed by a team manager together with the experience of not being able to give feedback and engage with manager constituted a

lack of job resources. Participants experienced that although managers invited them to share their opinions on matters in the workplace, there was not really a willingness to consider the input provided. The feeling also existed that feedback given to managers was often received in a negative light.

*Recognition:* Participants experienced feelings of not being appreciated and recognised in the job as a lacking resource.

*Role clarity:* No clarity with regard to roles and responsibilities was experienced as a lacking job resource.

*Supervisor support:* The lack of supervisor support was highlighted in comments on team managers not providing assistance when employees continue to struggle with difficult conversations, and not having good relationships with team managers. The difficult conversations referred to by participants related to challenges experienced in expressing a need for support from colleagues, as well as addressing unhappiness with certain processes not adhered to by colleagues in the workplace.

## **Category 2: Personal resources**

In category 2 personal resources were reflected through two main themes, namely used resources and lack of resources. Various sub-themes were identified in each of the aforementioned themes. *Used personal resources* comprised sub-themes affective coping, behavioural coping, and cognitive coping.

*Affective coping:* Affective coping was expressed by participants as a personal resource in statements around 'loving the company' and 'love being here'. The function of emotion-focused coping is described in literature as reducing the stressful emotional reaction by the environment (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980)), and tends to be utilised by individuals to avoid failure and protect self-worth (Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012).

*Behavioural coping:* Behavioural coping reflected as a frequently used personal resource that was highlighted by the majority of participants in the present study. Included in behavioural coping were various strategies employed by participants to actively work towards solving

problems contributing to distress experienced by participants; this included strategies aimed at acting on the environment as well as on the self (Shin et al., 2014). Keywords used to describe this sub-theme included putting healthy habits in place such as going to the gym and spending time on hobbies, asking family and friends for help, moving to a smaller apartment to address financial problems, trying to live a healthy lifestyle and balance work and life, considering moving out of corporate environment, and praying a lot to get clarity on what to do. Seeking professional support from psychologists and getting guidance from medical doctor/s on the use of medication also formed part of behavioural coping that contributed to personal resources for participants.

*Cognitive coping:* Participants employed cognitive coping as a personal resource by using time off to reflect on own needs, learning to understand triggers that were causing emotional reactions, and realising when it is necessary to distance oneself from the situation. Cognitive coping refers to strategies people employ to respond to the experience of life stress (e.g. rumination, putting into perspective, positive refocusing, and acceptance and refocus on planning) (Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2001). In the present study cognitive coping was further exercised in concerted decisions that were made to no longer work overtime, and admitting to over-commitment.

The second theme within the category of personal resources was *lack of personal resources*, underpinned by sub-themes affective coping, behavioural coping, cognitive coping, and support structures.

*Affective coping:* A lack of personal resources relating to affective coping was expressed through feelings of struggling to manage emotions, despondency, being on the verge of a breakdown, feeling depressed, and beating oneself up when things go wrong.

*Behavioural coping:* Participants expressed a lack of personal resources relating to behavioural coping in admitting that they do not do much for themselves, showing signs of presenteeism, procrastinating on tasks, deliberately keeping quiet because of what people might think, and avoiding interaction with other people.

Table 2

*Category 2: Personal resources*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Descriptive keywords</b>
Used resources	Affective coping	Love the company; feels coping fine; love being here.
	Behavioural coping	Sought professional support from a psychologist; start putting healthy habits in place like going to the gym and spending time on hobbies; will also extend her hand and ask friends and family for help; made changes in personal life, moving to a smaller apartment to address financial problems and save where possible; wanted to go off medication and has stopped using it with guidance of house doctor; requested contact details of employee assistance provider; currently under debt review, company that is used is however not doing everything that they need to; currently on medication prescribed by doctor, was struggling to sleep and medication is helping for this; started to exercise and taking supplements to help with energy levels; will appreciate having discussion with someone to give guidance; started to exercise, trying to live a healthy lifestyle and balance work and life; seeing someone that can give some advice on dealing with finances but also coping with the pressure and deal better with challenges and stress experience; might be returning to work after annual leave to resign, if finding something else; considering moving out of corporate environment; start making time for herself to ensure that she has sufficient energy recovery; creating a connection between father-daughter; does not want to leave company but leave department; thinking daily about leaving/resigning; made the decision to stop working switched off mails; decided to move to another department; close to leaving the business; busy exploring treatment options with doctor; dealing with what needs to be dealt with; started to exercise; praying a lot about what and how that picture should look; have open discussions with each other about matters; believes the problem is with oneself.

	Cognitive coping	Using time off to reflect on own needs; is coping and does not feel the need to have a discussion; coping fine; stops from thinking that it is own fault; learning to understand triggers and knows when to reign back in; realized that it is necessary to distance oneself because of the impact; realizes that it will continue; made a concerted decision to not work overtime anymore; dealing with all changes positively; admitting over-commitment because does not want to let the business down; adamant about managing her current situation; looking forward to new year; feels that things started to turn around and getting better; starting to cope better; things are much better; comfortable that spouse will find another job.
Lack of resources	Affective coping	Struggling to manage emotions; despondent; freaks out when feeling out of control over the day or feelings of finances; internalises when things go wrong wherein it becomes own fault and beats oneself up over it; on the verge of breakdown; feeling depressed (suicidal); world comes crashing down when feels like failing.
	Behavioural coping	Admits that does not do much for oneself; impacts the structure of how things are done; signs of presenteeism; behaving differently; procrastinates on tasks; started working whilst on sick leave; deliberately quiet as result of what people might think; avoids interacting with people and just keeps head down.
	Cognitive coping	Impacted on ability to cope; hates coming to work; acknowledges that there are things that no-one can help with; believes it will be difficult as this is not who the person is; questioning own competence and value add; does not understand why identified as at risk.
	Support structures	Family and support structure mainly in other city; can have open discussions with each other (spouses) but don't feel that anything changes; in-laws work full-time and offer little or no help, parents are in another city; does not ask for help from friends.

*Cognitive coping:* A lack of personal resources expressed through references relating to cognitive coping included comments such as not looking forward to coming to work, acknowledging that there are things that no-one can help with, and questioning their own competence and value-add.

*Support structures:* Participants shared comments of family and support structures being based mainly in another city, in-laws working full-time and offering little or no help, and not asking for help from friends.

## **Discussion**

### Outline of the findings

The present study was aimed at exploring resources from the perspective of employees identified as being at risk of burnout. Empirical evidence on the integrative role and influence of job and personal resources on the well-being of employees in the South African context is currently limited. Findings of the present study examined two types of resources (job and personal) through a qualitative approach which contributed rich and insightful data. Participants described job resources and elaborated on received job resources as well as lacking job resources. Information was also shared by participants on personal resources and described used personal resources as well as lack of personal resources.

### **Job resources**

*Job resources* was the first category identified from the findings. Various references exist in literature highlighting the influence of job resources on the well-being of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; De Beer et al., 2012). Job resources have been found to buffer the impact of job demands on burnout (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007) which can be seen to positively contribute to the overall well-being of employees. Previous studies have also highlighted the contribution of job resources in driving engagement, motivation, and work enjoyment (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Bakker, Van Veldhoven, & Xanthopoulou, 2010). The findings of the studies above illustrate the importance for organisations to understand what constitutes as job

resources in the minds of employees, and how to create an environment wherein these resources are experienced as being available and accessible to all employees.

Participants identified various job resources which influenced their well-being in the present study. Within the category of job resources *career opportunities* was identified as a received job resource together with *growth opportunities* being identified as a lacking job resource. Participants highlighted the need to be exposed to new skills and the importance of having the opportunity to move into new positions. Our research confirms the findings of Biron and Eshed (2016) which found burnout levels to be lower amongst employees experiencing higher career path fit than among employees experiencing career path gaps. In the aforementioned study the notion of generation Y employees ascribing even higher importance to seeing themselves progressing in their careers than previous generations is also highlighted (Biron & Eshed, 2016), emphasising again the importance for organisations to ensure sufficient opportunities for growth and development in employees' career paths.

*Coaching* was identified as a received job resource and participants emphasised the value gained from a personal development plan, as well as from discussing strategies with a coach, pairing up with a 'buddy', and shadow coaching. The value of coaching is confirmed by Duijts, Kant, Van den Brandt, and Swaen (2008) who found coaching to lead to significant improvements in employees' health, life satisfaction, burnout, and overall psychological well-being. Organisations that are able to capitalise on the value of coaching are likely to achieve a competitive advantage through the performance of employees in delivering upon business objectives.

Participants experienced *colleague support*, which included assistance from team members and good team relationships as a resource received in the workplace; it was also raised as a lacking resource by some participants in the present study. In a study among teachers, Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, and Vanroelen (2014) found relationships with colleagues to be directly related to emotional exhaustion and cynical depersonalisation, indicating that the support teachers receive from colleagues can function as a buffer against burnout. The value of solid colleague relationships is clearly reflected in the afore-mentioned study, and encouraging colleague support as an integral part of organisational culture is likely to be to the advantage of the organisation.

*Communication* was described as a received job resource in cases where participants obtained clarity on work-related matters, but was also raised as a lacking resource by participants where no feedback was received, and changes and business decisions were not communicated properly. Kim and Lee (2009) found both supportive relationship communication and job-relevant communication to contribute to lower levels of burnout and a decrease in turnover intention. In line with the social information processing theory Brown and Roloff (2015) also confirmed that burnout appears to be a job attitude that can be influenced by communication from the organisation. The influence of communication as a job resource is clearly highlighted in the above statements and emphasises the need for organisations to create an environment that allows for optimal and regular communication with employees.

The opportunity to take *leave* was viewed by some participants as a received job resource. In cases where it was difficult to take leave or where taking leave had a negative impact on performance of employees, leave was identified as a lacking job resource. Fritz and Sonnentag (2006) found recovery from work demands to occur during vacation and allowed for individual resources to be replenished; positive experiences during vacation also further contributed to rebuilding resources, as reflected in well-being and performance-related outcomes upon employees' return to work. Based on the above it can be concluded that creating an environment in which employees are able to take sufficient leave to allow for effort recovery should contribute to an enhanced well-being of employees.

Receiving professional support upon *referral* by the organisation was also viewed as a received job resource by participants; this included referrals for psychological as well as psychiatric support offered as part of the organisation's employee assistance programme. This finding confirms research by Tetrick and Winslow (2015) who emphasised the importance of employee wellness programmes, and reported on the preventative stance of wellness programmes nowadays aimed at enhancing job and personal resource for employees. According to Gregg (2015), wellness initiatives at present are aimed at creating an environment and culture that is more health conscious and focused on overall employee well-being than in the past. This supports the importance and critical role of employee wellness programmes in organisations.

Participants experienced *supervisor support* as a received job resource through good relationships with team managers and support received from managers and team managers in

dealing with various matters. Participants also reported cases in which they had identified the absence of support received from the manager, and a poor relationship with the manager as a lacking job resource. The present study confirms the findings of Weigl et al. (2016) that found supervisor support to be an important resource for employees in dealing with high self-reported work stress. McGilton, Hall, Wodchis, and Petroz (2007) also showed supervisory support to contribute to job satisfaction of employees; employees who received stronger support from supervisors were likely to experience lower levels of burnout, and can therefore be expected to be more satisfied at work.

Further sub-themes that were identified by participants as lacking job resources included financial assistance (studies), management style, recognition, and role clarity. *Financial assistance* as a lacking job resource was experienced by participants in the rejection received upon applying for study assistance. Starrin, Aslund and Nilsson (2009) highlighted the risk for psychological ill-health as a result of greater financial stress and more experiences of having been shamed. It could be argued that this experience combined with the importance attached by individuals to opportunities for development and learning in recent times (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), could translate into an experience of a lacking job resource for participants.

*Management style* was experienced as a lacking resource by participants in the perception which existed that it was unsafe for participants to openly share feedback with management. This finding is in support of research by Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, and McKee (2007) who confirmed a positive relationship between transformational leadership and psychological well-being of employees. Kara, Uysal, Sirgy, and Lee (2013) investigated the effects of leadership style on employee well-being and learned that transformational leadership positively influenced the quality of work-life experienced by employees, and further found that an increase in quality of work-life helped to reduce employee burnout. These findings emphasise the value and importance of embedding an effective leadership style as part of creating an environment that enables optimal well-being of employees.

*Recognition* as a lacking resource was experienced by participants through feelings of not being appreciated for the job they were doing. Brown and Roloff (2015) found that organisations can buffer the burnout process by rewarding their hardest working employees with more than creating an environment that communicates their value and significance

(often through monetary incentives), by demonstrating gratitude for their extra time and effort.

*Role clarity* was also identified as a lacking resource by participants. Various previous studies have reported on the correlation between role conflict, role ambiguity and burnout. For example, a study by Faúndez, Monte, Miranda, Wilke, and Ferraz (2014) found both role ambiguity and role conflict to influence burnout - in cases where higher levels of uncertainty exist around what is expected of employees in their roles, there is a stronger the likelihood that employees will experience higher levels of burnout as a result of this uncertainty. Similar results were found in a study by Tunc and Kutanis (2009) who also identified role ambiguity and role conflict to explain higher levels of burnout experienced by individuals. The results of these studies emphasise that organisations should be clear on what is expected of employees in their roles, to benefit from greater employee well-being.

### **Personal resources**

Resources experienced by participants did not only include job resources but also comprised personal resources. Despite limited research on personal resources, it has been found to be important in reducing the risk of burnout (Rupert, Miller, & Dorociak, 2015). Within the category personal resources participants reflected on various used personal resources, as well as personal resources that were lacking.

*Affective coping* was a personal resource identified by participants as part of used resources, i.e. participants commented on feelings of affection towards the company (love the company). It was, however, also recognised as a lacking resource through feelings of despondence, being out of control, and feeling depressed. Emotion-focused coping, which is aimed at reducing the stressful emotional reaction by the environment (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980), is an attempt to acknowledge, understand, and express emotions (Roesch & Weiner, 2001). Buruck et al. (2016) recognised the importance of dealing with negative emotions at work and studied emotion regulation skills (e.g. acceptance, tolerance, and modification) as personal resources to understand how it might reduce stress and support well-being. In the afore-mentioned study it was found that affective regulation training was effective for increasing emotion regulation skills and well-being of employees (Buruck et al., 2016). It can therefore be reasoned that by creating an environment in which employees are empowered

(e.g. training) to more effectively regulate their emotions (e.g. accept, tolerate and modify), organisations can contribute to the enhancement of overall well-being of their employees.

*Behavioural coping* was identified by participants as a used resource as well as a lacking resource. Extensive experiences were shared which constituted examples of instances where behavioural coping was employed by participants in the study. This included references to putting in place healthy habits (e.g. exercising), spending time on hobbies, taking action to address financial problems (e.g. moving into a smaller apartment, receiving professional financial advice), making changes to allow for a better work-life balance, acquiring psychological assistance, and pulling strength from religious beliefs. In a meta-analytic review examining the relationship between coping strategies and burnout, Shin et al. (2014) investigated the function of problem-focused coping to change the distressed person-environment relationship by acting on the environment or oneself, and found that problem-focused coping is associated with lower levels of burnout. Behavioural coping strategies employed by participants in the present study denote examples of action taken by participants aimed at addressing the factors causing distress. 'Rational coping behaviours' has also been identified as a resource which helped to overcome job-related stressors (Antoniou, Ploumpi, & Ntalla, 2013). Rupert et al. (2015) showed the role of recreational activities and self-care activities as personal resources contributing to reducing the risk for developing burnout. Evidence also exists in literature of the positive impact of religious coping strategies on lower burnout levels (Safaria, Othman, & Wahab, 2010; Ross, 1990). Participants in the present study also identified behavioural coping as a lacking resource with references to not taking action and avoiding interactions with other people. Avoidance coping has been found in literature to be associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation components of burnout (Austin, Shah, & Munce, 2005).

Participants identified *cognitive coping* as a used resource as well as a lacking resource in articulating personal resources. In investigating what personal resources reduced the risk for developing burnout, Rupert et al. (2015) identified the following four cognitive strategies: maintaining a sense of control, reflecting on satisfying experiences of work, maintaining professional identity/values, and maintaining self-awareness/self-monitoring. In the aforementioned study it appeared that having cognitive strategies to keep perspective on one's work was important for reducing both emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation components of burnout (Rupert et al., 2015). Capitalising on cognitive coping can become a

valuable personal resource for employees in embracing well-being and countering risks of developing burnout.

*Support structures* was the final lacking personal resource identified by participants in the study, and referred to lack of support from family and friends. Social support (e.g. getting help with a task, and being able to discuss their situations and feelings) has been confirmed as an effective coping resource that buffers the adverse effects of high job stressors, and contributes to lower levels of burnout (Garrosa et al., 2010; Rupert, Stevanovic, & Hunley, 2009). Encouraging employees to build strong social support networks could therefore be argued to enhance personal resources and to contribute to greater employee well-being in the workplace.

### Practical implications

Although the impact of resources on burnout has been studied in the literature, research within the South African context on the topic remains limited, specifically relating to the impact of personal resources on burnout. The present study provides an enhanced understanding of job and personal resources on the well-being of at risk employees. Creating awareness for employees around the availability of resources, and encouraging at risk individuals to engage with and utilise job and personal resources should lead to greater well-being and higher levels of engagement in the workplace. The challenge for organisations will remain in operationalisation of the implementation of such strategies to equip individuals with the necessary training and skills to successfully apply such strategies.

### Limitations and recommendations

The findings of this study should be interpreted in the light of various limitations. Firstly, due to the sensitive nature of the topic being studied there might have been instances where participants felt uncomfortable to share personal and sensitive information. The researcher believes however that extra care was taken to build rapport with participants during the interviews and ensure that sufficient safety was created for pertinent information to be shared. The decision made not to use a tape recorder during the interviews was one of the measures taken to contribute towards the creation of safety. Although not recording interviews verbatim could be seen as a limitation to the current study, the researcher believes that it was

the right decision to ensure collection of truthful data, and mitigated for this risk through accurate note-taking during the interviews, as well as confirming correctness of interview notes with participants after the conclusion of the interview process. Another potential limitation of the study could be that it focused only on the experience of resources from the perspective of employees, and did not investigate the view on resources from the organisation's perspective. Acquiring a better understanding on the availability of resources offered and measures taken by the organisation to provide support to employees at risk of burnout, could have contributed to creating a more comprehensive understanding of resources from the perspectives of employees and the organisation alike. A recommendation for future studies would be to follow an integrative approach to explore resources from the viewpoint of employees as well as from those of the organisation.

Although evidence exists in the literature of the role and impact of various behavioural coping strategies as a personal resource, this still remains a field that requires far more attention and further research to fully comprehend the impact thereof on the well-being of employees. A further recommendation for future research would be to complement the qualitative data with quantitative research, allowing the researcher to measure and understand the impact of individual job and personal resources on the various components of the burnout construct.

## **Conclusion**

The present study presented both job and personal resources (received and lacking) from the perspective of employees at risk of burnout may be important to consider in the overall well-being of employees. Having a better understanding of the type of job and personal resources which could impact on well-being, can empower individuals as well as organisations to ensure the availability of sufficient and relevant resources, and contribute to an organisational culture by which employees are encouraged to make use of resources.

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## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## 6. Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

The conclusions of this research are presented in this chapter. This is written in alignment to the general and specific objectives of the thesis. The chapter further contains a discussion on the limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for practice and future research.

### 6.1 Conclusions

It is important for organisations to understand the impact of employee well-being on performance internal and external to the organisation. There is a strong awareness amongst individuals, organisations, and researchers that navigation of the business landscape is continuing to be characterised by increasing demands and expectations, which are contributing to employees as well as businesses being under greater pressure to perform and deliver results (Evenstad, 2015). The reality remains that organisations are dependent on employee engagement and performance to successfully execute on these expectations (Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, & Courtright, 2015). Unfortunately, it is these exact demands and increasing pressure that negatively impact upon the well-being of employees (De Beer, Rothmann Jr., & Pienaar, 2012; also see Chapter 2 of the current study), prohibiting them from delivering optimal performance (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). Therefore, the general objective of this study was to investigate employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, performance ratings, and customer satisfaction index ratings in the financial services industry. The thesis focused on investigating employee well-being from *three* different angles. *Firstly*, it explored the experiences of employee well-being from the perspective of individual employees identified as being at risk of burnout, by focusing on demands (job and personal). *Thereafter*, it investigated the impact of work-related well-being of employees on performance internal to the organisation, and *thirdly* it investigated the impact of work-related well-being of employees on the perceived satisfaction of service by customers external to the organisation. *Finally* the investigation shifted back to the first angle by considering the experiences of well-being from the perspective of individual employees by exploring their available and lacking resources (job and personal). This was achieved by investigating the specific objectives set out for this thesis, individually discussed below.

The *first* specific objective of the study was to conduct a literature review on employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, job demands-resources (JD-R) model, job performance, and customer satisfaction ratings. Each article chapter included its own literature study in line with the objectives and the specific constructs of interests to that chapter. Summarily, the following can be concluded about the overall study constructs: The JD-R model was used as the theoretical framework within which employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, work performance, and customer satisfaction ratings were investigated for the purpose of this study. The JD-R model served as a framework within which to understand employee well-being and recognised two main categories of working conditions which impacted the burnout process i.e. job demands and job resources (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel (2014) outlined that burnout is likely to occur as a result of high job demands (and lower job resources to a lesser extent), while work engagement occurred as a result of job resources. The dual processes of the JD-R model (health impairment process and motivational process) were used to contextualise the impact of demands and resources on the well-being of employees, as well as on work performance of employees, and satisfaction of customers. The health impairment process depicts how high job demands lead to burnout and eventual health problems (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; De Beer, Pienaar, & Rothmann Jr., 2016), while the motivational process explains the impact of job resources on positive organisational outcomes (e.g. organisational commitment) through work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In addition to studying the impact of demands and resources on the well-being of employees, the literature review also explored empirical evidence relating to the impact of burnout and work engagement on work performance of employees (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Taris, 2006). Performance was shown to be a complex construct which required exploration of different dimensions in order to achieve a better understanding e.g. task and extra role performance (Demerouti, Bakker & Leiter, 2014). The practice of measuring performance (which included performance ratings) was also explored and various challenges inherent thereto identified (Adler, 2016). It was found that inconclusive evidence existed on the relationship between burnout and work performance (Bakker et al., 2014). Work engagement was found to be positively related to better performance in literature (Demerouti & Bakker, 2006). Finally the literature review focused on customer satisfaction and the impact of burnout and work engagement on customer satisfaction ratings (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Yagil, 2006). Customer satisfaction was found to be largely absent from the key aims of research in the context of call centres, despite the reality that the very reason for existence of call centres is

to provide satisfactory experiences to customers (Chicu, Ryan, & Valverde-Aparicio, 2016). Limited empirical evidence was found on the impact of burnout on customer satisfaction (Söderlund, 2017), specifically in call centres.

The *second* specific objective was to explore the experiences of demands amongst employees identified as being at-risk of burnout. A qualitative research design was implemented to generate richer insight into the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). A phenomenological approach was followed and the six phases of thematic analysis guided the researcher in execution of the study: i) familiarisation with the data, ii) coding, iii) searching for themes, iv) reviewing themes, v) defining and naming themes, and vi) writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Upon conclusion of this process three major categories were identified: job demands, life demands, and health concerns. Each of these categories had various themes feeding into them. The findings revealed that the participants experienced job demands as a factor impacting upon their well-being. Themes identified feeding into the job demands category included: change management, cognitive demands, emotional demands, job dissatisfaction, job experiences, job insecurity, remuneration, work overload, and work-life balance. The second category identified, life demands, included themes of family demands (e.g. illness of a family member, parenting, pregnancy), financial demands (e.g. debt, medical expenses, relocation), and personal demands (e.g. house hunting, studying). Within the third category (health concerns) themes extracted from the data included physical health (e.g. surgery, health scare, depressive disorder) and psychological distress (e.g. anxiety, cynicism, irritability). It is important to note that the experience of being at risk of burnout could be found in context of both job demands as well as life demands. This is an important finding and supports the view of Bianchi, Truchot, Laurent, Brisson, and Schonfeld (2014) and the findings of De Beer and Thuynsma (2016) that burnout should be considered a multi-domain phenomenon which should not solely be restricted to work-related factors. Furthermore, the study contributed to an enhanced understanding of the physical and psychological health concerns experienced by participants who were identified as being at-risk of burnout. Knowledge gained through this study contributed to understanding the experience of demands from the perspective of individual employees, identified as being at risk of burnout.

Objective *three* of the study set out to investigate the longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement, and objective performance ratings. Thus, the focus was on studying the impact of employee work-related well-being on performance internal to the

organisation. Specifically, this study investigated if burnout predicted increased performance ratings negatively, over time ( $H_1$ ), and if work engagement predicted increased performance ratings positively, over time ( $H_2$ ). The study was executed with a longitudinal design by conducting climate surveys at two points in time (one year apart); the surveys were completed by employees and included measures on burnout and work engagement. Performance ratings for the same two time-points were also obtained. These performance ratings were based on objective data from official ratings given by supervisors of employees, based on the employee's yearly performance review; allocation of ratings happened in a consultative process with individual employees. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data. The modelling rejected the hypothesis that burnout would predict performance ratings negatively over time ( $H_1$ ). However, it is important to note that the relation between burnout and good performance was negative ( $\beta = -0.23$ ;  $p = 0.076$ ), and it could be argued that with a larger sample size the relationship might have crossed the threshold of significance. Comparatively, the lack of support for  $H_1$  was in line with previous research studies which produced inconclusive results on the relationship between burnout and work performance (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Taris, 2006). Various arguments are made in literature that can explain the inconclusive results, e.g. the manner in which the performance construct is measured (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010), as well as employees utilising adaptive strategies to ensure continued performance delivery despite burnout experienced (Demerouti et al., 2014). Results from the analysis supported  $H_2$ , work engagement predicted increased performance ratings positively, over time, a finding that is consistent with previous studies which reported work engagement to predict higher performance [excellent performance] (Bakker et al., 2014; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). The study contributed to an enhanced understanding of the relationship between employee well-being (specifically the positive impact of work engagement and the potential negative impact of burnout) and performance internal to the organisation, when considered over time.

The *fourth* objective was to investigate the impact of burnout and work engagement on customer satisfaction index ratings, in a call centre environment. A quantitative research approach was followed, with a cross-sectional survey design that considered data at one point in time (Creswell, 2013). Firstly, the focus was on determining if burnout was negatively related to better (acceptable and good) customer satisfaction ratings ( $H_{1a}$ ), and positively related to worse (bad) customer satisfaction ratings ( $H_{1b}$ ). Results showed no significant

relationship between burnout and any of the customer satisfaction ratings ( $p$ 's > 0.05), rejecting all of hypothesis 1. The limited empirical evidence that exists in literature around this topic made it difficult to anchor the findings in previous research. But considering the negative impact of burnout on employee health (Ahola, 2007), and work performance (Bakker et al., 2004; Bakker & Heuven, 2006), it is not considered unreasonable to deduce that burnout should negatively impact on the satisfaction of customers. However, no significant result was found here and could be explained with previous literature that highlighted the expectations which exist of employees to display positive emotions (e.g. be friendly and welcoming, hide frustrations) when interacting with customers (Diefendorff, Richard, & Croyle, 2006), despite experiencing symptoms of burnout, especially in call centre environments. Thus, the positive display emotions presented by the employee, are likely to act as a "shield" that prevents the customer from strongly experiencing burnout-affected service provided by the employee. However, in more extreme cases of burnout it can be argued that the employee will not be able to maintain this shield and a lower quality of service would be provided. This could potentially be a contributing factor constraining researchers from acquiring stronger empirical data around the negative impact of burnout on customer satisfaction perceptions. The second hypothesis considered whether work engagement was positively related to better (acceptable and good) customer satisfaction ratings ( $H_{2a}$ ), and negatively related to worse (bad) customer satisfaction ratings ( $H_{2b}$ ). Results revealed work engagement to have a statistically significant positive relationship with both good ( $\beta = 0.98$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and acceptable ( $\beta = 0.83$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ) ratings – supporting hypothesis  $H_{2a}$ . This finding was in line with previous research which supported the positive relationship between work engagement and customer satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002). It was concluded that improving work engagement in a call centre environment would contribute to better experiences for customers (external to the organisation), and ultimately to higher customer satisfaction index ratings.

Objective *five* of the study set out to explore the experiences of resources from the perspective of at-risk employees. A phenomenological approach was taken with a case study design as research strategy. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and analysed by means of thematic analysis (familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Upon conclusion of the data analysis process two main categories emerged from the data: job resources and personal resources. Job resources were made up of two main themes

namely: i) received resources and ii) lacking resources, with a variety of sub-themes feeding into them. Participants experienced *received* job resources through the following sub-themes: career opportunities, coaching, colleagues support, communication, leave, referral (professional support), and supervisor support. *Lacking* job resources were experienced through sub-themes of colleague support, communication, financial assistances (studies), growth opportunities, leave, management style, recognition, role clarity, and supervisor support. It should be noted that in many cases there was an overlap between sub-themes influencing the experience of received job resources and the experience of lacking job resources indicating that these particular job resources are most likely key resources impacting on the experience of well-being within the particular organisational setup. This knowledge can be used to guide organisations in terms of which resources to concentrate on in optimising the creation of a workplace that facilitates optimal employee well-being.

The impact of job resources on employee well-being is well documented in literature (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker, Demerouti & Euwema, 2005; De Beer et al., 2012). It would thus be to the benefit of an organisation to take note of these resources and understand the manner in which it is experienced by employees, and how it can be used to create better experiences of employee well-being in the organisation. The *second* category identified by participants was personal resources and similarly comprised two main themes namely: used resources and lack of resources. Used personal resources were reflected through the sub-themes affective coping (e.g. feelings of affection towards the company), behavioural coping (e.g. start putting healthy habits in place, asking friends and family for help), and cognitive coping (e.g. making time to reflect, learning to understand triggers). Lack of personal resources were reflected through sub-themes affective coping (e.g. struggling to manage emotions, despondent), behavioural coping (e.g. procrastinating on tasks, signs of presenteeism), cognitive coping (e.g. questioning own competence), and support structures (e.g. family and support structure mainly in other city). It should again be noted that there is a strong overlap between sub-themes impacting used personal resources and lacking personal resources which leads us to conclude that these are key personal resources impacting on the experience of well-being for employees identified as being at risk of burnout. This insight can guide organisation in focusing attention on vital personal resources that is likely to have the biggest impact on the experience of employee well-being. Limited research exists in literature on personal resources, yet it has been found to be important in reducing the risk of burnout (Rupert, Miller, & Dorociak, 2015). Thus, understanding the manner in which personal

resources are experienced by employees being at-risk for unwell-being can be as important to further empower organisations to better manage the well-being of employees in organisations.

The *sixth* objective of the study was to present and discuss conclusions, limitations, and recommendations of the findings. This objective was delivered on through the presentation of the stipulated information in the current chapter of this thesis.

## 6.2 Limitations

It is important to note the limitations of the current thesis. Each article chapter contains its own section with limitations but more general limitations are worth pointing out: Firstly, it is important to consider that the sample consisted exclusively of employees working within a large financial services organisation in South Africa. Care should therefore be taken not to assume that findings of the current study would be applicable to all other settings and organisations, thus, blanket generalisations are cautioned.

The second general limitation to be noted is that the researcher relied on self-reported data as the majority source of information for the study (surveys were completed by participants). The challenge inherent in this is that participants could control what information they felt comfortable to reveal about themselves as well as the reality that information shared was further influenced by participants' level of self-insight and awareness concerning own well-being. The sensitive nature of the topic could have further contributed to hesitancy experienced by participants to openly and honestly share information. However, the manner in which the survey was positioned, together with the participants experiencing support received after year one of the survey, established sufficient levels of comfort for participation in the survey, and allowed employees to respond to the survey in an open and honest manner. The overall participation rate in the survey (ranging from 89%-92% over the two years during which the survey was implemented) is a further indication of the level of comfort felt by employees to participate in the survey. The longitudinal design of the second study (investigation of the relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings, over time) helped to minimise the likelihood of common method variance. However, it is suggested for future studies to also consider including information

gathered from additional sources (e.g. interviews with manager and colleagues, and 360° performance feedback). Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of study three is also a limitation that should be noted since it only provides a snapshot portrayal of the particular time-frame during which the study was conducted; results could therefore have been different if the study had been conducted using another time-frame (Levin, 2006).

Another limitation to note is the manner in which variables included in the different studies were measured. Performance ratings featured as a variable in study two; however, consideration should be given to the question as to what extent these ratings were an accurate reflection of actual performance. Previous research listed various concerns regarding the manner in which the performance construct is measured (Adler, 2016). The same is true for the variable customer satisfaction index ratings included in study three. Customer satisfaction was measured by means of single ratings allocated by customers after interactions with call centre agents. However, it should also be noted that customers' experiences are also affected by other factors external to the call centre adviser they have interacted with (Chich et al., 2016), e.g. slow system responses, transferring customers between departments, and overall satisfaction with the outcome of the call. The single rating used for measurement thus prevented the researcher from determining the extent to which the interaction with the employee contributed to the specific rating as compared to other, potential confounders.

The last limitation to be noted pertains to both qualitative studies (Chapters 2 & 5); not all participants who were identified as being at risk of burnout agreed to participate in an interview. Thus the researcher was unable to consider experiences of demands and resources from the perspectives of the afore-mentioned employees. However, the researcher believes that the richness and quality of information gathered from employees who participated in the interviews, allowed for a sufficient level of understanding of experiences of demands and resources by employees identified as being at risk of burnout.

## 6.3 Recommendations

### **6.3.1 Recommendations for practice**

Insights gained through exploring demands and resources as experienced by employees identified as being at-risk of burnout should be considered by managers and Industrial and

Organisational Psychologists to create a workplace that allows for optimal functioning of employees. Various themes were identified by employees as contributing to job and life demands experienced. Work-life balance was one of the themes identified. The society we live in and the reality of never-ending connectivity through the use of smart phones, laptops, emails and social networks, continues to increase the challenge of maintaining an acceptable work-life balance (Derks & Bakker, 2014). Organisations should consider providing guidelines with regard to doing work after hours and should strive to establish a culture in which work and family boundaries are respected and effectively managed. Encouraging sufficient effort-recovery serves to replenish the resource pool that contributes to positive work experiences for employees (Kühnel, Sonnetag, & Westman, 2009) and has been found to benefit person-level outcomes of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Hunter & Wu, 2016). Organisations can play a vital role in facilitating more acceptable employee well-being by encouraging employees to stop spending time on work-related activities during non-work hours, and start spending time on low-effort and social, non-work activities (Oerlemans & Bakker, 2014). Closer monitoring of leave balances is yet another approach that can be followed by organisations to facilitate sufficient effort-recovery, e.g. ensuring that all employees take a minimum of ten days consecutive leave per annum, and not allowing employees to accumulate more than thirty days' annual leave. Furthermore, organisations should be more mindful of the impact that cognitive demands can have on the well-being of employees, and actively support employees in dealing with cognitive demands, and provide support (e.g. cognitive behavioural training) where possible to facilitate effective performance of employees despite high cognitive demands that exist in the environment. Giving attention to managing changes in organisations more effectively is also a recommendation that holds the potential of lessening job demands as experienced by employees. Facilitating change enablement workshops and equipping leaders and employees with skills and knowledge on how to deal with change more effectively, is another recommendation to be noted.

Better management of demands should not only focus on job demands, but should also consider strategies for addressing the life demands of employees. It is important for organisations to acknowledge the impact of life demands (e.g. family) on the well-being of employees, and to ensure that relevant support is available as far as possible to assist employees in dealing with these challenges. This could entail support such as time off from work to deal with family matters, and counselling services being made available to the

employee and relevant family member(s) through the organisation's employee assistance programme (EAP). Providing social support should also be considered as a means to facilitate better well-being of employees. Organisations could consider establishing formal social support networks consisting of colleagues and supervisor support internal to the organisation, as this has been found to contribute significantly to explaining the variance in burnout intensity (Hamama, 2011). Employees could also be encouraged to build strong informal relationships and support networks with family and friends (Sánchez-Moreno, Roldán, Gallardo-Peralta, & De Roda, 2014). Equipping employees with a set of skills to deal with and manage emotions effectively could potentially contribute to an enhanced functioning of employees in coping with the effects of burnout. For example, Goodman and Schorling (2012) found a continuing education course based on mindfulness-based stress reduction to contribute to improved mental well-being and decreased levels of burnout.

The longitudinal relationship between burnout, work engagement and objective performance ratings were investigated in the second study. Work engagement was found to be a predictor of better work performance ratings by supervisors in the afore-mentioned study, and evidence exists in literature regarding job resources being the strongest predictor of work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It would thus be to the benefit of organisations to create a culture in which the optimisation of job resources is encouraged. An annual climate survey can be used to determine relevant resources in an organisation and the impact thereof on employee performance and well-being. This insight can then be applied by organisations to better manage relevant resources, e.g. create a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities amongst employees through the introduction of proper role profiles aligned with organisational strategy, and socialised to employees in workshop format. Proper performance management is also a resource that could be used to impact employee engagement levels in an organisation, since relying on performance ratings allocated by managers once or twice a year to measure performance is a practice that is questioned by many and not seen as the most effective method to follow for managing performance (Adler, 2016). One suggested approach to managing the performances of employees is through ongoing, regular dialogue between managers and employees with real-time, constructive feedback provided to employees. A further suggestion would be to include 360° feedback from all relevant stakeholders (e.g. colleagues, direct reports, teams) as input into these regular performance dialogues between managers and employees. These discussions then become another vehicle through which organisations are able to obtain feedback from employees on

the experiences of job demands and job resources, and the impact thereof on employee well-being and performance.

Organisations should also leverage the improved understanding of the impact and experiences of resources (received and lacking) as highlighted in chapter 5 of the thesis. Using this information to guide organisational architecture and design could contribute to the creation of a workplace that facilitates high levels of work engagement and productivity. Once again, an annual climate survey is one way for businesses to obtain substantive feedback on employee well-being in addition to acquiring vital knowledge on demands and resources as experienced by employees in the workplace. Another approach to obtaining feedback from employees on their experiences of the work environment could be to introduce 'quarterly connect sessions' during which employees are afforded the opportunity of connecting with senior leaders in the business to discuss any organisation-related matters that are of importance to them as it impacts on the working environment, and ultimately the success of the business. The insights gained from the annual climate survey and/or quarterly connect sessions could then be used to inform the design and implementation of organisational development interventions in the business. Action plans can be developed aligned with the specific needs from each area (department), specifying the nature of the intervention required, who will be responsible for developing and facilitating it (e.g. the manager or the organisational development consultant), when it will be implemented, and what would be the measures of success (e.g. next annual climate survey). Examples of organisational development interventions could entail leadership development programmes, training programmes focusing on improving critical communication skills, team development interventions, and career development workshops.

Creating a workplace characterised by effective management of demands and resources will ultimately benefit individual employees, the success of the organisation, and finally the satisfaction of customers.

### **6.3.2 Recommendations for future research**

It is recommended that future studies consider monitoring the experiences of demands and resources of employees at-risk of burnout, over time. The insights to be gained through this approach should allow organisations to understand the dynamic nature of demands and

resources, and the extent to which the same demands and resources continue to impact the well-being of employees. Researchers should also be able to further identify cases where employee well-being had improved, and gain an enhanced understanding of the key drivers that contributed to this. This could be done with state of the art implementations, such as mobile applications (“apps”) that are used instead of hardcopy booklet diary studies.

Implementing a longitudinal research design for investigating the impact of burnout and work engagement on customer satisfaction index ratings is another recommendation for future research. It was found that limited research existed on the impact of burnout and work engagement on customer satisfaction in call centres. A longitudinal study on this topic will allow for insight into and understanding of the impact (causality) of burnout and work engagement on customer satisfaction ratings over time. It is further recommended that future research include a more comprehensive customer satisfaction measurement index which includes collateral factors such as satisfaction with outcome of query or answer received, first-call resolution (versus numerous interactions before the query was resolved), and waiting time before the call was answered.

Finally, it is suggested that researchers consider repeating the longitudinal analysis investigating the relationships of burnout, work engagement and work performance with one another (study two). The difference should, however, be that an enhanced / improved measure of work performance is included as a variable in the study, as oppose to objective performance ratings (by supervisors) as per the current study. It would be suggested that a measure of work performance incorporate holistic feedback on employee performance obtained from all relevant stakeholders in the organisation, e.g. feedback from regular performance dialogues between employees and supervisors, 360° performance feedbacks (peers, direct report, supervisors), and feedback from cross-functional or project teams of which the employee had formed part. This should allow researchers to establish whether a more refined and accurate measure of performance allows for more differentiation in the relationship between burnout and (negative) work performance.

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