A Discourse Analysis of the Exogenous and Endogenous Drivers of Employee Well-being in South Africa

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Abstract

In South Africa, people management professionals are faced with the challenge of recreating their organizations to ensure that aspects such as core values, culture, strategy, systems, processes, and people are fully integrated. However, while the focus of employee well-being initiatives has been invariably positive (insofar as they aim to improve physical, psychological, and social functioning), it cannot be assumed that employees have been positively disposed toward them. Taking this important analysis into consideration, the purpose of this article is to: (i) Explore the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being and (ii) identify how the drivers of employee well-being impact on performance in the workplace. Limited research exists on the feasibility of an overall healthy workplace and on the impact of such workplaces on organizational functioning. This study employs a qualitative content analysis of a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed accredited South African journals, professional papers, regulations, and policies. The findings reveal that first, the organizational setting (source of exogenous drivers) has a direct implication on employees’ physical, psychological, and behavioral consequences. Second, the employee setting (source of endogenous drivers) plays a role in determining the extent to which an employee will display indicators of high or low levels of health and well-being in the workplace. Thus, a model is developed which encapsulates interrelated exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being which impacts on performance in the workplace.

Keywords: Employee Well-being; Exogenous; Endogenous; Workplace; South Africa

1. Introduction

Workplace issues can lead to poor production or performance, decrease the ability to actually complete work, and possibly lead to legal battles between employers and employees. In a workplace setting, it is, therefore, important that everyone feels that they are safe and valued, in cases where employees experience personal and work-related challenges, positive discipline such as counseling should be applied for improved psychological well-being (Day and Randell, 2014). Employee well-being is, therefore, an increasingly relevant and necessary consideration in the modern workplace. The total cost of poor employee health globally adds up to over $580 billion annually, of which 20% comes from the absence due to illness, workers’ compensation, and shorter long-term disability; 40% comes from medical and pharmacy costs; and another 40% comes from lost productivity (Katushabe et al., 2015).

Although the labor relations framework in South Africa provides for legislation that caters for labor matters, there is the absence of specific case law that addresses employee well-being. Employers have to identify hazardous activities that impact on the physical and psychological health of employees (Sieberhagen et al., 2011). In addition, since 1967, output per worker per unit of capital has fallen from R7 297 to R4 924 a year which represents a decline of 32.5% (Moneyweb, 2012; Productivity, 2014). In addition, there has been a 500% increase in sick leave between 2001 and 2013, suggesting some employees
take a sick day when suffering only minor ailments and days off without even being ill resulting in an estimated R19, 1 billion being lost due to absenteeism every year (Corporate Absenteeism Management Solutions, 2014; Pickworth, 2013). Furthermore, Redman (2015) posits that workplace productivity continues to drop substantially, and in South Africa alone, absenteeism is believed to cost the economy approximately R12 billion annually with an estimated percent of the workforce absent on any given day.

Failure to address workplace psychosocial factors has been shown to reduce workplace performance. A weak psychosocial environment has been shown to influence the perception of poor health, increase the experience of pain, induce delayed recovery from musculoskeletal conditions such as back problems, and elicit negative coping strategies such as excessive alcohol drinking or overeating (Berry et al., 2010; Brownett, 2015; Gilbreath and Montesino, 2006). Thus, holistically, addressing employee well-being needs will help ensure that organizations have motivated employees by guarding them against an overload of job demands and providing adequate job resources, which would help employees to maintain a healthy balance between the work environment and life outside of work (Jorgensen et al., 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this conceptual analysis is to: (i) Explore the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being and (ii) identify how the drivers of employee well-being impact on performance in the workplace. This article has three main sections. In the first section, I will provide the overview of the literature pertaining to the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being, the next section will highlight the methodology adopted, I will then move on to explore on the findings and conclusions drawn. Finally, I will highlight the theoretical and practical implications.

2. Literature Review/Research Gap

2.1. Conceptual clarification of employee well-being

Wellness and employee well-being are often used interchangeably while other authors consider the two concepts as two separate constructs. For the purpose of this article, wellness and employee well-being are going to be viewed as separate constructs. On the one hand, wellness is understood as a total person’s approach toward improving the quality of his or her life, health, and psychological strengths in proactive and positive ways both as a member of a community and as an employee. It is acknowledged that wellness is characterized by optimal physical health as well as psychological and social well-being and not by the mere absence of illness (Colling, 2013; Els and De la Rey, 2006). Wellness research requires an understanding that wellness forms part of an integrated system within an organization. Thus, a better understanding of wellness, its theoretical, conceptual base, and its application in organizations is, therefore, of paramount importance (Colling, 2013; Giberson and Miklos, 2014). On the other hand, employee well-being is simply defined as personal happiness or feeling good and living safely and healthily. Research shows that there is no workplace which is free from stress; workers may find that discussing their workplace stress or challenges with a trained mental health professional is helpful (Cooper and Bevan, 2014; Katushabe et al., 2015; Salanova et al., 2014). With this analysis in mind, employee well-being is an integral part of wellness; healthy improvements will not be effectively implemented if employees do not feel good about their well-being state (employee well-being).

2.2. Conceptual clarification of exogenous and endogenous drivers

Exogenous drivers of employee well-being are drivers that impact employees from an external source, while endogenous drivers of employee well-being are drivers that impact employees from an internal source which is inherent within their emotional and psychological state. The following section shall explore on some of the key sources of the exogenous and exogenous drivers of employee well-being.

2.2.1. Physical health

The extant literature shows that occupational stress and physical environment impacts on employee health which ultimately affects the execution of duties. It should also be noted that injuries are not only
for laborers but also for white-collar workers prone to the same injury. For example, prolonged sitting can cause lower back pain (Attridge et al., 2013).

2.2.2. Psychological health
There are varying definitions of psychological health found in the literature, but it can be understood as the absence of distress otherwise triggered by “a behavioral, psychological, or biological dysfunction in (an) individual” (Day and Randell, 2014; Gilbert and Kelloway, 2014). Poor psychological health can manifest in the form of employee dysfunctionality which can render them incapable of properly executing their duties.

2.2.3. Spiritual health
The notion of spiritual health has been explored on by communication and organizational scholars as an important component of an organization’s well-being (Gilbert and Kelloway, 2014). From a general perspective, spirituality is often synonymous with religion. However, in organizational terms, it is defined as “an ongoing process of growth and nourishment; wisdom, connectedness, integration, independence, and a holistic apprehending of organizational life” (De Klerk et al. 2009; Farrell and Geist-Martin, 2005). Spiritual health in organizations focuses on the quality of relationships, the pursuit for individual purpose, and the search for meaning in daily interaction and how they affect the optimum functioning of organizations.

2.2.4. Social health
The relationships among people are the fabric of organizations and shape an organization’s culture. An essential consideration from this perspective involves the social conditions that promote a less stressful, healthier lifestyle and the well-being of the whole person in the context of his or her social environment (Farrell and Geist-Martin, 2005). Furthermore, employees must take responsibility for the quality of relationships in both their professional and personal lives (Cilliers and Ngokha, 2006).

2.3. Regulatory framework of employee well-being in South Africa
This section is based on findings by Sieberhagen et al., 2011; Sieberhagen et al., 2009; Thekiso et al., 2013; Van der Colff and Rothmann, 2009; and Wissing, 2013. The main employee well-being-centric statutes in South Africa that influence employee’s health and wellness according to Sieberhagen et al. (2011) include the “Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Labour Relations Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, the Compensation for Occupational Diseases and Injuries Act, the Unemployment Insurance Act, the Employment Equity Act, and the Skills Development Act.”

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Constitution South Africa, 1996) (Section 23) can have implications for the health and wellness of South African employees. The Constitution of South Africa cited by Sieberhagen et al. (2011) states that: “Everyone has the right to fair labor practices; every worker has the right to form and join a trade union, to participate in the activities and programs of a trade union, and to strike; every employer has the right to form an employer’s organization and to participate in the activities thereof, and every trade union, employer’s organization, and employer has the right to engage in collective bargaining.”

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (No. 85 of 1993) applies to all employers, with the exception of miners, owners of certain shipping vessels; those exempted by the Minister and temporary employment services. According to Sieberhagen et al. (2011) “This Act imposes a general duty on employers to provide a reasonably safe and healthy working environment, to provide information, training, and supervision as is necessary to ensure health and safety and to report to an inspector any incident in which an employee dies or is injured or when dangerous situations arise.” By virtue of this act, inspectors are empowered to conduct periodic visits to workplaces and examine occupational health and safety compliance.
Facilities regulations make provision for sanitation facilities, safekeeping facilities, changing rooms, prohibition of smoking signs, catering facilities, and drinking water facilities (Sieberhagen et al., 2011).

The Unemployment Insurance Act (No. 30 of 1966) Sieberhagen et al. (2011) highlights that “the Act only applies if the claimant has been in employment previously and is seeking and willing to accept work or is unable to find work because of a scheduled illness. This Act can influence the health and wellness of women in that it ensures income while they are on maternity leave.”

The Skills Development Act (Act 56 of 1997) (South Africa, 1997b) promotes the development of skills levels of employees which ultimately enhances their psychological well-being. Improved skills enhance the capacity and capability of employees to perform very well; this is mainly because employees feel motivated to perform to exceptional capacity and capability.

2.3.1. Employees’ duties

This statute ensures that employees must take reasonable precautions to ensure a safe working environment. Sieberhagen et al. (2011) “highlights that an employee who acts in a reckless way or damages any safety equipment can be liable for the damages.” This indicates that although organizations should take responsibility for the health and wellness of their employees, the employees must also be reciprocal in the same manner by ensuring their own and their colleagues’ health and wellness.

Globally, the management of employee well-being has become an issue of crucial importance (Sieberhagen et al., 2011). It is for this reason that work-life balance and maintaining appropriate mental and physical health are becoming increasingly important for South African employees. Since the first democratic election in 1994, South African companies have become culturally diverse and integrated into the global economy (Simons and Buitendach, 2013; Van der Colff and Rothmann, 2009). These changes have affected and still impact South African employees’ work-life balance and have, thus, triggered the need to pay exceptional attention to employee well-being (Mostert et al., 2011).

The previous sections have highlighted how employee well-being is viewed from a holistic and legislative point of view and brings forth the need to explore on the conceptual framework on employee well-being. Thus, the existence of job resources can improve the well-being of employees. It can be in the form of organizational support structures (salary, pensions, medical aid); growth opportunities (performance feedback, competency development [personal and career], and job rotation); and advancement (Jorgensen et al., 2013). Figure 1 highlights the conceptual framework for the drivers of employee well-being which has been adapted from the research by Salanova et al., 2005.

Figure 1 depicts how the conceptualization of how the drivers of employee well-being are connected to the affective factors, subjective well-being, and outcome variables. Affective factors are emotional factors which influence an employee they can have a negative and positive effect. Subjective well-being refers to how employees experience the quality of their lives and cognitive judgments. Outcome variable is the resultant effects of well-being; these are elicited in the form of work ability, health engagement, and performance efficiency (Salanova et al., 2005). Given this understanding, employee well-being is a primary resource with reciprocal effects on work-related outcomes and has the capacity and capability to affect employee well-being (Avey et al., 2010).

Focusing on the analysis presented in this section, it can, therefore, be postulated that philosophical, theoretical, and empirical analyses research that focuses on the nature, dimensions, and dynamics of employee well-being at the individual, group, organizational is of paramount importance. Furthermore, many constructs related to the facets of employee well-being also need clarification to determine to what extent they can be holistically addressed. A number of practitioner-based consulting firms have begun to describe holistic well-being, engagement, and wellness as an integrated set of concepts in managing and building workplaces (Edington, 2006). The notion presented in this case is that for an employee to be fully engaged they need to have a sense of personal well-being. Of particular importance is the fact that there are psychological and physical components of employee well-being that are interrelated. Thus, it is essential to broaden our view on exogenous and exogenous drivers of employee well-being and their impact on building healthy workplaces.
3. Research Method

A qualitative content analysis methodology was adopted for the study. Content analysis is defined as a systematic and replicable technique for compressing many words into fewer content based on categorical rules of coding (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015). In this research, a broad systematic review of peer-reviewed accredited South African journals, International journals, professional papers, regulations, and policies was carried out using the South African Bibliographic Information Network and Google Scholar. This included published research articles from 1996 to 2016. A total of 65 articles were analyzed. Each article was classified based on its abstract. In the first step, articles were classified as conceptual or empirical or regulatory. Within conceptual papers, each article could be classified as “theoretical” (a new model and/or propositions about employee well-being), or as “research methods” focusing on methodological developments. The abstracts were then subjected to a second blind analysis to check whether there was agreement on the classification. 13 articles were then left mainly due to the fact that they did not address the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being. A deductive thematic data analysis was applied which involved interpreting data from a theoretical background (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015; Neuman and Robson, 2012). Based on this approach, two main themes were developed. The first theme was on the drivers of employee well-being and the second theme was on how these drivers impact on performance in the workplace. To improve the validity and reliability of the analysis, databases were systematically reviewed and synthesized with a pre-established widely acknowledged categorization framework. The objectivity and trustworthiness of the data analysis process were maximized by involving an expert employee well-being researcher to reaffirm the results.

4. Findings

The findings correlate with most theoretical and empirical findings by Attridge et al., 2013; Berry et al., 2010; Caperchione et al., 2016; Colling, 2013; De Klerk, 2005; Edington, 2006; Els and De la Rey, 2006; Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005; Field and Louw, 2012; Mcgillivray, 2005; Meyer-Weitz et al. 2015; Miller et al., 2016; Patel et al., 2013; Redman, 2015; Services SETA, 2015; Sieberhagen et al., 2011; and Sieberhagen et al., 2009. The philosophical thought system for employee well-being in South Africa is a product of various factors including history, culture, norms, values, and religious beliefs. There are important lessons to be learned from understanding the philosophical thought system known as ubuntu, which embodies the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a large majority of the South African population. Thus, ubuntu is invariably invoked as a scale for weighing good versus bad, right versus wrong, just versus unjust perceptions on employee well-being (Mangaliso, 2001). Table 1 highlights
Table 1: Results summary of the employee well-being-centric research on the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being

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<th>Research summary</th>
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<td>This article focuses on the management of employee wellness programs (EWPs) by South African organizations participation in EWPs, was also found to be problematic because employees were skeptical about their confidentiality. Furthermore, participation in an EWP was seen as a demand of work rather than as a resource. Half of South Africa’s top 100 organizations had active EWPs (Sieberhagen et al., 2011; Sieberhagen et al., 2009)</td>
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<td>Research was on how organizations that invest time and resources in an employee wellness culture can expect a return on the investment in wellness. Chronic exhaustion was found to trigger employees to distance themselves emotionally and cognitively from their day-to-day work. Thus, becoming less responsive to the needs of other people around them or the demands of the task at hand. Chronic exhaustion ultimately led to a depleted sense of efficacy. Poor physical well-being resulted in headaches, gastrointestinal illness, high blood pressure, muscle tension, and chronic fatigue (Jorgensen et al., 2013)</td>
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<td>Results of this study indicated that burnout (emotional exhaustion) was moderately related to work engagement among nurses, while depersonalization was related to both personal accomplishment and work engagement. Therefore, occupational stress could possibly impact on work engagement through its effect on burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). A statistical analysis of the effects of sense of coherence on burnout and work engagement revealed that a strong sense of coherence predicted lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and vice versa. This result was also found a strong sense of coherence predicted higher levels of personal accomplishment and work engagement, and vice versa (Van der Colff and Rothmann, 2009)</td>
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<td>Workplace environment</td>
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<td>The research focused on ethnicity as a unit of analysis in the context of poverty and well-being. It found out that those racial categorizations are not justifiable, and in the case of South Africa, hide valuable insights. The results of an exploratory analysis suggest that ethnicity allows a more insightful analysis of poverty and well-being than race. Second, this article introduces a multiple</td>
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correspondence analysis (MCA) in the context of subjective well-being research. MCA seems to show that subjective well-being can be regarded as an outcome measure. Furthermore, it was found that there were cultural differences (between the ethnic groups) regarding subjective well-being. It seems that the ethnic groups in South Africa have different conceptions of well-being and that different factors influence their subjective well-being assessments (Neff, 2007).

The research focused on the mediating effect of job characteristics (job demands and job resources) and work-related well-being among employees in the construction industry in South Africa. The findings revealed that a lack of job resources was more strongly related to negative WHI (−0.41) compared with job demands (0.29) and was also directly related to burnout (−0.51). Therefore, when employees have sufficient job resources, it may lead to fulfilling experiences at work, which spill over to their home life, improving vigor and dedication (Mostert et al., 2011).

Research focused on establishing a relationship between vigor and the security/stability career orientation among employees. Participants, who experienced a high need for job security, as represented by jobs that offer benefit packages and long-term employment, appeared to have lower levels of energy and seem to be less willing to invest effort in their work due to their overriding need for employment security. In this regard, the findings showed that participants employed as temporary contractors appear to place a significantly higher value on job security, which may explain their significantly lower levels of work engagement than those permanently employed. The results further show that job security as a source of job stress relates significantly positively to the security/stability career orientation and negatively to vigor (Coetzee and De Villiers, 2010).
Table 1: *(Continued)*

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<td>Research focused on the relationship between organizational commitment and work engagement. Well-being did show predictive value for organizational commitment. This is an important and valuable contribution because there has been little research on this relationship. This finding extends the existing body of knowledge on positive psychology in the context of the workplace because well-being plays a part in predicting the positive organizational outcome of affective organizational commitment (Field and Buitendach, 2011)</td>
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<td>The findings in this study indicated that positive relationships exist between psychological capital (PsyCap) work engagement and organizational commitment. The development of organizational interventions increased call center employees’ personal resources which will, in turn, increase their PsyCap levels and facilitate increased employee wellness. Furthermore, the complementary nature of work engagement and organizational commitment is conducive to long-term performance and sustainable human-based organizational competitive advantage (Youssef and Luthans, 2007)</td>
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<td>Research revealed important issue pertinent to employee well-being, an average of 10,000 police officers in South Africa are absent from work daily due to occupational-related stress educators more specifically in secondary schools in South Africa experienced high levels of stress with 20% in the Gauteng province being absent for more than 10 days/year. Their stress levels are fuelled by the exchange rate volatility, commodity prices, fluctuating interest rates, changing legislation and empowerment (Sieberhagen et al., 2011)</td>
<td>Regulatory/policies</td>
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<td>In the context of this study, the researchers postulate that satisfying the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness at work leads people to experience high levels of happiness and psychological well-being. The researchers extended this theoretical model to propose that the happiness of people at work, in turn, leads to increased positive organizational outcomes. The most convincing and consistent findings were obtained with job demands notably work overload and with poor resources, such as lack of social support from coworkers and superiors, and lack of job control (Schaufeli et al. 2008)</td>
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the major findings pertaining to the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being in South Africa.

Taking the above summary into cognisance, organizations are or have adopted the following wellness programs through corporate healthcare centers which focus on occupational health care, primary health care, preventative health care, curative care, and HIV/AIDS management. Biokinetic services include physical fitness testing and program prescription such as wellness workshops, lifestyle evaluations, occupational health and safety, first aid training, disability management, by providing assistance in the management of long-term absence due to injury, accidents, ill health, with the focus on the entire process of disability and incapacity. The key issues affecting employee well-being in South Africa are health management, regulatory issues, diversity, skills development, work-life balance, work-related issues, and social issues. Thus, exogenous drivers (occupational, policies and regulations, social, workplace environment) and endogenous drivers (emotional, spiritual, physical health, psychological) will impact negatively or positively on organizational effectiveness and employee productivity and performance. With this analysis in mind, an ENDEX model is proposed which incorporates exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being as depicted in Figure 2.

Table 1: (Continued)

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<td>The study set out to test a structural model of the factors that affect the work-related well-being of academics in South Africa, using a cross-sectional survey design. A good fit was found for a model in which burnout mediated the relationship between job demands/lack of job resources and ill health, while work engagement mediated the relationship between job resources and organizational commitment of educators. Burnout had a small negative impact on organizational commitment (Rothmann, 2003)</td>
<td>Workplace environment</td>
<td>Emotional&lt;br&gt;Policies/regulatory&lt;br&gt;Physical&lt;br&gt;Social&lt;br&gt;Psychological&lt;br&gt;Physical health</td>
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<td>Volkswagen Group SA has committed itself to investing R1 million annually on employee well-being programs. The company’s Health and Wellness Programme follows a holistic and integrated approach which focuses on the following components: Comprehensive occupational and primary health care, HIV and AIDS programs, and EWP and health and wellness interventions (Volkswagen, 2015)</td>
<td>Policies/regulatory</td>
<td>Emotional&lt;br&gt;Policies/regulatory&lt;br&gt;Emotional&lt;br&gt;Policies/regulatory</td>
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<td>The research revealed that legislation plays an important role in governing employee health and wellness. It is suggested that the government and stakeholders in well-being should advocate for legislation that promotes employee health and wellness. Furthermore, there is need to provide support structures to the management of employee well-being (Sieberhagen et al., 2011)</td>
<td>Policies/regulatory</td>
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5. Conclusions

Promoting and effectively maintaining healthy workplaces is contingent on the value attached to the well-being of employees. Hence, understanding the endogenous and exogenous drivers of employee well-being relies on the need to influence existing leadership mental models, behavior and embed a wellness-centric culture. In addition, to improving productivity and performance fostering, psychological healthy initiatives through improved well-being facilitate personal change, health management and promote healthy and supportive structures. Therefore, enabling well-being centric initiatives provides a competitive advantage due to its impact organizational performance and the role it plays in attracting and retaining talent.

6. Theoretical and Practitioner Implications

At the theoretical level, the present findings extend the body of knowledge on the external and internal drivers of employee well-being. First, the theoretical basis of employee welling has been tested conceptually through a systematic review of literature. This methodology has proved to be robust and valid using different analyses of journals, professional papers, regulations, and policies. Overall, the research gaps concerning employee well-being, highlighted by previous research by Johri and Misra, 2014; Kirk and Brown, 2003; Milner et al., 2015; and Sieberhagen et al., 2009, have been addressed in the present study by the proposed ENDEX model. Finally, the ENDEX model holistically provides an illustration of the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being and is grounded not only on research about employee well-being but also
can address organizational behavior and positive occupational health psychology at a multilevel analysis.

From a practical perspective, the findings facilitate a robust and validated methodology not only for understanding the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being but also for identifying the impact on employee productivity and performance and organizational effectiveness. Moreover, the findings also highlight the relevance of improving managerial practices within organizations since it is important not only to generate positive work environments but also to enhance healthy employees and teams as well as to understand better some of the healthy consequences for organizations. Through effective people management practices, interventions might include proper job design, provision of a psychologically safe workplace, collegial working relationships, health centers, and provision of counseling centers. In addition, continue training and development should be continuously advocated for in the promotion of employee well-being centric practices.

7. Limitations

The limitation for the study is that the methodology adopted for this article was a systematic review of literature. However, critical insights on the exogenous and endogenous drivers of employee well-being have been identified. Future research may be undertaken to empirically test the proposed ENDEX model. Furthermore, a mixed methodology approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative research tools could also be adopted to examine the antecedents of employee well-being using a longitudinal design and multivariate analysis.

References


