

Experiencing Energy at Work: A Qualitative Study of How Individuals Experience Energy in Their Work

Problem: Workplaces can drain workers' energy and result in decreased productivity and other negative effects for workers. This is a social problem that challenges us to understand the phenomenon of human energy more deeply. The benefits: Huselid and Becker (1997) and Norton (2006). Early management scholars - efficiency and effectiveness of organizations as energy systems (Barnard, 1968/1938; Katz & Kahn, 2003/1966).

Frameworks: Recent sociological and organizational scholars, especially positive organizational scholars, have provided a theoretical framework to study human energy (e.g., Collins, 1990, 2004; Quinn & Dutton, 2005; Shirom, 2004, 2007).

Empirical: Network researchers; productive organizational energy survey; interviews, energy counts, and energy gains and losses based on responses to job tasks. Surveys and qualitative studies of vigor at work (Wefald, 2008; Shraga, 2008) and being fired up or burned out at work (Norton, 2006). Qualitative studies and health surveys in the field of nursing to understand the concept of energy as experienced by chronically ill patients and champion athletes. Qualities of energy, the intensity of energy, and the management of energy.

Historically, human work has been performed until relatively recently through the human energy of slavery (Stewart, 1874). Our legal structures (labor, family, nation) are based on the servant-master relationship of order-givers (who gain).

The current study seeks to discover the nature of human energy in the workplace, the factors that affect it, and more insights into its dimensions and processes.

Energy is defined for this study as the force or power of human movement, action, change, or being. Human energy is emotion, which is controlled, triggered, and focused by both conscious and unconscious physical and mental activity and which is manifested in behaviors during workplace interactions. To paraphrase classical physics, it is the source of human work. It is related, but not identical, to power, motivation, discretionary effort, and engagement (Cole, Bruch, & Vogel, n.d.; Shirom, 2004, 2007).

Research Questions

How do individuals experience human energy, especially in the workplace?

What are the processes by which individuals are energized or de-energized, in particular, at work?

Methods

Inductive qualitative methods (Kuhn, 1996/1962). A post-positivist, interpretive, social constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007). The focus is a qualitative phenomenological study adapting heuristic, transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1990, 1994). It will include three Seidman (2006) interviews with each participant and embedded critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) to elicit details about critical incidents or interactions that affected participants' experience of energy. In addition to the methods indicated, participants will be asked to give numerical, if appropriate, and descriptive reports of measures of energy dimensions as they experience them and these will be analyzed for emerging patterns.

Using a purposive sampling strategy, participants will be sought (evenly distributed sample) who have either a high or low degree of energy and all will have high degree of reflectivity based on the theory of extreme cases (Boyatzis, 1998). In addition, the sample will be selected to achieve a maximum of variation in age, gender, ethnicity, organizational hierarchy, work environments, etc. (Boyatzis, 1998; Seidman, 2006).

Data Collection

Three 90-minute interviews, held 1 day to 1 week apart. Participants will be asked to define and describe energy and how it acts and changes within their life interactions, especially at work.

open-ended questions, short journal entries in the workbooks to allow participants to find a meaningful way to represent quantitatively or otherwise the experience of any dimension of energy and to describe interactions affecting energy. In direct depictions of the experience through self-dialogues, poems, artwork, diaries, journals, conversations, and actions, the researched experience retains its aliveness and vitality (Moustakas, 1994) – its energy. Member-checking of transcriptions and analyses, memoing, etc.

Data Analysis

Identify the voice of each participant in a profile based on his or her reported experiences of energy, especially at work. Commonalities among participants' experiences. Textural and structural descriptions of energy, the invariant constituents, and the themes that convey the essence of the phenomenon of energy.