

Should you switch off or stay engaged?

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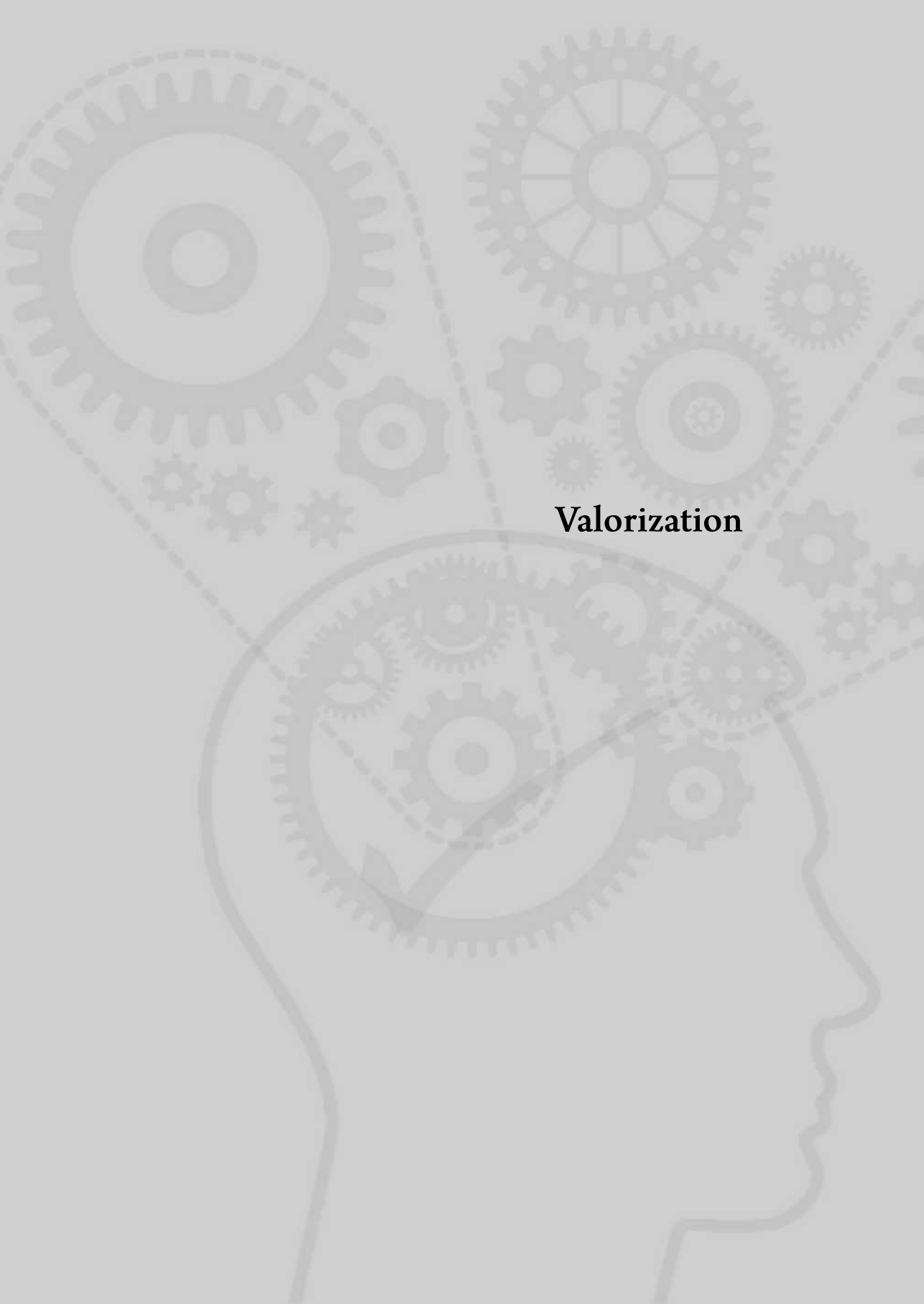
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Valorization

In this valorization chapter I will expand on the social value of the findings presented in this dissertation. Therefore, I will first identify the target group of the research and groups that could potentially benefit from the findings. I then provide an overview of the practical insights that the findings presented in this dissertation provide for employers and employees. I will propose a number of products and innovations that could be based upon the findings of this research. Finally, I will consider the insights that the findings provide for society more generally including potential implications for labor legislation.

Target group

The target population of this dissertation are employees, and more particularly employees with mentally demanding jobs. The findings presented in this dissertation are therefore foremost useful for these employees. Our results shed light on how different types of being mentally engaged with work-related issues during off-work time influences their recovery from work and consequently their well-being and job performance. Employees can use this information to schedule and manage their off-work time in such a way that the possibility of being caught up in thinking about work-related issues during off-work time is minimized. Given the findings related to problem-solving pondering, employees need to know the condition under which experiencing problem-solving pondering during off-work time may facilitate their recovery process.

There are two additional groups that can potentially benefit from the findings of this research including HR managers in organizations and legislative assemblies of labor laws. The findings can help HR managers to design and implement not only strategies that minimize mental engagement with work-related issues during off-work but also strategies that prevent the detrimental effect of thinking about work on the recovery process. The findings also provide insights for legislative assemblies of labor laws where the current labor laws can be evaluated to protect employees from work-related factors that have detrimental effects on the recovery process.

Products, innovation, and implementation

There are a number of products that could be developed based on the findings of this dissertation, including recovery guidelines, trainings, and well-being apps. The results presented in this dissertation demonstrated that employees with

mentally demanding jobs are highly vulnerable for exhaustion over time if they engage in affective rumination during their off-work time. The results may encourage HR managers in organizations to design recovery guidelines that enable employees to overcome obstacles to unwind from work-related issues during off-work time. For example, a guideline might be developed to protect employees to not be interrupted by work-related emails or phone calls after leaving their work places.

Regarding the importance of employees' subjective experiences during off-work time on their well-being and productivity, HR managers may provide facilities that encourage and enable employees to regularly engage in individual or group recreational activities during the evening or the weekend. Moreover, HR managers may suggest psychological interventions such as cognitive behavior therapy and mindfulness-based techniques for their high-ruminating employees. These interventions can help employees to disengage from affective rumination and improve the possibility to prevent impaired health and job-performance that affective rumination causes in the short and long run. Employees themselves can also undertake actions to manage their recovery from work and prevent work-related rumination. For example, they can impose restrictions on using technology (e.g. email, phone) during the evening or the weekend as a factor that may triggers affective rumination (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

This research is innovating as it showed that the experience of work-related problem-solving pondering has positive effects on the recovery process and well-being only if people can properly regulate their cognitions and emotions. This finding then suggests training courses aimed at promoting problem-solving skills as a strategy that HR managers can take to prevent burnout in their employees. These skills can help employees to act as more successful problem solvers when they are mentally engaging in work-related problems during the time of recovery. However, further research is needed to adapt and implement psychological intervention approaches on enhancing problem-solving skills. Given the findings related to problem-solving pondering, employees are recommended to become conscious of the nature and process of their thinking. They should then develop the ability to stop thinking about work-related issues if they do not experience a progressive and productive thinking that results in finding a solution for a specific problem. To enhance this capability, psychological self-awareness and problem-solving trainings can be useful.

Insights for society and implications for labor legislation

The sixth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS; 2016) showed that, on average, 10% of the EU workforce (ranging from 4.5% in Finland to 20.5% in France) feels severely “burned-out” against 17% of the non-EU countries (ranging from 13% in Albania to 25% in Turkey). The burnout prevalence is even worse in developing countries. For example a review study by Rezaei, Matin, Hajizadeh, Soroush, and Nouri (2018) showed that on average 36% of Iranian nurses experience high levels of burnout. Research also showed that burnout is not only negatively related to work-related well-being (e.g. work engagement and job satisfaction), but it is also negatively related to context-free well-being (e.g. happiness). Occupational health at the country level can be considered as a factor determining productivity and economic performance. In countries where employees highly value not only work but also their leisure, the prevalence of burnout can be less and employees can be more productive. This means that in countries where employees work harder and longer, economic performance is not necessarily higher if employees are not productive due to their insufficient recovery during off-work time.

The findings of this dissertation demonstrated that the way employees spend their time outside of work time (i.e. during the evening or the weekend) influences their well-being and job performance. More specifically, the results showed that the ruminative form of thinking about work during off-work time has a negative influence on well-being and job performance. Given these results, governments and legislative assemblies of labor laws should critically evaluate their current labor laws and assess whether the current laws sufficiently protect employees from work-related factors that inhibit the recovery process. More specifically, these laws might be revised in such a way that they protect employees’ rights to *not engage* in work-related activities outside of their official working time that trigger work-related rumination. For instance, they may oblige organizations to limit the pressure they explicitly or implicitly put on their employees during off-work time to engage in work-related cognitive processing (e.g. by limiting work-related e-mail use or by planning assignments in such a way that they can be fully completed during work time). As an example, these laws can protect employees’ right to refuse to respond to emails received from their managers during the evening or the weekend.

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