

Enabling and inhibiting factors of productive organisational energy

by Kobus Louw^{*}, Margie Sutherland^{**} and Karl Hofmeyr^{***}

Abstract

Organisational energy is described in the literature as a renewable resource that can be viewed as a differentiator between excellent and mediocre performance of organisations. The level of intensity of energy can have a positive or negative effect on employees. The objective of this research was to identify the drivers and inhibitors of productive organisational energy and to determine whether the factors differ across the various levels of employees in an organisation. The nominal group technique was used to conduct qualitative exploratory research in a mining organisation. Fifty-eight employees at three different levels at two coal mines participated in the study. The main enabling factors of productive organisational energy were found to be recognition, job security and management support. The major inhibitors were found to be bureaucracy, lack of discipline and lack of resources. Substantial differences were found between the respondents from the three different levels of employees. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Key words: leadership, energy, organisational behaviour, performance

1 Introduction

A challenge for leaders and organisations is to understand the drivers of high performance and what they need to focus on to increase organisational effectiveness. Jamrog, Vickers, Overholt and Morrison (2008) investigated factors underlying high performing organisations which outperform competitors. One area of differentiation was that in the higher performing organisations the employees were more motivated and engaged. The well-being of teams and individuals in organisations creates a willingness to contribute effort and energy to produce excellent results (Schiuma, Mason & Kennerley 2007). In this article the concept of organisational energy will be investigated.

Various definitions of organisational energy exist. Bruch and Ghoshal (2003) use the metaphor of wind to describe the construct and its effect. It is an invisible driving force that can be very powerful. In the organisational context it is a motivational force or energy that can be created or destroyed and that drives employees to perform tasks effectively, depending on their emotional state. The outcome is the result of the intensity and the quality of the energy. Whereas the intensity relates to the amount of energy, the quality relates to the nature of the energy and this is determined by the person's experience (Schiuma et al 2007; Bruch & Ghoshal 2003). Organisational

^{*} Mr K Louw holds an MBA from the Gordon Institute of Business Science.

^{**} Prof M Sutherland is a professor at GIBS University of Pretoria.

^{***} Prof K Hofmeyr is a professor at GIBS University of Pretoria.

energy has been defined as an organisational resource that can be renewed and acts as the differentiator between excellent results and mediocre performance in organisations (Bruch & Ghoshal 2003; Cole, Bruch & Vogel 2005; Derman, Barkhuizen & Stanz 2011). Jamrog et al (2008) have shown a correlation between levels of organisational energy and market performance. High performing companies are able to create the energy which moves the organisation forward (Cole et al 2005). Important questions for companies are: how can they build energetic organisations and what are the ingredients of an energetic organisation?

Although it has been established that the intensity and direction of organisational energy has a positive or negative effect on the performance of the organisation, the drivers and inhibitors of organisational energy have not been established empirically. It is also possible that different levels of employees are differently energised. The enablers and inhibitors of energy in the organisation may therefore differ from one level to another. This research was aimed at building on the theory and findings from the research undertaken by Bruch and Vogel (2011b), Lamberti (2010) and Schiuma et al (2007). In this study a qualitative approach using the nominal group technique evaluated the enabling and inhibiting factors of productive organisational energy at three organisational levels in two South African coal mines. By identifying the factors affecting energy it should be possible to increase the impact of the enabling factors positively, and to eliminate or reduce the negative ones, thus potentially improving individual and team effectiveness and organisational performance (Bruch & Ghoshal 2003).

2 Literature review

2.1 Organisational energy

The construct of organisational energy has been prevalent in academic literature since the 1980s but has begun to attract more attention in recent years. Smith and Tosey (1999) conceived organisations as energy systems consisting of inspiration, integration, meaning, community, control, activity and existence. Shiuma et al (2007) describe energy as an elusive characteristic that drives motivation, fosters creativity, and gives organisations a competitive edge. It is a fundamental dimension of motivated behaviour. It is broadly assumed that productive organisational energy is a key driver of stakeholder and shareholder value and a powerful force of intensity, pace and endurance, impacting on an organisation's work (Bruch & Ghosal 2003). The rationale behind this statement is that the more energy individuals have, the more effort they are likely to put into their work (Shiuma et al 2007). Dutton (2003) describes organisational energy as the "fuel that makes great organizations run". He views it as a resource within organisations that can be regenerated and activated when required. Quinn and Dutton (2005) also describe energy as "a type of positive affective arousal, which people can experience as emotion – short responses to specific events – or mood – longer lasting affective states that need not be a response to a specific event".

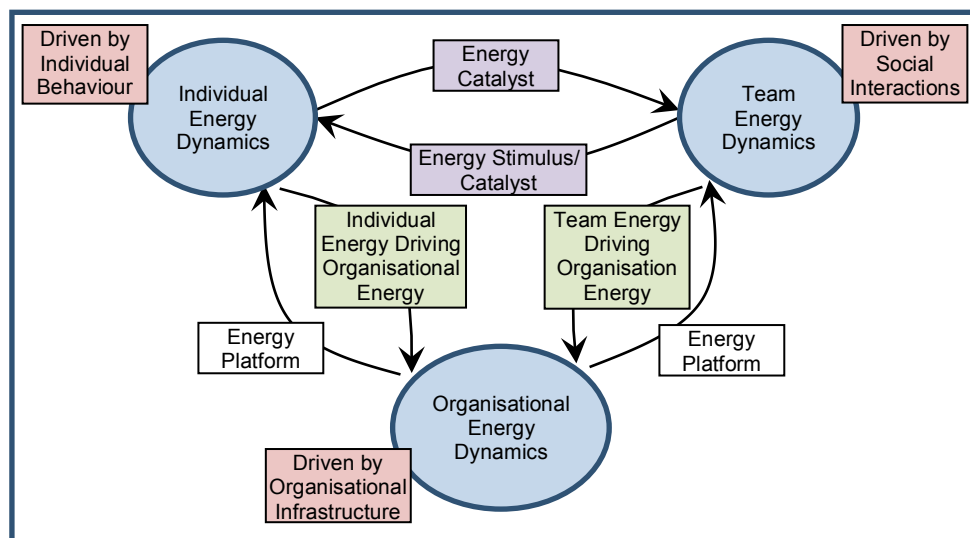
The notion of organisational energy is closely related to the concept of employee engagement (Lamberti 2010; Lok & Crawford 2004). Wildermuth and Pauken (2008) argue that leadership has an influence that can be used to engage or disengage employees by inspiring or alienating them. They also contend that engaged employees are energetic, and take pride in and feel enthusiasm for completing the tasks at hand as effectively as possible. Productive organisational energy is the result of the employee's state of well-being (Bruch & Ghoshal 2003; Cameron, Bright & Caza 2004).

A number of research studies undertaken suggest that the factors influencing the team and consequently the organisational energy include the individual's physical energy, cognitive energy and emotional energy (Bruch & Ghoshal 2003; Cole & Bruch 2006; Schiuma et al 2007). In an exploratory South African quantitative survey Lamberti (2010) proposed that the drivers of productive organisational energy are corporate identity, engagement, trust, leadership, emotional intelligence and human resource practices.

Bruch and Ghoshal (2003) maintain that companies differ in both the intensity and the quality of energy. Intensity refers to the strength of organisational energy as seen in the level of activity, the amount of interaction, the extent of alertness and the extent of emotional excitement. Quality refers to positive energy such as enthusiasm, joy and satisfaction; or negative energy such as fear, frustration or sorrow. Symptoms of lower energy are apathy and inertia, tiredness, inflexibility and cynicism. At any given time an organisation will be in a certain energy state. Further, energy is a good predictor as to whether an individual will achieve results, as people are likely to invest energy in activities in proportion to the amount of energy they have to exploit (Shiuma et al 2007).

Schiuma et al (2007) studied the relationship between individual and organisational energy and business performance. They identified three energy dynamics within an organisation, namely organisational infrastructure, social interaction and individual behaviour, as reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Energy dynamics in organisations



Source: Schiuma, G, Mason, S & Kennerley, M. 2007. Assessing energy within organisations. *Measuring Business Excellence* 11(3):69

They concluded that organisational energy is a dependent variable, rather than an independent variable, in the analysis of organisational success and competitiveness. This energy consists of cognitive, physical and emotional elements which serve as a behavioural impetus to motivation. This in turn affects organisational performance. Similarly, Cole et al (2005) validated the relationship between the collective energy of individuals in an organisation and the performance of those companies. In two surveys

conducted in ninety two organisations, the authors created a metric of “productive measured energy” (PME). They also assessed the correlation between internal criteria such as commitment to goals, organisational commitment and job satisfaction. This was measured against the unit of productive energy. The survey results showed a link between the internal variables of an organisation and its performance output in units of “PME”.

Productive energy can create positive perceptions in individuals which in turn can influence their ability to address challenges within an organisation (Donnelly 2008; Cherniss, Extein, Goleman & Eissberg 2006). These positive emotions result in an increase in creativity in knowledge workers and ultimately in a higher rate of worker retention (Bierema 2008). Downey (2008) also found that a positive emotional climate has a significant impact on job satisfaction and employee engagement. According to Bruch and Vogel (2011a), “leaders who learn to boost and leverage the productive energy of their organisations can inspire their workforce around common goals – while those who do not pay specific attention to these human forces may drive their organisation into complacency, resignation, burnout, or corrosion”.

2.2 Types of energy

Energy can be described as “the capacity to do work” (Schiuma et al 2007:70) or “the fuel tank that makes great organizations run” (Cole et al 2005:V1). It is a resource that oscillates between high and low levels of energy, impacting on the performance of individuals and teams. This in turn impacts on organisational performance as the organisation’s energy is related to but not equal to the sum of the energy of the individuals (Bruch & Ghoshal 2003).

Energy is the result of interaction between individual energy, team energy and organisational energy. Each energy type is driven by different factors. As illustrated in Figure 1 (Schiuma et al 2007), individual energy is driven by individual behaviour, whereas team energy is driven by social interaction within the team and organisational energy is driven by organisational infrastructure. Highly productive energy then produces high-performing companies (Taris & Schreurs 2009).

2.3 Individual energy

Individual energy can be described as the individual’s drive to perform work. Cole et al (2005) argue that individual energy is driven by two attributes. Firstly, energy originates from within the individual, and is a result of the socialising interactions in the group or team that create the energy within. The second attribute is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions (Bruch & Ghoshal 2003; Cole et al 2005; Schiuma et al 2007). Taris and Schreurs (2009) found that employees who report high levels of well-being are more productive. Factors that make an important contribution to high levels of individual well-being are organisational demand accompanied by control and support (Taris & Schreurs 2009; Donaldson-Feilder & Bond 2004). High levels of demand accompanied by low levels of support and control were associated with low well-being in individuals. Karasek (1979) developed one of the earlier models of energy dynamics which relates to the individual’s ability to deal with the demands that emanate from the goals or expectations of the organisation. If the individual has adequate control, authority and support from management, it is likely that the individual will channel energy in a positive way to cope with the demands of the job. If the individual does not have control over resources, the energy will manifest as stress, which will not contribute to organisational energy.

Taris and Schreurs (2009) argue that the factors that make individuals happy have a positive effect on individual energy. Nel (2011) refers to energy enablers and detractors.

Enablers increase focus and energy to drive the behaviour that gets things done. The detractors reduce mental energy and slow down or misdirect the behaviour. According to Taris and Schreurs (2009), inhibiting factors are those that relate to emotional exhaustion. They argue that high levels of emotional exhaustion lead to low levels of effort or energy. They also found that high levels of job pressure with low levels of control also influence job performance, which in turn leads to emotional exhaustion.

2.4 Team energy

Team energy is the social context of energy described by Cole et al (2005). In this social interaction two attributes contribute to the energy levels, namely the cognitive and the emotional transaction. The cognitive transaction is based on a sender-receiver cycle which involves knowledge, understanding and reaction. The other attribute is the emotional transaction within the team. This is built on the basis of the display of emotions, reactions and adjustments (Schiuma et al 2007). They add that the single most important driver of team energy is the social interactions within teams where social emotion is created on the basis of the display of feelings, reactions and readjustments.

Factors that enable team energy are those that promote social interaction (Cole et al 2005; Schiuma et al 2007). Schiuma et al (2007) contend that organisational activities drive social interactions and these drivers include socialisation processes, social support, career development, friendship ties, personal motivation, personal growth and trust. White (2008) argues that the internal factors contributing to team energy are purpose, challenge, camaraderie, responsibility, growth and leadership. Mathew (2007) proposes that a productive culture includes elements such as the right type of people, identification with the job, teamwork, trust and support. This would be characterised by clarity, coherence and adaptability to change. Mathew also argues that socio-emotional support influences the cognitive state of individuals and that if the influence is positive, this results in greater motivation and increased productivity. The factors that inhibit team energy are those that limit or prevent social interaction (Schiuma et al 2007). Some examples would be poor organisational structure, lack of trust and excessive working hours.

2.5 Organisational energy

In defining organisational energy, Shiuma et al (2007) emphasise the importance of the organisational activities which influence factors such as the socialisation processes, support, career development, friendship ties and other types of information flow which influence individual motivation and growth. The organisational activities in turn create the environment in which team energy flourishes. According to Schiuma et al (2007), an important link to individual and team energy is the energy platform created by the organisation. This platform is built on an organisational culture which includes constructive behavioural norms, values, feeling and expressions.

Lamberti's (2010) research identified six drivers of organisational energy, namely engagement (including communication, recognition and job control), leadership, emotional intelligence, corporate identity, trust and human resource practices. Taormina (2008) refers to the importance of organisational culture as a key enabler, comprising values, job satisfaction and employee involvement. According to Bruch and Ghoshal (2003), inhibiting factors create low levels of energy and are marked by signs of apathy, inertia, tiredness, inflexibility and cynicism. Some of the causes identified by Bruch and Ghoshal (2003) are conflicting priorities, lack of cooperation, ill-defined goals and low levels of teamwork.

2.6 Integration of energy

As argued above, individual energy drives team and organisational energy (Bruch & Ghoshal 2003; Cole & Bruch 2006; Schiuma et al 2007). If individual energy is high it is likely that team energy will be high, leading to positive organisational energy. The organisational culture and leadership set the culture (Fard, Rostamy & Taghilo 2009; Lok & Crawford 2004; Mathew 2007) and therefore create the platform on which high organisational energy is produced. The literature does not, however, contain sufficient empirical evidence of the drivers and inhibitors of productive organisational energy. Derman's (2008) study mentioned in its limitation section that there is a need to solicit information directly from employees.

2.7 Organisational levels

This study will also examine whether employees at different levels in the organisation respond to different inhibitors and drivers of organisational energy. Previous research (Lamberti 2010) has suggested that factors driving productive energy are likely to vary according to different organisational levels but this has not been substantiated in a South African context. Arnolds, Boshoff, Mazibuko and Klemz (2010) discuss how the various factors affecting job performance may differ across the occupational levels in an organisation, particularly between white and blue collar workers. Different levels within the organisation have more, or less, control over the support and resources needed to deal with the demands placed on them. Different levels have diverse requirements, skills sets and competencies. Through policies and procedures, organisations set the amount of freedom that each level enjoys when providing subordinates with support and control. Different job level classifications exist and job evaluation systems are a foundation of human resource practice, used to differentiate between varying strata in the organisation.

The classification used in this research is Drotter's leadership pipeline, which is a framework which describes the work done at different levels within the organisation. Drotter (2010) categorises the organisational levels as managing self, first-line management or managing others, managing managers, managing functions or departments, business managers, group managers and enterprise managers. His seminal work on understanding the "turns" employees make as they progress up the organisational hierarchy has added great value to the management of careers. He shows that the nature of work alters fundamentally at the different levels discussed in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Drotter's Leadership Pipeline Levels

Manage Function	Get results through managing and leading a function Develop functional strategy in support of business strategy Build a productive and value-adding function
Manage Managers	Get results through managers and managing multiple team managers Select, coach and train first-line managers Hold first-line managers accountable for their work
Manage Others	Get results through individual contributions Define and assign work to be done Enable direct reports and the team to do the work
Manage Self	Getting results through own personal effort Self-management and personal results Responsible for individual tasks and results

Source: Drotter, S. 2010. Leadership pipeline. *Leadership Excellence* 27(8):11.

Very little is known about what drives energy at the different levels in an organisation. This study sets out to identify the drivers and inhibitors at different levels in a South African context.

3 Research objectives

The research aimed to add to the understanding of the factors that enable or inhibit productive organisational energy, particularly in the context of levels in the organisation. Given that organisational energy has been described as a renewable resource that could be the differentiator between excellent and mediocre performance (Bruch & Goshal 2003; Cole et al 2005), this study set out to add to the understanding of this important factor, in a South African setting. The information could be used to build a practical framework for improving levels of energy in organisations. Three questions framed the research:

Research question 1: What are the enabling factors of productive organisational energy, and what is their relative strength?

Research question 2: What are the inhibiting factors of productive organisational energy, and what is their relative strength?

Research question 3: Are the enabling and inhibiting factors different for different levels in the organisation?

4 Methodology

This was exploratory, qualitative research as the drivers and inhibitors of organisational energy had not been studied previously in a South African setting. The mining industry has been the backbone of the South African economy and mining is an inherently dangerous career where work is carried out in difficult environments. Qualitative research is advised when a researcher is trying to understand a new phenomenon in a particular situation (Leedy & Ormrod 2000). Exploratory research can be defined as "research that aims to seek new insights into phenomena, to ask questions, and to assess the phenomena in a new light" (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:592). The study was exploratory, making use of the nominal group technique (Lloyd 2011) to elicit constructs from groups of employees at three different levels on the two mines who were asked to respond to questions about organisational energy. The research could be regarded as a case study as it took place within one large mining company. Written permission to conduct the study in the company was obtained.

4.1 Research strategy

The nominal group technique was used to identify the drivers and inhibitors of organisational energy. The nominal group technique results in valid data as the constructs are elicited from the participants and are not influenced by the researcher's cognitions or biases (Miller 2009, Lloyd 2011). This is particularly important in research such as the present study, where the facilitator is employed by the organisation. The nominal group technique is an effective research method for group discussions as it can break down barriers created by group thinking, which can limit group creativity and reduce the number of ideas generated. It was chosen because it minimises assertive individuals' domination and provides a process for eliciting responses in an unbiased way from all members of the group (Van der Waal & Uys 2009). Because voting for the constructs takes the form of a secret ballot, each idea has an equal chance of being used, resulting in an unbiased ranking of ideas generated by the group. This technique

has been used successfully where individual perceptions are being reviewed in a group and it is a commonly used method in problem identification and change management situations in organisations (Lloyd 2011).

4.2 Population and sampling

The research was undertaken at two mines, each of which employ approximately 11 000 employees. The framework used to differentiate the levels in the organisation was the leadership pipeline as described by Drotter (2010). The company used in this investigation has a job evaluation hierarchy which is easily mapped onto the levels as described in the pipeline shown in Table 1 above. The population for the study consisted of employees grouped according to these levels. The first group comprised semi-skilled operators at the level of “manage self”. The second group was at the “manage others” level and consisted of first-line managers. The third group consisted of more senior managers at the next two levels, namely “manage managers” and “manage function”. The sampling method was non-probability judgement sampling (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler 2008) where the criterion was the three pipeline levels described above. Two nominal groups per level were run. Fifty-eight employees took part in the process. The number of participants at each level and their job titles were as follows:

Table 2
Sample Description

Level description	Numbers in sample	Job titles
Manage self	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miner • Continuous miner operator • Shuttle car operator • Tractor driver • Artisan
Manage others	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift boss • Foreman • Mine overseer • Chief foreman • Chief surveyor
Manage managers and manage function	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mine manager • Shaft manager • Section engineer • Manager engineering services • Planning manager • Human resource manager

4.3 Data collection

To manage the nominal group technique effectively, the process needs to be face-to-face, and each group should be homogeneous (Blumberg et al 2008). The members of each of the six groups therefore represented only one leadership pipeline level. All six groups were facilitated by one of the researchers under the supervision of a researcher experienced in nominal group research. For the “managing self” groups an interpreter was used to ensure that all participants understood each of the factors in their own vernacular. Each session started with a definition of organisational energies as described by Schiuma et al (2007) in Figure 1. The link between these energies and productive organisational energy was explained. The process to be followed in the

session was explained and discussed. The confidentiality of their input was assured and all participants were given the opportunity to opt out if they so desired. None of the participants did so. Participants were then asked to note down the five most important factors that they believed enabled organisational energy. Each group member was then given a turn to share their ideas, providing one idea at a time, facilitated by the researcher. Each issue was recorded, discussed by the group and clarified. This process continued until all the ideas had been used. Ideas that were similar were combined. For each factor, clarifying questions were asked to ensure that the way the factor had been named was correctly captured. The factor was then given a unique number for voting purposes. The factors and voting numbers were displayed clearly via an electronic spreadsheet on a screen. The participants then voted on individual voting slips for the five factors that they believed were the most important enablers of organisational energy. Participants were not required to rank their five factors. The same process was followed for the inhibiting factors of organisational energy. Then the group votes for all factors were counted and feedback was given to the group on the ranked results for their group. The session closed off with a general discussion of the results and the participants were thanked. The data were stored electronically at the end of each session to protect their integrity. All six sessions followed the same process.

4.4 Method of analysis

An advantage of the nominal group technique compared with other forms of focus groups is that the outcome is quantitative data. The data were amalgamated across the six groups by matching similar factors identified across the six groups. This made it possible to answer the research questions by ranking the items based on the number of votes recorded, from the highest impact factors to the lowest. To complement the results of the nominal group discussions, a force field analysis was constructed using the data to produce a depiction of the factors impacting on organisational energy. Schwering (2003) recommends force field analysis as a means of assisting leaders and stakeholders to identify, document and understand the forces likely to influence a specific issue. In this research the factors influencing productive organisational energy were studied.

5 Results and discussion

In this section the results of the group discussions are presented per research question with the accompanying discussion of the findings in the light of previous research.

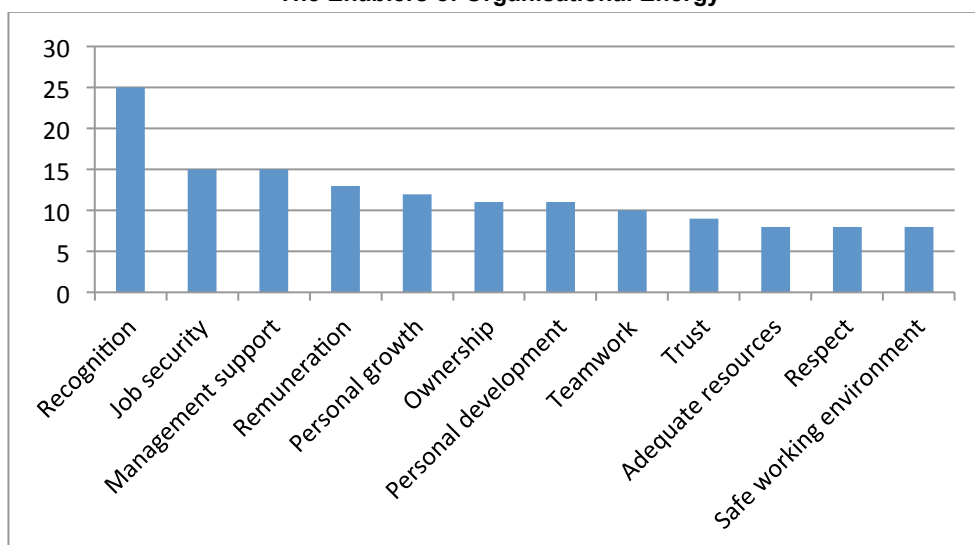
5.1 Research question 1: What are the enabling factors of productive organisational energy, and what is their relative strength?

The results from all six groups were combined and processed to produce an overall ranking of the enablers as shown in Table 3. The vertical axis represents the number of participants who voted for that factor.

The most highly ranked enabling factors of organisational energy as perceived by the focus groups from all three levels combined were recognition, job security, management support and remuneration. Recognition featured as an important enabler of organisational energy in all the focus groups. In the discussion of the factors it was made clear that by recognition was meant not only material recognition, but also all the other aspects of informal and personal recognition. Some participants described this

kind of recognition as the informal and “softer” type of recognition. Job security was also identified as an important driver of organisational energy; groups wanted to know that the organisation had a future and that they were included in that future. “Management support” reflected participants’ desire to contribute to improvement initiatives and their feeling that they needed the support of management in order to do this. Support would ensure that the right quality and quantity of work was being completed. Remuneration also featured strongly and cannot be ignored as an important driver of organisational energy. Remuneration was defined as fair reward for the work being done. It had to be market-related and individuals needed to feel that they were paid fairly for what they were worth to the company.

Table 3
The Enablers of Organisational Energy



The trust referred to by the participants had two aspects to it: not only did they feel that they were trusted by their immediate manager but trust was reflected in their direct reports trusting them to do the right thing. The explanation given for ownership was that individuals felt that they needed the freedom to take control and manage their responsibilities with the least amount of interference. Adequate resources were defined broadly as financial, people and equipment resources.

In discussing the findings, it is clear that the factors identified have an impact at both an individual and a team level. This supports the work of Schiuma et al (2007), who propose that energy is created at an individual level and at a team level, and these are the two main building blocks of energy in an organisation. From our research findings, the factors of recognition, job security and remuneration would tend to generate individual energy, while management support and personal growth opportunities have an impact at both an individual and a team level. In the discussions with focus group participants they were asked how the factors were created and who was responsible for creating them. The factors of recognition, job security, remuneration, management support and personal growth opportunities were seen as the result of drivers created by the organisation through organisational practices and performance. Two of them, namely recognition and management support, depend partly on leadership within the

organisation, which is responsible for making these drivers positive and thus generating energy.

The enablers identified in this research support earlier findings. Schiuma et al (2007) found that career development and personal growth were important drivers of team energy – similar to the personal growth opportunities and personal development elements in this research, although these are ranked slightly lower (fifth and seventh) than they were in the ranking by Schiuma et al. Mathew (2007) identified teamwork, trust and support as important factors contributing to a productive culture and these also overlap with the enablers in our research.

As noted earlier, Cole et al (2005) examined the relationship between the collective energy of individuals in an organisation and the performance of those companies. They found a positive correlation and this has important implications for organisational success. The factors that drive organisational energy do not simply produce happy or satisfied workers; the outcome is linked directly to organisational performance. In this study it was found that the factors of recognition, job security, management support, personal growth opportunities and ownership are the most important energy enablers and the company in which the research took place would do well to find practical ways to enhance these factors, thus driving performance. A more extensive study would be necessary to generalise the enablers to a broader population.

Recognition deserves particular attention in the interpretation of the results. It is by far the strongest enabler in this study. Recognition was identified as an enabler by all three levels in this study (see 5.3 below). It was also a key driver in the earlier work of Lamberti (2010). The classic research undertaken by Herzberg (1968) also identified recognition as one of the most important motivators of behaviour. This study supports the Herzberg findings to the extent that of the six most important enablers (recognition, job security, management support, remuneration, personal growth opportunities, ownership), four are “motivators” in Herzberg’s terms, as opposed to his “hygiene” factors. Job security and remuneration would be defined as hygiene factors and Herzberg’s theory argues that they need to be taken care of so that they do not act as dissatisfiers, but they are not motivators. The theory states unequivocally that “money is not a motivator”. Organisations and managers need to be reminded of the power of recognition as a key driver of organisational energy and this research emphasises that observation.

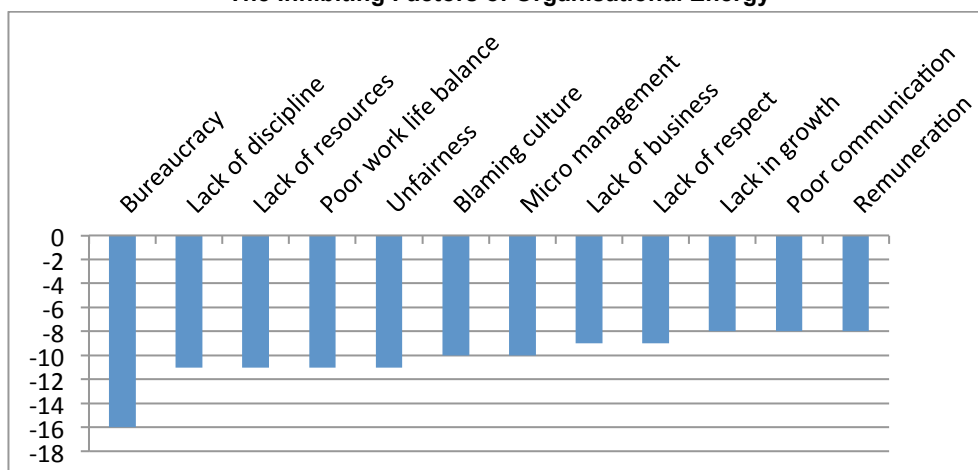
5.2 Research question 2: What are the inhibiting factors of productive organisational energy, and what is their relative strength?

The amalgamated results for all six groups are shown below. As in the case of the enabling factors, the inhibiting factors identified by all three levels of respondents were integrated to produce a weighted ranking of the five most important inhibiting factors. The vertical axis represents the number of votes the item received. The scale is shown as negative because these are the energy-sapping factors.

The most important inhibiting factors were bureaucracy, lack of discipline, lack of resources and poor work/life balance. An example of bureaucracy was the need to obtain approval repeatedly for resources and materials within the organisation. This was seen as a day-to-day governance issue and an example of red tape that affects decisions and decision making. Participants reported that both bureaucracy and lack of discipline result in a lack of control which impacts negatively on individual energy. Lack of discipline was described as a failure by staff members to follow policies and

procedures, requiring effort and energy on the part of management in order to deal with it. "Lack of resources" refers to financial, people, equipment and other materials required to get the work done.

Table 4
The Inhibiting Factors of Organisational Energy



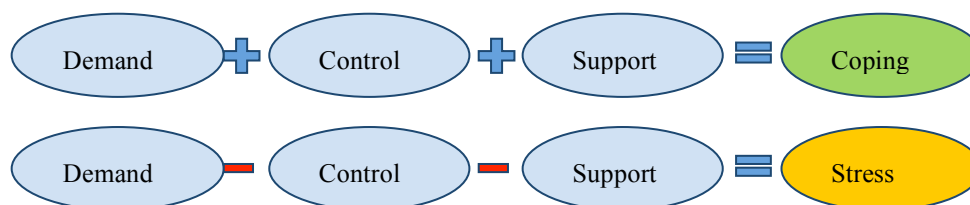
Problems relating to work/life balance were mentioned with specific reference to long working hours as well as the expectation that staff members had to be available twenty-four hours a day to deal with work-related problems. During the discussions focus group members also referred to "micro-management". This was seen as being told what to do and how, which could also be interpreted as a lack of trust by superiors. It had to do with not allowing individuals to make decisions themselves. A frustration was that in some cases even small details were being decided by management.

It is instructive to compare these findings with previous research on the subject. Nel's (2011) research identified trust, hope and respect as important factors and these were negatively affected by inhibitors such as bureaucracy, lack of discipline, lack of resources, poor work/life balance, unfairness and a blaming culture identified in this research. Similarly, Lamberti's (2010) research identified employee engagement (including communication, recognition and job control) as well as leadership, trust and human resource practices as drivers of organisational energy. The inhibitors in our research would have the effect of counteracting these drivers, by impacting negatively on employees and their willingness to apply energy.

In discussing the inhibiting factors, focus group members mentioned factors which are largely beyond their control. These are organisational factors that create a working environment which has a negative impact on the energy felt by employees and their resulting performance.

Karasek's (1979) model is relevant as it indicates that every job makes specific demands and with the appropriate control and support, the job should be manageable in such a way that the individual feels that he or she is coping and is equal to the demands of the job.

Figure 2
Karasek's Model of Job Demands



Source: Karasek, RA. 1979. Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24(2):285-285.

The inhibiting factors in our research fall into the categories of control and support. Bureaucracy and lack of discipline have a direct effect on the control element in the model, whereas lack of resources, poor work/life balance and unfairness imply a lack of support. This results in individuals who have difficulty dealing with the demands of the job, resulting in frustration because they lack the tools they need, and work long hours, which in turn impacts on work/life balance. The inhibiting factors could also be tied to emotional exhaustion caused by high levels of job pressure and low levels of control (Taris & Schreurs 2009).

The factors inhibiting organisational energy will affect the well-being and happiness of individuals as a result of their inability to cope with the job demands, because of a lack of support and job control. These organisational factors will impact directly on the individual's energy. Conversely, with the correct amount of control and support, energy is created to deal with work demands. This in turn leads to coping and what Taris and Schreurs (2009) refer to as the "happy worker".

The importance of identifying energy inhibitors is emphasised by the findings of Bruch and Vogel (2011a), who found that leaders who do not pay attention to productive (and unproductive) energy may drive their organisations into "complacency, resignation, burnout, or corrosion". The earlier work of Karasek (1979) is also instructive; in his view if individuals do not have control over resources, the energy which they possess will manifest as stress and will not contribute to organisational energy

Schiama et al (2007) describe a model of energy dynamics (see 2.1 above) in which organisational energy dynamics are driven by organisational infrastructure, individual behaviour and social interactions. The inhibiting factors in this study include infrastructural aspects such as bureaucracy, lack of resources and lack of business stability. Bureaucracy was identified as the most important inhibitor. Again, this research reinforces previous studies and resultant models of organisational energy.

If the enablers and inhibitors are taken together, the majority of factors are "external" (hygiene factors in Herzberg's (1968) model). Respondents in this study tended to identify aspects which relate to how they are treated, factors which would be the responsibility of others to correct. This suggests a transactional climate in which employees and managers expect to be provided with resources and other support in return for their energy and effort. The alternative would be an organisational culture in which employees feel committed to the company and take ownership for making sure that as far as possible enablers exist and the inhibitors are minimised, through their own efforts. This level of employee engagement has been shown consistently to

produce high-performing companies (Lamberti 2010; Lok & Crawford 2004; Davenport & Harding 2010).

5.3 Research question 3: Are the enabling and inhibiting factors different for different levels in the organisation?

The highest ranking enabling factors for the different levels of managing self, managing others and managing managers are represented in Table 5.

The data indicate that apart from recognition, which was important for all three levels, and trust and support, which were both important for two of the groups, the enabling factors are different for the three levels.

Table 5
The main enabling factors per level

Top five ranking	Managing self	Managing others	Managing managers
1	Recognition	Teamwork	Responsibility
2	Remuneration	Meeting targets	Recognition
3	Safe working environment	Recognition	Personal growth opportunities
4	Training	Trust	Job security
5	Management support	Support	Trust

The top five factors for the managing self level are recognition, remuneration, a safe working environment, training, and support from management. The last four factors are unique to this level. During the focus group discussions it was clear that employees at this level have a strong need to feel valued and to be developed and that the level of energy is dependent on inputs from their managers. The importance of a safe working environment is related to the inherent risk attached to working on a mine. Charan, Drotter and Noel (2001) describe the work of those “managing self” as consisting in achieving results through an individual’s own personal effort, managing oneself, and completing individual tasks. It is therefore not surprising that respondents at this level identify feeling valued (recognition), remuneration, a safe working environment and training as the most important enablers. They would be found at the lower levels of Maslow’s seminal (1943) hierarchy of needs, which indicates that employees at the managing self level are likely to need more basic drivers such as security, safety and reasonable pay. Remuneration as an enabler contradicts Herzberg’s (1968) seminal work on motivators. They would also need to feel that there are training opportunities so that they can improve their performance and prospects. Two specific work values identified by Charan et al (2001) are “developing technical skills” and “planning for personal success” and these would be enhanced by appropriate training opportunities. It is perhaps surprising that “leadership” was not identified specifically, although it can be seen as similar to “management support” by employees at this level.

At the next level of managing others it is important for employees to have clear targets and to be able to work as a team to achieve those targets. Employees at this level would also like to be recognised for their contribution, not only financially, but in other ways as well. They would like to feel that the importance of their contribution is acknowledged. They also need to feel that they have the trust and support of their managers and that this is reflected in direct reports on their work. Energy at this level is perceived to be dependent on those above and below them in the organisational hierarchy. At this level behaviour shifts from getting results through one’s own efforts to achieving results through others and through teamwork. Not surprisingly, the most

important enabler identified in this study was “teamwork”. Charan et al (2001) also identify “achieving team results” as an important work value. Similarly, this research identifies “meeting targets” as an important enabler. At this level employees who are managing others have a mindset characterised by the question “How can I motivate my team and make their work easier?”

Representatives of the most senior level in the research, those who are managing managers, indicated that they want to have control over the work that is done, and to be recognised for what they achieve. They stressed the importance of job security and growth opportunities. It is also very important for them to operate in a climate of trust. At this level they are dependent on their managers for some of the input that will release productive energy. People who work at this level have to achieve results through multiple teams and build management expertise in others (Charan et al 2001). They have to engage in longer term planning, with a time horizon of up to two years. In order to do this they need to be given an appropriate level of responsibility, the strongest enabler identified in this research for this level. Further, whereas the junior level sought “training”, this level requires “personal growth opportunities”.

The data in Table 5 indicate that the overriding finding for this research question is that apart from the overlapping factors of recognition, trust and support, the enabling factors for the three levels within the organisation are different. This reinforces the pipeline framework of Drotter (2010), which defines the levels in terms of distinct needs and work values.

In examining the inhibiting factors for the three levels, the rankings were compared to produce a list of the top five factors for the levels as classified by Drotter (2010). These factors are represented in Table 6. The data show that the inhibiting factors are completely different for the three levels for all factors.

Table 6
The main inhibiting factors per level

Top five ranking	Managing self	Managing others	Managing managers
1	Remuneration	Lack of skills	Bureaucracy
2	Unfairness	Poor decision making	Micromanagement by leaders
3	Poor work/life balance	Lack of resources	Lack of business stability
4	Lack of growth opportunities	Blaming culture	Lack of trust
5	Unsafe working environment	Absenteeism by team members	Indecisiveness by leadership

Employees at the level of managing self-ranked remuneration, being treated unfairly, and poor work/life balance as the most important inhibitors, followed by lack of growth opportunities and unsafe working conditions. The role of remuneration cannot be underestimated as it was shown to be the second most important enabler, but also the highest ranking inhibitor at this level. If properly managed it can be a source of energy, but if remuneration is perceived to be inadequate or unfair it inhibits the application of energy. It has the potential to be an important dissatisfier. In Herzberg’s (1968) terms it can demotivate, but when it is taken care of it does not motivate – although it does cease to dissatisfy. This study found remuneration to play an important role in releasing energy, both as an enabler and as an inhibitor. It needs to be managed carefully, but cannot be regarded as a panacea given Herzberg’s arguments about its limitations as a motivator.

Most of the factors on the list of inhibitors at this level relate to the way people are “treated”. If they are treated unfairly, or poorly paid, or perceive working conditions to be unsafe, they will withhold energy. At the same time the organisation needs to provide growth opportunities and facilitate a reasonable work/life balance. In summary, these factors suggest that at the lowest levels the employees indicate that a perceived lack of control over their work inhibits their level of organisational energy. Managers of self list lack of growth opportunities and unsafe working conditions as inhibitors, the corresponding enablers being training and safe working conditions. It is to be expected that some of items identified as enablers will be seen as inhibitors when they are not provided. Creating a climate of energy requires companies to provide an environment where the enablers exist, and where inhibitors are reduced to a minimum.

Employees who manage others list a different set of inhibitors. “Lack of skills” applies to their own skills and, more importantly, to frustrations caused by a perception that people who report directly to them lack skills. They also point to problems created by the level above them when they refer to poor decision making, a lack of resources, and a blaming culture. Absenteeism of team members also acts as an important inhibitor. These managers tend to blame others (lack of skills, lack of resources, and absenteeism of team members). It would be in a company’s interests to encourage managers to take responsibility for dealing with the inhibitors themselves and create a climate where energy can be released.

The most senior group represented in the research also criticise what they perceive to be problems created by their superiors: bureaucracy, micromanagement, lack of trust, and indecisiveness by leadership in the company. The fact that first-line managers (managing others) also sought to blame their bosses suggests an endemic problem of seeing frustrations as the fault of those at the level above. If a perception exists that others are to blame for sapping energy, a new culture in which managers take responsibility for bringing about change instead of complaining about the behaviour of others would need to be created. Similar findings have been noted in studies dealing with transformational leadership, organisational culture, and employee engagement (Davenport & Harding 2010; Kotter 1995; Daft 2011). Particularly at this level it might be expected that senior managers would identify inhibitors for which they can take responsibility themselves.

The findings from this part of the research clearly show that there is no overlap between the inhibitors cited by the different levels in the research. This implies that organisations wishing to foster energy would need to find different solutions based on the needs at each level. There is no single set of solutions which can be applied across all levels.

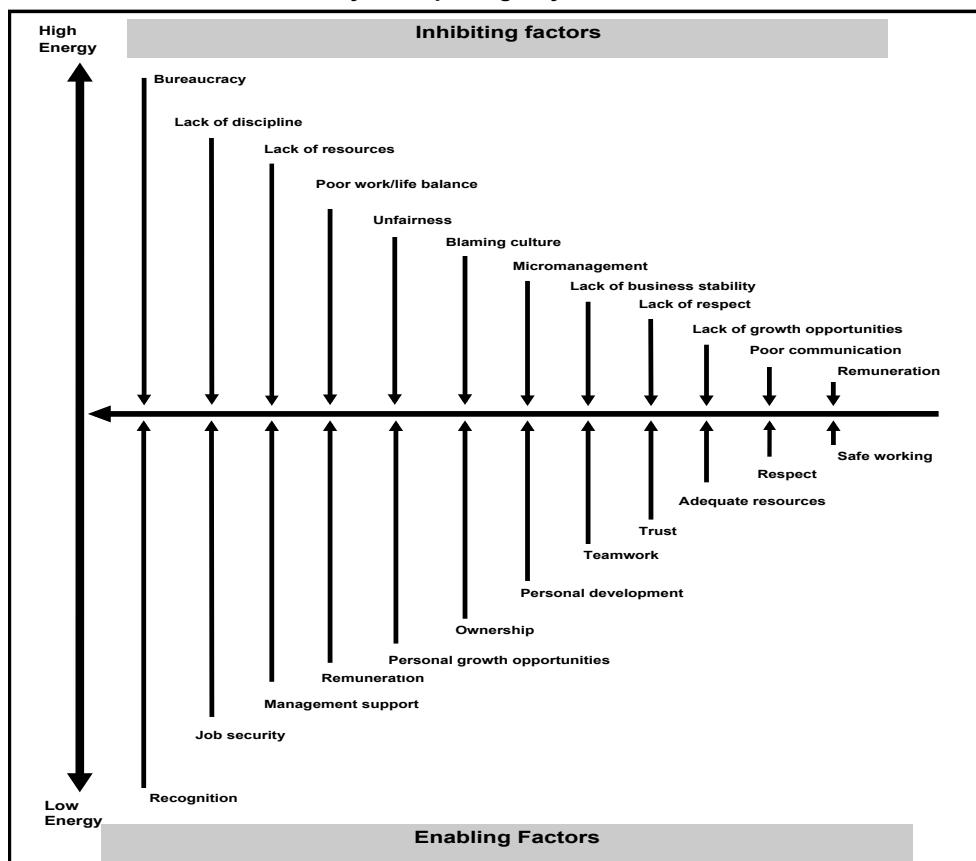
6 Conclusions

This research was aimed at building on the theory and findings from the research undertaken by Bruch and Ghosal (2003), Schiuma et al (2007) and Lamberti (2010) as their results did not include empirical data supporting the inhibiting and enabling factors of productive organisational energy. In this study a qualitative approach enabled the development of a model identifying the enabling and inhibiting factors of organisational energy which could be useful in the management and motivation of employees in a South African context to drive organisational success.

In order to produce the model, the framework of a force field analysis was used. Force field analysis (Brager & Holloway 1992; Schwering 2003), which is based on the

seminal work of Kurt Lewin, is a technique for evaluating and depicting forces that impact on a situation. Figure 3 is the analysis drawn up from the data on all six groups. It shows the vertical axis as the scale which measures the level of productive organisational energy, ranging from high energy at the top to low energy at the bottom. The horizontal line indicates the current level of energy. For presentation reasons the horizontal line is placed at the midpoint of the vertical line. In applied situations this line would be placed at the perceived or measured level of organisational energy. The most important inhibitors and enablers of organisational energy were then added as arrows: the longer the arrow, the more important the construct. The usefulness of force field analysis is that it shows managers how to “push the horizontal arrow up” in order to increase the energy level in the organisation. In order to do this, managers must place more emphasis on the enablers and reduce the influence of each inhibitor. The force field analysis provides the practical framework for managers to use to maximise organisational energy.

Figure 3
Force Field Analysis Depicting Key Enablers and Inhibitors



Based on the findings of the study, the key focus areas for the enhancement of productive organisational energy are those influencing factors that are individual and personal. Recognition has been identified as a key driver; the discussions that took

place in the groups indicate that it is not only tangible and financial recognition that is important, but also the softer side of personal engagement and positive feedback. Ensuring a feeling of job security and providing management support were also important enabling factors.

Approximately half the enablers are factors which have to do with the way people are "treated" (job security, management support, remuneration, adequate resources, safe working conditions). In order to create an environment where organisational energy is maximised, these factors need to be provided as far as possible. Once a climate has been created in which employees feel that these factors in their working environment are being addressed, they are able to apply energy in proportion to the extent to which the "internal" factors of recognition, personal growth opportunities, ownership, personal development, trust and respect are evident. Creating the right climate should not only be the responsibility of "the company" or top management. As long as managers at the levels included in this research take it upon themselves to bring about needed changes, instead of blaming others, it will be possible to make progress and create energy (Handy 1993). It is necessary to move away from a "transactional" contract with employees in which the individual commits energy only in response to incentives provided by the company. Instead, a culture of ownership and engagement should be encouraged in which employees willingly exert effort and energy because they feel they are part of the organisation and enjoy their work.

The inhibiting factors revolved around the perceived lack of support given to individuals and insufficient control of demands placed on them. The groups highlighted bureaucracy, a lack of discipline and resources, poor work/life balance and perceived unfairness as negative drivers. Even more so than the enablers, the inhibitors are factors within the control of managers; they have to do with the way employees are treated.

The findings from this research support previous results. Career development, growth and trust (Schiuma et al 2007), teamwork, trust and support (Mathew 2007), recognition, trust, human resources practices (Lamberti 2010), control and support (Karasek 1979) are confirmed in this research as key drivers of individual, team and organisational energy. This research adds a new dimension to the literature, namely the observation that the factors that influence organisational energy are different for different levels in the organisation. In addition, the factors of job security, respect, ownership, remuneration, bureaucracy, lack of discipline and micromanagement which were not mentioned in the literature are found to be important enablers and inhibitors in a South African context. The findings also support the model of energy dynamics in organisations referred to in Figure 1 (Schiuma et al 2007). Individual energy dynamics, driven by individual behaviour, have been identified. Team and organisational energy dynamics have also been shown to play a role and these are driven by social interactions and by organisational infrastructure respectively.

In the discussions with the group members and in the interpretation of the results of the research, a number of recommendations have been made which should assist South African companies to increase organisational energy. For companies and leaders to find ways to increase productive organisational energy they would need to attend to both enablers and inhibitors. Company leadership has a role to play but managers carry an equal responsibility to take ownership of factors affecting their energy and to address them. Leadership plays an important part as it is leaders who establish the systems and practices which promote aspects such as recognition and job security and limit the negative effects of bureaucracy and lack of discipline. Ultimately,

however, it is the actions of employees at all levels who have the determination to identify the energy factors which affect them and bring them to the attention of those with the influence to change them, but also the will to deal with the factors they can influence directly.

Research limitations and future research ideas

The sample consisted of employees at the three levels as described above and cannot therefore be generalised to all employees. Participants in the study all worked for the same company, albeit at two different mines. The sample size for this exploratory research was relatively small. For these reasons the results cannot be applied to all employees in other organisations, although it is expected that results would be similar in other mining companies. As this is exploratory qualitative research it cannot be regarded as confirmatory.

Based on the factors identified in this study, a quantitative large-scale study could be conducted to validate the findings. Further exploration needs to be done on the causal differences between the three levels of employees and to see whether these factors differ across industries.

List of references

- Arnolds, CA, Boshoff, C, Mazibuko, NE & Klemz BR. 2010. The motivational impact of job security, recognition, monetary incentives and training on the job performance of blue collar manufacturing employees. *South African Journal of Labour Relations* 34(1):86-102.
- Bierema, LL. 2008. Adult learning in the workplace: Emotion work or emotion learning? *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (120):55-64.
- Blumberg, B, Cooper, DR, & Schindler, PS. 2008. *Business research methods*. McGraw-Hill Higher Education. London.
- Brager, G & Holloway, S. 1992. Assessing prospects for organizational change: The use of force field analysis, in *Organizational change and development in human service organizations*, edited by D Bargal & D Schmid. Binghamton, NY: Haworth: 15-28.
- Bruch, H & Ghoshal, S. 2003. Unleashing organizational energy. *MIT Sloan Management Review* 45(1):45.
- Bruch, H & Ghoshal, S. 2004. Management is the art of doing and getting done. *Business Strategy Review* 15(3):4.
- Bruch, H & Vogel, B. 2011a. *Fully charged: How great leaders boost their organization's energy and ignite high performance*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Bruch, H & Vogel, B. 2011b. Strategies for creating and sustaining organizational energy. *Employment Relations Today* 38(2):51-61.
- Cameron, KS, Bright, D & Caza, A. 2004. Exploring the relationships between organizational virtuousness and performance: PROD. *The American Behavioral Scientist* 47(6):766.
- Charan, R, Drotter, S & Noel, J. 2001. *The leadership pipeline: How to build the leadership-powered company*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cherniss, C, Extein, M, Golemand, D, & Weissberg, RP. 2006. Emotional Intelligence: What does the research really indicate. *Educational Psychologist* 41(4):239-245.

- Cole, MS & Bruch, H. 2006. Organizational identity strength, identification, and commitment and their relationships to turnover intention: Does organizational hierarchy matter? *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 27(5):585-605.
- Cole, MS, Bruch, H & Vogel, B. 2005. Development and validation of a measure of organizational energy. *Academy of Management Best Conference Paper*, V1, V1-V6.
- Cross, R, Baker, W & Parker, A. 2003. What creates energy in organizations? *MIT Sloan Management Review* Summer:51-56.
- Daft, RL. 2011. *The Leadership Experience*. South Western: Cengage Learning. Mason Ohio
- Davenport, TO & Harding, SD. 2010. *Manager redefined: The competitive advantage in the middle of your organisation*. 1st edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Derman, L. 2008. Organisational energy and individual well-being. Doctoral thesis, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Derman, L, Barkhuizen, N & Stanz, K. 2011. The validation of a measure of organisational energy in the South African context. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management* 9(1).
- Donaldson-Feilder, E & Bond, FW. 2004. The relative importance of psychological acceptance and emotional intelligence to workplace well-being. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 32(2):187-203.
- Donnelly, R. 2008. Careers and temporal flexibility in the new economy: An Anglo-Dutch comparison of the organisation of consultancy work. *Human Resource Journal*. 18(3):197-215.
- Downey, JA. 2008. Hierarchy and happiness: The influence of emotion on administrative job satisfaction. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice* 32(8):597-606.
- Drotter, S. 2010. Leadership pipeline. *Leadership Excellence* 27(8):11.
- Drotter, S & Charan, R. 2001 Building leaders at every level: A leadership pipeline. *Ivey Business Journal* May/June:21-27.
- Dutton, JE. 2003. *Energize your workplace: How to create and sustain high-quality connections at work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, C & Redfern, D. 2010. How can employee engagement be improved at the RRG group? (part 2) *Industrial and Commercial Training*. 42(6):330-334.
- Fard, HD, Rostamy, AAA & Taghiloo, H. 2009. How types of organisational cultures contribute in shaping learning organisations. *Singapore Management Review* 31(1):49-61.
- Handy, C. 1993. *Understanding organizations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Herzberg, F. 1968. One more time: How do you motivate employees? *Harvard Business Review* January-February:53-62.
- Jamrog, JJ, Vickers, M, Overholt, MH & Morrison, CL. 2008. High-performance organizations: Finding the elements of excellence. *People and Strategy* 31(1):29.
- Karasek, RA. 1979. Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24(2):285-285.
- Kotter, JP. 1995. Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review* March-April:59-67.

- Lamberti, H. 2010. *The drivers of productive organisational energy*. Unpublished MBA Research Report from Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, 1-95.
- Leedy, P & Ormrod, JE. 2002 *Practical research, planning and design*. 7th edition. NJ: Prentice-Hall. Boston
- Lloyd, S. 2011. Applying the nominal group technique to specify the domain of a construct. *Qualitative Market Research* 14(1):105.
- Lok, P & Crawford, J. 2004. The effect of organisational culture and leadership style on job satisfaction and organisational commitment: A cross-national comparison. *The Journal of Management Development* 23(3/4):321-338.
- Maslow, AF. 1943. A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review* 50:370-396.
- Mathew, J. 2007. The relationship of organisational culture with productivity and quality. *Employee Relations* 29(6):677-695.
- Miller, L. 2009. Evidence-based instruction: A classroom experiment comparing nominal and brainstorming groups. *Organization Management Journal* 6(4): 229-238.
- Nel, J. 2011. *Mindset transformation*. Johannesburg: Mac Consulting.
- Quinn, RW & Dutton, JE. 2005. Coordinating as energy-in-conversation. *Academy of Management Review* 30(1):36-57.
- Saunders, M, Lewis, P & Thornhill, A 2009. *Research methods for business students*. 5th edition. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Schiama, G, Mason, S & Kennerley, M. 2007. Assessing energy within organisations. *Measuring Business Excellence* 11(3):69.
- Schwering, RE. 2003. Focusing leadership through force field analysis: New variations on a venerable planning tool. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 24(7):361.
- Smith, PAC & Tosey, P. 1999. Assessing the learning organisation, part 1: Theoretical Foundations. *The Learning Organisation* 6(2):7-75.
- Taormina, RJ. 2008. Interrelating leadership behaviors, organizational socialization, and organizational culture. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 29(1):85-102.
- Taris, TW & Schreurs, PJG. 2009. Well-being and organizational performance: An organizational-level test of the happy-productive worker hypothesis. *Work & Stress* 23(2):120-136.
- Van der Waal, CS & Uys, JM. 2009. Applying the nominal group technique in an employment relations conflict situation: A case study of a university maintenance section in South Africa. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* 7(1):137-143.
- White, RJ. 2008. Six factors for building a team. *Electrical Wholesaling*. Available at: <http://iims.uthscsa.edu/sites/iims-drupal/files/TeamProcess-8.pdf> (accessed on 10th October 2011).
- Wildermuth, CMS & Pauken, PD. 2008. A perfect match: Decoding employee engagement - part I: Engaging cultures and leaders. *Industrial and Commercial Training* 40(3):122-128.
- Zikmund, WG. 2003. In Thompson (Ed.), *Business research methods* (Seventh ed.). Ohio, USA: South-Western.