

## The Role of Social Skills in Work Engagement and Burnout: A Systematic Review

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**This study aims to investigate the role of social skills (SS) in work engagement (WE) and burnout through a Systematic Review (SR). The SR was performed in Scopus and Web of Science databases using the PRISMA-ScR approach. Eighteen research were selected, and the findings show a direct and indirect correlation between SS, positive with WE, and negative with burnout. It is concluded that SS acts as a protective factor for workers' health and, consequently, for better institutional results, and interventions should be implemented with a focus on developing workers' SS to promote engagement and prevent burnout.**

**Keywords:** Social Skills. Work Engagement. Burnout. Job Demands-Resources Theory. JD-R Model.

### Introduction

The incorporation of new technologies, combined with increased uncertainty and ambiguity, has resulted in more volatile professional performance, with the social space of work being exercised in the same physical space as individuals' private lives, forcing them to constantly change their mode of social action when they are required, which can have an influence on their health and performance [1]. Positive psychology research emphasizes the relevance of psychosocial protection in ensuring health throughout one's working life [2]. Organizations should include elements that mitigate possible risks and harms to worker health and increase motivation, engagement, and well-being [1].

Work engagement (WE) results from the motivational nature of resources [4]. It can be defined as a positive motivational state toward work that manifests itself in feelings of vigor, dedication, and absorption [3], according to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which assumes that all

characteristics of the work context can be modeled by job demands and resources [3]. It is desirable for organizations and workers because it promotes well-being and raises performance [4].

Burnout, on the other hand, is defined as a state of exhaustion related to the work environment caused by the presence of high demands and a lack of resources [5], which causes individuals to be unable to cope with the negative influences of demands and, as a result, fail to achieve their goals and are frustrated [6].

Social Skills (SS) constitute a descriptive construct of social classes and performances in a person's behavioral repertoire in managing interpersonal situations [7]. Communication, civility, making and maintaining friendships, empathy, assertiveness, expressing solidarity, resolving conflicts and interpersonal problems, expressing affection and intimacy in sexual-affective relationships, coordinating groups, and speaking in public constitute a general portfolio of relevant SS [7,8]. SS studies demonstrate that they operate as protective factors and that their absence is a risk factor [8].

Little research has looked at SS as a driver of WE and burnout prevention. The association between SS and burnout [10] and engagement [9,10] has been investigated, but no worker samples were used. Furthermore, the perspective of WE is still limited by the lack of studies that address its antecedents and behavioral consequences [4].

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Given the positive effects of engagement and the negative consequences of burnout, understanding their interrelationships with SS can aid in developing interventions focused on drivers of engagement and mental health. Thus, this study aims to conduct a literature review to investigate the role of SS in WE and burnout.

## Materials and Methods

This study was conducted through a Systematic Review (SR) using the PRISMA method [11], with the following guiding question: What are the possible interrelationships of social skills with work engagement and burnout?

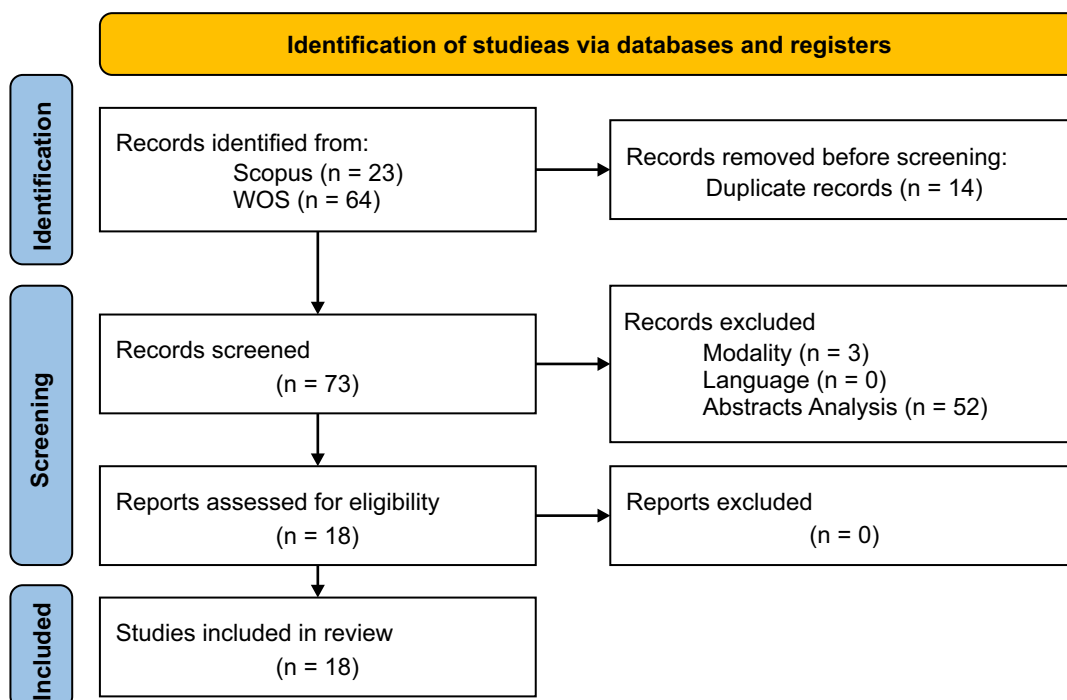
The search used strings in the Scopus and Web of Science (WOS) databases. For the definition of specific terms for SS, the classes of SS were considered [7,8]. Furthermore, tests and adjustments were conducted until more qualified results were obtained. The following string was employed: ("social skills" OR

communication OR civility OR friendship OR empathy OR assertiveness OR solidarity OR "resolving (conflicts or interpersonal problems)" OR affection OR "coordinating groups" OR "speaking in public" OR "social intelligence" OR "teamwork" OR "emotional intelligence" OR "leadership") + "work engagement" + "burnout" + ("Job demands-resources" OR "Job demand-resource" OR "JD-R")".

The search was conducted in March 2022, and the preliminary screening retrieved 87 articles. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied: removal of duplicates; inclusion of scientific articles, excluding books, book chapters, and other textual forms; and articles in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

As a result, the abstracts were analyzed to identify articles that addressed some association between at least one of the SS classes or subclasses with WE and burnout within the scope of the JD-R model. It resulted in the exclusion of 52 texts. Figure 1 illustrates the study selection procedure.

**Figure 1.** SR flow diagram. Identification of studies via databases and registers.



Source: Adapted from PRISMA 2020 [11].

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 lists the articles retrieved as a result of the execution of this SR.

The interpersonal interactions addressed were classified considering the SS classes to identify the SS discussed in the articles [7]. The framework was based on the theoretical references to characterize the concepts addressed. In overlapping concepts with many classes, the class with the most

similarity to the concept was chosen. It should be highlighted that the studies indirectly addressed SS by examining how other constructs involving interpersonal interactions, such as leadership and social support, influence engagement or burnout. The SS "coordinating groups" were addressed in studies that examined the impact of various leadership styles, and they are directly or indirectly positively associated with WE and negatively associated with burnout.

**Table 1.** List of selected articles.

Article Title
Emotional intelligence, work, and psychological outcomes in a public service context [12]
Empowering leaders optimize working conditions for engagement: A multilevel study [13]
Drivers of work engagement: An examination of core self-evaluations and psychological climate among hotel employees [14]
Engaging leadership in the job demands-resources model [15]
Associations of occupational stressors, perceived organizational support, and psychological capital with work engagement among chinese female nurses [16]
Organizational goal ambiguity and senior public managers' engagement: does organizational social capital make a difference? [17]
The hardier you are, the healthier you become. May hardiness and engagement explain the relationship between leadership and employees' health? [18]
How does emotional intelligence help teachers to stay engaged? Cross-validation of a moderated mediation model [19]
Engaging leader - Engaged employees? A cross-lagged study on employee engagement [20]
Drivers of employee engagement in global virtual teams [21]
Authentic leadership and psychological capital in job demands-resources model among Pakistani university teachers [22]
The influence of job and individual resources on work engagement among chinese police officers: A moderated mediation model [23]
The home care work environment's relationships with work engagement and burnout: A cross-sectional multi-centre study in Switzerland [24]
How engaging leaders foster employees' work engagement [25]
Job demands-resources model, transformational leadership and organizational performance: a multilevel study [26]
A dual path model of work-related well-being in healthcare and social work settings: the interweaving between trait emotional intelligence, end-user job demands, coworkers related job resources, Burnout, and work engagement [27]
Do digital competencies and social support boost work engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic? [28]
Gain or loss: the double-edged effect of empowering leadership on employees' innovative behaviours [29]

Engaged leadership facilitates the increase of resources while decreasing demands, resulting in an indirect relationship between burnout and WE via demands and resources [15]. It has a beneficial impact on two resources (social support and autonomy) [20], as well as directly impacting WE through interactions with subordinates and indirectly through work resources [25]. Transformational leadership acts as a resource that can increase personal resources (resistance and resilience) and WE [18]. It also balances resources and demands, which helps to reduce burnout [26]. Empowering leadership has an indirect positive influence on WE and burnout, which is mediated by workers' trust in their leaders [29], as well as mobilizing and optimizing resources, which strengthens the effects of WE [13]. Finally, authentic leadership directly affects engagement and indirectly influences burnout (through self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience) [22]. "Empathy" was studied in studies that evaluated leaders' support for their subordinates and support among members of work teams. It has a direct positive [14,16,17,23,24] and an indirect positive correlation with engagement [23], is directly and negatively related to burnout [24], or does not have an interrelationship with engagement [28]. Social support [14,16,17,23,24] and interpersonal trust [17] are resources that have the potential to improve engagement [14,17], which can be mediated by job satisfaction [23]. Social support and exhaustion have a considerable negative association [24]. The SS "resolving conflicts and interpersonal problems" was investigated in studies that examined the relationship between emotional self-efficacy [23] and emotional intelligence (EI) [12,19,27], both of which are capacities that allow people to deal with their emotions and cushion their effects on interpersonal interactions. The former influences engagement positively [23]. In contrast, EI is a personal resource that influences engagement positively [12,19,27] while also moderating the effects of the work context on psychological outcomes [12], buffering intrapersonal and interpersonal processes,

and assisting professionals in coping with the harmful effects of stress [19]. EI protects against burnout by mitigating the probability of harming relationships, and it drives engagement by allowing the development of positive relationships [27]. Finally, "communication" is also directly and positively associated with WE [14,21,24], as well as directly and negatively related to burnout [24]. In this regard, the culture of information sharing can collaborate with the positive psychological climate [14], and formal and informal communication skills are critical for workers to positively adapt to remote work as predictors of engagement in virtual teams [21]. Managers who use task-oriented feedback procedures contribute to increased engagement and reduce the impacts of burnout [24].

## Conclusion

The findings of this study allowed us to identify the role of certain SS classes in engagement and burnout. They act as protective factors for workers' health, directly and indirectly related to engagement (positive effect) and burnout (negative effect) via resource mobilization and as work demand buffers. For better institutional results, interventions should focus on developing workers' SS to promote engagement and prevent burnout. It also provided an overview of the current literature, focusing on research investigating how interpersonal relationships between leaders and subordinates affect WE and burnout. The findings indicate that scientific studies addressing the relationship of SS as a theoretical-practical field with WE and burnout are still incipient and, as such, should be part of a future research agenda.

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