

Exploring HRM Meta-Features that Foster Employees' Innovative Work Behaviour in Times of Increasing Work–Life Conflict

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Today, employees' innovative work behaviour (IWB) is critical for companies' success. However, employees increasingly experience work–life conflict (WLC) which negatively influences performance at work. Human resource management (HRM) has the potential to foster employees' engagement in innovative activities and to reduce tensions between work and private life simultaneously. Our paper aims to advance understanding under which conditions these relations occur by exploring HRM meta-features. These are defined as overall characteristics of an HR system helping companies to communicate the content of HR practices in a way that leads to desired interpretations by employees. Using a qualitative, interview study approach, we find that HRM contributes to IWB and diminishes feelings of WLC mainly through the four meta-features 'individual orientation', 'discretion orientation', 'effort orientation' and 'expectancy orientation'. We link our findings to extant literature and provide suggestions for managers how these meta-features can be put into organizational practice.

Introduction

Innovation undoubtedly plays a central role in organizational competitiveness (Reuvers et al., 2008; Shalley, Gilson & Blum, 2009). However, companies cannot be innovative without their employees (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Consequently, employees' innovative work behaviour (IWB) – the intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas, processes, products or services within a work role, group or organization for the benefit of the individual, group or organization – is a specific key asset for firms' success in a fast-changing business environment (West & Farr, 1989, 1990; Janssen, 2000). Innovative behaviour at work is crucial for the whole workforce and not only for employees in innovation-oriented jobs (Axtell et al., 2000; Mumford, 2003; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). For most employees innovative job performance is a voluntary and discretionary behaviour that is generally not prescribed in formal job descriptions (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Janssen, 2000, 2001).

Besides the need for innovation, companies are confronted with the challenge that today working men and women are more likely than ever to struggle with the competing demands of work and private life – they experience work–life conflict (WLC) (Byron, 2005; Kinnunen & Mauno, 2008; Kinnunen et al., 2010). According to role theory, the domains of work and private life require different roles which often result in conflict such that participating in one domain becomes more complicated due to pressure and demands of being involved in the other, and vice versa (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Michel et al., 2010). The primary reason for the increase in WLC lies in changes in the demographic formation of the workforce (Aryee & Luk, 1996; Shih, Chiang & Hsu, 2010). The number of families facing the demands of child and elder care is rising steadily, as employees' average age and the number of women joining professional life are increasing (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; Arthur, 2003). Additionally, the past decades have been marked by organizational restructuring and

downsizing, causing increased workloads for employees (Burke & Cooper, 2000; Baumol, Blinder & Wolff, 2003; Lapalme, Tremblay & Simard, 2009). Moreover, the lines between working life and home life have become more blurred due to technological advances enabling employees to work outside traditional office hours and office space (Ng & Feldman, 2008).

Companies need to manage WLC because it is associated with a variety of negative consequences for individuals and organizations (Siegel et al., 2005; Van Daalen, Willemsen & Sanders, 2006). Involvement in more than one role, leading to WLC, can lower employees' job performance as people have a fixed amount of time and energy and different roles compete for the individual's limited resources (Evans & Bartolomé, 1984; Burke, 1989; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). According to Amstad et al. (2011), WLC is a potential cause of stress that has harmful effects on employee behaviour. Moreover, it is argued that employees who experience WLC find it more difficult to engage in discretionary behaviour than in 'normal' job behaviour (Allen et al., 2000; Gilboa et al., 2008). Huhtala and Parzefall (2007) have explained how burnout – a potential consequence of WLC – negatively affects employee innovativeness. We assume negative effects of WLC on IWB.

Human resource management (HRM) can be seen as communication from the employer to the employee about important organizational objectives and eligible employee outcomes (Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Takeuchi, Chen & Lepak, 2009). Thus, practices contained in a company's HR system may signal that the company values IWB while trying to reduce WLC. However, employees may not understand the messages transmitted through HRM correctly (Li, Frenkel & Sanders, 2011). Hence, it is essential for companies to send unambiguous information (Delmotte, de Winne & Sels, 2011). HRM meta-features lead employees to appropriately interpret and respond to the information conveyed in HR practices by sending unmistakable notices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Although prior research has shown that HRM has the potential to foster employees' IWB (Dorenbosch, van Engen & Verhagen, 2005; Sanders et al., 2010) and diminish WLC (Berg, Kalleberg & Appelbaum, 2003; Shockley & Allen, 2007), we still do not know how these relations work (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). If feelings of WLC are reduced through a set of integrated HR practices, employees will probably have the time, energy and motivation to be engaged in IWB.

This paper contributes to the innovation and HR literatures. While enhancing our understanding of these interactions by exploring

HRM meta-features targeted at communicating that IWB as well as work–life integration is appreciated, we provide further empirical work in the HRM and innovation literatures on these matters. By analysing the linkages of HRM meta-features on WLC, we contribute to the HR literature. In addition, we aim at discovering HRM meta-features that are systematically grounded in empirical data and thereby contribute to the innovation and HR literatures (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte, de Winne & Sels, 2011; Li, Frenkel & Sanders, 2011). Finally, the analysed effect of WLC on IWB will contribute to further theoretical work in innovation as well as the HR literature.

We tackle our research goal by applying a qualitative research design. Interviews with representatives of 21 organizations in Germany as well as consultants from four different consultancies in the field of HRM constitute the prime data source. Additionally, we use external and internal related documents to broaden our understanding. A qualitative approach is suitable to gain an in-depth understanding of complex real-life situations and to generate knowledge relevant for practitioners (Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008; Yin, 2008).

The design of the paper is as follows. First, we illustrate the conceptual and theoretical foundations of our study. We elaborate on approaches of HRM and the influence of HRM on IWB and WLC. Next, we present our research methodology by explaining how we collected and analysed the empirical data. We then introduce the framework that emerged from our research. Finally, we show practical implications, discuss limitations of our research and provide suggestions for further studies.

Background: Innovative Work Behaviour, Work–Life Conflict and the Impact of HRM

IWB has its roots in role innovation, which can be defined as the initiation of major changes such as task objectives, processes, materials, scheduling and interpersonal relationships into a pre-existing role (Schein, 1971; Nicholson, 1984; West, 1987; West & Farr, 1990). It can be categorized as an active performance concept, being a self-initiated action aimed at improving current circumstances or creating new ones (Crant, 2000; Griffin, Neal & Parker, 2007; Parker & Collins, 2010). By drawing on Kanter (1988), Scott and Bruce (1994), as well as Janssen (2000), we conceptualize innovative behaviour at work as a multi-stage process comprising different behaviours that can be linked to distinct stages of the

innovation process. According to this perspective, IWB commences with problem recognition. Thereafter, idea and solution generation, promotion and realization follow (Kanter, 1988; Scott & Bruce, 1994). In contrast, employee creativity focuses on the production of ideas and is less target-oriented (Amabile, 1988, 1996). Consequently, it can be seen as a component of IWB. However, the distinction between creative behaviour and innovative behaviour in the workplace is one of emphasis, rather than of substance (West & Farr, 1990). Since innovation processes are characterized by discontinuous activities, rather than discrete, sequential stages (Schroeder et al., 1989), 'individuals can be expected to be involved in any combination of these behaviours at any time' (Scott & Bruce, 1994, p. 582). Thus, employee innovativeness is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes, and individual as well as contextual factors – including HRM – have been analysed as its determinants (Dorenbosch, van Engen & Verhagen, 2005; Sanders et al., 2010; Hammond et al., 2011).

If work impedes private life, employees experience WLC (Byron, 2005), which creates tensions and negative feelings detrimental to employee well-being (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001). Employee well-being is a multifaceted construct with a variety of components that may contribute to it (Avey et al., 2010; Wood & de Menezes, 2011). Broadly, it can be defined as a subjective and global judgement that one is experiencing a good deal of positive and relatively little negative emotion (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004, p. 341). Due to WLC's negative consequences for individuals, but also for firms, it is important to find means to deal with it (Siegel et al., 2005). HR systems can signal that a company cares about workforce well-being, which in turn diminishes WLC (Wu & Chaturvedi, 2009). Batt and Valcour (2003) have, for example, illustrated that high investment HR practices can help workers to fulfil their private demands better, and will consequently decrease employee WLC. Berg, Kalleberg and Appelbaum (2003) have shown that HR systems help to diminish or manage the stress associated with combining private and work life demands by positively influencing employees' perceptions that the company is helping them to connect work and family. Conversely, Shih, Chiang and Hsu (2010) show that high involvement HR systems increase expatriates' WLC. It is argued that these systems require higher employee involvement which can reduce the time and energy to fulfil private life demands, and thus fosters WLC of expatriates.

In summary, extant research indicates that HR systems can foster IWB as well as reduce

WLC. Nevertheless, it remains unclear under which conditions HR systems are effective to diminish feelings of conflicting work and private life demands and increase innovative behaviour at work. For that reason, we focus on exploring overall characteristics of an HR system that signal to employees that their company values innovative behaviour in the workplace but also tries to diminish employees' WLC.

Methodology

To examine how HR systems influence employees' IWB and WLC, we pursued a qualitative, interview study approach. Qualitative research is used to explore and understand real management situations (Holloway, 1997). Interview-based research is most suitable to discover key variables and their interaction (Eisenhardt, 1989). It is pursued in close co-operation with practitioners and consequently is well suited to generate practically relevant knowledge (Amabile et al., 2001; Gibbert, Ruigrok & Wicki, 2008). Moreover, interview-based studies are appropriate for complex issues with no clearly defined boundaries between phenomena and context (Yin, 2008). We define an interview study as an empirical investigation that primarily uses contextually rich data to investigate a particular problem intended to explore and better understand emerging, contemporary phenomena in their real-world settings (Eisenhardt, 1989; Barratt, Choi & Li, 2011). The focus of our research is on identifying meta-features of HRM that lead to increased IWB and reduced WLC.

Sample

For our interview selection we followed a criteria-based approach. Interviewees need to work for organizations that had to demonstrate a strong employee and innovation orientation. We reviewed annual reports and other external communication tools of organizations in Germany to generate a list of partners suited for our research project. We did not prefer any particular sectors, as it is supposed that meta-features of HRM are not industry-specific (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte, de Winne & Sels, 2011). Our final study sample comprised 70 per cent service and 30 per cent manufacturing industries in Germany. In total, we contacted 28 professionals for HR issues, 21 of whom agreed to participate. Additionally, we were able to involve four consultants who are experts in the field of HRM. Table 1 presents an overview of the interviewees who participated

Table 1. Overview of Sample

Interviewee no.	Role of interviewees	Industry	Size ^a
1	Head of Diversity Management	Automotive	Large
2	Head of Diversity Management	Automotive	Large
3	Head of Diversity Management	Chemical	Large
4	Head of Diversity Management	Chemical	Large
5	Expert HR Policy	Chemical	Large
6	Head of Personnel/Management Development	Chemical	Medium
7	Head of Personnel/Management Development	Construction Services	Large
8	Head of Diversity Management	Consultancy	Large
9	Partner	Consultancy	Large
10	Head of Diversity Management	Finance	Large
11	Head of Personnel/Management Development	Finance	Large
12	Head of Personnel/Management Development	Finance	Medium
13	Head of Personnel/Management Development	TIME ^b	Large
14	Vice Head of Diversity Management	TIME ^b	Large
15	Global HR Business Partner	TIME ^b	Large
16	Head of Personnel/Management Development	Non-profit	Large
17	Head of Diversity Management	Non-profit	Large
18	Head of Personnel/Management Development	Transport/Logistics	Large
19	Head of Personnel Management	Transport/Logistics	Large
20	Division Head of HRM	Transport/Logistics	Large
21	Head of HR Strategy/Policy	Transport/Logistics	Large
	Role of interviewees	Type of consultancy	Size
22	Level below Partner (focus on HRM issues)	Strategic Consultancy	Medium
23 ^c	Level below Partner	HR Consultancy/ Executive Search	Small
24	Partner	Executive Search	Small
25	Freelance/Owner	HR Consultancy	Small

^a Small: <1000 employees worldwide; medium: 1,000–10,000 employees worldwide; large: >10,000 employees worldwide.

^b Telecommunication, IT, media and entertainment.

^c Alumnus at the time of the interview.

in our study. Information on organization size and industry as well as the roles of the interviewees are presented.

Data Collection

We designed our data collection procedure carefully to address typical reliability and validity challenges in advance. Triangulating data sources – interviews, accompanying documents and press articles – allowed us to adapt different angles and thus we strengthened construct validity (Yin, 2008). By formulating a clear research framework and having a

formal interview guide (see Table 2 for summarized interview guide), we enhanced internal validity (Gibbert, Ruigrok & Wicki, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were our main data source which guaranteed a similar approach to all interviews, but also approved flexibility. Interviewing senior managers in the field of HRM and diversity management as well as HR consultants generated different perspectives. Interviews were conducted by direct visits or via telephone, and clarifications were sought through e-mails and phone calls. The duration of the interviews was between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviews were digitally

Table 2. Summarized Interview Guide

Interview section	Focus
Overview	Description of HR department; illustration of relevance of HR department
Personnel selection	Explanation of HR strategy/values Identification of criteria, methods and processes used for recruiting employees
Personnel development	Identification of criteria, methods and processes used for employee development Identification of career paths/options
Work-life integration	Identification of strategies and initiatives used for reducing WLC
Innovative behavior at work	Exploration of determinants and constraints of employees' engagement in innovative activities Links between HRM, WLC and IWB

recorded and then transcribed. Related documents provided by the interviewee, such as internal presentations, house magazines or annual reports, offered insights into formal practices and processes and helped us become familiar with the companies' structures, cultures and strategies. Our iterative data collection process took place between December 2010 and April 2011. It resulted in a total of 375 pages of internal and external company documents, and 1,500 minutes of recorded material amounting to 157,500 words.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, we used the interview transcripts, related documents and newspaper articles. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data analysis is a continuous and iterative process consisting of the three concurrent flows of activity data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. Data reduction means focusing, simplifying and condensing interview transcripts and other texts. Data display is the process of organizing and assembling information by using, for example, tables or matrices. Conclusion drawing is recognizing regularities or patterns and finding explanations. Referring to this generic process, we followed a three-step data analysis procedure based on prescriptions for grounded theory building – open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001) – and used the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA.

First, we engaged in open coding, wherein we analysed all transcripts and other texts line by line, to identify initial concepts in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whenever possible, we used *in-vivo* codes (i.e., language used by

the interviewees or in the articles) to label the concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When an *in-vivo* code was not available, we applied a short descriptive phrase. We then grouped the concepts into categories sharing certain ideas (Lee, Mitchell & Sablynski, 1999; Charmaz, 2006). Secondly, axial coding helped us to advance our categories into higher-order themes explaining central phenomena by searching for connections between categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thirdly, we adopted selective coding which aims at integrating the results into a theory or a theoretical model (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). We constructed an 'analytic story' by formulating propositions around the relationships that emerged (Creswell, 2007). Partially ordered meta-matrices or content-analytic summary tables supported data visualization and analysis. Basically, these representative devices allow an integrated interviewee- and variable-oriented approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to our research goal, we put emphasis on a variable-based analysis.

Findings

Our analysis of the interview transcripts as well as corresponding internal and external related documents reveals that HRM contributes to IWB and reduces WLC mainly through the four meta-features 'individual orientation', 'discretion orientation', 'effort orientation' and 'expectancy orientation'. Each meta-feature is in turn composed of two dimensions. Figure 1 displays the conceptual model that emerged from our study. In the following, we describe our research framework in detail. We first define each HRM meta-feature and explain

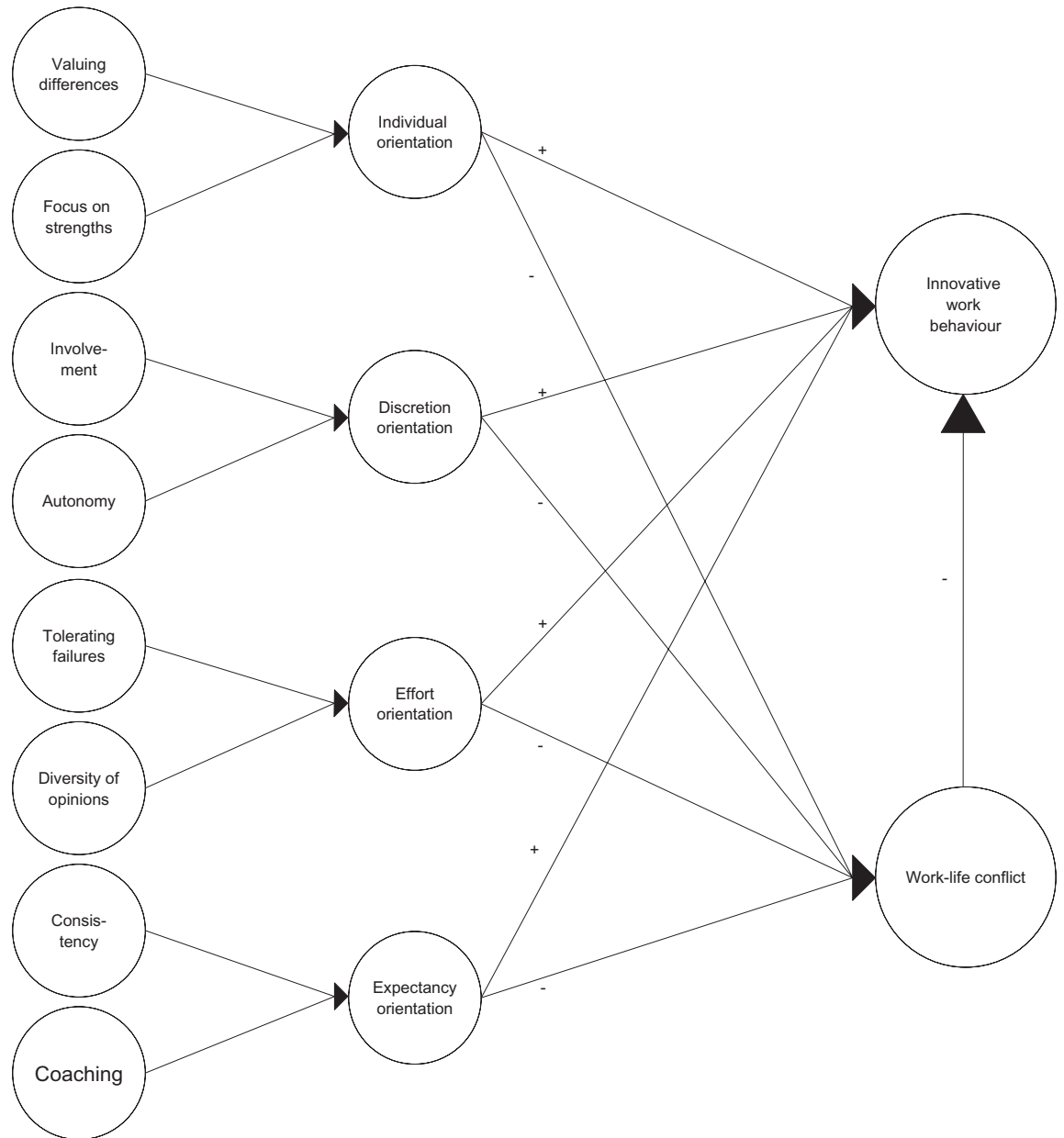


Figure 1. Research Framework: HRM Meta-Features Leading to Intended Perceptions and thus to Desired Outcomes of Increased IWB and Reduced WLC

with supporting quotes how it contributes to IWB and reduces WLC. Then, we link our findings to extant research, and give suggestions for implementing the meta-features into concrete HR practices.

Individual Orientation

Individual orientation of the HR system refers to the degree to which variation in employees is valued and leveraged for organizational competitiveness. In particular, the two aspects 'appreciation of differences' and 'focus on strengths' characterize individual orientation.

A diverse workforce (e.g., regarding age, gender or cultural background) has been recognized as a necessary precondition for successful innovations, as diversity extends the scope of knowledge, skills, abilities and perspectives (Kanter, 1988; Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993; Østergaard, Timmermans & Kristinsson, 2011). However, 'inclusion sets the stage for diversity so every single person can do his/her best' (related document, interviewee 3). Nevertheless, including all employees is only possible if differences among people are valued. The majority of our interviewees mentioned that respecting and

esteeming differences is a critical element for employees to engage in innovative behaviour in the workplace. For example, an interview partner accentuated 'openness to and appreciation of diversity enhance innovation' (interviewee 16). Moreover, our analysis exposed that appreciating individual differences helps employees to reduce perceived WLC as well. 'One of the central and strategic tasks of our human resources policy is to become even more responsive to the varying life stages and different needs of our employees and offer them appropriate solutions' (related document, interviewee 3). We learned from our interviews and document analysis that a 'one size fits all' approach is not suitable when trying to help employees to decrease the conflict between work and private life.

In addition, concentrating on individual strengths can be seen as a lever to increase innovative behaviour in the workplace and to diminish WLC. 'If people can employ individual strengths at work, they will fulfil their tasks with engagement and joy which helps them to be excellent and innovative' (related document, interviewee 5). The majority of our interviewees mentioned the relation between displaying strengths and innovative behaviour of employees. Extant research has shown that self-efficacy impacts individual innovation behaviour (Axtell et al., 2000). Self-efficacy is conceptualized as 'people's judgement of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance' (Bandura, 1977, p. 391). As an individual's performance experiences constitute a key source from which self-efficacy beliefs develop (Bandura, 1977, 1997), it is likely that employees who are able to use their strengths make more positive experiences and subsequently feel more confident at performing future, also non-routine, tasks. Moreover, empirical evidence demonstrates that self-efficacy is also related to susceptibility to stress (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Bandura, Barbaranelli & Caprara, 1996). Employees working in positions that permit individual strengths to be displayed are likely not to become frustrated in their work which in turn lessens WLC. Our findings are in line with the 'positive' movement both in psychology (Seligman, 1999) and organizational behaviour (Luthans, 2002). Since around the turn of the millennium, researchers have started to focus on human resource strengths and what contributes to employee flourishing rather than concentrating on people's weaknesses and thus following a so-called 'repair shop' perspective (Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Wright, 2003; Luthans et al., 2010).

'We have to tolerate diversity – also regarding the development of career paths. We

should stop pretending that everyone has to jump over the same hurdle' (interviewee 1). This quote demonstrates quite well how individual orientation can be put into organizational practice. In other words, 'individualized, custom-made career development options are necessary to increase diversity' (related document, interviewee 14). Similarly, another interviewee depicted 'for what concerns human resource development, we now focus on building individual competencies and we consider personal career as well as private plans for the future. In the past we rather had complete human resource development programmes' (interviewee 16).

Based on our findings we suggest that individual orientation as an overall characteristic of an HR system enhances IWB and reduces WLC.

Proposition 1a: An HR system characterized by individual orientation is positively related to IWB.

Proposition 1b: An HR system characterized by individual orientation is negatively related to WLC.

Discretion Orientation

The second HRM meta-feature that emerged from our research is discretion orientation conceptualized as the degree to which employees have accountability for and control over their jobs. It contains the two dimensions 'involvement' and 'autonomy'.

'We give our employees the greatest possible freedom along with a high degree of responsibility. This is an essential prerequisite for developing and utilizing our employees' innovative potential for the company in the best way possible' (related document, interviewee 13). This excerpt summarizes very well the importance of employee involvement and autonomy for IWB. Other interviewees, in turn, accentuated particularly the role of employee participation for innovative behaviour. 'Companies have to care about the opinion of employees; when aiming at innovation, involvement of employees is necessary' (interviewee 12). 'Employees feeling accountable for their ideas are passionate and consequently push these ideas' (interviewee 13). Our findings confirm learnings from the literature stating that employees are more likely to show innovative behaviour when feeling concern for and ownership of the problems they are confronted with in the workplace (Axtell et al., 2000; Dorenbosch, van Engen & Verhagen, 2005). Furthermore, extant research suggests that in order to engage in IWB employees need to feel having autonomy over

allocating their time or determining how their work is done (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Our findings validate cognitive evaluation theory (CET; Deci & Ryan, 1985) which states that intrinsic motivation for an action will only be enhanced if a person feels confident to fulfil the task while simultaneously experiencing autonomy. In other words, employees need to experience self-efficacy as well as self-determination. Our research reveals, furthermore, that an HR system characterized by discretion also facilitates a reduction of employees' WLC. By involving employees, companies learn about the needs of the employees. An interviewee stated it as follows: 'it is important that we do not purport a work-life balance solution that we think will help all employees. It is important to ask employees what they really need' (interviewee 13). Similarly, another interviewee stressed the significance of flexibility and made clear that you have to ask 'when does an employee need more time for private life? When does an employee spend more time at work?' (interviewee 8). Additionally, 'more sovereignty regarding time and place is a fundamental issue. In a way not to be mixed up with "self-exploitation". It is a matter of "personal tailoring". This offers possibilities for employees to align work with private responsibilities' (related document, interviewee 14).

Our interviews revealed that there is still a prejudice regarding physical presence and performance. 'Only employees working full-time are seen as top performers' was, for example, the statement of one of our interviewees (interviewee 17). Thereby employees' discretion is lowered. Consequently, companies aiming at an HR system characterized by discretion orientation should work on eliminating a 'face-time culture'. An interviewee put it as follows: 'it is a myth that an executive has to work full-time. Personality is essential not the hours spent in the office' (interviewee 25). Recently, Perlow and Porter (2009) have shown that consultants can meet the highest standards of service and still have planned, uninterrupted time off. Participants in the experiments reported increased job satisfaction and work-life balance. In addition, more open dialogues resulted between team members, which sparked new processes that enhanced the teams' ability to work more effectively and efficiently. As this research has been carried out with an occupational group that is known for an 'always-on' ethic, it is assumed that these findings also apply to employees in other professions.

In view of the above-mentioned arguments, we suppose that discretion-oriented HR systems encourage employees' innovative

behaviour at work and diminish conflict between work and private demands.

Proposition 2a: An HR system characterized by discretion orientation is positively related to IWB.

Proposition 2b: An HR system characterized by discretion orientation is negatively related to WLC.

Effort Orientation

Effort orientation refers to the degree to which engagement of employees is valued independent of a successful outcome. It is formed by the facets 'tolerating failures' and 'diversity of opinions'. Tolerating failures as requirement for IWB was brought up by 15 interviewees; the importance of allowing dissent was mentioned by 20.

Our study confirms findings from previous research stating that innovative workplace behaviour is encouraged when experimentation is legitimated and guilt is not assigned for breaking out of routine ways of doing things (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). This has been referred to as providing 'psychological safety' for employees (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Employees will experience psychological safety if they feel 'able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career' (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). However, it has to be noted, there are tasks or jobs which do not allow for experimentation. An interviewee illustrated it in the following way: 'in security-relevant areas, we do not want employees to depart from standard processes. There are concrete regulations [. . .]. Nevertheless, in other areas, we really appreciate that employees think proactively' (interviewee 20). One interviewee stated 'needless to say, it is important that employees can make their contributions, also when having a deviant opinion' (interviewee 16). This point was also illustrated by another interviewee: 'You can foster innovative behaviour in the workplace by encouraging employees to voice their ideas – uncommon and unorthodox ideas' (interviewee 4). As prior research has suggested that constructive controversy and task conflict advance innovation (Tjosvold, 1982; Shalley & Gilson, 2004), our results develop in the same direction. In addition to the mentioned aspects, some interviewees emphasized that employees who feel safe voicing their opinion – even when it is 'rocking the boat' or incorrect – experience more satisfaction regarding their work, which is likely to reduce WLC.

Companies striving for an effort-orientated HR system may design their performance

evaluation in a way that rewards engagement in general and not only successful results. Employees should trust that they would not suffer for their personal engagement.

Based on our findings we propose that effort orientation as an overall feature of an HR system encourages IWB and diminishes perceived WLC.

Proposition 3a: An HR system characterized by effort orientation is positively related to IWB.

Proposition 3b: An HR system characterized by effort orientation is negatively related to WLC.

Expectancy Orientation

The last meta-feature of an HR system we explored is expectancy orientation. This refers to the degree to which employees know what is expected of them, when and how. The aspects 'consistency' and 'coaching' contribute to expectancy orientation. Consistency between what a company says it will do and what is actually done is an essential prerequisite for employees' IWB. An interviewee highlighted 'the bottom line is that we require engagement in innovative activities, but at the same time we assist and support employees' (interviewee 5). This position is further strengthened by this citation: 'I have had the impression that these [consistent] HR practices enabled employees to be more innovative and also to be more motivated because these employees had confidence that the company sees and values their innovative engagement' (interviewee 23). Our findings back up prior research that has shown the importance of linking behaviour and outcomes. For instance, companies wanting their employees to try new approaches must positively evaluate and reward creativity (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). An interviewee stated 'at our company it is expected that you inspire other employees to show innovative performance and to continuously develop, to advance' (interviewee 5). Our results confirm earlier studies' findings that feedback delivered in a constructive way, as opposed to punitive responses, is beneficial for employee creativity (Shalley & Perry-Smith, 2001; Zhou, 1998, 2003).

Additionally, our findings expose that an HR system characterized by expectancy orientation supports employees in handling work and private life responsibilities. By making evaluation and reward criteria and processes transparent, companies can create an HR system characterized by expectancy orientation. Transparency is also important regarding work-life integration initiatives. For instance, 'we have developed guidelines which can be downloaded in our intranet so that our

employees and managers know what we offer and what are issues to pay attention to. Transparency is very important' (interviewee 5). Moreover, employees need to experience that arrangements an organization has made are valid. For example, if a company has committed to work-life integration initiatives such as flexible work arrangements or part-time also for executives, it can signal that these declarations hold, for example by making them public – internally and externally.

On the basis of the findings just demonstrated, we assume that expectancy-oriented HR systems support employees' IWB and reduce feelings of conflicting demands between work and private life.

Proposition 4a: An HR system characterized by expectancy orientation is positively related to IWB.

Proposition 4b: An HR system characterized by expectancy orientation is negatively related to WLC.

WLC and IWB

The relational view provides an explanation for WLC's effects on IWB: the higher the level of WLC employees perceive, the more they are likely to conclude that the company does not care much about them because it contributes to their WLC. Consequently, employees may reciprocate by reducing involvement and performance (Siegel et al., 2005). Moreover, the scarcity hypothesis of role theory (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978) offers an illustration of WLC's negative effects (Shih, Chiang & Hsu, 2010). Involvement in multiple life roles often results in conflict because individuals find it hard to perform each role adequately when the demands of different roles are incompatible (Gilboa et al., 2008; Michel et al., 2010). This argument is based on the following assumptions. Firstly, people have a fixed amount of time and energy. Secondly, different roles compete for the individual's limited resources. Thirdly, involvement in more than one role can weaken the individual's performance (Evans & Bartolomé, 1984; Burke, 1989; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990).

According to Amstad et al. (2011), WLC is a potential cause of stress that has harmful effects on employee well-being and behaviour. For instance, WLC is considered to be linked to job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions, which are in turn associated with a loss of competencies and high costs for companies (Anderson et al., 2002). Aryee, Fields and Luk (1999) show that employees struggling to balance work and non-work role requirements suffer from WLC, which negatively affects

their job performance. Moreover, Carlson et al. (2010) demonstrate that WLC has a negative effect on in-role job performance, and Shih, Chiang and Hsu (2010) show that WLC is negatively related to expatriate job performance. Moreover, it is argued that employees who experience WLC find it more difficult to engage in discretionary behaviour than in 'normal' job behaviour (Allen et al., 2000; Gilboa et al., 2008). Furthermore, Huhtala and Parzefall (2007) explain how burnout – a potential consequence of WLC – negatively affects employee innovativeness.

In view of the above-mentioned points, we assume that employees' experiencing a high level of WLC may not show as much IWB as employees who experience less WLC.

Proposition 5: WLC is negatively related to IWB.

We summarize our findings in Table 3. We give details regarding our understanding of the meta-features that emerged in our study based on our analysis of the interview transcripts and related documents. Moreover, we illustrate a random selection of additional proof quotes, and present an interview-based evidence analysis for our propositions. The evidence analysis is interview-based. Based on a cross-interview comparison, the analysis shows the frequency of certain relations mentioned explicitly or correspondingly by interviewees. Through linking our results to the extant literature, we integrate our findings and deduce implications.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of our paper was to empirically explore HRM meta-features signalling to employees that IWB as well as work–life integration is valued. We thus aimed at enhancing our understanding of under which conditions HR systems influence individual innovation in the workplace and feelings of WLC. HRM meta-features as overall characteristics of an HR system assist employees in correctly perceiving and interpreting the messages sent by HR practices. As HRM meta-features discussed in extant research are a theoretically based instrument, we contributed by exploring meta-features systematically grounded in empirical data. Moreover, we did not concentrate on discovering overall characteristics of an HR system in general but on those that enhance employees' IWB and simultaneously reduce experienced WLC. If feelings of WLC are reduced through a set of integrated HR practices, employees will probably have the time,

energy and motivation to be engaged in IWB. Hence, we expressed the constantly increasing importance of innovation for companies' success (Yuan & Woodman, 2010) as well as the growing significance of employee well-being (Wood & de Menezes, 2011).

Our analysis revealed that an HR system characterized by 'individual orientation', 'discretion orientation', 'effort orientation' and 'expectancy orientation' is able to communicate that a company values innovative engagement but also cares about employee well-being. Most interviewees mentioned that respecting and esteeming individual differences is a critical element for enhancing IWB as well as for helping employees to integrate work and private life demands. We have found that focusing on employees' individual strengths also fosters innovative behaviour at work and simultaneously reduces WLC. Moreover, our study shows that involving employees is essential. We confirmed the findings of previous studies that employees need to be autonomous in allocating their time and determining how their tasks are carried out to engage in innovation and to experience work–life integration. In addition, our study shows that valuing employee engagement independent of a successful result also increases innovative behaviour in the workplace and can reduce perceived WLC. Finally, our analysis revealed that employees need to know what is expected of them. For instance, there has to be consistency between what a company announces it will do and what it actually does, and employees need informational feedback regarding their behaviour.

Previous research has not analysed how HR systems influence employees' innovative job performance and feelings of WLC in one study. By integrating these concepts, we have shown that a number of different (theoretical) perspectives need to be connected to advance our understanding in this area. For instance, we have brought up the relevance of positive psychology for fostering innovative behaviour at work and reducing the stress associated with combining work and private life demands. We have shown, furthermore, how involving employees and granting autonomy are related to employees' experiences of WLC but also to their innovative engagement at work. Additionally, we have illustrated the importance of consistency for both outcomes, as WLC is negatively related to IWB. Employees' experiencing a high level of WLC may not show as much IWB as employees who experience less WLC. In line with the relational view, we state that the higher the level of WLC employees perceive, the more likely they are to conclude that the company does not care

Table 3. Definition of the Meta-Features, Proof Quotations, Evidence Analysis, Link to Extant Literature, and Implications

	Individual orientation	Discretion orientation	Effort orientation	Expectancy orientation
Definition	Degree to which variation in employees is valued and leveraged for organizational competitiveness. It contains the dimensions 'appreciation of differences' and 'focus on strengths'.	Degree to which employees have accountability for and control over their jobs. It contains the dimensions 'involvement' and 'autonomy'.	Degree to which engagement of employees is valued independent of a successful outcome. It contains the dimensions 'tolerating failures' and 'diversity of opinions'.	Degree to which employees know what is expected of them, when and how. It contains the dimensions 'consistency' and 'coaching'.
Additional proof quotes (sample selection)	'Approaches that allow for individualization are important because they enhance innovation. We do not need "cloned managers"; these are not innovative. We have to allow for diversity' (interviewee 1). 'It is to leverage potentialities, to advance and to strengthen these potential capacities so that employees can act entrepreneurial and are motivated to be innovative' (interviewee 8). 'We may not forget that employees spend a lot of time at work or thinking about work. We might accommodate it by permitting – to a certain degree – individualization' (interviewee 1). The relation between valuing differences and IWB was mentioned by 20 out of 29 interviewees; 15 noted that focusing on strengths fosters IWB. 17 interviewees brought up that respecting different needs is necessary for reducing perceptions of WLC. Seven interviewees referred to the relation between concentrating on strengths and a balanced work and private life.	'I think companies in general, but especially when innovation is needed, should listen more to their employees; listening exactly to employees' points of view and then acting will help companies' (interviewee 13). 'It is important that employees know how their work contributes to overall company goals. Involving employees is a prerequisite' (interviewee 23). 'We have a lot of individualized solutions regarding timing. We grant flexibility. Our employees are more engaged, in return for our cooperation' (interviewee 19). 22 interviewees noted the importance of employee involvement for IWB, and 24 mentioned that autonomy is important to foster innovative engagement at work. 13 interviewees touched on the relation between employee involvement and WLC, and 20 between autonomy and WLC.	'Faults are permitted. This is really important for innovative behavior in the workplace. At [company] we tolerate faults' (interviewee 5). 'Organizations should remunerate employees for pressing ahead with something. Of course, in general you reward someone for a successful outcome. But it is important to reward engagement as well. If something does not work, you can reward an employee' (interviewee 22). 'HR policy can make sure that there is a climate which tolerates faults and experimentation' (interviewee 18). Tolerating failures as requirement for IWB was brought up by 15 interviewees; the importance of allowing dissent was mentioned by 20. Two interviewees put on record the relation between failure tolerance and WLC. No interviewee referred to a potential link between allowing diverse opinions and WLC.	'The general framework has to be clear. It has to be clear and also demonstrated that the company wants their employees to be innovative. Evaluation criteria have to comprise it' (interviewee 5). 'It is very important that an employee receives a response how the company or his/her supervisor or colleagues see his/her way of working. Also how they assess the employee's proactive and innovative engagement' (interviewee 16). 'It is important that employees know that we take the issue of work-life integration seriously. It is important for personal well-being and for organizational success' (interviewee 14). The relation between consistency and IWB was mentioned by 20 interviewees, the relation between developmental feedback and IWB by 16. We found that the relationship between consistency and WLC was mentioned by 12 interviewees; the relationship between feedback in a coaching manner and WLC by five interviewees.
Evidence analysis (interview-based; frequency of certain relations mentioned explicitly or correspondingly by interviewees)	Diversity is supposed to be essential for innovation (Østergaard et al., 2011). We explained how companies responsive to individual differences and needs can raise workforce diversity and thereby foster IWB and reduce WLC. Extant research shows that employees feeling confident to execute a task are more likely to be innovative. We illustrated how companies focusing on strengths can enhance these feelings. Thus, we brought up the relevance of positive psychology/OB for IWB but also for WLC. Our research shows that individual orientation can be put into organizational practice by providing custom-made career development options.	Previous research has demonstrated the importance of employee independence and participation for IWB (Axtell et al., 2000; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Dorenbosch et al., 2005). Our research has reinforced these findings. Additionally, we illustrated how involvement and autonomy help to reduce perceptions of conflicting demands between work and private life. We demonstrated that companies aiming at an HR system characterized by discretion orientation should suppress a 'face-time culture', allowing flexibility concerning work time and place.	Our study confirms findings from previous research stating that employees' engagement in innovative activities at work is encouraged when experimentation is legitimated and employees feel safe to voice their ideas (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). We touched on the effect of providing psychological safety for reducing WLC. Moreover, we illustrated that allowing diverse opinions is essential for IWB. This confirms the findings of extant research stating that constructive controversy and task conflict advance innovation. Our study reveals that an effort-oriented HR system can be realized by rewarding employee engagement in general and not only successful results.	Extant research has demonstrated that IWB needs to be valued and rewarded (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Hammond et al., 2011). Our research confirmed these findings and explored, furthermore, the importance of consistency for reducing WLC. We refined earlier studies' findings stating that feedback delivered in a constructive way as opposed to controlling or punitive responses is beneficial for employees' engagement in creative activities (e.g., Zhou, 1998). We showed that companies can create expectancy orientation by making evaluation criteria, processes and work-life initiatives transparent, as well as by ensuring that permitted arrangements are valid.
Link to extant literature, add-ons explored by our research, and implications				

much about them because it contributes to their WLC, which also aligns with role theory (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Companies are confronted with growing competition for employee and managerial talents, and managing WLC is considered as one of the most significant human resource challenges in the twenty-first century (Siegel et al., 2005). Thus, it is important for companies to address work–life integration issues to attract and retain employees. Moreover, innovation is essential for organizational success. Innovation, however, resides in a company's workforce (e.g., Scott & Bruce, 1994; Yuan & Woodman, 2010). These reasons have produced an increasing interest in understanding the potential benefits of a company's HR system. It is believed that HR systems affect employee attitudes and behaviour, which influence at an aggregated level firm performance (e.g., Huselid, 1995; Takeuchi, Chen & Lepak, 2009). Nevertheless, it is argued that employees' perceptions of an HR system need to be examined to comprehend the link between HR systems and employee outcomes (e.g., Boon et al., 2011; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). In this regard, it is important that employees perceive the messages sent by HR practices as desired by the company (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Our paper has contributed to extant research by exploring characteristics of an HR system that help employees to understand that their company values innovative engagement but also supports them in connecting work and private life. We deduced implications from the meta-features that emerged for organizational practice. For instance, we suggested providing individualized career development paths, allowing flexibility concerning time and place and thereby reducing a 'face-time culture', rewarding employee engagement in general independent of successful results, or making evaluation criteria and processes as well as work–life initiatives as transparent as possible.

By applying a qualitative interview-based study approach, we were able to thoroughly investigate how HR systems influence employee IWB and WLC. We have explored conditions under which HR systems are effective in enhancing employees' engagement in innovative activities at work as well as reducing feelings of conflicting demands between work and private life. Through close co-operation with practitioners, we were able to produce insights relevant for organizational practice. However, besides the benefits interview study research offers, it is often criticized, especially regarding reliability and validity issues (Gibbert, Ruigrok & Wicki, 2008). These challenges, nevertheless, can be addressed upfront

by carefully designing the data collection and analysis procedures (Yin, 2008). Through a transparent documentation and by following systematic procedures, we dealt with the difficulty of potentially lacking rigour. By applying an interview study approach, we observed parallel patterns across different interviewees which strengthened the confidence in our propositions. This advantage is, though, accompanied by the disadvantage of decreasing depth which can be augmented when just analysing single cases (Yin, 2008). Furthermore, our analysis is limited to Germany. Thus, it would be interesting to see results of a similar study in other countries with different cultural contexts. Moreover, future research should further investigate our proposed relationships in a quantitative research setting. Therefore, identified meta-features need to be operationalized into measures for a survey, which would then allow empirical testing of whether HR systems characterized by 'individual orientation', 'discretion orientation', 'effort orientation' and 'expectancy orientation' lead to desired employee perceptions of the HR system and finally to the desired outcomes of increased IWB and reduced WLC. In addition, it may be interesting to consider potential moderators such as individual characteristics and socio-demographic differences.

To conclude, our study reveals potential HRM levers for how companies can manage the challenge of fostering innovative engagement in the workplace in times of increasing conflict between work and private life demands. The meta-features that emerged should help employees to correctly perceive, interpret and respond to the company's messages sent by HR practices.

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