

Personality Traits and Workaholism

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Abstract

The paper focuses on understanding the relationship between workaholism and personality. The main goal was to examine the personality antecedents of workaholism, specifically the role of conscientiousness, neuroticism and perfectionism in workaholism. Workaholism is viewed as a three-dimensional phenomenon consisting of excessive involvement in work, compulsive need to work, and lack of satisfaction from work. Based on the multiple linear regressions, the authors constructed a model of relations between personality traits and workaholism. While neuroticism predicted overall workaholism (positive relationship), conscientiousness was positively related to all three workaholism components. Furthermore, perfectionism predicted feeling driven to work (positive relationship) and neuroticism was related to joy in work (negative relationship). The results underline the possibility of predicting workaholism from personality traits. Based on the findings, employers and study counselors can implement preventive measures in order to help employees and students to preserve their performance and avoid maladaptive patterns of work behaviour.

Keywords: workaholism, work involvement, work drivenness, work enjoyment, personality, conscientiousness, neuroticism, perfectionism

1. Introduction

1. 1 Purpose of the Study

The goal of the study was to examine to what extent personality traits; specifically conscientiousness, perfectionism and neuroticism determine workaholism and its individual components. We departed from the assumption that personality is an important factor predicting workaholism. Our hypotheses were tested using linear regression models. It is the first research study of workaholism in the Czech Republic –a post-socialistic country where culture traditionally does not appreciate high individualistic performance focus. With less social pressure on performance, we can have more space for further study of those personality traits as predictors of workaholic behavior.

This study examines relationship between personality and workaholism not merely among workers, but also among university students (school assignments are considered to be their work) and persons simultaneously working and studying. Workaholism was looked at especially among individuals with shorter work experience whose relationship and attitude toward work is being developed. This is valuable perception for potential extension of already existing knowledge about workaholism to the student population with its specific conditions, work demands and work habits.

If we are better able to identify people with higher tendency to workaholism according to their personality traits, we can help them to decrease the risk of negative impact of workaholism on them and their surroundings.

1. 2 Workaholism

Workaholism is related to work involvement continuously greater than required for fulfillment of worktasks (Brady et al., 2008; Porter, 1996). The actual time spent working is insufficient in defining workaholism since it can be influenced by temporary situational factors. According to Taris et al. (2008), the risk toward workaholism is determined by compulsive work attitude and inability to disengage from work. External factors play a rather small role (Porter, 1996), workaholism can therefore be regarded as an internal compulsion rather than as a reaction to external incentives. Snir and Harpaz (2004) see workaholism as a serious and stable investment of time in work activities and thoughts of work, regardless of external demands. Workaholism is reflected in one's behavior, thinking and experience. Even though, there are no strict criteria for defining workaholism, empirical evidence demonstrates 2-3 crucial dimensions of workaholism.

In the present study, we used a three-dimensional view of workaholism (Spence & Robbins, 1992) which involves a so called workaholism triad:

1. *Work involvement* – represents time investment in work; extent to which one engages herself in work activities.
2. *Work drivenness* – internal pressure that forces an individual to work (or think about work), even though it is not required, and despite the experienced emotional dissatisfaction.
3. *Work enjoyment* – level of joy experienced at work and when thinking of work.

Workaholism is determined by a high level of work involvement, strong compulsions to work and low work enjoyment. Validity of the workaholism triad was confirmed by results of an extensive study (N = 5,853, across various sectors and professions) conducted by Buelens and Poelmans (2004). Therefore, we decided to use it.

1. 3 Workaholism in the Context of Work Performance and Occupational Health

Present studies imply that workaholics are not more efficient than other workers in various assignments. Actually, there are several causes of lower work performance in workaholics: unnecessarily exceeding requirements, high focus on often unnecessary details, repeatedly checking the work (Robinson, 2000). This inefficient behavior can be explained by perfectionism and rigidity (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Porter, 1996). Hogan and Hogan (2001) identified workaholic behavior patterns at an observed group of executive managers being important factors contributing to their failure at work. Robinson (2000) highlights higher rate of errors done by workaholics, which he puts into context with their higher rate of stress and low well-being. Nešpor (1999) points out the workaholic inability to allocate time for various parts of work appropriately. Poor time management means difficult estimation of the time required for successful completion of particular assignments and instead wasting time on unimportant things.

This matter is also related to chronic imbalance between time devoted to work and recovery (Snir & Zohar, 2008). Workaholics seem incapable of enjoying leisure time activities, pastime is less satiating for them and it is even perceived as undesirable (Scott, Moore, & Miceli, 1997). That leads inevitably to lack of compensation for work overload accompanied by work stress and subsequently to inadequate protection against related health issues (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000). There is enough evidence regarding workaholism as a contributor to serious health issues including death from overwork (Robinson, 2000). Taris et al. (2008) confirmed positive relationship between workaholism and the inability to break away from work. No significant relationship has been found between merely working hours and health issues. Spence and Robbins (1992) found significant negative correlation between work enjoyment and poor health. Chamberlin and Zhang (2009) link workaholism to higher rate of workers' health problems and organizational costs.

There is also negative impact of perfectionism on the organizational climate in the sense of increasing co-workers' stress present in workaholics (Porter, 2001). Workaholics apply strict quality criteria to their colleagues and often consider them as incompetent (Vodanovich & Piotrowski, 2006) – which does not support healthy work relationships.

Burke and MacDermid (1999) found higher rate of stress and stress-caused illnesses in workaholics than in non-workaholics. Despite that, Andreassen, Ursin and Eriksen (2007) found only a weak correlation between work stress and workaholism. However, according to Spence and Robbins (1992) workaholics permanently experience higher stress than a work enthusiast who works to the same extent while also being highly driven and working with enjoyment.

Whether viewing workaholism from a personal or an organizational perspective, much is documented concerning its negative impact on the individual's personal and family life (Brady, Vodanovich, & Rotunda, 2008; Robinson, Carroll, & Flowers, 2001), low outside-of-work satisfaction (Burke, 2000), overall low life satisfaction (Bonebright et al., 2000), workers' well-being (Schimazu & Schaufeli, 2009; Taris, Geurts, Schaufeli, Blonk, & Lagerveld, 2008), or presence of health problems (Taris et al., 2008). The health problems consequently lead to lower work efficiency (Robinson, 2000) which represents losses for organizations employing workaholics (Chamberlin & Zhang, 2009). Negative impact of workaholism on organizations themselves has been found, such as various forms of destructive behaviors toward the organizations (Galperin & Burke, 2006) or dysfunctional relationships with colleagues (Porter, 2001; Vodanovich & Piotrowski, 2006). Therefore, understanding the relationship between workaholism and personality traits can help predicting the occurrence of workaholism, resulting in healthier lives of workers and also lower losses for organizations influenced by negative impacts of workaholism.

1. 4 Workaholism and Personality Traits

Previous research has focused on personality determinants of workaholism (Aziz & Tronzo, 2011; Burke et al., 2006; Clark, Lechhook, & Taylor, 2010). While other variables, such as demographics (e.g., Buelens & Poelmans, 2004) and work variables were shown to be related to workaholism (Burke, Oberklaid, & Burgess, 2004), the latest research (e.g., Aziz & Tronzo, 2011; Liang & Chu, 2009) confirms conclusions of McMillan, O'Driscoll and Burke (2003) that trait and personality theories are essential when explaining workaholism.

Personality traits have been found to be related to development of workaholism. Trait theories see workaholism as a stable pattern of behavior that is dispositional and some situations may accentuate its level. Liang and Chu (2009) believe that crucial determinants of workaholism are personality and also repeated reinforcing of workaholic behavior externally. In a study by Burke, Matthiesen and Pallesen (2006), personality explained 22% of variance in Work drivenness and 11% of variance in Work enjoyment. Aziz & Tronzo (2011) showed that personality predicted 23% of variance in work involvement, 16% of variance in work drivenness and 15% of variance in work enjoyment. McMillan et al. (2003) suppose that workaholism can be best explained as one personality trait that can be activated and influenced by experience and events in one's environment (work environment, in particular).

1. 4. 1 Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness comprises competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation (Costa & McCrae, 1998). It is typically related to work performance – to perseverance, reliability and orderliness (Judge, Higgins, Thoreson, & Barrick 1999). Highly conscientious individuals are goal-oriented,

diligent, reliable and tenacious (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993). Workaholics set unrealistically high goals for themselves (Porter, 1996) and conscientiousness may help them to persevere with the ongoing task even when facing obstacles. Similarly as with workaholism, conscientiousness correlates with a strong orientation on performance (Scot et al, 1997). Clark, Livesley, Schroeder and Irish (1996) identified conscientiousness and performance orientation as some of essential variables that determine workaholism. Similarly, a positive correlation between conscientiousness and all three dimensions of workaholism has been found in other studies (Andreassen, Hetland, & Pallesen, 2010; Aziz & Tronzo, 2011; Judge et al., 1999), and between conscientiousness and work drivenness (Burke et al., 2006).

1. 4. 2 Neuroticism

Neuroticism pertains to individual differences in emotional stability (Hřebíčková & Urbánek, 2001). Based on a meta-analysis of 65 studies, Judge and Ilies (2008) found that individuals with high scores in neuroticism have smaller expectations of themselves and set lower goals than individuals with low scores of neuroticism. Highly neurotic individuals have a tendency to avoid situations that they perceive as strenuous and therefore can be less engaged with work than emotionally stable individuals. Their tendency to avoid demanding situations might be compensated via reinforcing their self-esteem through work.

In terms of workaholics, they seem to persevere in work also in order to attain higher self-esteem (Robinson, 1996), and low self-esteem has a very strong positive relationship with neuroticism (Auerbach, Abela, Ho, McWhinnie, & Czaikowska, 2010). Neurotics might compensate their tendencies to avoid demanding situations via reinforcing their self-esteem through work. That might be the reason why lower involvement in work does not occur. Studies found a relationship between neuroticism and work drive (Andreassen, Ursin, & Eriksen, 2007; Burke et al., 2006) and neuroticism and work enjoyment (Andreassen et al., 2007).

1. 4. 3 Perfectionism

High level of perfectionism pertains to the effort to execute tasks with high quality (Cattell, Cattell and Cattell, 1997), as well as order and individuals with high scores in perfectionism prefer predictable environment. Scott et al. (1997) identified perfectionist workaholic as one type of workaholic behavior patterns that is attentive to details and needs great control over her work. One of the characteristics of work addiction is rigid thinking, repeated setting of unrealistic goals, excessive focus on detail and need for control (Porter, 1996), and similarly perfectionists are described as rigid and overly controlling (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). Clark et al. (2010) found positive relationship between workaholism and pursuing unrealistically high standards that they consider to be a dimension of perfectionism. High standards might also result in expectations of high performance of oneself – enhancing greater compulsions to work, and thus workaholism. Workaholics were found to have the highest scores in perfectionism toward themselves (Spence & Robbins, 1992) but also toward others (Burke, Davis, & Flett, 2008). Liang and Chu (2009) identified perfectionism as the key component in the development of workaholism.

2. Method

2. 1 Participants

The research sample consisted of 470 participants (347 women and 123 men) of age ranging from 19 – 66 years ($M = 25.44$, $SD = 7.88$), 90% of the participants were under age of 32. The participants were recruited through social network Facebook, University Information System or an email sent to employees of a selected organization. Based on the invitation from Facebook, 358 participants volunteered to participate, 65 participants were recruited via University Information System and 45 participants responded to the email invite (out of 115 emails sent). One of the requirements for participation was minimum 5 months of full-time work experience or full-time study at a university and/or combination of work and study.

171 participants were full-time university students, 182 participants studied (full-time or part-time) while working (full-time or part-time), 117 participants worked full-time. All participants volunteered in the study by filling out online questionnaires anonymously. The participants were told that the purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between personality and school/work attitudes.

2. 2 Measures

2. 2. 1 Workaholism Components

The overall workaholism was assessed through 25-items WART Inventory (Work Addiction Risk Test; Robinson, 1998). Work involvement was also measured using WART. Internal consistency was $\alpha = .82$ for WART, while $\alpha = .74$ for scale of Work involvement. Work drivenness and enjoyment of work was measured using different scales of WorkBAT (Workaholism Battery; Spence, Robbins, 1992). Only items that were shown to be methodologically appropriate were used (McMillan, Brady, O'Driscoll, & Marsh, 2002). Seven items for Work drivenness, six for Work enjoyment and one for Work involvement (this item was added to the WART Inventory) were included. Internal consistency was $\alpha = .82$ for Work enjoyment and $\alpha = .79$ for Work drivenness.

2. 2. 2 Personality Traits

Conscientiousness and neuroticism were assessed using the Czech version of NEO Personality Inventory (Hřebíčková & Urbánek, 2001). Internal consistency of the scales were $\alpha = .82$ and $\alpha = .87$, respectively. Perfectionism was measured using 10-item scales of Cattell 16 factor Personality Inventory (Cattell et al., 1997). Internal consistency of Perfectionism scale was $\alpha = .70$, i.e., the minimal acceptable value (Kline, 1993).

2. 2. 3 Data Analyses

All variables met the criteria for performing multiple linear regression. Personality traits were entered into regression as predictors of workaholism and its three dimensions using method ENTER in two steps. The first block of predictors ($N=3$) comprised personality factors and the second block included demographic variables (Gender, Age) – used for controlling their influence.

3. Results

3. 1 Descriptive Statistics

The number of valid cases ranges from 454 (Workaholism and Work involvement) to 470 (Conscientiousness). All variables have normal distribution of data. Table 1 illustrates descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Workaholism	60.2	8.8	454	-						
2. Work involvement	13.9	3.39	454	.75**	-					
3. Work drivenness	9.2	4.02	461	.52**	.52**	-				
4. Work enjoyment	11.7	3.74	462	.11*	.19**	.16**	-			
5. Conscientiousness	31.3	6.85	470	.10*	.29**	.37**	.24**	-		
6. Neuroticism	24.1	6.65	459	.36**	.10*	.23**	-.20**	-.18**	-	
7. Perfectionism	10.5	4.58	459	.22**	.26**	.35**	.06	.56*	.14**	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

3. 2 Preliminary Analyses

In terms of personality traits, Conscientiousness strongly correlated with Perfectionism; Neuroticism had a weak, inverse correlation with Conscientiousness and also with a weak positive correlation with Perfectionism; Workaholism showed a strong correlation with Work drivenness (Table A).

Furthermore, age correlated weakly with Conscientiousness ($r = .13$, $p < .01$), Perfectionism ($r = .14$, $p < .01$) and Work involvement ($r = .11$, $p < .05$). ANOVA revealed main effect of work/study type on Work involvement – participants combining work and school scored higher than full-time students ($F = 8.381$, $p < .01$). Further, full-time workers scored higher in Conscientiousness in comparison with full-time students ($F = 4.043$, $p < .05$); full-time students scored higher in Neuroticism with comparison to participants combining work and school ($F = 4.610$, $p < .01$). In terms of gender, women showed slightly higher Work involvement in comparison with men ($F = 3.94$, $p < .05$) as well as higher level of Neuroticism ($F = 25.99$, $p < .01$). These low differences in several observed variables among particular groups did not call for separate data analyses for individual groups.

3. 3 Main Analyses–Multiple Linear Regressions

3. 3. 1 Workaholism

Table 2 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis. Only the first block of predictors accounted for a significant amount of increment in the explained variance on Workaholism. Personality factors in Model 1 explain 16% of variance in Workaholism. Neuroticism seems to be the best predictor of Workaholism. Adding demographic factors did not improve the model. Therefore, Perfectionism, which was a significant predictor in the first step of the regression, can seem to be an insignificant predictor in a model with multiple variables.

Table 2: Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Personality Characteristics on Workaholism (N =454)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	Beta	ΔR^2	Model R^2
(Constant)	42.20	2.56		.16**	.16**
Step 1					
Neuroticism	0.48	0.06	.36**		
Perfectionism	0.21	0.11	.11*		
Conscientiousness	0.14	0.07	.11*		
Step 2					
(Constant)	39.91	2.89		.01	.17**
Neuroticism	0.51	0.06	.38**		
Perfectionism	0.19	0.12	.10		
Conscientiousness	0.13	0.07	.12*		
Gender	1.43	0.90	.07		
Age	0.04	0.05	.04		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

3. 3. 2 Work Involvements

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis. Only the first block of predictors accounted for an increment in explained variance on Work involvement. Model 1 explained 15 % of variance in Work involvement by personality factors. The two primary predictors were Conscientiousness and Neuroticism. The contribution of Perfectionism was not significant.

Table 3: Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Personality Characteristics on Work Involvement (N = 454)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	Beta	ΔR^2	Model R^2
(Constant)	5.87	0.99			
Step 1					
Conscientiousness	.15	0.03	.31**		
Neuroticism	.12	0.02	.24**		
Perfectionism	.04	0.04	.05		
Step 2					
(Constant)	5.36	1.13		.00	.15**
Conscientiousness	.15	0.03	.30**		
Neuroticism	.12	0.02	.25**		
Perfectionism	.03	0.04	.05		
Gender	-.17	0.35	-.01		
Age	.03	0.02	.06		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

3. 3. 3 Work Driveness

Table 4 presents the results of the analysis. Two blocks of predictors accounted for an increment in the explained variance on Work drivenness; most of it was predicted by personality factors. In Model 1, Personality factors explained 24% of variance in Work Driveness. The greatest contribution was shown by Conscientiousness, than

Neuroticism and lastly Perfectionism. Demographic variables (Age has a significant contribution) increased the model by 1%, to a total of 25% of variance in Work Drivenness.

Table 4: Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Personality Characteristics on Work Drivenness (N = 461)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	Beta	ΔR^2	Model R^2
(Constant)	-2.44	1.11			
Step 1				.24**	.24**
Conscientiousness	.21	.03	.36**		
Perfectionism	.10	.05	.12*		
Neuroticism	.17	.03	.27**		
Step 2				.02**	.26**
(Constant)	-1.83	1.25			
Conscientiousness	.22	0.03	.37**		
Perfectionism	.11	0.05	.12*		
Neuroticism	.18	0.03	.29**		
Gender	.59	0.39	.06		
Age	-.05	.002	-.11**		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

3. 3. 4 Work Enjoyment

Table 5 presents the results of the analysis. Only personality factors accounted for a significant increment in the explained variance on Work enjoyment. Model 1 explained 9% of variance in Work enjoyment. Neuroticism and Conscientiousness had a significant contribution, while the contribution of Perfectionism was not significant. Adding demographic variables did not improve model in a significant way.

Table 5: Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Personality Characteristics on Work Enjoyment (N = 458)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	Beta	ΔR^2	Model R^2
Step 1				.09**	.09**
(Constant)	9.89	1.13			
Conscientiousness	.14	0.03	.25**		
Neuroticism	-.08	0.03	-.15**		
Perfectionism	-.05	0.05	-.06		
Step 2				.00	.09**
(Constant)	10.24	1.29			
Conscientiousness	.13	0.03	.25**		
Neuroticism	-.09	0.03	-.16**		
Perfectionism	-.05	0.05	-.06		
Gender	-.28	0.40	-.03		
Age	.00	0.02	-.01		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

4. Discussion

Based on the results of our study, the concept of personality is the best explanation to work drivenness, work involvement and workaholism in general. However, work enjoyment was predicted weakly. We found that higher levels of neuroticism are related to higher levels of workaholism. Work results or rewards from work environment might lead to greater self-esteem in individuals with high scores in neuroticism. Neurotic individuals might use excessive work as a means for coming with negative feelings (Mehroof & Griffiths, 2010). Furthermore, we observed that individuals with higher levels of perfectionism have greater tendencies to be workaholics. Conscientiousness per se has a very weak relationship with workaholism. The presence of conscientiousness in the model predicting workaholism can be explained by partially shared variance with perfectionism.

In terms of work involvement, conscientiousness was shown to be the best predictor, along with a weaker contribution of perfectionism, but neuroticism did not predict work involvement. On the contrary, the results indicate that emotionally less stable individuals tend to spend more time working than emotionally stable persons. Individuals with greater levels of neuroticism may experience a greater need to boost their self-esteem and have control over their environment, and greater work dedication may enable to satisfy those two needs.

Work drivenness was predicted by all three personality factors. A strong need for great quality work and excessive meticulousness in combination with low emotional stability seem to be accompanied by compulsive thoughts and behavior – a tendency to continue with work until the results meet high standards.

Work enjoyment seems to be contingent on other factors than those observed in our research. Apart from other psychological variables, environmental factors or specifics of work responsibilities can be potential candidates when explaining work enjoyment.

In comparison to a study of Aziz and Tronzo (2011), we found a stronger relationship between personality and work drivenness, but a weaker relationship between personality and work involvement and with work enjoyment. Participants of the Aziz and Tronzo (2011) research were American workers (in many work areas, predominantly in business) in age between 25-45 years. Our research sample comprised only of 10% of individuals above 32 years of age and both workers and students were included. However, the trend of the relationships is the same, and therefore the results can be applied to a population of young adults, workers or students. The results of multiple regression concerning work drivenness and work enjoyment are akin to Burke et al. (2006) conducted on a research sample primarily consisting of women with children, in age between 36–55 years old who worked in nursing homes. Our results show that personality predicts workaholism (specifically, work involvement and work drivenness) already in full-time students, before they enter the job market. The results suggest that personality influences also the way one approaches study responsibilities (work involvement and work drivenness). It seems that the relationship between personality and workaholism is the same regardless of gender, age, or profession.

Future research should focus on understanding the role of other psychological factors, such as self-esteem and well-being, in workaholism. Low self-esteem is seen as a trigger of workaholism by Ng, Sorensen and Feldman (2007). Robinson (1996) and Schimazu and Schaufeli (2009) also demonstrate the role of self-esteem in workaholism in clinical population. Workaholism can be also determined by factors related to a particular work situation of each individual. For example, Buelens and Poelmans (2004) showed that situational factors (type of management, salary range etc.) also play a role in prediction of workaholism. The authors, however, do not explain the mechanisms of how workaholic behavior develops. Importantly, examining workaholism via objectively measured external factors (e.g., quantitatively assessed work goals, percentage indicator of flexible salary component, length of work shifts, probability of work place loss or business loss, or fulfillment of study requirement among students) but also through subjective perception of those factors can bring out interesting insights in understanding of workaholism. For instance, based on the information about set work goals, one cannot imply how much pressure in the workplace an employee experiences. Prioritization of tasks can be reflected in the way they are executed. We believe that in explaining workaholism, not only personality, but also specific work and study conditions should be examined. Granted that workaholism is determined by personality, but also psychological and situational variables, the risk of developing workaholism can be contingent on the personality development or individual's current life situation. In contrast to relatively stable personality traits, the tendency toward workaholism can be mutable. That implies that workaholism could be modified both by the individual himself/herself or his/her environment, and the negative impacts of workaholism could be minimized.

5. Conclusions

The results correspond to previous findings concerning the importance of personality in explaining workaholism. The observed relationships can be generalized to populations of young adults – both workers and students. Most relationships observed between workaholism, its dimensions and the concept of personality is weak or mediumstrong; therefore, it is necessary to examine also other psychological variables that could play a role in predicting workaholism.

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