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WORKAHOLISM AND WORK ENGAGEMENT IN THE LIGHT OF AFFECTIVE EVENTS THEORY BY WEISS AND CROPANZANO

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Purpose: The aim of this study was to investigate the correlation between (a) the work-related feelings and behaviours and (b) workaholism and work engagement. The correlation model was based on the Affective Events Theory, proposed by Weiss and Cropanzano. So far, workaholism and work engagement have not been investigated in terms of this concept.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was based on a sample of 292 workers representing various occupations and industries. Four diagnostic questionnaires were used, namely DUWAS (for workaholism, or work addiction), UWES (work engagement), WORAF (for feelings) and WORAB (work-related behaviour). In order to verify the hypotheses, a path analysis was performed and twelve (12) models were designed. The indices of fit were good and/or acceptable for seven (7) of these models.

Findings: The majority of the hypotheses were confirmed fully or partially. A relatively strong direct correlation was found between emotions and work-related behaviour. The mediation effect of workaholism and work engagement was rather weak. The study confirmed the positive nature of work engagement. However, workaholism was marked by ambiguity in this respect.

Research limitations/implications: The main limitation of the study is the use of questionnaires. In the future, it would be advisable to use also other research methods and techniques to give credibility to the results. Another weakness of this study is that the sample is not representative. While respondents represented a variety of industries, occupations and positions, many others, particularly lower-skilled jobs (such as construction workers, shop assistants or warehouse operatives) were not covered.

Originality/value: This study is the first one to have investigated workaholism, work engagement and work-related behaviours and feelings at the same time, which makes it, to some extent, a pioneering piece of work.

Keywords: workaholism, work engagement, work-related feelings, work-related behaviours, AET theory.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Workaholism has been covered in the literature since the 1970s. It is defined as a condition where a person spends excessive amounts of time at work, even in their time for rest and relaxation. Another characteristic of workaholism mentioned in the literature is the internal pressure experienced by a person when engaged in work activities (Oates, 1968; Machlowitz et al., 1980; McMillan et al., 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2009). This uncontrollable compulsion to work is believed to be what makes workaholism different from the desirable work engagement, although some studies show that workaholism and work engagement are interrelated (Jaworek, 2016). Work engagement alone is defined differently (cf. Macey, Schnaider, 2008). However, it is most commonly described according to the definition proposed by Schaufeli and et al. (2002, 2009) as a positive state of mind that is characterized by vigour, absorption and dedication. This is the definition of work engagement adopted in this study.

While considering work engagement as something positive is unquestionable, looking on workaholism in such terms is problematic. Despite numerous studies and theoretical debates over more than the last fifty years, no agreement has been reached as to whether addiction to work is clearly negative or clearly positive. Some researchers hold the view that workaholics experience pleasure, happiness and fulfilment while they are engaged in their work activities (Machlowitz, 1980; McMillan et al., 2010, 2006; Ng et al., 2007). However, a large number of researchers support the view that workaholism, like any other addiction, is undesirable and leads to adverse consequences (cf. Killinger, 2007). They even argue that workaholism should be clearly distinguished from the "healthy" work engagement (e.g. Schaufeli et al., 2009).

The studies that asked the question whether workaholism is a negative phenomenon or a positive one provided no definite answer. On the one hand, empirical analyses show that a person addicted work is less happy and less satisfied with their life or has a negative perception of their health situation (Burke et al., 1999; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Libano et al., 2010; Shimazu et al., 2010). On the other hand, the findings of some analyses are completely different. According to a study by Golińska (2008), workaholics were more satisfied with their lives, experienced fewer somatic issues and had better moods than non-workaholics during the week before the study. Longitudinal studies by McMillan and O'Driscoll (2004) revealed no differences between workaholics and non-workaholics in terms of vigour, psychological health or general health. This study is another attempt to answer the above question and focuses on investigating the correlation between (a) workaholism and work engagement and (b) affect and behavioural reactions, which may determine, to a large degree, the classification of the two constructs (workaholism and work engagement) as positive or negative states.

In the case of work engagement (as defined by Schaufeli et al., 2009), studies unambiguously show a positive correlation between work engagement and highly activated positive affect and a negative correlation with unpleasant emotions (van Wijhe et al., 2011;

Clark et al., 2014, Burić, Macuki, 2018). However, analyses of workaholism and emotions show that addiction to work correlates with negative affect, but no negative correlation was found with positive emotionality (Clark et al., 2010; van Wijhe et al., 2011; Bovornusvakool et al., 2012; Balducci et al., 2012).

The correlation between behaviour and emotions in workplace contexts, in particular with constructs such as workaholism or work engagement, has virtually not been explored by researchers in the past. Interestingly, as far as the author of this study is aware, there are no research studies showing how a person's addiction to work translates into that person's efficiency at work. Such research, if it was available, would clearly cast a better light on the phenomenon at hand. Although such analyses require the use of research techniques and methods with a higher degree of sophistication than self-description, it seems that the simplest methods should be employed first. The results of this study are intended to fill this gap in research.

In order to verify the hypothesis regarding the role of workaholism and work engagement as mediators between the emotions and behaviour of workers, a path analysis was used in the statistical analyses in the study. The direction of the correlation investigated in this study was determined according to the assumptions of the affective events theory (AET), proposed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). AET is one of the few theories at the interface of psychology and management that consider the emotional aspect of the behaviour of workers in the workplace. According to Weiss and Cropanzano, work-related events affect the emotions experienced by an individual and these emotions influence the individual's behaviour and attitudes to work. The relationships between work events and the individual's emotions are modified by dispositions.

This study takes into account four work-related emotions, namely happiness, dejection, anxiety-related emotions and aggression-related emotions, and three types of behaviour divided into constructive behaviour (proactive behaviour) and dysfunctional behaviour (aggressive behaviour and passive avoidance behaviour). Researchers often describe specific types of behaviour as strategies for coping with difficult situations. These strategies are divided into two main categories: task-oriented strategies, which are seen as constructive and adaptive behaviour, and emotion-oriented strategies. Workaholism and work engagement were selected as employees' attitudes, and these are used as mediators in the model. This study does not take into account work events as triggers of the emotions experienced by workers, although these triggers are included in the AET. As the main aim of the study was to investigate the specific nature of the two constructs, namely work engagement and workaholism, work events are not included. The theoretical model of the correlations explored in this study is presented in figure 1.

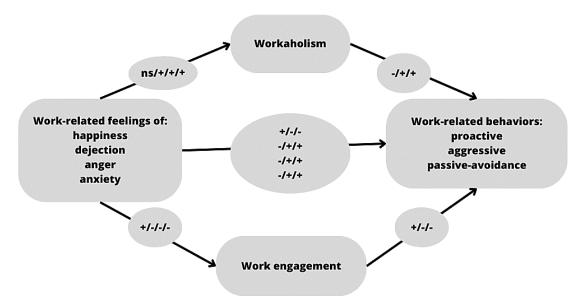


Figure 1. Theoretical model of correlations between happiness, workaholism, work engagement and work-related behaviour.

Source: own elaboration.

Based on the results of empirical analyses and on theoretical assumptions, it was assumed in this study that work engagement would be positively correlated with work-related happiness (H1) and proactive behaviour (H2) and, at the same time, that work engagement would reduce the degree of aggressive behaviour (H3) and anxiety-and-avoidance behaviour (H4) and would negatively correlate with dejection (H5), anxiety (H6) and anger (H7). In the case of workaholism, it was assumed that there was no correlation between workaholism and positive affect (H8), that workaholism correlated positively with dejection (H9), anxiety (H10) and anger (H11), aggressive behaviour (H12) and anxiety avoidance behaviour, and that it correlated negatively with proactive behaviour (H13). It is also assumed that work engagement and workaholism mediate between the emotional reactions and behavioural reactions of respondents (H14 and H15, respectively) and that the emotions included in this analysis directly correlate with work-related behavioural reactions (H16).

2. Methods

2.1. Research procedure and research methodology

The study used questionnaires and was conducted online via the MS Forms platform. The respondents were extramural students studying for a second-cycle degree in management and combining their studies with a professional occupation. Each respondent was assured as to the anonymity of the survey and advised that they were free to stop the survey at any time.

The following four questionnaires were used in the survey.

- 1. *Dutch Work Addiction Scale* (DUWAS), developed by Schaufeli. It was adapted (abridged) by Kożusznik, Dyląg and Jaworek (2014) and this adapted version was used in this study. The scale is divided into two subscales (each with 5 items) and measures excessive work and compulsive work. The answer scale ranges from 1 (almost never) to 4 (almost always).
- 2. *Ultrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES), developed by Schaufeli and Bakker. A version shortened to nine (9) items was used in this study. The scale is divided into three subscales (each with 3 items) and measures vigour, absorption, and dedication. The answer scale ranges from 0 (never) to 6 (always).
- 3. Work-Related Affective Feelings (WORAF), developed by Jaworek, Marek and Karwowski (2020). It is divided into four subscales for work-related feelings: dejection (5), anxiety (8), anger (4) and happiness (7). The answer scale ranges from 1 (almost never) to 4 (almost always).
- 4. Work-Related Behaviour Scale, developed by Jaworek, Marek and Karwowski (2021). It is divided into three subscales: aggressive behaviour 6) passive avoidance behaviour (8) and proactive behaviour (7). The answer scale ranges from 1 (almost never) to 4 (almost always).

To verify the hypotheses, a path analysis was performed using the Amos 29 statistical software module. Twelve (12) models were designed, including four models for emotions and three for behaviour, where workaholism and work engagement were variables mediating between a particular emotion and a particular type of work-related behaviour. As the sample of respondents was relatively small, only observable variables were used in the models.

2.2. Description of the sample

The study involved a sample of 292 people actively engaged in the workforce (women: 65.4%, 4.5% of respondents did not disclose their gender identity). They included people working in occupations such as teachers (24%), public administration personnel (10.6%), managers (leaders) (10.3%), nurses (7.9%), bank personnel (6.8%), and social workers (6.8%). Approx. 18% of respondents said they held managerial positions. Nearly a quarter of respondents (24.3%) were people aged between 20 and 30 years, 36% were aged 31-40 years, 25.3% – 41-50 years, and 13.4% – older than 50 years. The largest number of respondents said they had between 6 and 10 years of work experience. A third said between 1 and 5 years, and nearly 14% said over 20 years, with almost 9% saying they had no more than 1 year of work experience.

3. Results

Of the 12 models in the study, the fit indices for seven were good and/or acceptable and/or borderline acceptable, and only these were used in the interpretative analysis of the results. The seven models are: 1,2,3,4,8,9, and 12). Details are given in table 1.

Table 1. Fit indices for the tested models

Model	WR	WR	Chi ² /df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
	behaviours	feelinegs							
1	Aggr	happiness	3.599	.988	.940	.963	.973	.918	.095
			(p = .027)						
2	Aggr	anger	3.945	.981	.937	.940	.954	.907	.101
			(p = .008)						
3	Aggr	anxiety	4.483	.978	.925	.937	.950	.899	.109
			(p = .004)						
4	Agrr	dejection	3.979	.987	.933	.957	.967	.900	.101
			(p = .019)						
5	PassAv	happiness	5.741	.990	.903	.972	.976	.857	.128
			(p = .017)						
6	PassAv	anger	5.330	.982	.912	.936	.946	.839	.122
			(p = .005)						
7	PassAv	anxiety	9.526	.984	.842	.950	.954	.724	.17
			(p = .002)						
8	PassAv	dejection	2.425	.992	.959	.971	.982	.946	.070
			(p = .088)						
9	Proact	happiness	2.448	.988	.959	.969	.981	.962	.071
			(p = .062)						
10	Proact	anger	5.501	.982	.909	.898	.912	.735	.124
			(p = .004)						
11	Proact	anxiety	9.526	.984	.842	.929	.934	.602	.171
			(p = .002)						
12	Proact	dejection	3.684	.988	.938	.928	.944	.832	.096
			(p = .025)						

Note: WR = work-related; Aggr = Aggressive, PassAv = passive avoidance, Proact = proactive.

Source: own elaboration.

Employees' emotions versus workaholism and work engagement

Work-related emotions were found to be a strong predictor of work engagement. These were, in particular, happiness emotions ($\beta = 0.63$; models 1 and 9). Correlations with negative affect ranged from $\beta = -0.34$ (model 2) to $\beta = -0.28$ (model 3). The correlation between workaholism and emotions was slightly weaker. The regression coefficients for this correlation ranged from $\beta = 0.16$ for hopelessness (models 4, 8 and 12) to $\beta = 0.34$ for anxiety emotions (model 3).

Proactive behaviour

Of the four models with the dependent variable of proactive behaviour, only two (models 9 and 12) delivered satisfactory fit indices. Only in one of the models, one of the constructs, namely work engagement, was found to be a mediator (model 12). This mediator was also a positive predictor of proactive behaviour ($\beta = 0.25$). The emotion of dejection reduces the level of work engagement ($\beta = -0.32$). In model 9, workaholism correlated very weakly with proactive behaviour ($\beta = 0.10$).

Aggressive behaviour

The fit indices for all the four models with the dependent variable of aggressive behaviour were acceptable. Two models (2 and 3) showed a virtually identical pattern. The work-related emotions of anxiety and aggression directly correlate with aggressive behaviour $\beta = 0.60$ and $\beta = 0.62$, respectively), workaholism ($\beta = 0.34$ and $\beta = 0.26$) and work engagement ($\beta = -0.34$ and $\beta = -0.26$). In two models (1 and 4), workaholism was found to be a significant predictor of aggressive behaviour ($\beta = 0.20$ and $\beta = 0.11$). In model 1, work engagement was a mediator that slightly reduced the level of the behaviour under analysis ($\beta = -0.14$).

Passive avoidance behaviour

Among the models with the dependent variable of passive avoidance behaviour, only one model (8) showed a satisfactory fit index value. The study showed a direct correlation between the emotion of dejection and passive avoidance behaviour ($\beta = 0.51$), workaholism ($\beta = 0.16$) and work engagement ($\beta = -0.32$). Work engagement was found to be a mediator between the emotion of dejection and passive avoidance behaviour, and a negative predictor of the latter ($\beta = -0.17$). No direct correlation was found between workaholism and the work-related behaviour under analysis.

4. Discussion

The results confirmed the majority of the hypotheses. Work-related emotions were found to correlate relatively strongly with work engagement. In line with the expected correlation directions, positive emotions increase the level of work engagement, while negative affect may reduce that level (H1, 5, 6 and 7). A similar yet opposite correlation was found between workaholism and the work-related emotions of dejection, anger and anxiety (H9, 10 and 11). It needs to be noted, however, that the correlation was rather weak or moderate. As regards hypothesis 8, the study found no correlation between addiction to work and positive affect.

The hypotheses regarding the relationship between (a) workaholism and work engagement and (b) behavioural reactions were confirmed (H2, 3, 4, 12, 13 and 14). Work engagement may suppress aggressive behaviour and passive avoidance behaviour, and it may encourage proactive behaviour. However, work engagement was found to be a weak and moderate predictor of these types of behaviour and was not confirmed in all the models. Workaholism correlated even more weakly (close to statistically significant) with the types of behaviour under analysis. Addiction to work was found to be a poor predictor of aggressive behaviour (models 1 and 4) and proactive behaviour (model 9). No correlation was found in any of the models between addiction to work and passive avoidance behaviour (H13). Consequently, the hypotheses regarding the mediating nature of workaholism (H15) and work engagement (H14) between emotions and behavioural reactions were also confirmed partially: the mediating role of work engagement or workaholism was found in only four of the seven models.

It follows from the results of the study that workaholism is a complex construct. The results show that addiction to work correlates with negative affect and dysfunctional behaviour, although this correlation is low or moderate and was not confirmed in all the models. It further follows that the researchers' assumption that addiction to work should be categorised as a clearly negative phenomenon was not confirmed by the results. It may be the case that certain personspecific factors not included in the analyses play a role in addiction to work. A study by Jaworek (2021) on a group of managers showed that despite the high level of workaholism among them, work engagement and positive feelings are very high and, at the same time, occupational burnout and negative work-related emotions are relatively low (when compared to 14 other occupation included in the study). This means that excessive working driven by an internal compulsion (this excessive nature of work and this internal compulsion are the main symptoms of workaholism) will not always lead to dysfunctional behaviour. The decisive factor may be that workaholics have developed specific psychological characteristics that allow them to stay away from the negative effects of workaholism, while working efficiently and behaving proactively. On the other hand, some studies show that workaholism may have negative consequences. Those workaholics who experience such consequences may not have the necessary resources (such as personality traits, or adaptive strategies they can use in difficult situations etc.) that would help benefit from their work activities.

It needs to be noted that the sample of respondents in this study comprises both rank-and-file workers and leaders (managers), which may have affected the results. However, the relatively low percentage of managers in the sample was insufficient for the researchers to perform comparative analyses in terms of the correlations explored in this study. In the future, it would be advisable to undertake a research study in which psychological dispositions would be taken as moderators of the types of behaviour under analysis. Perhaps such a study would provide a definite answer to the question whether workaholism is something positive or something negative, while redirecting the research into workaholism towards the question about when workaholism is harmful.

This study has also shown that emotions are clearly a stronger and more certain indicator of work-related behaviour than workaholism and work engagement are. This correlation was found in all the models in this study, thus confirming hypothesis 16. This result may be the basis for organisations to adopt measures designed to develop and promote particular types of organisational behaviour on the one hand and to prevent employees' dysfunctional behaviour on the other. Managers would focus their efforts on the feelings experienced by staff and on the triggers of the feelings. Future studies should, therefore, aim to investigate the correlation between (a) different aspects of the organisational environment and employees' dispositions and (b) the feelings experienced by employees.

This study is affected by a number of limitations, which prevent the researchers from drawing definite and far-reaching conclusions. The main limitation is the use of questionnaires. In the future, it would be advisable to use also other research methods and techniques to give credibility to the results. Another weakness of this study is that the sample is not representative. While respondents represented a variety of industries, occupations and positions, many others, particularly lower-skilled jobs (such as construction workers, shop assistants or warehouse operatives) were not covered.

5. Summary

Addiction to work (or workaholism) is often classified as an organisational pathology and considered as a negative phenomenon that should be cured. However, findings across studies dealing with workaholism are not consistent, and some studies do not confirm the above assumptions. The findings of this study do not provide a definite answer to the question about the negative versus positive nature of workaholism, although they lean towards 'moderately negative'. At the same time, the study confirms the clearly positive nature of work engagement.

The analyses covered not only the affective dimension of the phenomena under investigation, but also work-related behaviour, which is line with the Affective Events Theory (proposed by Weiss and Cropanzano). This aspect seems to be of particular interest because of overtones of practicality. Organisations are interested mainly in what their staff deliver at the end of the day. In other words, they expect efficiency and effectiveness. The results of this study show that the emotions experienced by employees are a stronger predictor of both proactive and dysfunctional behaviour than work engagement and workaholism are, and it is emotions that HR managers should look at in the first place.

Lastly, it needs to be noted that this study is the first one to have investigated workaholism, work engagement and work-related behaviour and feelings at the same time, which makes it, to some extent, a pioneering piece of work.

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Appendix

Table 2. *Correlations between variables included in the study*

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Work engagement								
2.	Workaholism	.06	1						
Work-related feelings									
3.	Anxiety	28**	.34**						
4.	Happiness	.63**	07	51**					
5.	Dejection	32**	.16**	.69**	-,51**				
6.	Anger	34**	.26**	.70**	57**	.65**			
Work-related behaviors									
7.	Passive Avoidance	33**	.04	.54**	39**	.56**	.51**		
8.	Proactive	.33**	.06	34**	.49**	35**	23**	33**	
9.	Aggressive	26**	.20**	.62**	32**	.60**	.59**	.65**	22**

Note. **p < .01.

Source: Own elaboration.