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Investigating the combined effects of workaholism and work engagement: A substantive-methodological synergy of variable-centered and person-centered methodologies☆

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ABSTRACT

The present series of three independent studies examines how workaholism and work engagement combine relying on a variety of distinct methodologies: interaction effects (Study 1, n = 160), a person-centered approach (Study 2, including two samples of n = 321 and 332), and a hybrid mixture regression approach (Study 3, n = 283). This research also documents the relations between workaholism, work engagement, and work outcomes (i.e., work-family conflicts, work performance, sleeping difficulties, and burnout). Furthermore, this research investigates the role of workload (Studies 2 and 3) and perceived social support (Study 2) in the prediction of profile membership. Studies 1 and 2 showed that the combination of high levels of work engagement with high levels of workaholism was associated with a variety of negative outcomes. In Study 3, the highest levels of sleeping difficulties and work-family conflicts were associated with the workaholic profile, followed by the engaged-workaholic profile, and finally the engaged profile. Finally, in Studies 2 and 3, workload showed strong associations with an increased likelihood of membership into the profiles characterized by higher levels of workaholism.

Work engagement and workaholism have received, in isolation or combination, a fair amount of scientific attention (Birkeland & Buch, 2015). Still, little is known about the impact of their interactions, or combinations within specific employees, in the prediction of work outcomes. Yet, the importance of considering their combined impact has oftentimes been highlighted. For instance, Stoeber and Damian (2016) proposed that the deleterious effects of workaholism could be compensated by the presence of work engagement. Similarly, van Beek, Taris, and Schaufeli (2011) emphasized the need to differentiate between at least three distinct types of hard-working employees: engaged, workaholics, and engaged-workaholics. Furthermore, research has started to examine how workaholism and work engagement combine within specific individuals, and the impact of these combinations (Innanen, Tolvanen, & Salmela-Aro, 2014; Mäkikangas, Schaufeli, Tolvanen, & Feldt, 2013). Nevertheless, the need for more person-oriented studies in order to obtain a clearer picture of the most common configurations of work engagement and workaholism, as well as of their antecedents and consequences, has also been highlighted (Upadyaya, Vartiainen, & Salmela-Aro, 2016; van Beek et al., 2011).

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The present research thus seeks to contribute to our understanding of the combined effects of workaholism and work engagement by: (1) Examining how these two constructs interact (Study 1) in the prediction of work outcomes (i.e., sleeping difficulties, work-family conflicts, burnout, and work performance); (2) examining the naturally occurring configurations, or profiles, of these two constructs, their relations with the same work outcomes, and the extent to which these configurations and relations can be generalized across two independent samples of employees (Study 2); (3) examining whether residual relations between these two constructs and work outcomes remain once employees' profiles are taken into account, and the extent to which these residual relations differ as a function of profile membership (i.e., are moderated by profile membership; Study 3); and (4) examining the role of workload and perceptions of social support in the prediction of profile membership (Studies 2–3).

This research is a substantive methodological-synergy (Marsh & Hau, 2007) in which evolving statistical approaches are applied to this substantively important research question through a series of three distinct studies. As such, it has broad relevance to the organizational sciences by providing an illustration of the variety of complementary variable-centered (i.e., latent interactions), person-centered (i.e., latent profile analyses; LPA), and hybrid (i.e., mixture regressions) approaches that can be used to investigate the combined effects of psychological characteristics in the prediction of work outcomes. Just like in the analogy of the blind person having to touch the different parts of an elephant in order to be able to identify it as an elephant (rather than as a snake, a tree trunk, etc.), we seek to illustrate how these approaches can be used to obtained differentiated, and yet complementary, views of the same underlying phenomenon.

1. Workaholism

Oates (1971, p. 1) defined workaholism as “the compulsion or the uncontrollable need to work incessantly”, to which Machlowitz (1980) added that workaholics tend to allocate as much time as they can to their work. Workaholism thus encompass two distinct, yet complementary, components (Schaufeli, Bakker, Westman, & Emmerik, 2009; Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009b): (a) working excessively: A behavioral component (i.e., being hardworking, spending a great deal of time in work activities, neglecting other spheres of life), and (b) working compulsively: A cognitive component (i.e., being obsessed with work, thinking compulsively about work). It follows that workaholism cannot be reduced to either of these components (Clark, Michel, Zhdanova, Pui, & Baltes, 2016). However, many studies have shown these components to be moderately to strongly interrelated (Hakanen, Peeters, & Schaufeli, 2018), calling into question whether they reflect distinct dimensions rather than complementary components of a global overarching construct (Birkeland & Buch, 2015; Gillet, Morin, Cougot, & Gagné, 2017c). Although some have considered workaholism to be desirable (Baruch, 2011), recent studies (Clark et al., 2016) showed that it tends to be associated with a variety of negative outcomes such as sleeping difficulties (Salanova et al., 2016), work-family conflicts (Taris, Schaufeli, & Verhoeven, 2005), and burnout (Schaufeli, Bakker et al., 2009). In this research, we rely on a representation of workaholism as a global overarching dimension encompassing specific ratings of working excessively and compulsively, which is more aligned with our objective of assessing relations between constructs rather than looking at the internal structure of a specific construct. This is also in line with recent studies (Gillet, Morin, et al., 2017c; Huyghebaert et al., 2018) revealing high correlations ($r > 0.75$) between these specific components and workaholism profiles characterized by matching levels of excessive and compulsive work.

2. Work engagement

Work engagement is “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Engaged workers possess high levels of energy, work hard, and tend to be involved and happily absorbed in their work (Hakanen et al., 2018). Despite the recognition that work engagement involves vigor, dedication, and absorption, the high correlations among these specific components (Hakanen & Peeters, 2015; Mäkikangas et al., 2013) calls into question their existence as separate dimensions and suggest that they may reflect an overarching global construct (Upadyaya et al., 2016; van Beek et al., 2011). Moreover, a recent 3-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale has been proposed by Schaufeli, Shimazu, Hakanen, Salanova, and Witte (2018) on the basis of an emerging unidimensional operationalization of work engagement. Thus, and in accordance with our representation of workaholism, we rely on a representation of work engagement as a global construct encompassing specific ratings of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Research has supported the predictive validity of work engagement in relation to higher levels of performance (Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008) and psychological and physical health (Seppälä et al., 2012), as well as lower levels of work-family conflicts (Babic, Stinglhamber, Bertrand, & Hansez, 2017) and sleeping difficulties (Reis, Arndt, Lischetzke, & Hoppe, 2016).

Workaholism and Work Engagement: Distinct Constructs.

Whereas work engagement and workaholism are both characterized by a high level of activation, workaholics work hard due to a strong inner drive that is impossible to repress and anchored in guilt and self-imposed pressure, whereas engaged employees work hard because they find their job pleasurable and satisfying (Schaufeli, 2016). As such, work engagement is seen as involving both arousal and pleasure, whereas workaholism rather involves arousal and displeasure (Schaufeli et al., 2018). Indeed, Salanova, Del Libano, Llorens, and Schaufeli (2014) showed that engaged employees scored high on energy, pleasure, challenge, efficacy, and identification, while workaholic employees had high levels of energy, challenge, efficacy, and identification, but low levels of pleasure. Workaholism can be seen as an addiction to work (Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009b; Spence & Robbins, 1992). Even more than engaged workers, workaholics invest time and energy at work, and keep on doing so regardless of whether they fail or succeed, whether their work interferes with their private lives (Hakanen & Peeters, 2015), and whether their physical and psychological health is altered as a result (Shimazu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2010).

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