



Review

The effects of perfectionism on innovative behavior and job burnout: Team workplace friendship as a moderator



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 September 2015

Received in revised form 24 February 2016

Accepted 28 February 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Perfectionism

Personal initiative (PI)

Innovative behavior

Job burnout

Team workplace friendship

ABSTRACT

Perfectionists are known as high-end goal pursuers. In this study, we utilize the concept of personal initiative (PI) to verify that perfectionists who go beyond their assigned tasks, and develop and initiate the accomplishment of their own goals also promote innovative behavior; however, they may also encounter job burnout. To extend research on perfectionism, we distinguish between the effects of healthy perfectionism (perfectionistic strivings) and unhealthy perfectionism (perfectionistic concerns) on innovative behavior as well as job burnout, and test the moderating effect of team workplace friendship utilizing valid matching samples of 112 team sets (112 supervisors and 437 members). The results reveal that healthy perfectionism is positively associated with innovative behavior, while unhealthy perfectionism is positively associated with job burnout; moreover, high team workplace friendship strengthens the positive relationship between healthy perfectionism and innovative behavior, but weakens the positive relationship between unhealthy perfectionism and job burnout. Our findings provide managers with insights into perfectionism to optimize human resource utilization, and highlight the need to initiate a team workplace friendship context to promote innovative behavior and decrease job burnout.

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1. Introduction

Perfectionism is a common personality characteristic that describes people who strive for flawlessness and set excessively high performance standards, sometimes resulting in overly critical self-evaluations or responses to external evaluations (Childs & Stoeber, 2010). Perfectionism has been positively related to creativity (Wigert, Reiter-Palmon, Kaufman, & Silvia, 2012), which can lead to innovative behavior. However, some suggest that perfectionism reduces innovation (Rule & Montgomery, 2013) and detracts from employee innovativeness (Cocco & Quttainah, 2015). Further, while Childs and Stoeber (2012) note that perfectionism is associated with higher levels of burnout, Hill, Hall, Appleton, and Murray (2010) did not find this to be the case for athletes. In response, this study aims to further clarify perfectionism's distinct influences on innovative behavior and burnout. Due to these inconsistencies, we wish to discover if perfectionism has distinct influences on innovative behavior and burnout.

Relevant literature on the two dimensions of perfectionism (Hamachek, 1978; Stumpf & Parker, 2000; Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995) notes that normal, adaptive, or positive perfectionism is viewed as healthy perfectionism, while neurotic, maladaptive, or negative perfectionism is seen as unhealthy perfectionism. In the current study, healthy perfectionism related to perfectionistic strivings

(Stoeber, Harris, & Moon, 2007) is associated with people who strive for excellence (Enns, Cox, Sareen, & Freeman, 2001). Unhealthy perfectionism related to perfectionistic concerns (Stoeber et al., 2007) is associated with people who seek others' approval, or fear potential failure due to mistakes or not meeting their own standards (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 1998). We expect that the two dimensions will show different effects on innovative behavior and job burnout.

Based on the concept of personal initiative (PI), individuals utilize self-starting and active behavior to achieve goals through persistence in the face of obstacles (Frese & Fay, 2001). People with healthy perfectionism actively display innovative behaviors while pursuing their goals; however, unhealthy perfectionists often face burnout due to the aforementioned negative associations. As such, perfectionism can be seen as a double-edged sword (Stoeber, 2014) in the workplace.

In addition, according to the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), high workplace friendship environments often emphasize supporting others and sharing information, in contrast with environments that lack this context. As such, the current study explores whether team workplace friendship has a moderating effect on the relationship between perfectionism and innovative behavior, as well as job burnout. In the context of high team workplace friendships, drawing on the facets of personal initiative (Frese & Fay, 2001), healthy perfectionists seek out resources and feedback more effectively, and also freely share new ideas, while unhealthy perfectionists are less likely to perceive approval and encouragement of co-workers within a supportive environment. Therefore, we believe that team workplace friendship strengthens the positive relationship between healthy perfectionism and innovative

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behavior, and weakens the positive relationship between unhealthy perfectionism and job burnout.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

Perfectionists have been described as having high standards, persistence, conscientiousness (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004), self-discipline, and self-sentiment (high self-concept control), as well as rigorous willpower (Conn & Rieke, 1994). However, as noted previously, they often measure their self-worth based on their accomplishments and others' evaluations, and can be overly critical when their standards are not met (Childs & Stoeber, 2010).

Since Hamachek raised two dimensions of perfectionism in 1978, several studies have described perfectionistic strivings and concerns (Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). The former detailed perfectionistic personal standards and a self-oriented striving for perfection found that these were positively correlated with positive affect and achievement motivation (Enns et al., 2001). Moreover, evaluations of self-worth on the attainment of goals are related to maximum performance (Hrabluik, Latham, & McCarthy, 2012). In contrast, the latter captured feelings of discrepancy between expectations and performance, concerns over making mistakes, and distrust regarding one's actions (Stoeber & Childs, 2011), which were found to be associated with fear, anxiety, depression and stress (Rice et al., 1998; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In the current study, they are classified as healthy and unhealthy perfectionism.

Even though many studies have probed perfectionism, few have considered the simultaneous effects of the two types, and some focused solely on general perfectionism (Hill et al., 2010). In response, we simultaneously explore the effects of both types on the dependent workplace variables.

Increasingly, today's managers argue that they need active participants rather than passive implementers of orders, especially in hi-tech R&D groups. Based on PI, individuals take an active approach to pursue self-set goals, anticipate future opportunities, and overcome barriers; three key related aspects include self-starting, proactiveness and persistence (Frese & Fay, 2001), which reinforce one another (Frese, Garst, & Fay, 2007). Personal initiative enables personal development and pursuit of goals, while proactiveness enables anticipation of potential opportunities. Taking advantage of and exploiting decisive opportunities contribute to greater innovation. Furthermore, the ability to persistently and rigorously devise and share creative solutions to barriers is a key factor in reaching one's goals. Thus, we predict the following:

H1. Healthy perfectionism is positively related to innovative behavior.

Burnout occurs frequently among individuals who experience extreme pressure at work, which in turn can result in emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). According to the PI (Frese et al., 2007), a balance between an active approach to pursuing goals and rigorous monitoring of tasks is required. Unhealthy perfectionists tend to focus primarily on meeting their own high standards and receiving high evaluations; if either does not occur, they tend to become anxious (Page, Bruch, & Haase, 2008) and feel that their task completion is inadequate. In turn, they lose their confidence and initiative, and stop being proactive, leading to an inability to efficiently accomplish assignments; they may even attempt to evade their responsibilities. Based on the above, we posit the following:

H2. Unhealthy perfectionism is positively related to job burnout.

According to the social cognitive theory, an individual's behavior is affected by their personality and life circumstances (Bandura, 1986). For individuals who interact with others in a specific social environment, the most common and important factors in the workplace are personal abilities and organizational functions (Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003).

The concept of PI (Frese & Fay, 2001) notes that once a goal is established, individuals collect information to help execute plans, and gather feedback to adjust their actions. To do this, employees need resources. In an environment of high team workplace friendship, employees not only share information and discuss problems freely, but also gain support and assistance from one another (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002). Within a context of high team workplace friendship and abundant resources, healthy perfectionists are able to motivate themselves to develop innovative behaviors. Moreover, team members value the pursuit of the high standards of healthy perfectionists and assist them in developing their ideas, promoting more innovative behaviors. In return, healthy perfectionists show respect to their team members, and set reasonable standards in terms of balancing individual and team goals. Given above, we propose the following:

H3. High team workplace friendship strengthens the positive correlation between healthy perfectionism and innovative behavior.

However, unhealthy perfectionists place considerable value on the perceived discrepancy between standards and performance. Drawing on the concept of PI, self-starting individuals set goals, look for resources and overcome barriers (Frese & Fay, 2001). However, within high team workplace friendships, team members receive feedback as well as resources: both help solve problems. By overcoming potential obstacles, they decrease the gap between their expectations and outcomes, and may persist in pursuing their goals. Overcoming difficulties, enduring persistence and self-starting all reinforce one another (Frese et al., 2007) in an upward spiral.

Further, in high team workplace friendship situations, unhealthy perfectionists sense an increase in trust, which promotes increased personal accomplishment and reduces their fear of inadequacy, thereby decreasing emotional exhaustion and burnout levels (Kruger, Bernstein, & Botman, 1995). We therefore predict the following:

H4. High team workplace friendship weakens the positive correlation between unhealthy perfectionism and job burnout.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample and procedure

Taiwan is a world semiconductor sale leader, relying on its excellent R&D in high technology. We selected the top 1000 high technology firms in Taiwan as listed in Commonwealth Magazine as our population. We recruited R&D teams and asked them to identify at least one team leader paired with three to five team member participants. In total, 257 paired-questionnaires (257 leaders and 1255 members) were sent out.

Data collection took place over a two-month period. After removing the invalid questionnaires, the total sample size was 112 sets (112 leaders and 437 members), for 43.58% and 34.82% response rates at the team and individual levels, respectively. Before advancing to the HLM statistical analysis, we aggregated the valid matched data, and confirmed that one team leader was paired with at least three member participants (Bliese, 2000; Gilson, Shalley, & Ruddy, 2005; James, 1982). Furthermore, we dealt with missing items using the mean imputation method. According to Bennett (2001) stated that bias is likely when greater than 10% of the sample data is missing. Our statistical analyses were within the limit accepted and were not considered biased.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Perfectionism

The Revised Almost Perfect Scale (APS-R) (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001) was the original 23-item source for measuring perfectionism; it includes three subscales: high standards, discrepancy, and order. Following Stoeber and Otto (2006) and Stoeber et al. (2007),

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