



# The dimensionality of workaholism and its relations with internal and external factors<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

“Are workaholics born or made?” The current research aims to answer the question above, while investigating the joint impact of internal and external factors (Work Drive and Work Enjoyment) related to workaholism’s dimensions. In Study 1, we hypothesize an order of precedence between those dimensions, utilizing one moderator (Job Autonomy) and one mediator (Work-Family Conflict - WFC) (158 employees). Study 2 (349 employees) expands the general framework, taking two moderators (Self-Criticism and LMX) into consideration. Multivariate (vs. bivariate) analyses allowed more thorough understanding of workaholism and its dimensions. We offer theoretical and practical implications.

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## La dimensionalidad de la adicción al trabajo y su relación con factores internos y externos

### RESUMEN

“¿Los adictos al trabajo nacen o se hacen?” Este trabajo trata de contestar dicha pregunta investigando la repercusión conjunta de factores internos y externos (la motivación por el trabajo y el disfrute del mismo) en relación a las dimensiones de la adicción al trabajo. En el estudio 1 se plantea la hipótesis de un orden de precedencia entre esas dimensiones usando un moderador (la autonomía en el puesto de trabajo) y un mediador (el conflicto trabajo-familia) en una muestra de 158 empleados. El estudio 2, en una muestra de 349 empleados, amplía el marco general teniendo en consideración dos moderadores (autocrítica e intercambio líder-subordinado). Los análisis multivariable (en relación a los bivariales) permitieron una mayor comprensión de la adicción al trabajo y de sus dimensiones. Por último, se abordan implicaciones teóricas y prácticas.

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### Palabras clave:

Adicción al trabajo

Autocrítica

Intercambio líder-subordinado

Conflicto trabajo-familia

Inestabilidad emocional

Autonomía en el puesto de trabajo

Variable supresora

Oates (1971) coined the term Workaholism and defined the phenomenon as “an addiction to work, the compulsion or

uncontrollable need to work incessantly” (Oates, 1971, p. 11). Oates noted that workaholics’ need to work becomes exaggerated and may cause harm to their health, personal happiness, interpersonal relations, and social functioning. In a later discussion of the term, Spence and Robbins (1992) regarded workaholism as an addiction. They noted that “the workaholic feels driven or compelled to work, not because of external demands or pleasure in work, but because of inner pressures that make the person distressed or guilty

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about not working” (p. 161). Since Spence and Robbins (1992), there have been many papers in the academic literature devoted to workaholism (e.g., Andreassen, Griffiths, Hetland, Kravina, Jensen, & Pallesen, 2014; Patel, Bowler, Bowler, & Methe, 2012; Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008). Most researchers agree upon workaholism’s core behavioral manifestation, namely, heavy investment in work (Scott, Moore, & Miceli, 1997; Snir & Harpaz, 2015; Spence & Robbins, 1992). That is to say, workaholics spend many hours a week on work-related activities when given the opportunity to do so (Snir & Zohar, 2008) and much beyond what is required or expected by colleagues or organizational demands (Scott et al., 1997).

Of note, workaholism has frequently been considered as comprising a multi-dimensional structure (for an in-depth review, see Andreassen, 2015). This paper will also adhere to the multi-dimensional structure of this concept.

### Dimensions of Workaholism

Spence and Robbins (1992) offered the first multi-dimensional definition of workaholism. They prescribed three dimensions and dubbed them the ‘Workaholism Triad’ – Work Involvement, Work Drive, and Work Enjoyment. Work Drive constitutes the inner pressures that compel the employee to work, while Work Enjoyment is the pleasure derived from the work itself. The Involvement dimension refers to the commitment of employees to their work and time invested in it (see Spence & Robbins, p. 161).

As far as we know, since Spence and Robbins (1992), there have been two additional multi-dimensional definitions of workaholism. Such dimensions include Non-Required Work and Control of Others, which gauge the amount of time and energy spent at work (Mudrack & Naughton, 2001), and Working Compulsively and Working Excessively, which assess both the time and energy invested in work (i.e., heavy work investment) and the drive compulsion for investing these resources (Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009). However, in this paper, we chose to follow Spence and Robbins’ (1992) dimensions because it is the only theoretical framework in which the Drive dimension coexists with a *positive experience* of Enjoyment at work. We find this approach highly relevant in the current world of social sciences, with its emphasis on Positive Psychology, and in the context of an overall western culture, that promotes the workplace as a potential source of self-fulfillment and enjoyment. As Harpaz (2015) wrote:

In contrast to the negative side, other studies have emphasized the positive aspects of the drive to work. They saw it as a dispositional motive that causes enthusiasm and passion in one’s work behavior, perceiving it as a source of pleasure, self-fulfillment, and existential meaning (p. 370).

In light of past literature, we noticed that the Triad’s dimensions (Drive, Enjoyment, and Involvement; Spence & Robbins, 1992) are consistently deemed theoretically independent of each other (see Graves, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Weber, 2012; McMillan, Brady, O’Driscoll, & Marsh, 2002; Spence & Robbins, 1992). It is important to note that throughout the literature the Drive and Enjoyment dimensions are deemed the most consistent, while research has failed to confirm the relevance of the Involvement dimension (e.g., Andreassen, Hetland & Pallesen, 2012; McMillan et al., 2002). One reason is that the definition of involvement has terminological collinearity with organizational commitment (for further review, see Scott et al., 1997, p. 290) and the latter dimension, i.e., organizational commitment, was considered, overall, an invalid dimension (Andreassen, Griffiths et al., 2014). Thus, this research focuses specifically only on the Drive and Enjoyment dimensions.

Concerning the associations between Work Drive and Work Enjoyment, there have been some inconsistencies: several

researchers have found significant positive relationships (Burke, Matthiesen, & Pallesen, 2006; Clark, Michel, Zhdanova, Pui, & Baltes, 2014; McMillan et al., 2002), while others have found close-to-zero relationships (Andreassen, Hetland, & Pallesen, 2010; Spence & Robbins, 1992). It is vital to emphasize that in these studies the authors obtained results by employing correlational methodology (post factum, in the correlation matrices) and not by establishing a priori confirmatory hypotheses. These inconsistencies lead us to believe that the relationship between Drive and Enjoyment is most probably regulated by other, indirect variables (mediators, moderators).

### The Current Research

Faced with these inconsistent findings, we reassert that the goal of the present paper is to test the dimensionality of workaholism and its relations with internal and external factors. The medium for achieving this objective is a test of a broader theoretical framework that incorporates the Drive and Enjoyment dimensions, including antecedents, moderators, mediators, and outcomes. We aim to show that Work Drive – at times regarded as being “intrinsically bad” because of its potentially negative outcomes (Schaufeli et al., 2009, p. 325) – may have positive outcomes as well (i.e., Enjoyment). In other words, “Out of the strong, came forth something sweet” (Judges 14:14). By doing so, we will try to unveil potentially important variables, *which can be used for organizational interventions*, in order to bring something “sweet” “from something “strong”.

This research is built upon two separate studies, whereby the second study is additive to the first in terms of the conceptual framework, namely, it serves as a test of the association between Work Drive and Work Enjoyment and its relations with other internal and external factors. We split our research into two separate studies due to the large amount of variables overall (see Figure 3). Had we incorporated them all into one study, from the perspective of the respondents, survey completion would have been overly burdensome. This approach of breaking down a global research project, comprising a large number of factors, into sub-studies is supported by previous studies (e.g., Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2012; Sharoni, Shkoler, & Tziner, 2015).

### Work Drive and Work Enjoyment – Order of Precedence

Before elaborating on the said variables and associations, we wish to focus specifically on the relationship between the Drive and Enjoyment dimensions. As far as we know, testing the notion that Work Drive *precedes* Work Enjoyment has yet to be determined on a solid theoretical basis. This relationship stands in the center of our framework (see Figure 3), and as such is of paramount importance.

Work Drive can be considered as an uncontrollable internal need (Taris, Schaufeli, & Shimazu, 2010), which may override preventive motivational focus (Taris, van Beek, & Schaufeli, 2015) – the prevention of unpleasant feelings when not working. This proposition is supported by Ng, Sorensen, and Feldman’s (2007) research that demonstrated that the act of working assuages the associated unpleasant feelings when not working, such as anxiety, helplessness, depression, and/or guilt (see also Spence & Robbins, 1992; Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012; Andreassen, Griffiths, Hetland, & Pallesen, 2012). Therefore, the act of working might play a role as a mood modifier, which is an important component of any addiction (Andreassen et al., 2012; Griffiths, 2005), namely, working in order to escape or avoid dysphoria.

Therefore, we hypothesize that the uncontrollable internal drive to work *precedes* the experiences that might derive from the work itself (e.g., Work Enjoyment). The association between Drive and

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