Human Resource Management Review 22 (2012) 232–243

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Human Resource Management Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/humres

Beyond workaholism: Towards a general model of heavy work investment ☆

Raphael Snir [a,*], Itzhak Harpaz [b]

[a] School of Management and Economics, School of Behavioral Sciences, The Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo, Israel
[b] Center for the Study of Organizations & Human Resource Management, Graduate School of Management, University of Haifa, Israel

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Workaholism
Heavy work investment
Attribution theory

ABSTRACT

Although the term workaholism is widely used, little consensus exists about its meaning, and there is a great need for further theoretical and methodological advancement. We attempt to address this need by introducing the concept of Heavy Work Investment (HWI), and viewing workaholism as only one of its subtypes. Furthermore, we propose a model consisting of four main components: HWI, its possible predictors, its types, and its outcomes.
In this model, using Weiner's (1985) attributional framework, we differentiate between situational and dispositional types of HWI, each with its own subtypes, as based on the predictors of such an investment. For example, financial-needs-based and employer-directed are situational subtypes, whereas workaholism and work-devotion are dispositional subtypes. Based on the proposed HWI model, we compare dispositional investors with situational investors.
Finally, the measurement of HWI, as well as future research directions (study of situational investors, research across time and cultures, and exploration of inter-generational similarity/difference) is also discussed.

1. Introduction

By the term workaholics, Oates (1971) refers to people whose need to work has become so exaggerated that it may constitute a danger to their health, personal happiness, interpersonal relations and social functioning. Studies of workaholism resulted initially in a large volume of clinical and anecdotal data (e.g., Killinger, 1991; Machlowitz, 1980; Waddell, 1993), causing scholars to lament the lack of conceptual and methodological rigor (e.g., Scott, Moore, & Miceli, 1997). Recent studies have adopted better procedures, resulting in quantitative data that are amenable to statistical analysis (e.g., Aziz & Zickar, 2006; Bakker, Demerouti, & Burke, 2009; Chamberlin & Zhang, 2009; Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Russo & Waters, 2006; Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008; Shimazu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2010). Yet despite the common use of the term "workaholism," little agreement exists as to its meaning beyond its core element: heavy work investment.

This theoretical paper serves two main objectives. The first is to stress that workaholism is only one of the subtypes of heavy work investment. Namely, every workaholic is a heavy work investor, but not every heavy work investor is a workaholic. The second is to propose a model in which, using Weiner's (1985) attributional framework, we differentiate situational from dispositional types of heavy work investment, each with its own subtypes, as based on the predictors of such an investment.

Several writers have focused on the negative aspects of workaholism (e.g., Killinger, 1991; Porter, 1996; Robinson, 1989, 2007; Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009; Taris, Schaufeli, & Verhoeven, 2005). For instance, Robinson (1989) defines workaholism as a progressive, potentially fatal disorder of work addiction, leading to family disintegration and an increased inability to manage work habits and life domains. Rooted in the addiction paradigm, one of the earliest measures of workaholism is the Work Addiction

☆ The authors are grateful to Rich Arvey, Suzy Fox and Yitzhak Fried, for their helpful comments and insightful suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.
* Corresponding author. Tel.: +972 3 5714767.
E-mail address: rafi-snir@bezeqint.net (R. Snir).

1053-4822/$ – see front matter © 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2011.11.011

Risk Test (WART; Robinson, 1989). Workaholism, as measured by WART, includes five dimensions: Compulsive Tendencies, Control, Impaired Communication/Self-Absorption, Inability to Delegate, and Self-Worth (Flowers & Robinson, 2002). Nevertheless, despite Robinson's quite extensive use of the WART, its external validity needs additional examination. With few exceptions (e.g., Taris et al., 2005), most samples have included students (that are typically young and do not necessarily work), members of Workaholics Anonymous (which constitute a biased/range-restricted sample), or psychotherapists as expert observers (e.g., Flowers & Robinson, 2002; Robinson, 1996, 1999).

According to Schaufeli et al. (2009), workaholism is negatively conceptualized as working excessively and working compulsively. Based on this conceptualization, they propose a two-scale, ten-item workaholism measure, dubbed the Dutch Workaholism Scale (DUWAS). Satisfactory psychometric properties of the DUWAS are indicated (e.g., Del Libano, Llorens, Salanova, & Schaufeli, 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2009).

On the other hand, some writers view workaholism positively, as involving a pleasurable engagement at work (Machlowitz, 1980; Sprankle & Ebel, 1987). For example, Machlowitz (1980:16) found that "as a group, workaholics are surprisingly happy. They are doing exactly what they love – work – and they can't seem to get enough of it." Likewise, Snir and Zohar (2008) found that workaholics experience more positive affect during work than during leisure activity, by comparison to non-workaholics. Moreover, they found no significant differences between workaholics and non-workaholics regarding the likelihood of performing work-related activities during leisure activity, or in the levels of physical discomfort and negative affect during the weekend. This suggests *no* indications of work addiction, such as the inability to stop working, and withdrawal symptoms.

Other writers differentiate negative from positive workaholism types. For example, Scott et al. (1997) identify three types of workaholism patterns: compulsive dependent, perfectionist, and achievement oriented, and signify the first two as negative types, the third positive. Spence and Robbins (1992) based their characterization of workaholism on three attitudinal work-related properties: involvement, drive (due to inner pressure), and enjoyment. They define a workaholic as a person with high scores in work involvement and drive, and low scores in work enjoyment. They contrast this profile with work enthusiasm, defined as high involvement and enjoyment and low drive. Hence, instead of differentiating negative and positive types of workaholism, Spence and Robbins (1992) differentiate workaholism — being negative, from work enthusiasm — being positive. Work enthusiasm is similar to the recently introduced concept of work engagement, which refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Taris, & Bakker, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Based on the above conceptualization, Spence and Robbins (1992) developed a three-scale Workaholism Battery (WorkBAT), which is a widely used measure in workaholism research. Despite apparent polarity, Spence and Robbins (1992) reported that their largest sub-group (19% of the sample) scored highly in all three aforementioned work-related properties (i.e., involvement, drive, and enjoyment), and therefore labeled them enthusiastic workaholics. According to this finding, work drive and work enjoyment are not opposites and can be viewed as orthogonal dimensions. Some research supports the psychometric properties of the Workaholism Battery (e.g., Burke, 2001; Spence & Robbins, 1992), but its factorial structure is subject to some controversy (e.g., Huang, Hu, & Wu, 2010; McMillan, Brady, O'Driscoll, & Marsh, 2002).

Regardless of statistical properties, it is noteworthy that the Workaholism Battery is derived from three attitudinal constructs that partially overlap other well-established concepts: work involvement and drive are not entirely differentiated from work centrality and job involvement. This also holds regarding work enjoyment and job satisfaction. According to McMillan and O'Driscoll (2006), it is feasible that work drive and enjoyment are merely antecedents that trigger workaholic behavior. Finally, Spence and Robbins' Workaholism Battery does not measure the feature which we consider a conspicuous aspect of workaholism, namely long work hours. That is, one may exhibit high involvement and high drive but work regular workdays. In our opinion, qualifying such an individual as a workaholic is erroneous.

2. Towards a general model of heavy work investment

The foregoing short description of the state of workaholism research indicates a great need for further theoretical and methodological development. As noted above, there is little consensus concerning the meaning of workaholism, as reflected in its negative versus positive conceptualizations, and the attitude–behavior controversy. There is also an implicit, though prevalent, assumption in the popular press and among practitioners that if one invests heavily in his/her work, he/she is most likely a workaholic (e.g., Downey Grimsley, 1999; Tuckman, 2006). In the present paper we attempt to address these shortcomings, by introducing the two-dimensional concept of Heavy Work Investment (HWI), and viewing workaholism as only one of its subtypes. Furthermore, we propose a model, presented in Fig. 1, consisting of four main components: HWI, its possible predictors, its major types, and its outcomes.

The model shows the major sets of variables and the most straightforward relationships considered to be of primary importance in the study of HWI. The arrows indicate that an attempt should be made to determine the extent to which variables of one set predict (in a statistical sense) variables of another set. Possible moderators in relationship between HWI and its outcomes are also outlined.

2.1. Heavy Work Investment (HWI): a two-dimensional concept

The shortcomings of previous workaholism research led Snir and Zohar (2008) to define workaholism as heavy time investment in work that does not stem from external demands (e.g., financial needs). This behavior-based definition does not overlap possible attitudinal predictors (e.g., work centrality, job involvement) or outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction). However, assessment of