

References and selected further reading

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Workaholism

The term 'workaholism' was coined by the American minister and psychologist Wayne Oates in 1968 to refer to his own addiction to work. Workaholism is an individual difference characteristic referring to self-imposed demands, compulsive overworking, and an inability to regulate work habits (Robinson, 1997). Workaholics work beyond what is reasonably expected to meet organizational requirements. Their compulsive tendencies make workaholics devote more resources (e.g., time, effort, energy) to work, leaving them with fewer resources to devote to their family and private life. As a consequence, workaholics often neglect their life outside their job – their personal health, their family, and their community. Compulsive workers recognize that work is excessive but are unable to reduce or control it. They continue to work hard despite social or health problems, and they experience unpleasant withdrawal symptoms when away from work. Their motive to work excessively is not because they enjoy their work or their high achievement orientation, but because they are perfectionist and set overly stringent standards (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

There is accumulating evidence that workaholism is related to poorer psychological and physical wellbeing (Harpaz and Snir, 2015). Workaholics report relatively high levels of exhaustion, anxiety and depression, but also relatively low levels of work engagement and life satisfaction (Clark et al., forthcoming). Workaholics love to work, but the repetitive and addictive character of their behaviours seems to drain their psychological resources. Furthermore, because workaholics are willing to sacrifice personal relationships to derive satisfaction from work, it is not surprising that the spouses of workaholics report high levels of work–family conflict, low levels of social support and a low relationship quality (Bakker et al., 2009).

Despite their enormous investments in work, workaholics usually perform less well than non-workaholics. Working long hours diminishes both productivity and quality, because sleep-deprivation and fatigue make it hard to stay concentrated and increase the risk of mistakes. Moreover, workaholics are often self-centred and experience problems

collaborating with colleagues, undermining team performance. There is still a debate in the literature regarding the most important causes of workaholism, and, consequently, the most important remedies. Whereas some scholars argue that workaholism is an individual difference variable that originates in employees, others have argued that the working environment is more important. Managers may create a culture that venerates overwork and stimulates excessive hard work. Working long days for a long period of time undermines opportunities for recovery and contributes to chronic exhaustion, the core symptom of job burnout.

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See also:

Burnout; Employee engagement; Long hours culture; Stress.

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Worker

Section 230(3)(b) of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and section 296(1)(b) of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 both prescribe that an individual is a ‘worker’ if s/he has entered into or works under a contract, whether express or implied and (if it is express) whether oral or in writing, whereby the individual undertakes to do or perform personally any work or services for another party to the contract whose status is not by virtue of the contract that of a client or customer of any profession or business undertaking carried on by the individual. As such, in order to qualify as a ‘worker’, the individual must be engaged on the basis of a contract, involving the provision of personal services to the other party to the contract, and the latter must not be the individual’s client or customer.

The significance of the statutory category of ‘worker’ lies in the fact that such an individual – while not qualifying as an ‘employee’ working for an employer on the basis of a contract of employment – is entitled to the benefit of some statutory employment rights, such as the right to be paid the national minimum wage under the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, and the right to holiday leave and pay under the Working Time Regulations 1998. This intermediate category lies somewhere between employment at one end of a spectrum and commercial self-employed independent contracting at the opposite end of that same spectrum. It was first introduced as a legal category by legislation in the mid-1980s and is intended to capture individuals