Dimensions, Antecedents, and Consequences of Workaholism: A Conceptual Integration and Extension

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Dimensions, antecedents, and consequences of workaholism: a conceptual integration and extension

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Summary

While the concept of workaholism has received a good deal of attention in the popular press, theoretical and empirical research have lagged behind. In part, the lack of a formal, agreed upon definition of the construct and its dimensions has hampered research on this topic. The purpose of this review is to offer a cohesive definition of workaholism, discuss its underlying dimensions, and identify its key antecedents and consequences. Measurement issues, directions for future research, and implications for management practice are discussed as well. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

With the increase in weekly work hours over the past 2 decades (McMillan, Brady, O'Driscoll, & Marsh, 2002), workaholism has emerged as a prominent topic in the practitioner literature (Fassel, 1990; Killinger, 1991; Robinson, 1998; Smith & Seymour, 2004). Our keyword search (using ‘workaholism’) of the last 20 years’ studies included in the Business Source Premier research database located 131 articles on the issue. However, the amount of attention given to workaholism by academic researchers has been significantly less. Of these 131 articles published on workaholism, only 40 appeared in academic journals and only 28 were empirical in nature (e.g., Burke & Matthiesen, 2004; Ersoy-Kart, 2005; McMillan et al., 2002; Robinson, Carroll, & Flowers, 2001a). Because the extent of workaholism continues to increase in America and worldwide (Schor, 1991; Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001), a better scholarly understanding of the topic appears both necessary and timely.

The changing nature of careers in recent years (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) further accentuates the need to increase our understanding of workaholism. For instance, clear role expectations at work do not exist anymore (Sullivan, 1999) and the boundaries between work and personal life are becoming more blurred (Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996). In addition, with the advance of technology (e.g., internet and

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telecommunication), more and more employees are able to work outside the traditional office and outside traditional work hours (Cooper, 1998). These changes can induce more workaholism especially in managerial employees, who now have both greater incentives and greater opportunities to invest more heavily in work.

The central purpose of the current article is to provide an integration and extension of the conceptual literature on workaholism. The paper has four specific goals. First, we attempt to clarify the definition of the construct of workaholism. There is still no widely accepted definition of workaholism (Seybold & Salomone, 1994) and the absence of such a definition may be a key reason why advancement of empirical research on the topic has been rather slow (Scott, Moore, & Miceli, 1997). The second goal is to discuss the antecedents of workaholism. Here we synthesize the diverse literature on dispositional factors, socio-cultural factors, and behavioral reinforcements that contribute to workaholism. Our third goal is to discuss consequences of workaholism. Previous research on workaholism has argued that workaholism has both positive (Burke, 2001a) and negative consequences (Fassel, 1990). However, only sporadic attempts have been made to integrate these divergent and sometimes inconsistent sets of findings. Finally, in the discussion section, we outline some important research and practical issues related to workaholism, including measurement challenges, how current work trends and organizational culture affect workaholism, and managerial implications.

The Construct of Workaholism

Oates (1971, p. 1) is credited with the initial use of the term ‘workaholism’ to describe one’s ‘addiction to work, the compulsion or the uncontrollable need to work incessantly.’ Therefore, workaholics can be seen both positively and negatively. On one hand, workaholics are addicts who cannot control themselves; on the other hand, they are particularly diligent and dedicated workers. A review of the literature, however, indicates that a variety of other elements have been used to define workaholism since the Oates research (e.g., see Scott et al., 1997, p. 291). Unfortunately, there appears to be no consensus regarding which set of dimensions provides the most accurate and complete definition of workaholism. Some of the more commonly used definitions of workaholism are discussed below in chronological order.

Fassel (1990) defines workaholism as pathology. She suggests that ‘workaholism is a progressive, fatal disease in which a person is addicted to the process of working’ (p. 2). She suggests that due to the addiction, the person’s personal life becomes unmanageable in relation to work. This ‘fatal disease’ perspective, though, seems rather drastic (Thombs, 1994). While this definition can alert people to the seriousness of workaholism and therefore invite attention to the topic, it can also promote denial from workaholics themselves. Many victims may resist being classified as ‘diseased,’ especially if the disease has a strong ‘mental health’ component.

Unlike Fassel’s (1990) emphasis on addiction and progression, Spence and Robbins’ (1992) definition focuses more on the roots of workaholism. In fact, their definition is the one most often cited in the literature (e.g., Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Burke, 2000a; Kanai, Wakabayashi, & Fling, 1996). They suggest that workaholism consists of the dimensions of enjoyment of work, inner drive to work, and work involvement. However, the factor structure of these three dimensions has not been fully replicated in empirical studies (e.g., Kanai et al., 1996; McMillan et al., 2002). In addition, as we discuss in more detail below, there is an important distinction to be drawn between enjoyment of work and enjoyment of working. Overall, Spence and Robbins’ definition promotes a multi-
dimensional perspective of workaholism, even though there is still disagreement with regard to the
validity of the specific content dimensions they propose.
Porter’s (1996) definition similarly emphasizes the elements of internal drive and work involvement.
She suggests that workaholism is ‘excessive involvement with work evidenced by neglect in other areas
of life and based on internal motives of behavior maintenance rather than requirements of the job or
organization’ (p. 71). In a way, her definition is an improvement upon Spence and Robbins’ (1992)
because it more explicitly includes the core behavioral component (excessive working) into
the definition. Scott et al. (1997), too, define workaholism in a similar way. They define workaholics as
those who spend a great deal of time in work activities (even at the cost of sacrificing time for other
non-work activities), persistently think about work when they are not working, and work beyond
organizational requirements or economic needs. Thus, it can be seen that, as the literature has advanced
over the last few decades, at least two elements have emerged as core characteristics of workaholism:
an internal drive to work and time spent working at the expense of other important life roles. These
elements are also incorporated into the proposed definition of workaholism to be presented in this
paper.
Other researchers have attempted to integrate the literature by developing typologies of different
types of workaholics. Unfortunately, some of these typologies are largely atheoretical because the
processes by which they were generated are unspecified or unable to be replicated. For instance, some
researchers (Fassel, 1990; Oates, 1971; Rohrlich, 1981) argue that there are different types of
workaholics, but the underlying theoretical dimensions used to differentiate among types of
workaholics are neither transparent nor explicitly addressed. Some other typologies of workaholics do
have stronger theoretical rationales because the authors create the typologies based on elements of
workaholism suggested in the literature, such as work involvement and enjoyment (e.g., Naughton,
1987; Scott et al., 1997; Spence & Robbins, 1992). However, there is still little consistency across the
series of typologies proposed.

The Dimensions of Workaholism

Scott et al. (1997) used a rather inductive approach to derive a definition of workaholism. That is, first
they gathered the commonly suggested attributes of workaholics and then they proposed theoretical
dimensions to capture those attributes. Here, we use a more theory-driven and deductive approach.
Specifically, because workaholism is a form of addiction (Oates, 1971), we use theoretical work on
addictive behavior to guide us in identifying the core content dimensions of workaholism. Figure 1
depicts our theoretical framework.
The element of addiction has been central to our understanding of workaholism from the earliest
years of workaholism research (Oates, 1971; Seybold & Salomone, 1994). While the meaning of
addiction is far from consensual (Goodman, 1990), the research on addiction appears to place emphasis
on three overarching dimensions: affect, cognition, and behavior. In a handbook of addictive behaviors,
Smith and Seymour (2004) suggest that an addiction of any kind—including drug usage, drinking,
gambling, eating, working, and buying—often involves compulsion and loss of self-control
(cognition) and continued engagement (behavior) in spite of adverse consequences. On the other hand,
Orford (1985) conceptualizes addiction as excessive appetite, the satisfaction of which brings pleasure
and gratification (affect). Similarly, the American Psychological Association states that disorders of
impulse control involve ‘pleasure, gratification, or release at the time of committing the act’ (p. 321).
Because addiction appears to involve these three core overarching dimensions—affect, cognition, and behavior—the proposed definition of workaholism should also reflect these three dimensions. Therefore, in this paper, workaholics are defined as those who enjoy the act of working, who are obsessed with working, and who devote long hours and personal time to work. In short, workaholics are those whose emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are strongly dominated by their work. We discuss each of the three dimensions of workaholism in more detail below.

Affective dimension

Passion for working provides workaholics with the impetus to dedicate much of their time and energy to their work and to persevere in spite of setbacks. Past research also acknowledges the important role of positive affect in defining workaholism. For instance, Bonebright et al. (2000) attribute workaholism to the ‘immense enjoyment’ derived from working. Similarly, Spence and Robbins (1992) assert that a person’s enjoyment of work is a core dimension of workaholism. Cantarow (1979) suggests that workaholics are those who seek passionate involvement and gratification from working. Finally, it has been observed that hard-workers often use the word ‘fun’ to describe their work experiences (Kiechel, 1989; Machlowitz, 1980). Thus, it seems that workaholics typically find working pleasurable.

As mentioned earlier, Spence and Robbins (1992) suggest that some types of workaholics do not enjoy the work they do. We agree with this possibility because it is often the act of working rather than the nature of the work itself that workaholics enjoy. If a person, for whatever reason, becomes addicted to working instead of other behaviors, then the intrinsic or extrinsic rewards which come from this...
activity must bring the individual some level of satisfaction or gratification. Thus, unlike Spence and Robbins’ suggestion that enjoyment of work is a dimension of workaholism, we emphasize that it is enjoyment of working that is the more appropriate dimension. This distinction addresses one of the key concerns raised about Spence and Robbins’ definition over the years (McMillan et al., 2002; Scott et al., 1997).

Moreover, we suggest that the joy derived from working is not the only affective component underlying workaholism. Specifically, we argue that workaholics often experience negative emotions when they are not working. That is, workaholics find not working unpleasurable because their happiness in life stems primarily from one source—working. For instance, Morris and Charney (1983) suggest that workaholics experience anxiety and even depression when they are deprived of work. While some non-workaholics may also experience these same negative emotions when they are deprived of work, it is reasonable to expect that the frequency and intensity of these negative emotions will be more strongly experienced by workaholics.

Taking into account the negative emotions that workaholics experience during non-work activities, then, provides a more complete conceptualization of the affective dimension of workaholism. In particular, guilt and anxiety appear to be the two core negative emotions that are commonly experienced by workaholics when they are deprived of work. For instance, Spence and Robbins (1992) measured workaholism using a scale with an item that states ‘I feel guilty when I take time off from work.’ Anxiety is experienced because workaholics often are goal-oriented and competitive (Scott et al., 1997), and therefore time spent on non-work activities may be viewed as a period during which they are excluded from the ‘competition.’

Cognitive dimension

The cognitive dimension of workaholism reflects those intellectual processes that propel workaholics to work excessively. We suggest that the core cognitive element characterizing workaholism is an obsession with working (McMillan et al., 2002). Workaholics often are obsessed with work activities, a strong preoccupation that they cannot suppress and control (Smith & Seymour, 2004).

This cognitive component is implicit or explicit in most definitions of workaholism suggested in the literature. For instance, Scott et al. (1997) suggest that workaholism involves persistently thinking about work when not working. Oates (1971) suggests that workaholism is the uncontrollable need to work. Both Cherrington (1980) and Porter (1996) suggest that it is an irrational over-commitment to work. Naughton (1987) and Spence and Robbins (1992) each suggest that workaholism involves an inner urge or drive to work excessively. Thus, these writers all agree that workaholism is marked by an obsession with working, even with the knowledge that excessive working is not necessary.

Behavioral dimension

The behavioral dimension of workaholism is actual excessive involvement in work. It should be noted here that this behavioral dimension is not the same as the consequences of workaholism that will be discussed in a later section. Rather, this behavioral component is part of the character of workaholism itself. There are two sub-components that underlie this dimension of workaholism: working long hours and excessive intrusion of work into personal life.

It is commonly accepted that workaholics are those who work for long hours (Machlowitz, 1980; Oates, 1971; Porter, 1996). For instance, Mosier (1983) defines workaholism as working over 50 hours a week. Bonebright et al. (2000) suggest that one of the major characteristics of workaholism is that a
great deal of time is spent in work activities. As McMillan et al. (2002) observe, two key research articles in this area (Scott et al., 1997; Spence & Robbins, 1992) have emphasized long working hours as the critical component of definition of workaholism. Thus, it appears reasonable that, in defining workaholism, working long hours should be taken into consideration.

It is important to note, however, that the motives behind working long hours are often different between workaholics and non-workaholics. For workaholics, working long hours is a manifestation of the addiction. On the other hand, non-workaholics may work long hours because of organizational requirements or out of financial necessity, but still strive to have important, outside-work interests (Naughton, 1987).

McMillan et al. (2002) emphasize, though, that only using work hours to represent workaholism can be misleading. Therefore, we suggest that the second critical component underlying the behavioral dimension of workaholism is the extent to which work is allowed to entwine itself with personal life. This can mean either that workaholics allow work to interfere with personal life or allow work to substitute for personal life (e.g., escaping family). For instance, workaholics may engage in some level of work even when they play, eat, or are on vacation (Machlowitz, 1980). Further, their hobbies can also be highly related to their work (e.g., a financial planner may spend weekends golfing with important or prospective clients).

This second behavioral element (allowing work to mix with personal life) is also acknowledged by some writers as important in defining workaholism. For instance, Cherrington (1980) suggests that workaholics are unable to comfortably divert their time to non-work interests. Similarly, Bonebright et al. (2000) assert that one of the major characteristics of workaholism is that social and recreational activities are sacrificed in return for spending more time on work. We suggest that workaholics may also choose recreational activities that complement or advance their work, further blurring divisions between work and non-work life.

Summary

The current multi-dimensional definition of workaholism has two important advantages over the definitions provided by other writers (e.g., Fassel, 1990; Oates, 1971; Spence & Robbins, 1992). First, it captures the most critical elements that have been used to characterize workaholism in previous research (including joy in working, obsession with working, excessive hours, and neglect of other parts of life). Second, it is grounded in research on addiction that suggests that addiction involves three overarching dimensions—affect, cognition, and behavior. Thus, we retain the notion of addiction in the definition (Oates, 1971) and at the same time are able to articulate the more specific and detailed content dimensions of this addiction for future researchers to use in their investigations. Using the languages of latent models (Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998), then, workaholism is the underlying factor that creates affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations; these three dimensions are important indicators of the underlying construct of workaholism. In the discussion section, we will return to this issue with some suggestions for operationalizing this multi-dimensional definition of workaholism.

Antecedents of Workaholism

One of the most interesting questions in this area of research is why people go to the extreme and become workaholics. Table 1 outlines the key empirical studies that have examined correlates of workaholism.
## Table 1. Key empirical studies examining workaholism in the last 20 years (arranged in chronological order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Definition/operationalization of workaholism</th>
<th>Study sample</th>
<th>Key correlates of or findings about workaholism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spence and Robbins (1992)</td>
<td>Examining dimensions and outcomes of workaholism</td>
<td>Three dimensions&lt;br&gt;- Work involvement&lt;br&gt;- Drive&lt;br&gt;- Enjoyment of work&lt;br&gt;Cluster analysis to separate workaholics from others</td>
<td>291 social workers</td>
<td>Time commitment (+)&lt;br&gt;Perfectionism (+)&lt;br&gt;Non-delegation of responsibility (+)&lt;br&gt;Job stress (+)&lt;br&gt;Health complaints (+)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robinson and Post (1994)</td>
<td>Examining the face validity of Work Addiction Risk Test (WART)</td>
<td>Robinson’s (1989) 25-item five-dimensional WART</td>
<td>50 graduate students</td>
<td>The WART appeared to have face validity; students were largely able to classify items to the supposed dimensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robinson and Phillips (1995)</td>
<td>Examining the content validity of WART</td>
<td>35 items including 25-WART items</td>
<td>20 psychotherapists</td>
<td>Subjects concluded that the 25 items were content-valid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanai et al. (1996)</td>
<td>Examining outcomes of workaholism</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions&lt;br&gt;- Work involvement&lt;br&gt;- Drive&lt;br&gt;- Enjoyment of work&lt;br&gt;Analyzing each dimension separately instead of as a composite</td>
<td>962 Japanese businessmen</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ scale was not upheld. A two-dimension scale (drive &amp; work enjoyment) was subsequently used in the study Related to health complaints (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson and Post (1997)</td>
<td>Examining the relationship between workaholism and family functioning</td>
<td>Robinson’s (1989) 25-item five-dimensional WART&lt;br&gt;Workaholics were those whose total scores were at least one standard deviation above the mean</td>
<td>107 self-identified workaholics</td>
<td>Perceptions of family’s problem-solving ability (-)&lt;br&gt;Communication among family members(-)&lt;br&gt;Clearly established family roles (-)&lt;br&gt;Affective reactions to family stimuli (-)&lt;br&gt;Affective involvement in family (-)&lt;br&gt;General family functioning (-)</td>
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Table 1. (Continued)

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<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Definition/operationalization of workaholism</th>
<th>Study sample</th>
<th>Key correlates of or findings about workaholism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burke (1999)</td>
<td>Examining gender differences in workaholism</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions</td>
<td>530 MBA graduates</td>
<td>There is no gender difference in workaholism across all three dimensions</td>
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<td>-Work involvement</td>
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<td>-Enjoyment of work</td>
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<td>Analyzing each dimension separately instead of as a composite</td>
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<td>Robinson (1999)</td>
<td>Examining the criterion-related validity of WART</td>
<td>Robinson’s (1989) 25-item five-dimension WART</td>
<td>363 undergraduate students</td>
<td>Anxiety (+)</td>
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<td>Workaholics were those whose total scores were at least one standard deviation above the mean</td>
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<td>Type A behaviors (+)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robinson and Carroll (1999)</td>
<td>Assessing the reliability and validity of the Children of Workaholics Screening Test</td>
<td>Children of Workaholics Screening Test</td>
<td>207 undergraduate students</td>
<td>The screening test demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity</td>
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<td>Depression (+)</td>
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<td>Parentification (+)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bonebright et al. (2000)</td>
<td>Examining outcomes of workaholism</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions</td>
<td>171 employees of a high technology organization</td>
<td>Work-life conflict (+)</td>
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<td>-Work involvement</td>
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<td>Life satisfaction (effects depended on types)</td>
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<td>-Drive</td>
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<td>Purpose in life (effects depended on types)</td>
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<td>-Enjoyment of work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burke (2000a)</td>
<td>Examining the relationship between workaholism and divorce</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions</td>
<td>530 MBA graduates</td>
<td>No difference in workaholism between married and divorced respondents</td>
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<td>-Work involvement</td>
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<td>Analyzing each dimension separately instead of as a composite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Study Title</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Results/Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burke (2000b)</td>
<td>Examining the relationship between beliefs and fears and workaholism</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions - Work involvement - Drive - Enjoyment of work Classification of people into types of workaholics based on their scores on each dimension</td>
<td>530 MBA graduates</td>
<td>Beliefs of striving against others No moral principle Striving to prove oneself (effects depended on types of workaholics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke (2001a)</td>
<td>Examining outcomes of workaholism</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions - Work involvement - Drive - Enjoyment of work Analyzing each dimension separately instead of as a composite</td>
<td>530 MBA graduates</td>
<td>Job satisfaction (-) Salary increase (+) Promotions (+) Career satisfaction (+) Self-reported career prospect (+) Intention to quit (-) The above relationships were largely driven by enjoyment of work Respondents’ scores on the three components measured 12 weeks apart were similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke (2001b)</td>
<td>Examining the test–retest reliability of Spence and Robbins’ (1992) scale</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions - Work involvement - Drive - Enjoyment of work Analyzing each dimension separately instead of as a composite</td>
<td>67 managers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peiperl and Jones (2001)</td>
<td>Comparing the correlates of workaholism and overworking</td>
<td>Workaholics were defined as those who work too much but feel that the rewards arising from their work are at least equitably distributed between themselves and their employers Subjects were classified as workaholics versus overworkers using mid-points as cutoff points</td>
<td>174 MBA students</td>
<td>Workaholics were more satisfied with their compensation and with their careers compared to overworkers</td>
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### Table 1. (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Definition/operationalization of workaholism</th>
<th>Study sample</th>
<th>Key correlates of or findings about workaholism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robinson et al. (2001a)</td>
<td>Comparing spouses of workaholics and those of non-workaholics in terms of marital estrangement, positive affect, and locus of control</td>
<td>Robinson’s (1989) 25-item five-dimension WART Subjects were classified as workaholics and non-workaholics using cutoff points based on previous studies</td>
<td>326 members of American Counseling Association</td>
<td>Spouses of workaholics reported greater marital estrangement, less positive affect, and more external locus of control compared to spouses of non-workaholics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke and Koksal (2002)</td>
<td>Examining antecedents and outcomes of workaholism</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions</td>
<td>60 Turkish managers and professionals</td>
<td>A two-dimension scale (drive &amp; work enjoyment) was subsequently used in the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Richardsen, and Martinussen (2002)</td>
<td>Examining the factor structure and psychometric properties of Spence and Robbins’ (1992) scale</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions</td>
<td>87 Norwegian managers</td>
<td>Job involvement, time on the job, perfectionism, job stress and satisfaction, well-being, beliefs, values, and fear (effect sizes varied across dimensions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers and Robinson (2002)</td>
<td>Examining the structure and validity of the WART</td>
<td>Robinson’s (1989) 25-item five-dimension WART</td>
<td>107 self-identified workaholics and 363 students</td>
<td>WART’s five dimensions were not supported. Instead, a three-dimension scale explained more covariance</td>
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<td>The subsequent scale correctly classified workaholics and non-workaholics 89% of times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>McMillan et al. (2002)</td>
<td>Examining the validity of Spence and Robbins' workaholism scale</td>
<td>320 employees from various industries</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins' scale was not upheld. A two-dimension scale (drive &amp; work enjoyment) was subsequently used in the study. Related to job satisfaction, motivation, job involvement, and number of hours worked (effect sizes varied between dimensions).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burke, Burgess, and Oberklaid (2003)</td>
<td>Examining the relationship between workaholism and divorce</td>
<td>658 Australian psychologists</td>
<td>Workaholism was not related to divorce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harpaz and Snir (2003)</td>
<td>Examining correlates of workaholism</td>
<td>1915 employees</td>
<td>Total weekly work hours while controlling for financial needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke (2004)</td>
<td>Examining the relationship between workaholism and self-esteem and motive for money</td>
<td>145 undergraduate business students</td>
<td>Work centrality (+), Economic orientation (+), Gender (men +), Managers and professionals (+), Private sector (+), Self-esteem (−), Motives for money (not significant)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke and Matthiesen (2004)</td>
<td>Examining antecedents and outcomes of workaholism among journalists</td>
<td>211 Norwegian journalists</td>
<td>Positive affect, negative affect, exhaustion, cynicism (effects depended on types of workaholics).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Definition/operationalization of workaholism</th>
<th>Study sample</th>
<th>Key correlates of or findings about workaholism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kochanska, Friesenborg, Lange, and Martel (2004)</td>
<td>Examining parents’ and infants’ temperament as contributors to their emerging relationships</td>
<td>Clark’s (1993) uni-dimensional SNAP (Schedule for Nonadaptive and Adaptive Personality) scale of workaholism</td>
<td>112 parents and child</td>
<td>Mother’s workaholism predicted shared positive ambience with the child and her responsiveness to the child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMillan et al. (2004)</td>
<td>Examining the effects of workaholism on personal relationships</td>
<td>McMillan et al.’s (2002) two-dimensional scale - Drive - Enjoyment of work Classification of people into types of workaholics based on their scores on each dimension</td>
<td>105 employees from a variety of industries</td>
<td>Workaholism was not related to lower satisfaction of personal relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ersoy-Kart (2005)</td>
<td>Examining the factor structure, reliability, and validity of a Turkish version of the workaholism battery</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ three dimensions - Work involvement - Drive - Enjoyment of work</td>
<td>175 working graduates</td>
<td>Spence and Robbins’ scale was not upheld (drive &amp; work enjoyment) was used Related to Type-A trait (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnstone and Johnson (2005)</td>
<td>Examining the relationship among organizational climate, occupational type, and workaholism</td>
<td>McMillan et al.’s two dimensions - Drive - Enjoyment of work Analyzing each dimension separately instead of as a composite</td>
<td>151 employees from the social service and business sectors</td>
<td>Work pressure Work involvement Coworker cohesion Supervisor support (effect sizes varied between dimensions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taris et al. (2005)</td>
<td>(a) Developing a Dutch version of WART (b) Examining the tenability of using only a subscale to measure workaholism (c) Testing a process model</td>
<td>Robinson’s (1989) 25-item five-dimension WART</td>
<td>Study 1, N = 356 Study 2, N = 232 Study 3, N = 199</td>
<td>The factor structure of the Dutch version is similar to that of American version The use of the subscale, compulsive tendency, appeared to be a reasonable short-form substitute of the 25-item full version Perceived job demand was a mediator in the workaholism-stress relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three theoretical perspectives in the literature on addiction, in particular, can help shed light on the causes of workaholism. These three perspectives are drawn from the literatures on individual dispositions, socio-cultural experiences, and behavioral reinforcements in the environment. These three theoretical perspectives on workaholism together suggest that people become workaholics because they possess certain personality traits (Scott et al., 1997), their social or cultural experiences facilitate workaholism (Oates, 1971; Robinson & Post, 1995), and/or their workaholic behaviors are reinforced repeatedly.

A dispositional perspective on workaholism

Dispositional traits can play a major role in generating addictions (Eysenck, 1997; Hirschman, 1992). The underlying premise of this research perspective is that higher levels of certain traits promote addiction. For instance, researchers found that those with anti-social personality were more likely to get addicted to drugs and gambling (Pietrzak & Petry, 2005).

With respect to workaholism, we suggest that one of the most important dispositional influences is self-esteem. Self-esteem is the extent to which one likes oneself and feels one is a person of worth (Brockner, 1988). Most people are motivated to maintain a positive self-view (Dipboye, 1977). That is, they endeavor to avoid situations that decrease their self-evaluation. Because addictive behavior is believed to ‘provide a means to numb or avoid negative feelings tied to other activities or involvements’ (Porter, 1996, p. 73), those with low self-esteem are more likely to engage in addictive behaviors than others (Robinson & Kelley, 1998) and thus be predisposed to become workaholics as well. Working to excess allows workaholics to maintain control over an important part of their lives and therefore to derive more pleasure from life in general (Robinson, 1996). In contrast, non-work related activities can create fear for those with low self-esteem because such activities deprive them of a way to distance themselves from failures and social rejections in other parts of their lives (Bednarn, Wells, & Peterson, 1991). Thus, we predict:

Proposition 1
Self-esteem is negatively related to workaholism.

Achievement-related personality traits (e.g., Type A personality, obsessive-compulsive personality, and need for achievement) can also predispose individuals to become more addicted to working. Specifically, these traits can promote workaholism because working long hours is likely to be seen as the most reliable means in achieving important work goals.

For example, the Type A personality is characterized by ambition, impatience, and hostility (Edwards & Baglioni, 1991; Savickas, 1990). Of particular relevance to workaholism is the fact that one of the core dimensions of Type A personality is achievement striving (Bluen, Barling, & Burns, 1990). Similarly, those with obsessive-compulsive personalities also exhibit high levels of perseverance and industriousness (Pollak, 1979). Finally, the trait of need for achievement also directly reflects one’s drive to reach personally important goals (McClelland, 1975).

While personality is one of the primary antecedents of addictions, it should be noted that values can also be important contributors to workaholism. A value is an internalized belief about how one should behave (Ravlin, 1995). Values are partially genetically determined and partially acquired through personal and socialization experiences (Meglini & Ravlin, 1998; Rokeach, 1973). Values are structured hierarchically (Rokeach, 1973). That is, people prioritize values differently, and values that are ranked higher are likely to have stronger effects on behavior. While values and personality traits are often closely related empirically, they are theoretically distinct constructs (Roccas, Sagiv, Shwartz, & Knafo, 2002).
Feldman (2002a) suggests that career behaviors are likely to be governed, in part, by values. In terms of which values are likely to be held by workaholics, Schwartz’s (1992) typology of values provides some insight. Specifically, those who highly value achievement and self-direction should be more likely to become workaholics. According to Schwartz, the value of achievement reflects the desire to be successful, capable, ambitious, and influential. The value of self-direction reflects an orientation toward independence. These values appear to predispose individuals to become overly focused on their own job and career attainments and therefore create a strong belief that working is one of the (or their most) important life tasks. Consequently, we predict:

**Proposition 2**

Achievement-related traits (P2a) and achievement-related values (P2b) are positively related to workaholism.

**A socio-cultural perspective on workaholism**

Another prominent perspective on addiction is the socio-cultural perspective, which suggests that addiction is generally a product of the social and cultural experiences that individuals have in their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Hirschman, 1992; Thombs, 1994). Furthermore, some addictions (e.g., drinking or drug usage) can fulfill social functions of releasing the addict from normal social obligations (e.g., attendance at family events). Indeed, by dedicating excessive time to work, workaholics have what is generally considered to be a legitimate excuse to avoid participating in social functions and activities. Berglas (2004) also suggests that one major reason why people become workaholics is because they lack the capacity or willingness to have intimacy with others.

Socio-cultural experiences often arise within the family or in the workplace. On the family side, a variety of negative experiences can precipitate workaholism. For instance, Matthews and Halbrook (1990) suggest that individuals growing up in clinically dysfunctional families are likely to seek out highly stressful or highly involving jobs because they have developed a tolerance for (and/or an affinity for) chaos through their experiences with their families. Moreover, work can be seen as a socially acceptable way of avoiding the family. Furthermore, addiction researchers suggest that overly demanding or overly protective parental styles are also likely to predispose children to have problems with addiction; children develop a sense of inadequacy when parents’ demands cannot be satisfactorily met or when parents can no longer provide protection (Lawson, Peterson, & Lawson, 1983). To compensate for this sense of inadequacy, individuals may feel a necessity to work diligently.

Further, vicarious learning by observation of others’ addictive behaviors (Bandura, 1986) can also induce workaholism (Barnes, 1990). If individuals see that other members in the family (e.g., parents, spouses, siblings, significant others) work excessively, they may have tendency to treat their own work in the same manner because they are influenced by those important role models (Machlowitz, 1980). For instance, Oates (1971) suggests that some female houseworkers who become workaholics have taken their husbands’ work behaviors as their own role model and believe they need to do as much or more than their husbands just to achieve the same level of recognition from their children or relatives. In sum, having family members engaged in workaholic behaviors may predispose one to becoming a workaholic, too.

**Proposition 3**

Stressful or dysfunctional childhood/family experiences (P3a) and vicarious learning of workaholism at home (P3b) are positively related to workaholism.
Social experiences in organizations can also induce workaholism. For instance, the argument about vicarious learning mentioned above also applies to the work context. That is, observing the workaholic behaviors of supervisors, mentors, and other role models—such as excessive work hours and neglect of personal life—can also induce imitative responses from other employees. Moreover, peers’ workaholic behaviors can evoke workaholic behaviors in others because of the competitive atmosphere widespread workaholism creates (Seybold & Salomone, 1994). For instance, in such a competitive, ‘arrive early, leave late’ environment, employees’ work hours escalate even further simply so that employees can be noticed. Thus, peer competition may increase hours worked and allocation of personal time to work as well.

**Proposition 4**

Vicarious learning at work (P4a) and peer competition (P4b) are positively related to workaholism.

Besides vicarious learning, there is another element in social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), namely self-efficacy, that needs to be considered here. Self-efficacy refers to the extent to which individuals are confident in exerting control over certain aspects of life. Those who believe that they do not have control over their family, for instance, may be more likely to have addictions to drugs or alcohol as a form of escape (Thombs, 1994). With regard to workaholism, it may be that those individuals who have stronger self-efficacy in work activities than in non-work activities are more likely to become workaholics. Because these individuals believe that they are better at dealing with work than with non-work activities, they may devote as much time as they can to work activities and thereby avoid non-work activities at which they are less skilled. Thus, we predict:

**Proposition 5**

When self-efficacy in the work activities is greater than self-efficacy in non-work activities, individuals are more likely to experience workaholism.

**Behavioral reinforcements of workaholism**

Addiction is a conditioned response which becomes stronger over time with the increase in the magnitude or frequency of reinforcements (McAuliffe & Gordon, 1980). Addiction to a certain behavior (e.g., drug usage) starts when individuals need immediate gratification (Skinner, 1975); once gratified, the same behavior is likely to be repeated. In terms of workaholism, research on addiction would suggest that the initiation of workaholism is a result of positive reinforcement of workaholic behaviors or the lack of punishment of such behaviors. Therefore, when employees realize that workaholism is rewarded (e.g., salary raise, promotions, and verbal praise by significant others), they are likely to further increase those behaviors in order to continue to receive rewards. For instance, in discussing how workaholism develops in early upbringing, Machlowitz (1980) suggests that good academic performance is often rewarded with encouragement whereas poor performance may be ‘punished’ by less parental love. Therefore children are motivated to work hard at school in return for praise, setting a pattern that is replicated later in employment.

It should be noted that this reinforcement perspective on workaholism focuses more on workaholic behaviors and less on the affective and cognitive dimensions of workaholism. However, it is likely that reinforcement of workaholic behaviors can eventually spill over to the affective and cognitive dimensions as well. For instance, after working excessively for a long period of time, individuals should get used to the rhythm of working long hours and therefore start feeling guilty or anxious about not working.

In organizational settings, workaholic behaviors can be positively reinforced by a number of factors. For instance, if an organization implements a ‘winner-takes-all’ or ‘star’ reward system, employees are
Proposition 6

Tangible and intangible rewards for excessive work (P6a), ‘winner-takes-all’ reward systems (P6b), organizational emphasis on work input rather than work output (P6c), and highly engaging work environments (P6d) are positively related to workaholism.

Summary

In general, little attention has been given to identifying those individuals who are likely to be or become workaholics. We suggest that workaholism is largely derived from three sources: dispositional traits (e.g., self-esteem, achievement-related values, Type-A personality, compulsive-obsessive personality, and need for achievement), socio-cultural experiences (e.g., stressful family, vicarious learning, and peer competition), and behavioral reinforcements (e.g., rewards and punishments in organizations). These different sources of influences are likely to collectively influence whether one becomes a workaholic.

Consequences of Workaholism

Most of the research on the consequences of workaholism has focused on its negative side (e.g., Killinger, 1991; Schwartz, 1992). Burke (2001a) observes that "[t]hese writers . . . depict workaholics as unhappy, obsessive, tragic figures who were not performing their jobs well and were creating difficulties for their coworkers" (p. 2340). Not surprisingly, some have suggested that workaholism is a clinical problem that requires professional assistance (e.g., Bonebright et al., 2000; Naughton, 1987; Robinson, 1998). Other writers are more sanguine about workaholism, suggesting that it might sometimes be beneficial for individuals or organizations (e.g., Burke, 2001a; Machlowitz, 1980). We posit that one approach to understanding whether workaholism is positive or negative for individuals and organizations is to differentiate short-term consequences from long-term consequences. We discuss this temporal differentiation after introducing the outcomes we examine in this paper below.

Job and career satisfaction

Previous research suggests that workaholism may be positively related to job and career satisfaction (Machlowitz, 1980; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). In particular, those who find working pleasurable and feel guilty or anxious in non-work activities would logically feel more satisfied at work.
(job satisfaction) and in their work careers (career satisfaction). For instance, Burke (2001a) found that enjoyment of work, one of the important dimensions of workaholism identified by Spence and Robbins (1992), was significantly and positively related to career satisfaction. Therefore, even though we acknowledge that some workaholics do not enjoy the nature of their work as much as the act of working itself, we still expect that, in general, workaholism will be positively related to job attitudes.

**Proposition 7**
Workaholism is positively related to job (P7a) and career satisfaction (P7b).

**Mental health, perfectionism, and distrust**

Workaholism can also produce some negative cognition-related outcomes, such as poorer mental health, perfectionism, and distrust of coworkers. Specifically, workaholism may be associated with poorer mental health because of workaholics’ obsession with their jobs, leading them to perseverate in thoughts about work even when they are off the job. Because workaholics do not have sufficient time and opportunity (e.g., leisure activities) to recover from their excessive work effort, they may become emotionally or cognitively exhausted over time (Taris, Schaufeli, & Verhoeven, 2005). Furthermore, long work hours can mean greater exposure to work-related stress, particularly when workaholics have high performance standards. Researchers have also noted the negative effects on mental health when work roles overly dominate other life roles (Greenhaus, 1988; Wallace, 1997).

Besides mental health, other possible cognition-related outcomes associated with workaholism are a tendency towards perfectionism and lack of trust of colleagues. Spence and Robbins (1992) found that the three dimensions of workaholism they proposed were related to perfectionism and non-delegation of work to colleagues. Because workaholics are heavily concerned with their work, they have unreasonably high performance standards and, therefore, find it difficult to trust their colleagues to perform up to their standards (Porter, 1996). Unfortunately, the drive for perfectionism can also lead to more negative perceptions of one’s own abilities and performance, further promoting the workaholic’s tendency to increase his/her own work input. As noted earlier, workaholic behaviors can also create a very competitive atmosphere (Porter, 1996; Spruell, 1987), thereby further straining relationships with coworkers.

**Proposition 8**
Workaholism is related to poorer mental health (P8a), greater perfectionism (P8b), and increased distrust in coworkers (P8c).

**Career success, social relationships, and physical health**

There are several other outcomes of interest here that can result from workaholism. First, in terms of career success, those who work longer hours have been found to have greater extrinsic career success including salary and promotions (Ng et al., 2005) because long work hours represent a human capital investment that is often rewarded in the labor market (Becker, 1964). Another reason for this proposed relationship is that senior managers tend to ‘sponsor’ those who demonstrate diligence. Corroborating this assertion, Burke (2001a) found that workaholism positively predicted promotions.

However, the potentially greater career success (in terms of pay and promotions) is not without cost. There are two types of costs to consider here: poorer social relationships outside of work and poorer physical health. Workaholism can result in poorer social relationships outside of work because individuals only have limited resources of time and energy. Excessive devotion of time and energy to
work logically reduces the time and energy available for developing and maintaining social relationships outside of work. For instance, Robinson, Flowers, and Carroll (2001b) found that workaholism was associated with more marital problems. Bonebright et al. (2000) found that workaholics also had greater work–family conflict. Machlowitz (1980) suggests that being workaholic is not compatible with being intimate with others.

The second cost associated with workaholism is poor physical health. Workaholics may experience poorer physical health than non-workaholics because of their lack of leisure and exercise. This lack of leisure and exercise can negatively impact health directly (by increasing blood pressure and cholesterol) or indirectly (by contributing to lower resistance to infections, increased smoking, decreased sleep, and weight gain, etc.). For instance, workaholics have been found to report more health complaints than non-workaholics (Kanai et al., 1996) and a recent meta-analysis demonstrates that working long hours is associated with more physical illnesses (Sparks, Cooper, Fried, & Shirom, 1997). Thus, we predict:

**Proposition 9**
Workaholism is positively related to extrinsic career success (P9a), social relationship problems (P9b), and physical health problems (P9c).

**The role of time**

The relationship between workaholism and job performance is unclear. On one hand, workaholics can be joyful and energized workers. They also devote more hours to work than others and, as a result, their job performance may be better than that of non-workaholics in the short-term. On the other hand, workaholics may have poorer mental and physical health and social relationships, which can reduce work effectiveness over the long-term. Past research provides little insight into how workaholism affects job performance or how the effects differ over time.

Putting the outcomes of workaholism in a temporal perspective, we would expect that workaholism will have more negative consequences in the long run than in the short run. Specifically, job and career satisfaction can fluctuate quite quickly across job settings and work contexts, and thus increases in workaholic behavior might have short-term positive consequences for employees themselves. However, over longer periods of time, sustained perfectionism, distrust in others, and poor mental and physical health can interfere with both the proper functioning of the workaholics themselves and the quality of teamwork, communication, and morale in their work groups. Therefore, we predict that:

**Proposition 10a**
Employee workaholism is positively associated with job satisfaction, career satisfaction, and job performance in the short run.

**Proposition 10b**
Employee workaholism is associated with poor employee health (both mental and physical), perfectionism, poor social relationship problems at work, and poor job performance in the long run.

**Discussion**

In this paper, we have outlined a definition of workaholism, the major antecedents of workaholism, and its most prominent outcomes. In this section, we discuss several additional issues, including
Measurement challenges

There are at least two challenges in classifying respondents as workaholics with a multi-dimensional definition of workaholism. The first challenge is concerned with specifying the inter-relationships among the three dimensions. Namely, do individuals have to be high on all three dimensions in order to be classified as workaholics? What if an individual scores high on two dimensions but low on the third one? Because we maintain that all three dimensions are needed to characterize workaholics, individuals should arguably be high on all three dimensions in order to be classified as workaholics. In practice, this should not pose a measurement problem because the three dimensions are likely to be positively related. For example, those who love the act of working (affective) are also likely to dedicate excessive hours to work (behavioral) because working provides enjoyment. Those who have an obsession with working (cognitive) should be those who feel guilty about not working (affective). Similarly, those who feel guilty and anxious about not working (affective) are more likely to intermingle work and pleasure to alleviate that guilt and anxiety (behavioral).

Furthermore, some indirect empirical evidence supports the assertion that the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of workaholism are likely to be positively related. For instance, Burke and Koksal (2002) found that joy in work (affect) was significantly and positively related to work involvement (behavior) (0.56). Spence and Robbins (1992) found that internal drive to work (cognition) was significantly and positively related to time commitment (behavior) (0.46). Further, Kanai et al. (1996) found that joy in work (affect) was significantly and positively related to internal drive to work (cognition) (0.70).

Therefore, we expect that individuals are unlikely to be very high on certain dimension(s) but very low on others. At present, we do not differentiate sub-types of workaholics based on combinations of scores on the three dimensions because there is not a sufficient empirical base to do so at this time. Consequently, in this paper, our emphasis is solely on differentiating between workaholics and non-workaholics. Subtypes of workaholics should be investigated once this field of study generates more extensive, reliable, and valid empirical research.

The second measurement challenge concerns the issue of ‘cutoff points.’ Namely, if all the three dimensions are needed to characterize workaholics, then how high do individuals have to be on each of the three dimensions to be classified as workaholics? Some researchers have classified those whose total scores across all the dimensions of workaholism are in the top third or one standard deviation above mean as workaholics and those in the bottom third or one standard deviation below mean as non-workaholics (Haymon, 1992; Robinson & Post, 1997). Some others determine cutoffs based on previous studies that have used the same workaholism scale (e.g., Robinson et al., 2001a) or a combination of multiple criteria (e.g., McMillan, O’Driscoll, & Brady, 2004).

While we do not object to these different approaches, we believe that different cutoff points might be needed in different occupations and industries. For instance, in professional industries such as law and accounting firms where workaholic behaviors are likely to be cultivated, a higher cutoff may have to be set because the base rate of work hours is so high. In industries where workaholic behaviors are rarely seen (e.g., clerical staff), a lower cutoff could be used to differentiate workaholics from non-workaholics. Thus, because the extent of workaholism can vary widely across job settings, more judgment calls will be needed on the part of researchers to determine the appropriate cutoff points (e.g., see McMillan et al., 2004).
Alternatively, when cutoff scores cannot be determined for whatever reason, researchers can consider treating workaholism as a continuous variable (e.g., Robinson, 1989; Taris et al., 2005). This approach has the advantage of not misclassifying marginal cases of workaholics whose ‘workaholism’ scores are only slightly within or outside of cutoffs. The drawback of this approach, though, is that researchers or clinicians do not have a separate group of workaholics for comparative analyses with non-workaholics.

Finally, it is important to note here that two research designs are potentially beneficial in this field of research. First, longitudinal research can shed light on the possibility of reverse causation in relationships between workaholism and other variables. For example, does workaholism lead to job and career satisfaction or do job and career satisfaction lead to workaholism, or both? Similarly, does marital conflict lead to workaholism or does workaholism result in marital conflict, or both in some sort of spiral effect? The second research design choice is the use of others’ ratings of workaholism. Inasmuch as workaholics’ behaviors can greatly affect their spouses, children, friends, coworkers, supervisors, and among others, the use of ratings of workaholism from these sources should allow us to further understand and compare the extent to which workaholism benefits or harms the different sets of stakeholders in individuals’ lives.

**Work trends and workaholism**

In order to increase our understanding of workaholism, researchers also need to devote more attention to examine the career context in which workaholism is embedded. For instance, it has been suggested that careers are increasingly becoming boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). In boundaryless careers, people’s work experiences are not limited to just one or two organizations. Instead, careers span across multiple organizations and employment settings. Furthermore, individuals are expected to take more responsibility for their own career development (Sullivan, Carden, & Martin, 1998). Career self-management, thus, starts to become the norm (King, 2004).

These recent changes in the nature of careers can have both positive and negative effects on workaholics. On one hand, some of the characteristics of boundaryless careers appear to provide fertile ground in which workaholism can grow. For instance, the strong emphasis on personal control and learning on the jobs in recent years (Sullivan, 1999) is in line with workaholics’ desire to maintain control at work and active involvement with their jobs (Scott et al., 1997). Also, the unclear boundaries among multiple life roles (Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996), such as between spouse and work helpmate, are also consistent with workaholics’ intermixing of work and personal life (Bonebright et al., 2000). In some ways, then, workaholics may actually feel more comfortable in a career environment that is increasingly boundaryless and flexible.

In contrast, other work trends can have a more negative impact on workaholism. For example, another recent change in the career landscape is that there is a strong emphasis on the development of multiple networks and peer learning relationships (Sullivan, 1999). However, as noted earlier, workaholics often have more problems with their relationships with coworkers and thus may be at disadvantage compared to non-workaholics in making friends and mentoring activities. In this area as well as in others previously discussed, work context is a critical variable in explaining the various results of prior empirical research on workaholism.

**Organizational culture and workaholism**

While we do not discuss macro-level factors (e.g., economic conditions and societal trends) in detail here, their influence should be considered more fully in future research. One of the most critical of these
to examine is organizational culture, or the shared values, beliefs, and norms among organizational members (Schein, 1990). As noted earlier (e.g., in the example of law firms), some organizations and industries have cultures that, to a certain extent, induce and sustain workaholism (Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Wallace, 1997). Conversely, if the organizational culture does not reinforce excessive working or competitiveness (e.g., the classic production facility with ‘rate-busting’ norms), workaholism will be frowned upon or actively discouraged. Indeed, some organizations (like SAS) require employees to leave by a given time each night to promote work–family balance (O’Connor, 2005).

Another culture-related issue is the difference between masculine and feminine organizational cultures (see Detert, Schroeder, and Mauriel, 2000, for a review of dimensionality of organizational culture). In a masculine culture, organizational members perform their jobs in a ‘masculine’ fashion (Newman & Nollen, 1996): competitive, power-hungry, task-oriented, and fearful of failure. Because these characteristics are compatible with workaholism (Scott et al., 1997), we might expect workaholism to be especially prevalent in masculine organizational cultures. In contrast, in feminine cultures, organization members perform their jobs in more ‘feminine’ ways, such as displaying modesty and showing concern for relationships (Newman and Nollen). The above characteristics of a feminine organizational culture are obviously not compatible with the competitive atmosphere created by workaholics (Spruell, 1987) and will be less welcome there.

Organizational culture does not only cultivate workaholism, but also moderate the relationships between workaholism and important work outcomes such as job performance. Given that masculine organizational cultures appear more suitable for workaholics than feminine cultures, workaholics should have better job performance when the organizational culture is masculine rather than feminine. Workaholics in a masculine culture may not feel constrained working excessively because striving for better performance is the norm. On the other hand, workaholics in a feminine organizational culture may not feel reinforced for their behaviors because they will be seen more as deviants than as positive role models. Overall, then, the influence of macro-level factors like organizational culture on workaholism deserves greater attention.

Managerial implications

This paper also highlights some important management issues related to workaholism. First, managers should seek a level of engagement from employees that enhances productivity but is not so extreme as to have negative consequences for either the individual or the organization (e.g., in terms of burnout, turnover, stress-related illnesses, and healthcare costs). Seeking to increase productivity by simply encouraging excessive work behaviors from employees can end up hurting, rather than helping, organizational performance—particularly in team-oriented environments where trust and collaboration are needed.

The second implication is especially relevant to managers. Workaholism is a problem particularly endemic to managers themselves because their work expectations are often not clear and the reward system for their work is often ambiguous (Feldman, 2002b). If, in fact, workaholism can spread by vicarious learning and role modeling of supervisors and mentors as we reasoned earlier, then efforts to curb workaholism have to come top–down as well as bottom–up.

Third and finally, technology plays a double-edged sword in shaping workaholic behavior. On one hand, advancement in communication technology can reduce workaholic behavior because it allows employees to more easily integrate work demands and personal life demands by giving individuals greater flexibility in work time and work place. In addition, the ability to work from more places and spaces can also alleviate individuals’ concern about not working sufficient hours.
At the same time, though, the flexibility derived from advanced technology can actually promote more workaholic behavior (Porter, 2001; Sullivan, 1999) because the boundaries among work and other life roles become more easily permeable. For instance, Ammons and Markham (2004) observed that those who work at home were more susceptible to addiction to work. Further, technology can also provide a constant stimulus to evoke addictive behavior at work. In fact, researchers are increasingly concerned with addiction to using computers or the internet (Young, 2004), both of which have become important means through which people perform their work activities today. How technology impacts workaholism, then, warrants much greater attention from managers as well.

Conclusion

Organizational researchers have largely neglected the construct of workaholism. In part, this has been due to a lack of consensus on a definition for the construct. In this article, we offer a more succinct yet comprehensive definition of workaholism. Moreover, our definition and correlates are largely grounded in theories of addiction. These important steps allow for a fuller understanding of the antecedents of workaholism in the future. They also encourage a richer understanding of the consequences of workaholism—both positive and negative, not only in the short term, but also in the long run. These efforts are timely and important given that workaholism is growing in the United States and worldwide.

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