

## THE STUDY ON RELATIONSHIP OF WORK/ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES AND WORKAHOLISM

Yen Ku Kuo  
National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan  
hrdlover@gmail.com

Ying-Yueh Su  
Chinese Culture University, Taiwan  
yysu@sce.pccu.edu.tw

Bang-Lee Chang  
Chinese Culture University, Taiwan  
blchang@sce.pccu.edu.tw

### **Abstract:**

Workaholism has been conceptualized by Spence and Robbins (1992) as comprising three dimensions: work involvement, feeling driven to work, and work enjoyment. These dimensions formed some work characteristic to describe staffs in organization. By using their construct, this paper combines literature concerning workaholism and further proposes a preliminary model to demonstrate our proposition. Based on the premise of positive workaholism, our model identifies potential linkages between workaholism and its antecedents: work values, and organizational values. Both intrinsic and extrinsic work values push individuals toward becoming workaholism. Encouraging-work-prior-to-family is the organizational value accelerating toward workaholics. To explore the relationship between theories is benefit to human resource in organization.

*Keywords: workaholism, work values, organizational value, human resource*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term “workaholic” first appeared in Oates’ book entitled *Confessions of a Workaholic* in 1971. As Burke (2004) mentioned “Equating workaholism with alcoholism, the workaholic was portrayed as a tragic, unhappy, individual estranged from family and friends and on a path leading to ill health” (p.420). The early work created a negative stereotype of workaholism giving rise to several myths about workaholics (Burke, 2004). However, in 1980, Machlowitz offered a very different picture of the workaholic. She described workaholics as very satisfied, productive, healthy individuals (Machlowitz, 1980). Until 1990, most of the writing on workaholism was anecdotal, atheoretical and non-empirical. They offered prescriptions based on personal experience, consultation with organization, and clinical observation and treatment (e.g. Fassel, 1990; Killinger, 1991; Oates, 1971; Schaeff & Fassel, 1988). Things changed, since Spence and Robbins (1992) had constructed the definition and measure of workaholism. They conceptualized workaholism using three dimensions: work involvement, feeling driven to work, work enjoyment, and their corresponding measure were the Workaholism Battery (WorkBAT). After workaholism was conceptualized, a few scholars intended to provide different definitions and measures for workaholism (e.g. Mudrack, 2004; Scott, Moore, & Miceli, 1997; Snir & Harpaz, 2004); whereas some researchers investigated the antecedents of workaholism (e.g. Burke, 2001; Burke, Burgess, & Oberklaid, 2003; Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Mudrack, 2004; Snir & Harpaz, 2004); even some focused on the consequences of workaholism (e.g. Burke, 1999a; Burke, 1999b; Burke, Richardsen, & Mortinussen, 2004; McMillan & O’Driscoll, 2004; Scott et al., 1997). There is a general agreement that workaholism is a stable individual difference characteristic. There is also some consensus that workaholism is likely to be a central concept in understanding the relationship of workplace experience, typically involving work stressors, and a variety of work outcomes (satisfaction, job performance), extra work satisfactions (family, friends), and health indicators (psychosomatic symptoms, medication use) (Burke, 2004).

Despite some progress, a lot of questions still remain in this area. According to Buelens and Poelmans (2004), four major issues must be concerned— culture bias, sample bias, no clear correlation between the extent of workaholism and the number of working hours, and limited number of variables. However, an issue closely related to human resource management but still remains disputable is that “Whether workaholism is beneficial or harmful to organizations and their members?” Scott et al. (1997) argued that this issue can lead to two different managerial implications. Some organizations view workaholism positively. If workaholics are dedicated employees who are impassioned and enamored of work (e.g. Korn, Pratt, & Lambrou, 1987; Machlowitz, 1980), then organizational leaders would want to hire, develop, and retain them. In contrast, others view workaholism negatively (e.g. Killinger, 1991; Schaeff & Fassel, 1988). If workaholics are obsessive, unable to relax, and self-centered, then they may perform poorly and create conflicts with co-workers (Fassel, 1990). This suggests that employers should avoid hiring workaholics or design workplace that prevent, not encourage, workaholism. In order to suit the remedy to the case, either encouraging or preventing workaholism needs a full understanding of the antecedents of workaholism. The understanding of the consequences of workaholism can provide important managerial implications, while the understanding of the antecedents can afford remedies to solve the problems of workaholism. Accordingly, to investigate the antecedents of workaholism will be the vital point of this research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Definitions and Dimensions of Workaholism

Workaholism is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon composed of several subconcepts (Buelens & Poelmans, 2004; Scott et al., 1997). The first definition of workaholism in the academic literature was proposed by Spence and Robbins (1992), who claimed that “the common element in discussions of workaholism is that the affected individual is highly committed to work, devoting a good deal of time to it” (p.161). They suggested three distinctive characteristics of workaholism: work involvement (WI), which they relate to long working hours, drive (D), an addictive drive to work under internal pressure, and the lack of work enjoyment (WE) in the execution of work.

Scott et al. (1997) argued that three problems still remain in that definition. First, being highly committed to work is something very different from devoting a good deal of time. Second, what is meant by “a good deal of time.” Third, anecdotal evidence suggests that, some, but not all, workaholics

have a low enjoyment of work. After viewing a lot of literature reviews on workaholism, Scott et al. (1997) defined workaholism with three elements: discretionary time spend in work activity, thinking about work when not at work, and working beyond organizational or economic requirement. On the base of these three elements, they distinguished three types of workaholics, compulsive-dependence, perfectionist, and achievement-orientation. Compulsive-dependent workaholics acknowledge that they work too hard, but are unable to control their behavior, even despite social or health problems. They show unpleasant withdrawal symptoms or (anxiety) when they do not work and think about work obsessively. Perfectionist workaholics' work and productivity are prized to the exclusion of leisure activities and friendships. They are characterized by "a need to impose order, their use of checklists and rules, their attention to detail, and, most of all, their need to have mental and interpersonal control over their environment" (Buelens & Poelmans, 2004, p.442). Achievement-oriented workaholics are described "strive for achievement, success, and the accomplishment of moderately different tasks; they are stimulated by competition and are able to delay gratification and focus on distant goals" (Scott et al., 1997, p.299). Scott et al. (1997) concluded that these three characteristics are continuous variables, they are necessarily mutually exclusive, and a workaholic may be a combination of any two or all three of these types.

Previous measure scales about workaholism are divided into three categories: WorkBAT (Buelens & Poelmans, 2004; Burke, 2001; McMillan et al., 2002; Spence & Robbins, 1992; Burke, Burgess, & Oberklaid, 2003; Burke, Oberklaid, & Burgess, 2004; Burke, Richardsen, & Mortinussen, 2004), work addiction test (WART) (Robbins, 2000b), and total weekly work hours (Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Snir & Harpaz, 2004). Among them, WorkBAT is the one that has been used widely. Three issues are regarded crucial in exploring WorkBAT: Firstly, the independence of three dimensions. Some scholars (Kanai, Wakabayashi, & Fling, 1996) challenged this speculation by re-verifying items of workaholism through factor analysis, and they got merely two dimensions, namely D and WE. Whereas except their argument, most scholars still got results showing that WI, D, and WE are independent. Secondly, Spence and Robbins (1992) have defined clusters of high-WI, high-D and low-WE as workaholics; while clusters of high-WI, high-D and high-WE as enthusiastic workaholics. Subsequent scholars following the definition of Spence and Robbins (1992) simply investigate the causal relationship of workaholics, totally ignoring enthusiastic workaholics as one type of workaholics. The biggest problem generates from this neglect is that many scholars have found that workaholics enjoy in their works (e.g. Cantarow, 1979; Machlowitz, 1980). For example: Cantarow (1979) stressed that workaholics seek "passionate involvement and gratification" through work. Some scholars think that to put high-WI and low-WE together into one construct has made its definition unclear. Scott et al., (1997) argued that how low enjoyment of work can be reconciled with high commitment; since it is widely known that commit is positive related to job satisfaction. Besides, correlation analysis of Spence and Robbins (1992) also reveals that the correlation between WI and WE are positive, thus, it is still disputable to define whether workaholics as low-WE or high-WE (Buelens & Poelmans, 2004).

Combining all the above discussions, this study believes that to use WorkBAT as a way to investigate the causal relation of workaholism, at the meantime pay attention to the internal consistency of its dimensions, it is more proper to take WI, D WE as components of workaholism, and to adopt the additive model of high-WI, high-D and high-WE to measure the value of workaholics. On the base of above premises, this study infers the antecedents of workaholism as follows.

## **2.2. Antecedents of Workaholism**

A number of antecedents of workaholism have being examined in previous investigations. These included personal demographic characteristics (Burke, Oberklaid, & Burgess, 2004; Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Spence & Robbins, 1992) and workplace values (Burke, 2000; Schaef & Fassel, 1988). Some researchers suggested that organizational factor play a role in the development and maintenance of workaholism (Fassel, 1990; Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Schaef & Fassel, 1988). And, Organizational factors would include values, supporting work-person life imbalance (Burke, 2001; Burke et al., 2003; Killinger, 1991; Schaef & Fassel, 1988). Within an industry, some companies will have a reputation as place where people work hard and play hard (Peiperl & Jones, 2001).

By integrating previous studies concerning the factors of individuals and organizations, this paper proposes two antecedents of specialization: work values, and organizational values. First, work values refer to enduring perspectives of what is fundamentally right or wrong as applied to work setting (Judge & Bretz, 1992), representing individuals' desire for work in this study. Responsible workers

have more intensive desires toward their work, which cause them possessing higher feeling driven to work and having more work enjoyment, hence leading to a higher workaholism. Second, organizational values refer to normative standards and guidance for members to behavior compatibly with organizational needs (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Cladwell, 1991), representing climates of organizations that encourage or drive employees work hard in this study. For example, organizations encouraging work prior to family will urge their employees to achieve higher work involvement and feeling driven to work, hence leading to a higher workaholism.

### **3. PROPOSITIONS**

#### **3.1. Work Values and Workaholism**

Values are neither situation-specific nor function-specific; rather they reflect general, abstract notions alluding to thought and action and they act as guiding principles in one's life (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Work values are evaluative standards relating to work or the work environment by which individuals discern what is 'right' or assess the importance of preferences (Does, 1997). It has become imperative for organizations to have a better understanding of the work values pattern of its employee, since work values are found to influence work commitment and effectiveness, achievement and creativity (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2005), motivation and performance (Hoy & Miskel, 1991), and job satisfaction (Brown, 2002). Intrinsic work values reflects the desire to use initiative in a job and to gain responsibility, challenge, and interest from it, while extrinsic work values identifies more material priorities, notably generous holidays and good working hours and pay (de Vanus & McAllister, 1991). Martin and Philips (1991) found that employee job satisfaction is a function of the perceived intrinsic and extrinsic rewards offered in the work situation. Values concerning work are connected to commitment, yet this connection is stronger for intrinsic values than extrinsic ones (Putti, Aryee, & Liang, 1989). Accordingly, we propose the following propositions:

P1: Work values significantly influence workaholism.

P1a: A higher level of intrinsic work values would lead to a higher level of workaholism.

P1b: A higher level of extrinsic work values would lead to a higher level of workaholism.

#### **3.2. Organizational Values and Workaholism**

In order to improve employees' performance, organizations often encourage workaholic behaviors. Individuals working long hours are perceived dedicated and committed staff, and capable to compete with peers for rewards, recognition and career development opportunities. According to Burke (2001), he stated "Organizational downsizings and restructurings have created more work for fewer staff, as well as the crisis conditions conducive to workaholism. As organizations strive to become more entrepreneurial, support for workaholism is fostered. Organizations rarely discourage such behaviors..."(p.639). A few researchers suggested that organizational factor play a role in the development and maintenance of workaholism (Fassel, 1990; Schaef & Fassel, 1988). And, Organizational factors would include values, supporting work-person life imbalance (Burke et al., 2003; Killinger, 1991; Schaef & Fassel, 1988). Burke (2001) examined the relationship between workaholism and perceived organizational values supporting work-personal life imbalance. The result showed that organizational values of workaholism are significantly higher than non-workaholism, and managers reporting more supportive organizational values are less driven to work and have greater work enjoyment. Accordingly, we propose the following propositions:

P2: Organizational values significantly influence workaholism.

P2a: A higher level of encouraging-work-prior-to-family would lead to a higher level of workaholism.

In sum, this paper proposes that there are two mechanisms leading to workaholism: First, work values—pushing force toward becoming workaholics, another indispensable element that helps molding workholics. Second, organizational values — the driver helps accelerating toward workaholics, an important environmental element, while not as the above two elements constituting the inevitable components of workholics.

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