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The push and pull of work: The differences between workaholism and work engagement

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The term workaholism has been part of our everyday vocabulary for almost four decades now. Given the widespread use of this term among lay people, it is quite remarkable that our scientific understanding of workaholism is as yet quite limited: even the correct conceptualization of this concept is still heavily debated (Burke, 2006). Is workaholism more than just devoting too much time to work? Should workaholics be considered with compassion as they suffer from a serious disorder that requires treatment, or is workaholism a desirable state that has positive consequences, for both the individual workers and their employers?

And, most importantly in the present context, how does workaholism relate to the concept of work engagement, which also involves notions of hard work, high work involvement, and superior performance? The current chapter first discusses the origins and conceptualization of workaholism. After addressing the conceptual distinctions and similarities between workaholism and work engagement, we explore the empirical evidence on the differentiation between the two concepts – are they really different? Finally, we draw conclusions regarding the distinction between work engagement and work addiction, and provide a short





inventory of issues to be addressed in future research.

What is workaholism?

The idea that work can be addictive and may have adverse consequences for employee well-being and his or her social environment is not new. For example, on 24 April 1852, the French novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880) writes in a letter to his mistress Louise Colet that “I love my work with a frenetic and perverted love” (cited in Unwin, 2004, p. 10). Writing was all for Flaubert: “I am a man of the quill. I feel through it, because of it, in relation to it, and much more with it.” One of the consequences of his approach to writing was that he left several thousands of pages of jottings, drafts, and notebooks with plans and scenarios, most of which were never used. Meanwhile, normal life was postponed. The many letters to Colet show that Flaubert was in the habit of putting off proposed meetings with his mistress, usually because he wanted to finish a section or a chapter of *Madame Bovary*. His tendency to consider everything that occurred as potential writing material led Flaubert’s mother to tell him that “your obsession with sentences has dried up your heart” (Unwin, 2004, p. 11). Clearly, working was tremendously important for Flaubert, evidently at the cost of his relationships with other people – he never married or led anything like a normal family life; a workaholic *avant la lettre*. Similarly, in his treatise “Das Recht auf Faulheit” (“The right to be lazy”), the German anarchist Paul Lafargue (1883) speaks of “Arbeitsucht” (work addiction) as the cause of the “Erschöpfung der Lebensenergie des Einzelnen und seiner Nachkommen” (“Exhaustion of vital energy of the individual and his offspring”, translation ours). As a third example of the early awareness that work may be addictive and may have undesirable consequences, the Hungarian psychiatrist Sándor Ferenczi, a follower of Sigmund Freud, described in 1919 the “Sunday neurosis”, i.e., the phenomenon that healthy people experienced recurring anxiety, headaches, stomach aches, depression, and nausea during their respite on Sunday (for Jews, on Saturday), out of fear that the lack of their day-to-day work routines would unleash repressed impulses.

In its current meaning, the term workaholism has been coined by the Baptist clergyman, professor of the psychology of religion, and author of over 50 books reverend Wayne E. Oates, who told of his personal awakening to the realization of his own compulsion to overwork after his 5-year old son asked for an appointment at his office to talk about something that bothered him (Killinger, 2006). Oates realized that his way of dealing with his work strongly resembled one of his clients’ addiction to alcohol – hence the term *workaholism*, “a semihumorous word for the addiction to work” (1971, p. 13). Oates described his “uncontrollable need to work incessantly” in 1968 in an article in *Pastoral Psychology*. The term attracted worldwide attention after Oates published *Confessions of a workaholic* (1971), a book written for a broad audience of lay people, defining a workaholic as “a person whose need to work has become so excessive that it creates noticeable disturbances in his health, happiness or relationships”. Since then, the term workaholism has been used widely in the popular press, and entering the key word “workaholic” yields over 2.7 million hits on the internet (July 2008). Interestingly, scientific attention to this concept has lagged behind this popular interest. Taris and Schaufeli (2007) searched the scientific *PsycINFO* database for publications including the key words *workaholic*, *workaholics* or *workaholism*, and found that during the 1970–1980 time window only three publications included at least one of these key words in their titles and/or abstracts. However, after 1980 the number of publications on this subject roughly doubled every five years; during the 2001–2006 time frame, no less than 88 papers on workaholism were published. Although this figure is still modest relative to the attention given to phenomena such as work satisfaction, commitment and burnout, the scientific interest in workaholism is clearly on the rise.

Conceptualization and definition of workaholism

In spite of the growing interest in workaholism, our understanding of this phenomenon is still quite limited (McMillan, O’Driscoll, & Burke, 2003). According to Burke (2001a), “much of the





writing [on workaholism] has not been guided by a clear definition of the concept or by well-developed measures” (p. 65) – indeed, researchers tend to disagree fundamentally regarding the true nature of workaholism. For example, in a recent review McMillan and O’Driscoll (2006) discussed no less than nine “major” workaholism definitions, not mentioning the “minor” definitions that are around as well. Many scholars agree with Oates’ (1971) view that workaholism is by definition bad because it is an addiction that is similar to alcoholism (e.g., Cherrington, 1980; Killinger, 2006; Robinson, 1989). As Porter (1996) put it, “Whereas an alcoholic neglects other aspects of life for the indulgence in alcohol, the workaholic behaves the same for excessive indulgence in work” (pp. 70–71). Conversely, others view workaholism as a state with *positive* consequences for both workaholics and the organizations they work for (Korn, Pratt, & Lambrou, 1987; Machlowitz, 1980; Peiperl & Jones, 2001). Cantarow (1979) considers the workaholic personality as positive, because its hallmark is the joy of creativity; according to her, workaholics seek passionate involvement and gratification through their work. Similarly, Peiperl and Jones (2001) consider workaholics to be “hard workers who enjoy and get a lot out of their work” (p. 388).

Yet others view workaholism both positively and negatively, distinguishing between different types of workaholism, some of which are good whereas others are bad. For example, Keichel (1989) distinguished between happy and dysfunctional workaholics, whereas Naughton (1987) compares “good” job-involved workaholics (who are high in commitment and low in compulsion) with “bad” workaholics (who are high in commitment as well as compulsion). Scott, Moore, and Miceli (1997) identified compulsive-dependent workaholics, perfectionist workaholics, and achievement-oriented workaholics; the latter group is very similar to Korn et al.’s (1987) “hyper-performers”. The currently most widely used approach to measuring workaholism distinguishes three supposedly underlying dimensions – the so-called “workaholism-triad” (Spence & Robbins, 1992): work involvement (being highly committed to work and devoting a

good deal of time to it), drive (feeling compelled to work hard because of inner pressures), and work enjoyment (experiencing work to be pleasant and fulfilling). Crossing these three dimensions leads to six different types of workers, including three types of workaholics; (i) *non-enthusiastic workaholics*, who are high in commitment and drive, and low in enjoyment; (ii) *enthusiastic workaholics*, who are high in pleasure, commitment, and drive; and (iii) *work enthusiasts*, who are high in commitment and enjoyment, but who are lacking the drive to work hard. Buelens and Poelmans (2004) refer to the latter group as the “happy and hard workers”, who are “enthusiastic, meet interesting people, love their jobs, and avoid conflict at home and in the workplace, possibly owing to their resulting positive attitude and a high level of social intelligence” (p. 454).

Workaholism versus engagement

As Schaufeli, Taris, and Bakker (2006b) note, the above description of work enthusiasts strongly resembles the recently introduced concept of work engagement, the positive opposite of job burnout (e.g., Maslach, Leiter, & Schaufeli, 2001). Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their jobs. More specifically, job engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002b). *Vigor* is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence, also in the face of difficulties. *Dedication* refers to being strongly involved in one’s work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. Finally, *absorption* is characterized by being fully concentrated on and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work.

Engaged employees thus work hard (vigor), are involved (dedicated) and feel happily engrossed (involved) in their work. In this sense they are similar to workaholics. However, contrary to





workaholics, engaged workers lack the typical compulsive drive that is characteristic of any addiction, including an addiction to work. For engaged workers work is fun and not a compulsion, as was concluded from a qualitative study of 15 engaged workers (Schaufeli, Taris, LeBlanc, Peeters, Bakker, & De Jonge, 2001). These workers worked hard because they liked it and not because they were driven by a strong inner urge they could not resist. Thus, for the sake of conceptual clarity, instead of distinguishing between “good” and “bad” forms of workaholism, it seems appropriate to discriminate between workaholism (being intrinsically bad) and work engagement (being intrinsically good). This agrees with the recommendation of Porter (1996) to “return to the origin of the term as a starting point for future research”, i.e., Oates’ initial definition of workaholism. This view of workaholism as a “bad” phenomenon thus excludes perspectives that consider workaholism as “good” (e.g., Cantarow, 1979; Korn et al., 1987; Macholowitz, 1980; Peiperl & Jones, 2001).

What, then, are the core characteristics of workaholism? The early definition of Oates (1971) of workaholism as “the compulsion or the uncontrollable need to work incessantly” includes two features that return in most later definitions of workaholism: (i) working excessively hard; and (ii) the existence of a strong, compulsive, inner drive. The former points to the fact that workaholics tend to allocate an exceptional amount of time to work and that they work beyond what is reasonably expected to meet organizational or economic requirements. The latter recognizes that workaholics persistently and frequently think about work, even when not working, suggesting that workaholics are “obsessed” with their work. In our view, workaholics work harder than their job prescriptions require and they invest much more effort in their jobs than is expected by the people with whom or for whom they work, and in doing so they neglect their life outside their job. Typically, they work so hard out of an inner compulsion, need, or drive, and not because of external factors such as financial rewards, career perspectives, organizational culture, or even poor marriage. This reasoning is consistent with that

of McMillan and O’Driscoll (2006), who proposed that “workaholism is generally understood to involve an unwillingness to disengage from work. Workaholics’ most notable characteristics are tendencies to (a) work with a passion that is obvious to the outside observer; (b) think about work [...] more frequently, compared to non-workaholics, after most other people have “mentally switched off”; (c) focus their conversation on work, even in social situations; (d) strive for tangible achievements in the workplace; (e) work slightly more hours than others” (p. 89). Characteristics *b* and *c* refer to the compulsive element of workaholism (i.e., difficulties in distancing themselves from the job), whereas characteristics *a*, *d*, and *e* refer to effort expenditure in the workplace. According to McMillan and O’Driscoll (2006), the compulsive element of workaholism may be an antecedent of excessive effort expenditure at work, similar to enjoyment in work (cf. Spence & Robbins, 1992); as the latter is not part of Oates’ (1971) original conceptualization of workaholism, it seems best not to include it in any measure of workaholism. Thus, workaholism is best defined in terms of (i) a strong inner drive to work hard, in combination with (ii) high effort expenditure. It can be distinguished from engagement in that engaged employees also work hard and show high levels of dedication, but they lack the compulsive inner drive to do so; engaged workers work hard simply because they like their job so much and not because they cannot resist a strong inner urge to work. In other words, engaged workers are pulled to work because they enjoy it for its own sake, whereas workaholics are pushed to work because they have to obey their obsession.

Workaholism versus engagement: The empirical evidence

As shown above, it is not particularly difficult to distinguish conceptually between workaholism and engagement. However, any conceptual distinction should be warranted empirically to be valid. Thus, this section examines the evidence for our position that engagement and workaholism are related, yet distinct concepts. We present evidence on two types of questions, namely





(i) factor-analytic evidence on the relationships between the dimensions of engagement and workaholism, and (ii) correlational evidence on the relationships between engagement and workaholism on the one hand, and theoretically related concepts (such as job characteristics, work outcomes and health) on the other.

The relationships between the dimensions of engagement and workaholism

As indicated above, research on workaholism is relatively scarce. Moreover, the concept of engagement has not been around very long. It is therefore not surprising that very few studies deal with the relationships between workaholism and engagement. Two exceptions to this rule are Schaufeli et al. (2006b) and Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rensen (2008). These studies are described in more detail below.

Study 1

Schaufeli et al. (2006b) drew on data from a convenience sample of 2164 workers who responded to a survey that was published on the website of a popular Dutch psychology magazine. Visitors to its home page were invited to learn more about their work-related well-being, and could complete a 60-item questionnaire. After filling out the survey, participants were instantly (i.e., online) informed about their levels of engagement and workaholism, and received computer-customized feedback concerning their scores. Comparison of the demographic characteristics of the sample to those of the Dutch workforce revealed that males, young workers (< 24 years old), and more highly educated people were overrepresented in the sample, which is not uncommon in internet-based research (Taris, Schreurs, & Sepmeijer, 2005b). *Workaholism* was measured with two scales. The first was a nine-item Dutch version (Taris, Schaufeli, & Verhoeven 2005a) of the Compulsive Tendencies scale proposed by Flowers and Robinson (2002), which was relabeled Working Excessively (WE, $\alpha = .84$, sample items are “I seem to be in a hurry and racing against the clock” and “I find myself continuing to work after my co-workers have called it quits”). The second scale is the eight-item Drive scale of Spence and

Robbins’ (1992) WorkBat, which was relabeled Working Compulsively (WC, $\alpha = .86$, sample items are “I feel obliged to work hard, even when it is not enjoyable” and “I feel guilty when I take time off work”). *Work engagement* was measured with the nine-item shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006a, $\alpha = .93$; see Chapter 2 for all items of the UWES).

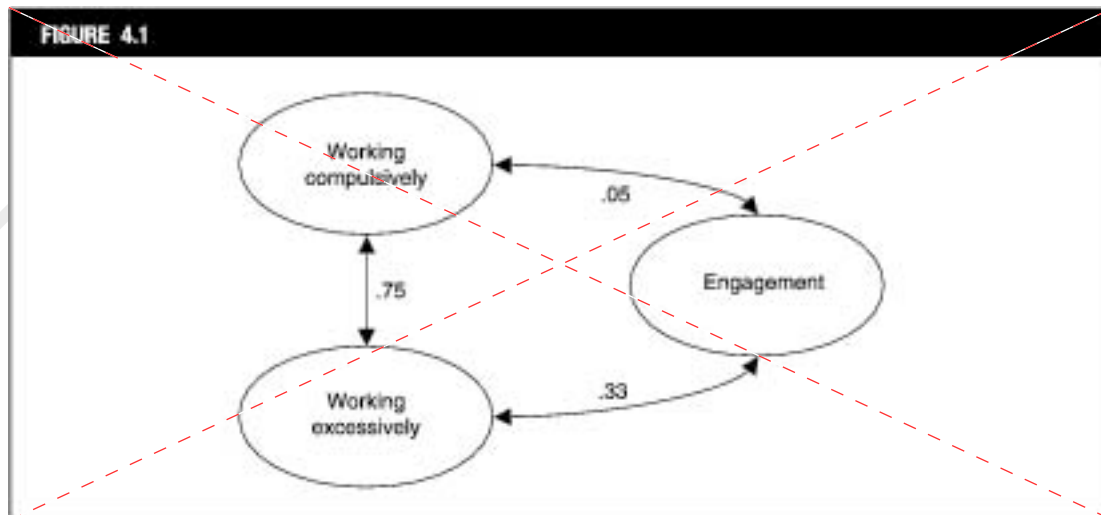
Study 2

The sample used in Schaufeli et al. (2008; Study 2) included 587 middle managers and executives of a Dutch telecom company (response rate 69%). The majority were men, lived with a partner, and held at least a college degree. Workaholism was measured with virtually the same instrument as used in Study 1. Work engagement was measured with the 17-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002b; see also Schaufeli & Bakker, Chapter 2, this volume). Six items tapped Vigor ($\alpha = .88$), five items measured Dedication ($\alpha = .93$), and six items measured Absorption ($\alpha = .80$).

Results

Figure 4.1 summarizes the findings for Study 1 regarding the relationships between the dimensions of workaholism and engagement. In Study 1, confirmatory factor analysis was used to compare two models: a one-factor model in which all 17 workaholism items and all 9 engagement items loaded on the same latent factor, and a three-factor model in which all engagement items loaded on one factor, the items measuring WE loaded on a second factor, and the items tapping WC loaded on the third factor. The three latent factors were allowed to correlate. Results indicated that the three-factor model fitted the data significantly better than the one-factor model. Figure 4.1 presents the correlations between the three latent factors. The subscales of workaholism are strongly associated, but the correlations between engagement and the two workaholism indicators are non-significant (for WC) or modest (for WE). Thus, it appears that engagement and workaholism are empirically different concepts, the main findings being that





Relationships between the dimensions of engagement and workaholism (Study 1).

(i) engaged employees have a tendency to work hard, and (ii) engagement is unrelated to working compulsively.

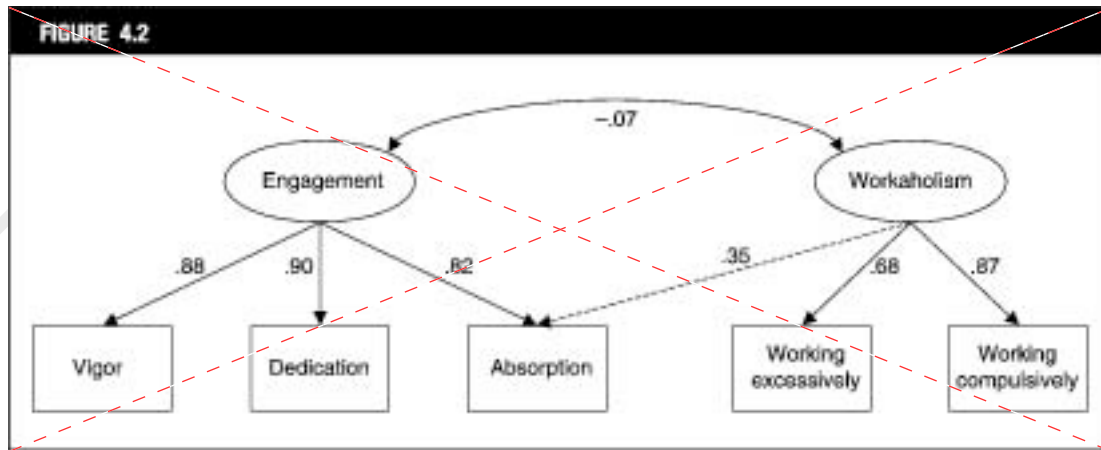
The value of the findings obtained in Study 1 is somewhat limited, in that no distinction was made between the subscales of engagement. Study 2 was designed to overcome this limitation, testing a similar series of models as in Study 1, but now involving five distinct subscales: three for engagement and two for workaholism. Again, a one-factor model in which all five scales loaded on a single factor was compared to a two-factor model, with the three engagement indicators loading on the first factor and the two workaholism scales loading on the second factor. Although the two-factor model fit the data considerably better than the single-factor model, model modification was necessary to obtain an acceptable fit to the data. Specifically, a factor loading relating absorption to workaholism had to be added (cf. Figure 4.2). As the figure shows, the loadings of vigor, dedication, and absorption on engagement are high and statistically significant; additionally, working excessively and working compulsively have substantial loadings on the workaholism factor. What was unexpected, though, is that absorption also loads substantially (standardized loading = .35, $p < .001$) on workaholism. This confirms the idea that workaholics are fully immersed

in their work and are reluctant to disengage from work (McMillan & O'Driscoll, 2006). However, theoretically it is assumed that the underlying motivation for being absorbed in one's work differs; where engaged workers are absorbed in their work because it is so much fun, workaholics feel driven to work – their absorption is a matter of compulsion, not of enjoyment. In other words, engaged workers are intrinsically motivated or pulled towards work, whereas workaholics are intrapersonally motivated or pushed to work. Further, it is interesting to see that the factor-level association between engagement and workaholism is low ($-.07$, *ns*); thus, after accounting for the fact that both workaholics and engaged workers are absorbed in their jobs, there is no reason to assume that there is a relationship of substantive interest between the two concepts.

Summary

All in all, the factor-analytic evidence discussed here supports the conceptual distinction between engagement and workaholism. The available evidence clearly shows that it is empirically warranted to distinguish between these concepts, in that WC and WE were in both studies only moderately (estimate = .33, for the relationship between WE and engagement in Study 1) or not at all (all other relationships) related to engagement. The





Relationships between the dimensions of engagement and workaholism (Study 2).

Absorption subscale of engagement (that is, forgetting about time) might be construed as a workaholism indicator, reflecting the theoretical notion that both workaholics and engaged workers have difficulties in disengaging from work – although the underlying reasons for being unable to disengage may well be different for the two groups.

Although this evidence suffices to show that engagement and workaholism can be measured separately and independently, it cannot be concluded that these measures really tap different constructs. That is, if engagement and workaholism are truly different, one would expect them to retain different patterns of relationships with other variables, such as work characteristics, work outcomes, and health. This issue is discussed in the next section, drawing on data from the same two studies.

The relationships between engagement, workaholism, and other variables

In order to assess the differential validity of workaholism vis-à-vis engagement, Schaufeli and colleagues (2006b, 2008) investigated their relationships with several sets of variables. For the present chapter these clusters of variables were regrouped into four broad clusters, covering (i) working time-related variables, (ii) work characteristics, (iii) health and well-being, and (iv) organizational behaviors.

Working time

The most obvious characteristic of workaholics is that they work beyond what is required, devoting much more time to their work than others do (Buelens & Poelmans, 2004; Scott et al., 1997). Brett and Stroh (2003) reported that North American workaholics work on average 50–60 hours per week, with those with high scores on the drive/working compulsively component working the longest hours (Spence & Robbins, 1992; Taris et al., 2005a). Not surprisingly, positive correlations have been found between the time committed to the job (such as working overtime, working during weekends and taking work home) and workaholism (Taris et al., 2005a). A large representative sample of the Dutch workforce revealed that work engagement is also related to working overtime (Beckers, Van der Linden, Smulders, Kompier, Van Veldhoven, & Van Yperen, 2004). Thus, both workaholics and engaged workers are expected to devote much time to their work.

Schaufeli et al.'s (2006b, 2008) findings confirm this expectation. Table 4.1 shows that the workaholism indicators as well as engagement are positively related to spending more hours at work. These associations are strongest and most systematic for working excessively; employees obtaining high scores on this concept work more hours than others, and spend more time overworking. Although similar tendencies are





TABLE 4.1

Correlates of indicators of workaholism and engagement

	Working excessively	Working compulsively	Work engagement
<i>Working time</i>			
Overwork ^{a, c, d}	.40	.29	.27
Overwork ^{b, c}	.24	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Percentage of overtime ^b	.15	.15	<i>ns</i>
Working hours ^{a, c}	.47	.29	.24
<i>Work characteristics</i>			
Job demands ^b	.46	.23	.13
Job control ^b	<i>ns</i>	-.17	.18
Co-worker support ^b	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	.12
Supervisor support ^b	<i>ns</i>	-.10	<i>ns</i>
<i>Health and well-being</i>			
Self-perceived health ^a	-.08	-.24	.35
Distress ^b	<i>ns</i>	.17	-.23
Depression ^b	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Anxiety ^b	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Psychosomatic complaints ^b	.09	.15	.11
Absenteeism ^a	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	-.09
Life satisfaction ^a	<i>ns</i>	-.26	.31
Job satisfaction ^b	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	.24
Organizational commitment ^b	.10	.11	.14
<i>Organizational performance</i>			
In-role performance ^a	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	.37
Extra-role performance ^a	.10	.11	.32
Innovativeness ^a	.23	<i>ns</i>	.37

Note. All associations are significant at $p < .05$ ($ns, p > .05$).

a Estimate derived from Study 1, $N = 2156$. Effects are standardized regression estimates, except^c.

b Estimate derived from Study 2, $N = 587$. Effects are standardized maximum likelihood estimates. The correlations with engagement were obtained by averaging the correlations with vigor, dedication and absorption reported by Schaufeli et al. (2008).

c This is a raw correlation coefficient.

d Overwork was computed as a combination of "works at weekends", "takes work home", and the percentage of overtime relative to the total number of hours worked.

e Overwork was computed as a combination of "works at weekends" and "takes work home".

observed for work engagement and especially working compulsively, here the associations are considerably weaker.

Work characteristics

In their attempts to continue working, workaholics may go as far as to actively create more work for themselves, e.g., by making projects more complicated than necessary, by self-imposed deadlines, or by refusing to delegate work (Machlow-

itz, 1980; Porter, 1996). This may also lead to a low quality of social relationships at work (Porter, 2001). Further, strong correlations were found between workaholism and job demands (Taris et al., 2005a). Conversely, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) reported that engagement was positively related to job resources such as social support from colleagues, but *not* to job demands. The evidence collected by Schaufeli et al. (2006b, 2008) corroborates these impressions. Both work-





aholics and engaged workers experience relatively high job demands; again, this association is strongest for Working Excessively. Working Compulsively is associated with low levels of job control and low levels of supervisor support; conversely, engaged workers experience high levels of control and high co-worker support. Thus, although both workaholics and engaged workers report high job demands, the workaholics judge other characteristics of their work negatively, whereas the engaged workers evaluate their work positively.

Health and well-being

Workaholics report relatively high levels of job strain and (mental) health complaints, particularly as far as the drive/compulsion component is concerned (Buelens & Poelmans, 2004; McMullan & O'Driscoll, 2004; Spence & Robbins, 1992; Taris et al., 2005a). Similarly, life satisfaction of workaholics is low (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000). The latter study also showed that work enthusiasts (the "good" workaholics, or engaged workers, in our terminology) reported high life satisfaction. Comparable findings were obtained by Buelens and Poelmans (2004), showing that work enthusiasts were satisfied with their salary and relationships at work, whereas "bad" workaholics were dissatisfied in these respects. Other evidence revealed that work engagement is negatively related to psychosomatic health complaints (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and positively to mental health (see Bakker & Leiter, Chapter 13, this volume).

The findings reported by Schaufeli et al. (2006b, 2008) are in line with these notions. Whereas workaholics tend to report low levels of self-perceived health and satisfaction and high levels of distress, the engaged workers report the opposite pattern of effects; they are happy workers, enjoy relatively good health, are relatively less often absent, are satisfied with their lives, and show low levels of distress. Interestingly – and in line with our expectations – both workaholics and engaged workers are committed to their work. Furthermore, in these two studies both workaholics and engaged workers report slightly more psychosomatic complaints than others. The finding that workaholism is positively related to

mental health complaints has been confirmed elsewhere. For example, a recent study among Dutch and Japanese employees – using shortened versions of the WE and WC scales – showed that workaholics reported higher levels of burnout than non-workaholics (with correlations of .53 and .64 in the Dutch and Japanese samples, respectively; Schaufeli, Shimazu & Taris, in press). However, Schaufeli et al.'s (2006b, 2008) finding that engaged workers also report higher levels of psychosomatic complaints has not been replicated. Schaufeli et al. (in press) showed that engagement was negatively related to burnout (with correlations of $-.75$ and $-.50$ in the Dutch and Japanese samples, respectively), whereas Shimazu et al. (2008) found that engaged workers reported better health and well-being than unengaged workers. Clearly, additional research is needed to clarify the relationship between engagement and psychosomatic complaints.

Organizational behavior

Whereas some authors maintain that workaholics are extremely productive workers (e.g., Korn et al., 1987; Machlowitz, 1980; Peiperl & Jones, 2001), others claim the opposite (Oates, 1971; Porter, 2001). The latter argue that workaholics may work hard, rather than smart, creating difficulties for themselves and their co-workers; they suffer from perfectionism, are rigid and inflexible, and cannot delegate tasks to others. Burke (2001b) reported some circumstantial evidence that workaholics perform not particularly well; for instance, workaholic behaviors were *not* associated with salary increases. Thus, it appears that workaholics are not necessarily good (and perhaps even poor) performers. As regards engagement, there is preliminary evidence that engaged employees perform better than others. For instance, Salanova et al. (2005a) recently showed that levels of work engagement of contract employees in hotels and restaurants were positively related to service quality, as perceived by customers. Similarly, engaged students passed more exams during subsequent semesters (Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002a) and obtained a higher point grade average during next year's grade point average (Salanova, Bresó, & Schaufeli,





2005b). Demerouti and Cropanzano (Chapter 11, this volume) discuss further evidence for the work engagement–work performance relationship. All in all, it appears that engagement is positively related to organizational performance, whereas the association between workaholism and performance is still unclear.

The findings reported by Schaufeli et al. (2006b) support these notions. Indeed, the differences between workaholics and engaged workers were perhaps most visible for variables tapping organizational performance. Whereas engaged workers reported higher levels of in- and extra-role behavior and innovativeness than unengaged workers, workaholics were considerably less convinced of their performance in these respects. There were no significant relationships between both workaholism indicators and in-role performance, and although both Working Excessively and Working Compulsively are positively related to extra-role performance, these associations were considerably weaker than for engagement.

Summary

As for the factor-analytic evidence discussed above, the pattern of relationships with various clusters of correlates presented in this section suggests that engagement and workaholism are empirically distinct constructs. There are some similarities, e.g., both engaged workers and workaholics tend to spend much time working, report high job demands, are committed to their jobs, and report relatively high levels of extra-role performance. However, it appears that high levels of engagement are usually associated with good health and well-being and with desirable job characteristics (in terms of support and control); conversely, such relationships are absent or negative for workaholic workers. Generally, it appears that whereas engaged workers work hard, they are quite happy with their jobs and feel that they perform well; workaholics work hard as well, but tend to evaluate their work and well-being negatively. These findings are largely in line with our expectations and with previous research that compared work enthusiasts and “good” workaholics with “bad” workaholics.

Concluding remarks

The present chapter was designed to provide a short overview of the similarities and differences between workaholism and engagement. We first discussed the concept of workaholism. Historically, many different forms of workaholism have been distinguished, some of which are considered “positive” (e.g., “work enthusiasts”, Spence & Robbins, 1992; cf. Buelens & Poelmans, 2004), whereas other forms are considered “negative” (e.g., Flowers & Robinson, 2002; Porter, 2001). This did not contribute to the conceptual clarity of the concept. Moreover, it is quite possible that divergent findings on the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of workaholism are due to differences in the conceptualization and measurement of workaholism. Therefore, in defining workaholism we returned to the origins of the concept, drawing on the classic notion of Oates (1971) of a workaholic as “a person whose need to work has become so excessive that it creates noticeable disturbances in his health, happiness or relationships” – i.e., as a concept that has distinctly *negative* consequences for the person and his or her environment. Conversely, the “positive” forms of workaholism bear more than a slight resemblance to the concept of work engagement. Both workaholics and engaged workers work hard and are highly involved in their work. However, whereas workaholics work hard due to a strong, compulsive inner drive they cannot resist (intrapersonal motivation – they are pushed to work), engaged workers do so because they enjoy their work so much (intrinsic motivation – they are pulled towards work). It can be speculated that the underlying motivation to work hard differs fundamentally between engaged workers and workaholics, for instance in terms of reinforcement sensitivity (cf. Van der Linden, Beckers, & Taris, 2007). Perhaps engaged workers are more likely to be sensitive to rewards and are reinforced by positive incentives (e.g., social approval, challenge, and resourceful jobs), whereas workaholics are more likely to be sensitive to punishments and are reinforced by negative incentives (e.g., social disapproval, fear of failure, or feelings of guilt when not working).

Thus, theoretically work engagement and work





addiction are two different concepts – but is this distinction warranted empirically as well? Evidence from two independent Dutch studies revealed that workaholism (as measured in terms of working excessively and working compulsively) could clearly be distinguished from work engagement (involving the notions of vigor, dedication, and absorption). One remarkable finding here was that the third indicator of engagement (absorption) showed a substantial loading on workaholism as well. This led Schaufeli et al. (2008) to conclude that absorption “is perhaps not a unique feature of work engagement” (p. 196). Theoretically, it seems plausible that absorption overlaps with workaholism as well; the latter concept clearly includes the notion of being immersed in one’s work. Apart from this overlap, it appeared that workaholism and engagement are only weakly related.

The conceptual distinction between engagement and workaholism was confirmed by inspection of the pattern of relationships between both states on the one hand, and various clusters of other concepts on the other. Whereas both engagement and workaholism are characterized by high effort expenditure at work (in terms of the time spent working and high job demands), high scores on workaholism are generally accompanied with adverse work characteristics (control and social support), lack of well-being (especially mental health), and only moderate trust in one’s own work performance. Conversely, engaged workers are generally quite satisfied with their jobs and their lives, report good health, and state that they perform well. In sum, our findings underline the distinction between “good” and “bad” workaholism; good workaholics (i.e., engaged workers) tend to experience their work and health positively, whereas bad workaholics are indeed the unhappy individuals portrayed in early accounts of workaholism. These results agree with a recent, comprehensive review of research with the widely used workaholism triad (Burke, 2006). Although “work enthusiasts” or good workaholics work the same number of hours per week as “non-enthusiastic” or bad workaholics, the former have higher self-esteem, feel more personally secure, show less Type A behavior

(impatience and irritability), and experience more job, life, family, and community satisfaction than the “real” workaholics. Moreover, “work enthusiasts” have better career prospects, have a lower intention to quit, exhibit better physical and psychosomatic health, and show better well-being (Burke, 2006).

Future research

The findings discussed above suggest that work engagement can (and even must) be distinguished from workaholism. However, it should be acknowledged that the evidence presented here draws on only a limited amount of research. To our knowledge, only two studies (Schaufeli et al., 2006b, 2008) directly compared engagement and workaholism to each other. Although the findings of these two studies are quite consistent, and seem to agree with research on the workaholism triad as reviewed by Burke (2006), it would seem desirable to replicate and extend their findings using independent databases, preferably involving non-Dutch workers. The only study in which a non-Dutch – Japanese – sample was included is rather limited in scope and focused exclusively on the differential relationship of engagement and workaholism with burnout (Schaufeli et al., in press).

Moreover, the evidence so far has been collected using cross-sectional designs. Although such designs may provide a first indication of the differences and similarities between workaholism and engagement, they cannot provide any reliable indication of the possible causal direction of the associations between these two concepts, their temporal stability, and the causal order of their relationships with other variables. For example, theoretically the main distinction between these two types of workers is that workaholics work hard because they feel this strong inner drive, whereas engaged workers work hard because they like their job so much. Is it possible that these motivations for working hard change over time, e.g., could an engaged worker who is disappointed in the job maintain the same behavioral pattern (working hard) but for different reasons? Similarly, qualitative evidence (Schaufeli et al., 2001) revealed that engaged workers may have





Practical implications

The present chapter compared the concepts of workaholism and engagement with each other. Whereas it is clear that engagement (i.e., “good” workaholism) has generally positive consequences for both the individual worker and the organization they work for, the consequences of workaholism (defined as working excessively and compulsively) are generally negative. Yet, conceptually both concepts overlap to a substantial degree; both imply a (very) high level of commitment and effort expenditure; the main difference being that workaholics’ high effort expenditure is due to an inner compulsion, whereas engaged workers work hard because they enjoy their work so much. There are indications that both states may alternate (Schaufeli et al., 2001), such that engaged workers may have been workaholics and vice versa. Thus, it seems important for organizations to cherish their engaged workers as well as to monitor them closely – cherish them because they are valuable to the organization; monitor them, because organizations presumably want to keep these workers happy and productive. In doing so, organizations are well-advised to provide their employees with the necessary job resources because resourceful jobs drive work engagement (see Halbesleben Chapter 8, and Salanova, et al., Chapter 9, this volume).

There are no clear indications that workaholism involves any advantages to the organization or the individual worker. In contrast, it seems that workaholics negatively affect organizational performance, for instance by refusing to delegate tasks and making tasks unnecessarily complicated (Machlowitz, 1980; Porter, 2001). For organizations this means that they should be concerned about individuals who appear to be their most conscientious and hard-working employees. This can be done, amongst others, by:

- counteracting the typical workaholic culture of glorifying excessive long work hours, for example by role modeling of supervisors;
- training supervisors; they should make clear to their subordinates what the meaning, purpose, and importance of their work is. This could lead to a decrease in workaholism (especially working compulsively) and an increase in work engagement (especially dedication);
- avoiding hiring workaholics, for instance by including personality tests that tap typical workaholic traits such as need for dominance, obstinacy, orderliness, and rigidity (Mudrack, 2006);
- Offering Employee Assistance Programs for workaholic employees (Porter & Herring, 2006).

Unfortunately, person-directed interventions specifically aimed at reducing workaholism are scarce. Robinson (2007) has devised a guidebook for workaholics, their families, and the professionals treating them. Other person-directed interventions may include:

- improving coping skills using cognitive-behavioral techniques, for instance, time management and problem-solving training (to decrease the need to work excessively hard), and rational emotive therapy (to decrease the need to work compulsively);
- joining self-help groups like Workaholics Anonymous (www.workaholics-anonymous.org).

Hence the bottom line is that engagement – or the pull to work – is likely to be increased by organizational-level interventions, whereas workaholism – or the push to work – is likely to be decreased by individual-level interventions, albeit that organizations might facilitate the latter type of interventions for their workaholic employees.

experienced spells of burnout in the past; as burnout may be a consequence of workaholism (Taris et al., 2005a), it appears possible that workaholics may become engaged workers under the right circumstances. Thus, it seems important to study the temporal stability of workaholism and engagement as well as possible changes in these concepts, as well as the factors that facilitate these changes. For example, increases in family obligations could mean that for some engaged workers their work suddenly interferes with their family life, which is an indicator of workaholism. Similarly, positive changes at work may lead workaholic workers to reinterpret the reasons why they work excessively hard – now they work for fun rather than because they feel they must,

meaning that they are classified as engaged workers rather than workaholics.

Finally, on a more fundamental level, an attempt could be made to link engagement and workaholism to different underlying motivational systems. Based on our conceptual analyses and on the empirical findings that we have reviewed above, it could be speculated that engagement is related to an appetitive motivational system, whereas workaholism is related to an avoidant motivational system. Relevant theoretical approaches would be: reinforcement sensitivity theory (Gray & McNaughton, 2000) with reward versus punishment sensitivity; regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 2006) with promotion versus prevention focus; and goal orientation with mastery versus





performance goals (Dweck, 1999). It could be hypothesized that the underlying motivation of engaged workers is reinforced by rewards (e.g., job resources), promotion focused (e.g., learning new things), and directed towards achieving mastery goals (e.g., self-enhancement). This is consistent with the notion of being pulled towards work. In contrast, the motivation of workaholics would be reinforced by punishments (e.g., disapproval from others), prevention focused (e.g., not making mistakes and errors), and directed towards achieving performance goals (e.g., outperforming colleagues). This is consistent with the notion of being pushed to work.

All in all, whereas the available evidence suggests that engagement and workaholism may be distinguished both theoretically and empirically, the relationships between these concepts and their possible correlates are as yet far from clear. Future (preferably longitudinal) research should examine more comprehensive models for the relationships between these concepts as well as their antecedents and consequences, and motivational underpinnings. We expect that in this vein more insight will be obtained in the similarities and distinctions between these two concepts, as well as in their interrelationships. For the time being, it seems that employees can be both pulled and pushed to work.

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