

A MEANINGFUL LIFE AT WORK

The Paradox of Wellbeing

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2018

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78756-770-2 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78756-767-2 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78756-769-6 (Epub)



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Dedicated
To good friends ...

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a result of an amazing and meaningful journey made by all the authors who care and respect for the life and wellbeing of individuals. Inspired by their own experiences at work, the authors accentuate the pertinent aspects of an individual's mental capability and emotions. In essence, this book enables them to communicate their carefully referred thoughts and practices to readers of how powerful choice is in determining an individual's life in the pursuit of happiness, particularly at the workplace.

This project is fully supported by Equitable Society Research Cluster (ESRC), University of Malaya, under award grant number RP043-16SBS.

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INTRODUCTION

At the heart of every individual is the belief that life revolves around many things, part of which, is work. Central to this notion of work is economic necessity where people work to live. Work has always been the fundamental feature of human experience, and one of the most baffling issues in current research concerns this human experience at the workplace. Although much thought has been given into improving work conditions, enhancing motivation and enriching employee satisfaction, our limited understanding of the nature of this experience, has therefore, restricted our opportunities to grow.

In the work context, employees are individuals who are given salaries or wages in return for their contributions to the work organisation they are attached to. Coming from different backgrounds with different social values and beliefs, these individuals often experience difficulties and trials at their workplace, and if unattended, these negative experiences can affect their wellbeing. Regardless of how well an employer tries to 'care' for the employees, there is always some form of damaging effect caused by work that affects an employee's wellbeing. Due to this outcome, an abundance of research, particularly in the area of psychology, tends to focus on studying the concept of wellbeing and its effect on mental

illness. Unfortunately, the tendency of research to focus on the negative effects of work, such as mental illness, only offers a form of resolution for problem-solving. It does not highlight the actual experiences of the employees at the workplace. This inclination was noted by Myers (2000), who stated that the number of publications focusing on the negative state of work, as compared to the positive state of work, is in the ratio of 14:1. Consequently, much criticism was directed to those studies focusing on mental illness rather than mental wellness. Researchers (e.g. Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; Guest, 2017) have also argued that studies should be giving more emphasis to positive behaviour at work. Any outcome derived from such studies can provide some enlightenment into the positive effects of work on employees' mental wellness and wellbeing; the results of which can be used to enhance future workplace conditions, where necessary.

This book contributes to the issue of employees' wellbeing in a developing country such as Malaysia, where the topic has not been thoroughly researched before. The book offers readers an insight into the Asian cum Malaysian perspective and experience of what wellbeing means. It must be noted that while developing countries consider the need for equity and sustainability to be evident, the conditions for sustainability and equity, or indeed the very necessity for both, are not immediately apparent, particularly in Malaysia. Part of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016) consists of the commitment in empowering all the citizens by means of participating and benefitting from the country's prosperity. This commitment is anchored on the belief that inclusive growth is not only key to an individual's wellbeing and societal wellbeing, but it is also critical for sustaining longer periods of solid economic growth. Thus, one of the priorities in sustainable and equitable progress is the focus on human capital

development. While the social and economic indicators of wellbeing are highly explored, there seems to be limited research that focuses on the concept of the emotional wellbeing of the individual. Relevant to this, a sustainable workforce is shaped and nurtured through employment practices that associate the individual's wellbeing to positive employment experiences in the organisation (Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014). Yet, despite the growing significance in scholarly literature, the individual's wellbeing at the workplace has not been well researched and so, it is less conspicuous in practice. This observation highlights a gap that needs to be addressed because the concept of wellbeing has important implications for personal and work-related outcomes, such as a transparent and justifiable process in building an equitable society. The concept of wellbeing serves as the pillar of a sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development as it is associated with human development and their experiences. Based on this, the aim of this book is to examine the various domains of the employees' positive and negative experiences at the workplace in order to assess how this contributes to their wellbeing.

In doing so, this book takes into consideration the perspectives of Choice Theory by William Glasser (1999). Choice Theory elucidates on the choices that we often make in life. This includes the good and the bad choices. The most practical way to understand Choice Theory is to concentrate on why we select the common despairs or negativity that we feel befall us. When we are unhappy, we believe that we cannot control our misery. For example, when we failed at work, we often blame our colleagues, our leaders, our jobs, the forces that caused our despair. In fact, the greatest mystery of any human misery is probably whether we can find ways to resist that force. The real question is, is resistance a choice? Indeed, it certainly is.

An extension of the Choice Theory argument is that our behaviour consists of four components which are acting, thinking, feeling and the physiological association with all our actions, thoughts and feelings, which is what Glasser called total behaviour. The epitome of Choice Theory is the concept of choosing to stop a negative behaviour. We could, in a great way: (1) change our desire, (2) change our action or (3) change both. The notion that we always try to make the perfect choice is essential to understanding our total behaviour.

However, one rather significant matter in Choice Theory is the fact that humans prefer to obtain more than what is available. For instance, with reference to the need for belongingness, it should be defined by ‘how much we are willing to give, not by how much we are willing to receive’ (Glasser, 1999, p. 80). And as long as people think that they want more and are not willing to give more, then conflicting issues will arise in any relationships, be it between a subordinate and a supervisor, or from a colleague to another. Therefore, it is vital that individuals should expect that life is not a fair process. In some cases, one individual could give more towards a relationship in comparison to others. Having an awareness of this, and realising this, will help an individual stay on their toes. That is to say, once we have accepted reality, it is easier to deal with reality as opposed to always expecting more from others. How we behave and how we choose to live our lives depends on us, and only us. If we understand Choice Theory, then all logical external premises or control would diminish. So instead of blaming others, we would question ourselves if we had made the right choice to begin with. That is, have I thought of that? Have I tried the other way? Could I have done it differently?

One of the most important reminders from Choice Theory is that we must believe that people will find better ways to

take control of their everyday lives. And in doing so, we may help them as well. As leaders or as peers, we need to put this in consideration because once the fear is removed, people ‘can learn that other choices are possible, and acting on those new, more effective choices sets them free’ (Glasser, 1999, p. 129). Choice Theory does not guarantee that individuals will be perfect at work or that they will have a great working life, but it does help people to be great in having to deal with problems at work. If, as humans, we need to be surrounded by happy and supportive people, in the context of work, it is the job of leaders, supervisors, colleagues, subordinates, etc. to be so. Nevertheless, there are too many people in these roles that do not realise just how important they are. Thus, the intention of this book is to create this awareness among individuals about how they have a major role in affecting their own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of others.

The concept of wellbeing is defined as one that revolves around the actualisation of human potential and a meaningful life. It focuses on how individuals thrive in the face of adversity in life, how they react to these issues emotionally and how satisfied they become with their experiences at work or outside of work. In the context of this book, the phenomenon of wellbeing will focus on the pursuit of happiness and a pleasant life at work. The book commences with two chapters that focus on making choices at the workplace. Chapter 1 is entitled ‘Passionate about Work or Addicted to Work?’ This chapter focuses on how engagement and ‘workaholism’ have pertinent roles in affecting the employees’ wellbeing at work. Readers will find that there is a stark contrast in the wellbeing of a passionate employee and an addictive employee. Chapter 2 is entitled ‘Being Good or Being Bad in the Workplace? Does Moral Imagination Influence Employees’ Ethical Behaviour?’ This chapter explains the importance of employees’ behavioural

conduct in dealing with ethical issues at the workplace. Both Chapters 1 and 2 emphasise that life is about choices and employees can make their own choices on how they want to develop themselves at the workplace.

Of the subsequent chapters of the book, Chapters 3 and 4, focus on the issues that induce negative effects on one's wellbeing. Chapter 3 places a special attention on the issue of cyberbullying and it is entitled, 'Cyberbullies: Hurt Me Not!' as there is no denying that cyberbullying can affect the wellbeing of employees. As an important reminder to readers, Chapter 3 emphasises on how victims are subjected to psychological and physiological distress which, inevitably, impacts on the organisation's wellbeing and performance. Chapter 4 offers an insight into the issue of sexual harassment. Entitled 'It's Not a Compliment, It's Harassment!', this chapter provides an all-encompassing elucidation on what it takes for sexual harassment to occur, how one can overcome it and how to succeed in the face of a challenging situation. Chapter 5, 'Positivity and Happiness in the Workplace' discusses the different perspectives of positivity at work. This chapter enlightens the reader on how positivity, and its link to happiness, can be exceptionally significant in ensuring excellent organisational performance. Finally, the book concludes with a highlight on 'Employee Wellbeing: A Matter of Choice'.

Today's generation places a great demand for their voices to be heard. Individuals want to be involved and consulted as to how they could improve their wellbeing at work. Therefore, understanding their work values, their choices and the problems they face in the workplace, may help organisations to structure job designs, human resource policies, compensation packages, working conditions, among others, so as to be able to provide good working conditions for their employees. It is hoped that this book can act as a conduit in

contributing to organisational discourse which encompasses the need to improve employees' wellbeing. Undoubtedly, organisations that nurture employees' experiences, would eventually also nurture the organisation's work and people quality.

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CHAPTER 1

PASSIONATE ABOUT WORK OR ADDICTED TO WORK?

*Some people strive to make a living, while others
strive to make a life.*

INTRODUCTION

Work has been an integral part of our lives. In the past, work was perceived to be a purposeful human action which involves physical and mental efforts that are carried out for economic values, and not for pleasure (Budd, 2011). In other words, people work to live. Many of us have the belief that the harder we work, the better we become. This has led to the hierarchical structure of work where individuals are often segregated according to their status at work. With the advent of technology, today's working conditions have also changed as organisations become competitive with one another. In the modern world, organisations need employees who are dedicated to their work and who perform their best at work. This makes up for the organisation's productivity and quality. To

begin with, it is important to note that some employees allocate more time and energy to their work, in comparison to others. On the one hand, organisations may push their employees towards working hard, but on the other hand, the individual themselves may want to put in heavy work investments into their jobs. As employees, this is the choice we often make at work, for the purpose of making a living out of our work or for making a life out of it. Making a living involves securing sufficient income while making a life concerns the issue of work–life balance. Our wellbeing is very much dependent on the choice that we need to make.

The fact that some choices may be good does not mean that more choices are better. At times, the choices that we make can cause more harm than good. [Schwartz and Ward \(2004\)](#) assert that doing more could actually mean achieving a lot less. For example, people who are perfectionists, tend to do more to exceed their usual standard of performance. However, this could have detrimental effects on the person's efficiency; in fact, it could actually reduce work productivity ([Sherry, Hewitt, Sherry, Flett, & Graham, 2010](#)), thereby, lowering work satisfaction ([Fairlie & Flett, 2003](#)). While work has been a means for one's survival in the past, the contemporary way of looking at work is that it is more than just for survival purposes. To understand its success, some relevant questions can be asked: Would hard work equate to success? Would success be an antecedent to our happiness and wellbeing, and what does it take to be successful?

A large array of studies (e.g. [Chang, Jia, Takeuchi, & Cai, 2014](#); [Macky & Boxall, 2008](#); [Shin & Konrad, 2017](#)) have shown that competitive working conditions cause employees to compete among themselves so as to achieve that state of 'success'. Employees seem to equate success with better compensation, respectable top management positions, bigger houses, longer life savings plans and many other goals. Thus,

the concept of ‘survival of the fittest’ blends in well with their lifestyle which is to compete for higher positions, better pay and perhaps, even longer working hours, all of which cause major drawbacks on the wellbeing of the individuals. Some potential drawbacks can be traced to the incidences of depression, anxiety, mental disorders and physical health problems.

A recent report by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2017) showed that anxiety and depression have a significant impact on the economy. This amounted to an estimated cost of about US \$1 trillion per year, just for lost productivity, throughout the world. In 2017 alone, more than 300 million people worldwide experienced depression, and in 2015, the estimated number of people living with anxiety disorders throughout the world was 264 million. Additionally, about one in five adults in the US, that is, 43.8 million people, became victims of mental illness within a given year. In Malaysia, *The Star* newspaper (2 April 2017) reported that four out of every 10 Malaysians will experience some mental health issues in the course of their lives, and psychologists are confident that the figure will continue to rise. Other studies (e.g. Rusli, Edimansyah, & Naing, 2008) which focused on Malaysian employees have also shown that many individuals at work are suffering from job stress symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Idris & Dollard, 2014).

One factor relating work with anxiety and depression is work-related stress that is usually caused by overwhelming work demands, but the perplexing thing about this is that these anxieties and depression symptoms are not treated. Lauber and Rossler (2007) reported that mental illnesses are rarely dealt with in developing countries in Asia and the reason is often traced to the problem of stigma, and neglect as well as discrimination. In this regard, employees, as human

beings susceptible to these emotional distress, are often prevented from getting the help and treatment they require. More often than not, these problems occur within a culture that views stress and depression as well as mental illness, negatively, as if it is the individual who is unstable. Consequently, the anxiety and depression issues become some kind of stigma and taboo in society. Moreover, Asians, in particular, do not like to talk about their problems, especially with regards to work. Therefore, individuals keep many issues to themselves and then become overwhelmed and suffer internally. Observations show that individuals who suffer from emotional problems are often perceived to be weak, therefore, when overwhelmed with work-related stress, these individuals are more likely to put the blame on their physical problems, such as their back pain, headache, inability to sleep and constant fatigue, instead of their internal distress. Undeniably, these issues with stress stem from the modern day culture of working.

In today's changing and challenging organisations, employees tend to work longer hours (Drago, 2000). The pressure exerted by the organisation's management as well as the economy has prompted organisations to compensate those employees who are willing to work hard and sacrifice their time for their profession. As a result of this, individuals continuously aim to enhance their capability and knowledge, build networks with others inside and outside the organisation and work harder than ever, so as to remain competitive and be ready for the rewards offered by their organisations. Taken together, these pressures can stimulate employees to work hard in their career because they want to move up the corporate ladder in their respective organisations.

WORK ENGAGEMENT AND WORKAHOLISM

A review of relevant literature indicates two categories of 'working hard': (1) an intrinsically positive form of working hard where employees are passionate about their job; this is known as work engagement, and (2) an intrinsically negative form of working hard where employees seem to be more addicted to work; this is known as workaholism. Nevertheless, the motive that propels people to be engaged at work or to become workaholics, has not been examined extensively, thus, it remains unclear. Despite the growing significance noted in scholarly and management literature, there seems to be a disconnection between the two constructs where the outcome is not related to work. This chapter aims to explore the differences, similarities and the interconnection between the two constructs, and the impact these may have on the well-being of employees. Ultimately, this chapter will also examine the concept of work engagement and workaholism domains so as to understand how this affects the employees' attitude towards work and its implications for their wellbeing.

Drawing from the self-determination and choice theory, this chapter looks at the differences between employees who are passionate about their work and employees who have an addiction to their work. Within these theories, a major motivation regulating an individual's behaviour is intrinsic motivation. As workaholics and as engaged employees, both actually focus on the degree in which individual is self-motivated to make their own decisions without the influence of external factors. For instance, workaholism has little to do with a person's love or truthful need to contribute to organisational goals. Instead, workaholics work excessively hard because they feel that they must do so. Not doing so may induce anxiety and unhappy emotions such as shame, guilt and anxiety (Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012).

In contrast, work engagement is associated with positive outcomes and it is characterised very much by the individual's dedication towards work, an absorption with work and the vigour in doing work (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002).

Past research tends to underestimate the importance of these two constructs of work (Christian & Slaughter, 2007; Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008). In this regard, this chapter posits that both work engagement and workaholism have pertinent roles in affecting employees' wellbeing at work. To date, there are apparent gaps in the current knowledge and understanding of why people work, and what drives people towards working hard. These gaps can be addressed accordingly, so that the outcomes drawn can serve as the foundation for future studies to understand what drives people towards working hard. The outcome extracted will serve as the significance of this chapter, thereby setting it apart from previous studies. The justification for addressing this research centres on the claim that both work engagement and workaholism have pertinent implications for employees' personal wellbeing and other work-related outcomes. The argument and conceptualisation of work engagement and workaholism will serve as two different models of working hard.

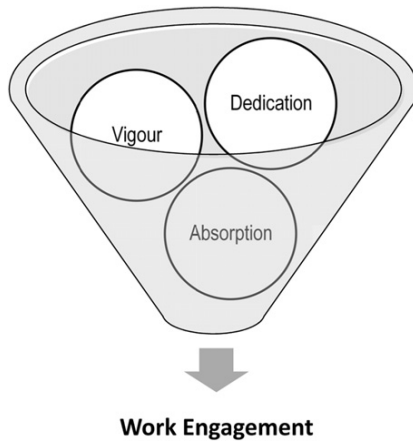
ENGAGEMENT AS PASSION TOWARDS WORK

Scholars and practitioners (e.g. Gorgievski & Bakker, 2010; Towers Watson, 2010; Zivnuska, Kacmar, Ferguson, & Carlson, 2016) assert that passion or engagement for work is a major determinant of employees' wellbeing and performance. Passion for work has been conceptualised as a strong inclination towards work that one loves, it is considered as

highly important and it serves as a vital part of one's self-concept; work is an area where one invests a significant amount of time and energy (Forest et al., 2012). Recent years have witnessed an immense degree of research that focused on the concept of engagement at work. Due to some of their outcomes, consultancy agencies have begun calling for some variants of engagement to be adopted at the workplace as a policy goal for organisations.

The notion of employees being engaged at work focuses on positivity; it looks at the fulfilling aspects of doing work. In a sense, being engaged at work allows the individual to feel satisfied and happy. This positive reflection is in line with the notion of positive organisational behaviour. Thus, work engagement presents a positive form of resource that can be beneficial for the individual. Studies (e.g. Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002) indicate that work engagement can be defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind where employees bring all their physical, cognitive and emotional energies into the work, and this is equivalent to passion. Work engagement predominantly refers to the experiences employees have while working. Being passionate helps the employees to identify themselves with the work they are doing.

Work engagement is a disposition that was found to be relatively stable. It also comprises three elements: vigour, dedication and absorption in work (Schaufeli et al., 2002) (see Figure 1.1). The first of these, vigour, refers to the energetic resources that the individual has, for example, physical strength, emotional energy and cognitive liveliness. Vigour, as a resource, demonstrates a high level of mental resiliency, thus, individuals who have a high level of perseverance in facing any difficulty at work are considered to have vigour. Individuals who are high on vigour also experience a higher will power to achieve their goals; they invest exceptional

Figure 1.1. Elements of Work Engagement.

Source: Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, and Bakker (2002).

effort in at their work or job. A person who is vigorous demonstrates a person who is engaged at work and consequently, he/she grows into a passionate employee.

The second element, dedication, represents the experience the individual feels, such as a feeling of significance, motivation, pride and enthusiasm, when doing work. Dedication is demonstrated by giving one's best at work. In a sense, a dedicated employee would be a very disciplined person who follows rules and regularly tries his/her best in solving work problems. An individual who is dedicated to his/her job would surely be an engaged person.

The third element, absorption, is relevant to the feeling of contentment while performing one's work. It demonstrates a state of attentiveness. An individual who is absorbed at work exhibits the characteristics of persistency and being engrossed in doing work. In most cases, absorbed individuals are happy

to undertake responsibilities at work. They also do not notice how time flies. Essentially, an individual who is absorbed would be very much engaged in his/her work, appearing to be passionate in the job.

Unlike workaholics, engaged employees lack the typical compulsive drive; they treat work as fun, not an obsession, and they work hard due to their intrinsic motivation. These individuals are hardworking not only because they like their job, but also because they are driven by a resilient internal urge which they find difficult to fight (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Engaged workers feel drawn to their work out of passion. They have effective connections to their work. However, they remain in control. Due to this, they normally find a balance between work and family. Not only do they enjoy work and find work a challenge, but they also enjoy their free time. Hence, an engaged employee will work hard, but only to the extent which they feel is necessary. In this regard, they can choose to disengage themselves from work when the need arises. If anything, the one aspect that makes an employee passionate about work is his/her identification with the work he/she does. This implies that such individuals demonstrate a strong passion towards their work, as in a 'strong inclination towards work which they find important, and in which they invest time and energy' (Vallerand, Paquet, Philippe, & Charest, 2010, p. 290).

Studies on work engagement revolve around the job-demand resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) which helps us to understand the sources that trigger work engagement. At the centre of the JD-R model lies the notion that every job may have its own sources to the employee's wellbeing. These sources may be grouped into two elements: job resources and job demands. The first of these, job resources, represents elements that can facilitate engagement such as the support of supervisors, help from co-workers, the

range of skills and knowledge available and the autonomy and learning opportunities offered by the organisation. Studies suggest that supportive environments, acknowledging the individual's emotions, providing feedback and opportunities for decision-making are all antecedents to work passion, that is, engagement (Bonneville-Roussy, Vallerand, & Bouffard, 2013). The second of the two, job demand, on the other hand, represents those elements that reduce engagement such as workload, unfavourable physical environment, difficult colleagues and other things. The JD-R model illustrates that job resources may become more prominent when individuals are threatened with high job demands. For example, when employees have a high workload (job demand), the presence of supportive supervisors (job resource) will be significant in ensuring that employees are highly engaged and are on a positive level.

Evidence drawn from other studies (e.g. Abu Bakar, Cooke, & Muenjohn, *in press*; Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003) seems to suggest that personal resources can facilitate engagement. It appears that individuals who have positive core self-evaluation and a belief in themselves, are more likely to be resilient in their ability to control and to go through their daily activities. In a sense, individuals with personal resources have a higher degree of coping; thus, they are able to withstand challenges (job demand) and be more engaged in their job.

OUTCOMES OF ENGAGEMENT

Ultimately, the discourse among work engagement is that it is highly valuable to organisations. There are four major reasons why engaged workers are performers (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). First, they feel positive emotions such as joy and

enthusiasm. Second, they construct their own personal and job resources. Third, they experience better health and fourth, they transfer their engagement to other people. These optimistic outcomes should be the aim of any modern organisation.

Having a passion towards one's work is one way to maintain one's wellbeing and to perform well (Zigarmi, Nimon, Houson, Witt, & Diehl, 2011). This is because passion can fuel motivation, so eventually work is seen as something meaningful for those individuals. Under such circumstances, a person would feel intensely alive when involved in doing the work which he/she is supposed to be doing. Being passionate about one's job will facilitate one's performance because naturally, individuals would use all their mental and physical resources at work to the best of their ability. Consistent with this view, research (i.e. Bakker, 2011) also shows that passionate employees demonstrate greater in-role and extra-role performance. In-role performance refers to the core-task behaviour that is required in each employee. Extra-role performance refers to those behaviours that are not defined as part of the individual's work. Employees who are passionate about their job will go the extra mile in helping other people as well as improving themselves. Consequently, this has a large impact on the financial performance of an organisation, thereby, producing happier customers, and better working relationships with people outside the organisation.

When an individual is being passionate at work, his/her behaviour can also affect and benefit team members, and the environment. Passionate workers are seen as role models due to their positive emotions and energy. This form of behaviour is indeed contagious. Passionate employees transfer their emotions and behaviour to others in the workplace, and this would have a large effect on organisational performance. Ultimately, passionate employees who are highly engaged with their work would say that their work makes them feel

invigorated, happier and motivated. In other words, they get something in return. Conversely, workaholics do not work to get something in return. Workaholics display an overwhelming need to keep on working even though it could be detrimental to their health and personal life. The following section elaborates on the concept of workaholism and how it can be an addictive disposition.

UNDERSTANDING THE ADDICTIVE SIDE OF WORKAHOLISM

*I am afraid to sleep.
Every time I wake up,
I have to go to work.*

– Anonymous

Over engagement at work could indeed lead to detrimental outcomes. In most cases, workaholics are described as those who are reluctant to be disengaged from work. What is worse is that they frequently, and persistently, ponder about work even when they are not at work. [Schaufeli, Taris, and Bakker \(2008\)](#) define workaholism as having two elements: (1) spending countless hours on a person's work and (2) being incapable of disconnecting from work. [Andreassen, Hetland, and Pallesen \(2013, p. 8\)](#) define workaholism as:

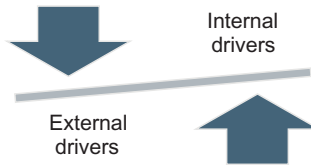
being overly concerned about work, to be driven by an uncontrollable work motivation, and to put so much energy and effort into work that it impairs private relationships, spare-time activities, and/or health.

The discourse on workaholics seems to revolve around the idea that workaholism is, generally, a stable excessive working disposition. This means that individuals are preoccupied

with their work on a daily basis; they devote their time into thinking about work and they would even free up their time for work. In the end, workaholics spend a lot of working hours doing more work than was initially intended.

Workaholism appears to be synonymous to working hard where working hard, at times, is seen as parallel to working long hours. However, conceptualising the concept of workaholism solely on the total number of working hours can be a problem of misrepresentation because it neglects the addictive nature (Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009). This is because workaholics have difficulty in disengaging from work issues. Therefore, workaholism can be classified as a behavioural addiction. One thing to note in workaholism is the excessive work behaviour which is not a requirement, but is performed by the employee. In fact, these employees often do much more than what is realistically expected of them.

On one side of the debate, this compulsive and domineering thought about work seems to calm their thoughts. Workaholics have an urge to work to attain pleasure. On the other side of the debate, workaholics do not necessarily enjoy or love their jobs. They only have an obsessive, guilt-ridden compulsion to keep on working. Based on this, the question that arises is that if workaholism involves the latter explanation, how then do these workaholics attain pleasure out of their work, as is enjoyed by those who are engaged with their work? A general consensus among scholars (e.g. Beek et al., 2012; Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008) can be used to explain this misperception. Although workaholics are driven by their compulsion to work, the motive behind their compulsion is quite different from the motive of those who are engaged in work. Figure 1.2 shows that people are motivated to work due to internal and external drivers. Internal drivers represent the compulsion to work due to the individual's state

Figure 1.2. Motivation to Work.

of mind. In other words, workaholics work in order to avoid or lessen their anxiousness and guilt as well as to fulfil the feeling that one ‘should work’. This is the very nature of workaholics. By comparison, external drivers are related to the compulsion to work as a result of external causes such as financial requirements, financial problems, poor marriage, organisational requirements and the obligation to meet the supervisor’s order.

In light of the above, it can thus be argued that workaholics do not engage in excessive work due to external drivers, for example, they work not because of their family nor to earn a living. Rather, a significant feature of workaholism is driven by internal drivers, that is, workaholics need to work hard because they feel that it is a necessity to work hard. A moment of not working would arouse feelings of distress, shame and irritability. In some respect, due to these internal drivers, workaholics would continue working even in the condition of negative outcomes (such as an increase in health problems or marital issues). In fact, workaholics strive to work to forget about their other problems such as family or other personal issues. Work, it seems, provides a heavenly getaway for them to forget about other important things in life. Apparently, workaholics throw themselves into their work so as to avoid these negative

Figure 1.3. Causes of Workaholism.

feelings. By the same token, in order to lessen their emotional state of guilt and irritability, workaholics are also driven by two major causes of workaholism, as depicted in [Figure 1.3](#).

CAUSES OF WORKAHOLISM

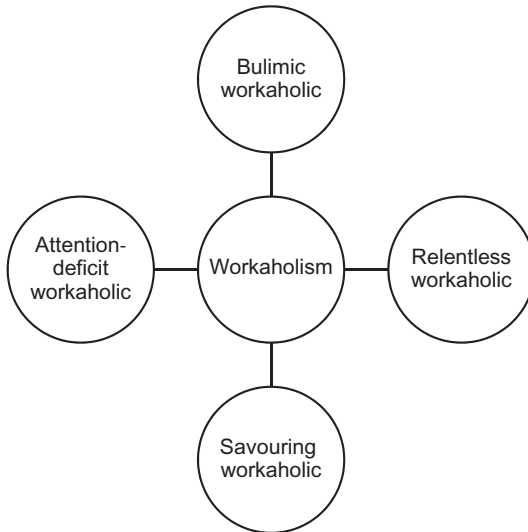
Workaholism can occur as a result of behavioural reinforcements. To some degree, the organisations' reward systems and punishments could be a source that affects people and turn them into workaholics. For instance, [Mudrack \(2006\)](#) accentuates that workaholics have a greater tendency to want to prove themselves as compared to employees who are not workaholics. Thus, receiving good rewards and avoiding punishments would be an agenda that workaholics abide by. Evidence (e.g. [Aziz, Zmary, & Wuensch, 2018](#)) suggests that this relates to the concept of low self-worth and low

self-esteem. The need to be competitive and the need to 'prove' themselves characterises a workaholic employee. An individual with low self-image may exhibit a workaholic's behaviour when he/she associates hard work with success.

Another issue related to the concept of self-esteem is the notion of perfectionism. Often people strive for perfectionism at work. This attempt at flawlessness regularly affects how people work. In fact, [Stoeber and Stoeber \(2009\)](#) mention that the majority of working individuals have at least one sphere in their life span where they are perfectionistic, and the domain that is most affected by this is, work. The close link between workaholism and perfectionism goes a long way back to the work of [Spence and Robbins \(1992\)](#), who consider perfectionism as one of the main dimensions of workaholism. The strive to become a perfectionist, it seems, stimulates individuals to work harder than they should.

Eventually, workaholism was also regarded as a personality trait. [Andreassen, Ursin, Eriksen, and Pallesen \(2012\)](#) assert that workaholics have a high score on traits such as narcissism, neuroticism and conscientiousness. It is possible that these personality traits are also related to dysfunctional work behaviour, that is, being consumed with thoughts about work. For example, a person who is highly narcissistic would be driven to working hard so that he/she can boast of his/her accomplishments. A narcissistic person would value power and pursue career development at a different rate. Their pre-occupation with work may eventually precede other activities in life.

[Robinson \(2013\)](#) proposed four dimensions of workaholism, as shown in [Figure 1.4](#). They include: (1) the *bulimic workaholic*, who is a person who does his/her work with perfectionism or not at all (i.e. it is hard for the person to begin any job, a form of procrastination, and once the person begins a the job, he/she will finish it in the shortest time, but

Figure 1.4. Dimensions of Workaholism.

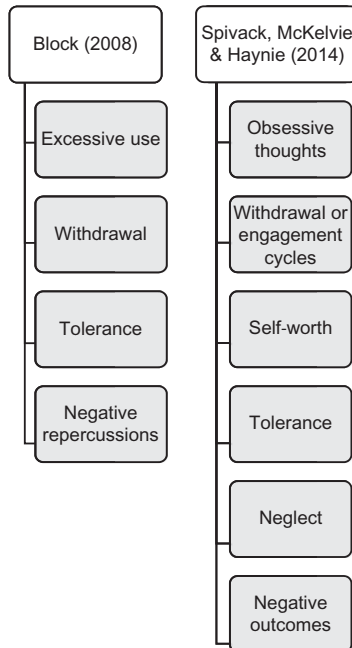
Source: Adapted from Robinson (2013).

mostly with sloppy effects); (2) the *relentless workaholic*, who is a person inspired by completing tasks and objectives in the shortest possible time and thus, the person is unable to stop working on meeting deadlines (3) the *attention-deficit workaholic*, who is a person that becomes easily uninterested and impatient and constantly pursues different projects; and (4) the *savouring workaholic*, who is a person that is pre-occupied with meticulous details and feels that anything less than perfect is undesirable.

Behavioural addiction is a form of functional dependency whereby an individual is hooked on a stimulus. This stimulus provides pleasure or relief from an internal discomfort (Spivack, McKelvie, & Haynie, 2014). This addictive experience exhibits qualities that compel the individual to

repeat the experience so as to reinforce his/her own motivation, be it positive or negative. Building on the works of Spivack et al. (2014) and Block (2008), it is believed that behavioural addiction includes different conducts such as excessive use, withdrawal, tolerance and negative repercussions (Figure 1.5). It shows that people who are addicted to work may also carry these addictive elements. In this respect, workaholics may continue to have obsessive thoughts about work (constant thinking about their action and searching for novelties); they may be involved in withdrawal or engagement cycles (ritualised behaviour of anxiety and

Figure 1.5. Components in Behavioural Addiction.



Sources: Block (2008) and Spivack et al. (2014).

engaging whenever possible) and their daily actions at work may provide them with a sense of self-worth (action serves as feeling of self-worth). Additionally, workaholics may spend so much time and money at work due to their tolerance that they later neglect other activities and eventually, become isolated from family and friends. Most of these behaviours become a source for negative outcomes, such as stress and emotional-guilt and the sacrificing of the individual's wellbeing.

THE OUTCOME OF WORKAHOLISM

Workaholism is a complex phenomenon that can be activated by many factors. For the most part, workaholism has conflicting psychological, physical and social effects for individuals and the people surrounding them. Thus, it can be concluded that a workaholic is not identical to a person with a strong work ethic. An individual with a strong work ethic would place a significant importance in their work and family life. In a sense, balancing home and work should be a personal agenda, but this is not the practice of the workaholic. In this respect, personal meaning and value-added impacts are not important for the workaholic. A seminal work by [Oates \(1971\)](#) introduced the concept of workaholism to include those whose work has become so extreme that it creates disruption to the employee's happiness, leading to deteriorating health, disturbance to interpersonal relationships, as well as social functioning competence.

As mentioned previously, working long hours or thinking about work excessively is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for workaholism. An obsessive-compulsive tendency to working hard induces people to become workaholics, and this can be very toxic to the individual's health. An obsessive-compulsive disorder often involves an urge of doing repetitive

behaviours to avoid anxiety. Due to the fact that there is lesser societal shame or stigma linked to workaholism than to other addictions, problematic health signs that emerge among workaholics, therefore, remain undetected and untreated. Heavy work involvement, combined with low enjoyment, comes at the expense of one's emotional wellbeing. A recent meta-analytic review by Clark, Michel, Zhdanova, Pui, and Baltes (2016) found that workaholism leads to various negative outcomes encompassing individual, interpersonal and organisational outcomes. These outcomes range from burn-out, work–life conflict, job stress and the detriment caused to the individual's physical as well as mental health. In particular, workaholics have the tendency to possess the personality traits of perfectionism, where the perfectionist focuses more on high standards, discrepancy and order, unnecessarily.

In the long run, workaholism is unhealthy and not beneficial to the individual and the organisation. For instance, workaholism leads to a blurred line between home or personal life and work; it also has a damaging effect on the individual's motivation and work enjoyment. The workaholic's guilt-ridden approach to work can reduce personal job and life satisfaction to the extent that it makes the workaholic less effective in his/her role, be it at work or at home. Ultimately, workaholism is not just bad for the individuals, but also for those people surrounding those individuals.

Workaholism can also promote severe negative consequences which then lead to a negative behavioural tendency among the individuals. In particular, workaholism can be exacerbated by the implementation of modern technological gadgets such as smartphones, laptops and also social media platforms introduced by the Internet. As a result of the advent of technology, heavy work investment is now more commonly seen, with employees now thrown into the high pace gear of the changing work conditions. Thus, it is easier

for individuals to become immersed in their work until they become addicted. Based on this, workaholics can be categorised as heavy work investors who spend most of their waking hours 'working'. Eventually, workaholics lose their perspective of what a full life means.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT AND WORKAHOLISM TO WELLBEING

The discussions provided above demonstrate that there are differences in the characteristics of employees who are engaged in their work and those who are workaholics. Clearly, workaholism is not associated with wellbeing because one of the main aspects of workaholism is to work longer hours. Although people who work longer hours may be seen as champions, and may even be treated as role models at the workplace, the reality is that they are not champions because they do not yield any positive symptoms as well as any healthy work behaviours. Further to this, workaholics are more inclined towards investing their resources such as time, energy, emotion and attention into their work and they will continue to do so regardless of the outcomes. Often workaholics pursue their work at the expense of their private lives and ultimately, their wellbeing.

Unlike engaged workers, workaholics feel more stress if they are unable to do work, or if they are prohibited from working. Their need for work is extremely excessive, to the point that it can diminish their chances of happiness. Workaholism endangers the health of employees and it also worsens their relationship with other people. Such kinds of people are not really welcomed by organisations as it will only have a negative impact on the organisation's performance. These negative impacts vary from having lower

productivity, reduced efficiency and reduced profitability to an organisation with high turnover rates.

In order to prosper and survive in today's working conditions, organisations need to hire engaged and passionate employees. Work engagement, it seems, has positive consequences on employees in terms of their wellbeing and their work performance. Engaged employees are persistent and fully immersed in their jobs. A culture that stimulates people to work smarter instead of longer hours and a place that stresses the importance of work–life balance would be valuable to any organisation. In the case of engaged employees, positive symptoms prevail and individuals would find more enjoyment in their workplace.

Essentially, managers must realise the true difference between workaholics and engaged employees. Organisations should hire people who are engaged and passionate about their work because engaged employees treat work as fun and feel happy to be at work. In essence, being happy at work will cause employees to be more productive while simultaneously enhancing their performance. In addition to that, happier employees are easy to work with, and this indirectly, affects the performance of other individuals in the organisation. Understanding how workaholism and work engagement can attribute to health, life satisfaction and wellbeing, is pertinent.

INTERVENTION: HOW DO WE HELP WORKAHOLICS?

So, what can be done about those employees who are already in the system? First and foremost, organisations need to intervene and take charge by ensuring that workaholism does not go unabated. Such problems should not be condoned, and be allowed to prevail. At the global level, the World Health Organisation had developed a plan for improving workers'

health. The Mental Health Action Plan (2013–2020) had also outlined several significant objectives and implementation strategies which can be used to counter the prevalence of workaholism. They are as depicted below:

- address the social causes of mental health, such as the standard of living and the working conditions;
- conduct activities for the prevention and promotion of health and mental health, including activities that can help to reduce stigmatisation and the discrimination of mental health; and
- increase access to evidence-based care through health service development, including access to occupational health services.

At the organisational level, the top management should take serious considerations in applying intervention techniques to help workaholics in improving their lifestyle and daily activities. [Figure 1.6](#) illustrates several intervention techniques

Figure 1.6. Intervention Techniques to Help Workaholics.



that can be used by organisations and the members in ‘healing’ the workaholics.

According to [Andreassen \(2013\)](#), motivational interviewing can help the workaholics into realising the negative aspects of their work behaviour. This approach begins with some principles of showing empathy, open communication and reflection, exploring the problem and eventually, setting a good discourse with the workaholic individuals. For instance, a workaholic should not be told to reduce his/her work because it will only create animosity and resistance. Instead, the intervention should focus on exploring his/her thoughts about work, what the person would change if he/she has the opportunity to do so, what is important to the individual, and how he/she would like to work. The goal is to give the workaholic a clear view about life and what is imperative in it. This interview process can be conducted by peers as well as supervisors.

Coaching is another form of treatment programme that can be used to heal workaholics. Coaching is a distinctive technique that has value in supporting individuals into making behavioural changes that can enhance their health and wellbeing ([Anstiss & Passmore, 2017](#)). Similar to motivational interviewing, the purpose of coaching is to enhance self-awareness and trigger personal responsibility. [Seligman \(2012\)](#) recommends different coaching styles that focus on five aspects of the wellbeing. First, is the need to help individuals to increase their experience of positive emotions. Second, is to coach individuals to be more engaging in life, that is, spending time on other activities (e.g. sport, spirituality and recreation) aside from work. Third, is to coach individuals to improve their relationship with others, whether at work, or at home. Fourth, is to help the individuals grow by assisting them in clarifying their values and ranking these values according to importance, so that the workaholics can

reflect on these values, thereby implementing these into their lives. Fifth, is to coach the individuals towards achievement so that these individuals will acquire a sense of accomplishment and closure, once their work is completed. Through this way, it is deemed that workaholics would not feel the compulsion to work excessively. Most coaching activities are usually conducted by supervisors and those who are more experienced than the workaholic individuals.

Another intervention technique is the group-focused initiatives. This technique considers the members inside the organisation or work group as well as the social context of work (Day & Penney, 2017). Among the things which organisations can do is to take into account the issue of interpersonal compatibility among workaholics and their work group. Restructuring the work teams may be a good strategy so as to ensure that workaholics are grouped with individuals who are more engaged at work. This alternative may provide a valuable context, thereby, enhancing the social interactions of the workaholics with non-workaholics. This can lead to an improvement in co-worker civility, trust and wellbeing.

A decent work–life balance programme should also be introduced to curb workaholism. The integration of work and family has been a prevalent issue, particularly in today's changing society. Although research on work–life balance has proliferated over the past decade, in reality, employers are still ignoring the necessity of practising it in the workplace. Employer recognition in supporting this as a pertinent matter may very much affect the way employees do their work. If workaholics are constrained from having a balance between family and work, the syndrome may become worse. An appropriate work–life balance programme offered by organisations can aid in 'healing' the workaholism syndrome. To fulfil this, organisations can organise company outings, provide a fitness gym, offer childcare services within the

work domain, structure flexible working hours, provide short breaks and have team-building exercises among co-workers. These strategies would enable the workaholics to find their ground and a chance to experience the balanced work and family lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Fundamentally, it is clear that having a passion for work and an addiction for work are two different sides of the coin. In light of the above discussions, work engagement can be distinguished from the concept of workaholism. In predicting employees' wellbeing, passion for work may be a better predictor than workaholism. Workaholics and employees who are engaged with work spend a lot of time and effort in their work, but the distinction between passion and addiction is its controlled motivation.

Every so often we find ourselves in a place where work plays a major role in our lives. To be committed to work is good but the key to wellbeing is to take note of our level of commitment. In a sense, understanding that work should be meaningful may guard us against being too obsessive in our line of duty. As [Ryan and Deci \(2001\)](#) commented, psychological wellbeing calls upon human beings to live a life that corresponds with their true self. It appears that when the values of human beings are most consistent with their actions and activities, they become completely engaged, be it at home or at work.

The paradox to wellbeing is rather baffling. It must be noted that being passionate and addicted to work are heavy forms of work investment. In most cases, addicted people work hard to justify their dysfunctional behaviour. Essentially, workaholism has little to do with the passion one

has for work or even the sincere desire to contribute to organisational goals. In ensuring our wellbeing as employees, we must not succumb to such a state of disposition because an addiction to work can be detrimental to our health and performance, thereby, affecting our personal lives as well as the lives of other people surrounding us.

Based on the above argument, should one, then, work hard or not? It would seem that this is neither a choice, nor a resolution. From the lighter side of things, work should be seen as something fun and enjoyable. After all, as the saying goes, 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'. Ultimately, we should create a life that we cannot wait to wake up to: a life full of engagement and passion, be it at home or at work. Only then would life be fulfilling.

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