

## Paid Time Off (PTO):

# Work Stress as a Potential Moderator between Workaholism and PTO Usage

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### Abstract

In the current study, the relationships between workaholism, work engagement, work stress, and paid time off (PTO) usage will be examined. Previous studies indicate recovery from daily work stressors is necessary for continued success in work (Bloom et al., 2013). Yet, in 2018, 27% of PTO offered in the U.S. went unused (U.S. Travel Association, 2019). It is important to consider what types of workers decide to forego this time off. Notably, *workaholics* experience negative life outcomes such as work stress and work-life imbalance (Aziz & Zickar, 2006; Robinson, 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2006a). Thus, the potential moderating influence of work stress on the relationship between workaholism and PTO usage will also be investigated.

### Workaholism

Workaholism was first introduced by Oates (1971) as the addiction to work. Initially, it was viewed that workaholics uniquely worked long hours. While long work hours are one characteristic of workaholics, further research also considers employees' attitudes and feelings towards their jobs (Aziz et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2016; Ng et al., 2007). Consensus is that workaholism is the compulsive need to work excessively (Clark et al., 2016). Workaholics report higher levels of work stress (Aziz et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2016; Spence & Robbins, 1992), more health issues (Clark et al., 2016; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009), and greater burnout (Clark et al., 2016; Moyer et al., 2017) compared to non-workaholics.

### Work Engagement

Engaged workers derive pleasure from working hard, and find work to be enjoyable (van Beek et al., 2011). While workaholism is deemed the 'bad' type of worker, work engagement is the 'good' type of worker (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Work engagement is strongly associated with passion to work (Shimazu, & Schaufeli, 2009), with engaged workers finding their work to be satisfying and interesting (van Beek et al., 2012).

### Work Stress

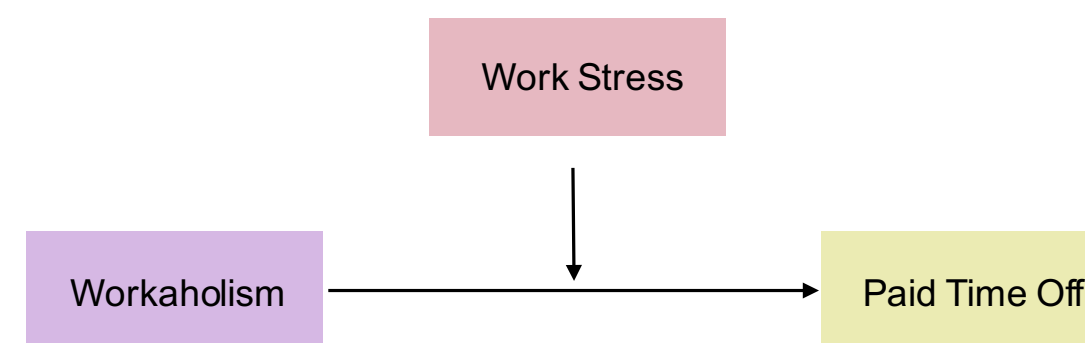
Work stress is a physiological and psychological response to discrepancies between job demands and available resources, and it constitutes a major part of the stress individuals experience (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). Work stress can lead to declining health, burnout, and overall lower work productivity (Huan & Oppenauer, 2019; Donald et al., 2005; Westman & Eden, 1997). Due to the negative effects of work stress, recurrent recovery from daily stress (and stressors) is important (Bloom et al., 2013). The most accessible way is using PTO for vacation time (Bloom et al., 2010).

### Paid Time Off

PTO is a benefit provided by the employer to allow for time off, vacation, sick time, and federal holidays, while still receiving a salary (Ford & Locke, 2002). Time off provides the chance for stress recovery and reduces the likelihood of burnout (Westman & Eden, 1997). It also provides individuals time to pursue personal and social interests outside of work (Richards, 1999). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), 32% of workers reported working on weekends. Thus, many employees use PTO for vacations to recover and disengage from work. Vacations offer relaxing opportunities to disconnect. They have immediate positive effects on health and well-being, but gradually fade over the course of a few weeks as one returns to work (Bloom et al., 2013; Westman & Eden, 1999).

### Conceptual Model

Figure 1.



### Hypotheses

The current literature identifies key differences between workaholism and work engagement, specifically by their motivating behaviors (van Beek et al., 2012). Though workaholics and engaged workers are highly involved in their work, Shimazu & Schaufeli (2009) found contrasting differences in outcome variables. Workaholism also impacts workload (Balducci et al., 2020). Thus, the following hypotheses are presented:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Workaholism will be negatively related to work engagement.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Workaholism will be positively related to work stress.

Previous researchers have discussed the hesitancy for employees to use PTO in terms of organizational work culture and managerial pressure (Ford & Locke, 2002). However, the relationship between PTO and workaholism has never been addressed. The Conservation Resources (COR) theory, derived from Hobfoll in 1989, explains that individuals are motivated to protect resources that are important to them (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Workaholics work excessively (Clark et al., 2016) and thus may view their work as a resource to protect, spending more time than necessary working. Workaholics will spend more time at work and less time in other aspects of life, such as taking PTO. This was later supported by Aziz and Zickar (2006), who found workaholics reported a high amount of work interfering with personal life compared to non-workaholics. Hence, the following hypotheses are posited:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Workaholism will be negatively related to PTO usage.

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Work engagement will be negatively related to PTO usage.

**Hypothesis 5 (H5):** Work stress will be negatively related to PTO usage.

**Hypothesis 6 (H6):** Work stress will moderate the relationship between workaholism and PTO usage, such that the greater the level of work stress, the stronger the relationship between workaholism and PTO usage (see Figure 1).

### Method

#### Participants

Study participants will be roughly 400 full-time (i.e., 40 or more hours per week), English-speaking workers recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The MTurk sample will include employees from US-based companies who are at least 18 years of age.

#### Procedure

Upon study approval by the Institutional Review Board, survey items will be compiled in Qualtrics and administered via MTurk. MTurk enables researchers to post Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) specifying requirements for who can qualify to finish the HITs in exchange for a small monetary incentive. MTurkers will be briefed on the study's purpose and completion time. After providing informed consent, they will be assessed on workaholism, work engagement, work stress, and PTO usage.

#### Measures

**Workaholism Analysis Questionnaire.** The 29-item WAQ (Aziz, Uhrich, Wuensch, & Swords, 2013) will be used to assess workaholism. The WAQ uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), whereby higher scores indicate greater levels of workaholism. A sample item includes, "I enjoy spending evenings and weekends working." Aziz et al. (2013) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .93.

**Stress in General-Revised Scale.** The 8-item SIG-R (Yankelevich et al., 2012) will assess levels of work stress. An example question is "Does this describe your job...Demanding", with 'yes', 'no', and 'cannot decide' as possible response options. Higher scores indicate more work stress. The Cronbach's alpha of the original measure was .80.

**Utrecht Work Engagement Scale.** The shortened 9-item UWES-9 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2006b) will be used to assess work engagement. The UWES-9 uses a seven-point frequency scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*); higher scores suggest greater levels of work engagement. A sample item is, "At work, I feel bursting with energy." Schaufeli and Bakker (2006) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .92.

**PTO usage.** We developed a 6-item measure to assess an individual's PTO usage. Questions will evaluate the frequency of PTO usage. Given that PTO offered is job-dependent, PTO usage will be computed as a percentage. An example item is, "In the last calendar year, did you use up all of the PTO awarded to you by your employer?"

#### Data Analysis

Using SPSS v27, descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations, ranges) and Pearson correlations will be computed for all of the study variables.

A multiple regression analysis will be utilized to test work stress as a possible moderator in the relationship between workaholism and PTO usage. Workaholism will be the predictor and PTO usage the criterion. Multiple regression will also be used to adjust for work engagement as a covariate in the model. The main effect of workaholism and work stress will be examined first. Next, the interaction (i.e., workaholism X work stress) will be assessed. If the interaction is statistically significant, then Hayes' PROCESS (2014) will be used to test the potential moderating influence of work stress.

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