

2nd World Conference On Business, Economics And Management - WCBEM 2013

Workaholism: A New Challenge For Organisation Management

Nistor Gheorghita^{a*}

^a*Bucharest of University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work,
B-dul Schitul Măgureanu, nr. 9- 11, Bucharest, Romania*

Abstract

A serious analysis of an *unhealthy* organisation, which encourages work addiction, can reveal communication issues, unsolved or unknown conflicts, unrealistic tasks or deadlines, a poor management, a poor control of the leadership, high-level stress. To workaholics, the organisation is the place where work becomes obsessive and the other sides of personal life suffer. Work addiction is regarded as being negative, at individual and organisational level, a failure to management that cannot cope correctly with employee problems. By using secondary data analysis, case study we will try to grasp the specificity of the phenomena. Should we think of layoffs, increased unemployment, lack of working place certainty, we find these as being far more serious than working after hours. Modern organisations are confronted with new challenges which organisational management must properly manage. And sometimes the solutions are not so hard to find unless we find the equilibrium in all we do.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
Selection and peer review under responsibility of Organizing Committee of BEM 2013.

Keywords: Efficiency, research funding model, public spending;

1. Introduction

Performance orientation and productivity enhancement are specific organizational objectives. If, at first, the research focused on the division of labor in society and on the employment of machines (Durkheim, 1893 [2001]), on organization and scientific management (Taylor, 1911, Fayoll, 1916, *apud* Zlate, 2004), on human relations, later on the research diversified and concentrated on the role of formal structures and on group dynamics. It was only at the beginning of the 90's that the studies focused on the new context of the work process, on the requirements the work force is subject to, as it is forced to adapt itself to more and more complex and different duties. Any negative factor, which disrupts or leads to the fulfillment of the organizations' objectives is regarded by the specialists. Hence, the attention focused on the state of health of the individual, on the stress factors, which can perturb the equilibrium. After H. Seyle gave currency to the concept of stress, several modalities of analyzing the concept in organizational field emerged (Laszlo, 2008, *in* Avram and Cooper, (coord.), 547-549): a. *the engineering model*,

* Corresponding Author: Nistor Gheorghita. Tel.: 040 0722 464 111
E-mail address: nistorgheorghita@gmail.com, gheorghitalazar@yahoo.com

defining stress as external stimulus which has impact upon the organism and within which the specialists focus on measuring stressful situations by means of a specific scale (Symonds, *apud* Cox, 1993, p.9, Holmes and Rahe (1967), Kanner *at al*, 1981); b. *the physiological model*, stating stress as the organism's adaptation answer to a stressful event (W. Cannon, H. Selye); H. Selye is the one who defined stress as a general adaptation syndrome carried on in three phases (alarm state, resistance state, and exhaustion state); c. *the "interactional" or transactional model*, where the relation between the individual and the life environment is important (Lazarus and Folkma, 1984).

Among the factors which are most frequently held responsible for organizational stress, we name intrinsical sources of the work process, the perception of ones role in the organization, relations at the workplace, organizational structure and climate, aspects related to career development, work-family conflicts, great workload, alert work rhythm (Laszlo, 2008, *in* Avram and Coper (coord.), 550-554).

"Work ennobles one", claims a Romanian saying, and too much work turns one sick, by addiction. When referring to addiction, we think of substance addiction, of something negative, which is destructive for the individual. Addiction has physical and mental consequences, can affect memory, the decision taking and learning capacity, and the destructive effects can be observed on long term. But it is not the same when referring to work addiction, considered by some specialists as "the cleanest of all addictions" (Fassel, 1993 *quoted Los Angeles Time, 1999*) or as a "pretty addiction" (Robinson, 1998). This new type of addiction does not imply social embarrassment elements as do alcoholism or drug addiction. The most popular work holism definition is the one formulated by Oates W. (1971, p.11), who defined the concept in the first book to be published on workaholics as "*an excessive and uncontrollable need to work incessantly that disturbs health and relationship*" (<http://www.springerreference.com/docs/html/ chapter bid/363619.html; para.2>).

2. About work addiction and the state of the researches in the field

Work addiction is a relatively new concept, described in the 60's - 70's by several specialists, with varied forms, even contradictory. Some authors saw workaholism as beneficial from organizational perspective (Korn et al., 1987; Machlowitz, 1980; Sprankle and Ebel, 1987), or as negative (Oates, 1971; Schaefer and Fassel, 1988; Killinger, 1991; Robinson, 1998 *apud* Burke; Burgess; Oberklaid, 2003, 301). The crisis, the unemployment rate increase, led to the assuming of more work tasks than during the previous times and it is hard to tell which of the work addiction -specific symptoms can be interpreted as belonging to the external environment or to the subject's inner features. Still, a pathological relation characterizes work addiction with an experience leading to internal imbalances and damaging the physical and mental health state.

After the 80's, work addiction was defined as a serious compulsive disorder in dysfunctional families, as workaholics manifested symptoms similar to those of alcoholics, e.g. depression, anxiety, irritability. The workaholics' families developed coping strategies similar to those who confronted alcoholism (Brown, 1985; Robinson and Rhoden, 1997; Steinglass, 1988; Wegscheider, 1980, *apud* Robinson, 1998, p.66). Robinson stated in 1998 that work addiction had already become an independent study subject, separate from the interest for the other known addictions (alcohol, drugs, etc.). The construct of *work addiction* developed as a symptom of the ill familial system, as addictive behaviours influenced all the family members. It can have an intergenerational cyclicity, being, therefore, a learned behaviour, responsible for the malfunctioning of the family of origin. The family established later on in adulthood will develop a set of rules, beliefs and patterns which will be dictated by career, the workaholic's custom to work. "Work addiction is the pretty addiction. Not only does it look good on the workaholic, it also is becoming on their offspring" (p.73). During the process of therapy and counselling of the families which confronted to this phenomenon, specialist noticed the fact that workaholics did not have an active role in raising and educating the children and that if they did, they imposed perfectionist standards. The children develop certain hard feelings, a so-called "hunger" for the attention of the absent, workaholic parent (Oates, 1971; Robinson, 1998). Sometimes, there appear substitution or alliance situations between the children and the non-workaholic parent, as the latter tries to replace the role of the absent parent, determining the child to become "parentified" (Chase, 1998; Jones and Wells, 1996 *in* Robinson, 1998). Oates W. (1971, *apud* Robinson, 1998, p 67) has identified four symptoms on work addict persons, after having discussed with their children: *preoccupation, haste, irritability and depression*.

Most of the people work for achieving a decent life, for feeling fulfilled (see the motivational theory of Maslow, 1957 [2007]) and wish to activate in work places that satisfy these needs. Work ethic, the fact that modern technology makes employees available 24 hours a day, are aspects which lead to the person's ever growing work involvement. Organizational culture according to which a good employee does not admit himself beaten, consists of challenges, which the individual faces. Satisfaction, positive rewards, promotion within the organisation will lead to the increase of self-esteem, which will determine some individuals to work harder and harder. Employees whose only fulfilment source is work cannot develop coping mechanism for non-fulfilments or disappointments from other life spheres. Fassel, 1993 (in Conroy, R.W., 1995, retrieved from <http://psiholog.proeducation.md/parinti/7.html>) has identified three stages of workaholism. In the first stage, the individual is concerned and thinks only of the work tasks and refuses himself spare time outside the job. During the next stage, the middle one, the subject loses his friends, has no extra-job relations and has no longer a social life. Health disorders appear, as well as tiresome, exhaustion, episodes of short loss of memory, insomnia, etc. In the final stage, the addiction becomes more and more evident, the health problems that dictate a change of lifestyle become aggravate. Chronic headaches, back pains, high blood pressure, ulcer and depression or heart problems (strokes, heart attacks), which determine the person's hospitalization may appear.

Robinson (1998) pointed out, after analyzing several clinical studies, ten factors by which one can identify work addiction: "(a) hurrying and staying busy, (b) need to control, (c) perfectionism, (d) difficulty with relationships, (e) work binges, (f) difficulty relaxing and having fun, (g) brownouts or memory losses of conversations or trips to and from a destination because of exhaustion and mental preoccupation with panning and work (a side effect of tuning out the present), (h) impatience and irritability, (i) inadequacy, and (j) self-neglect" (p. 66).

Due to its impact and destructive effects on physical, mental and social plans, a series of techniques, identification and measuring instruments were created. For example, the Norwegian and British researchers developed a scale for measuring work addiction: The Bergen Work Addiction Scale (BWAS), probably named this after the name of city or university (Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen, Bergen Clinics Foundation, Norway, and Nottingham Trent University, UK). Because of the fact that people are put under ever growing pressures, that the boundaries between family life and professional life fade away, there appear increasingly more work addicts. Work addiction has been associated with insomnia, health problems, burnout and stress as well as creating conflict between work and family life (Andreassen; Griffiths; Hetland; & Pallesen; et al. 2012.b). The scale was built upon the participation of 12 135 Norwegian employees from 25 different industries, and reflects the seven core elements of addiction: *salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, relapse and problems*. "The BWAS uses seven basic criteria to identify work addiction: 1. You think of how you can free up more time to work. 2. You spend much more time working than initially intended. 3. You work in order to reduce feelings of guilt, anxiety, helplessness and depression. 4. You have been told by others to cut down on work without listening to them. 5. You become stressed if you are prohibited from working. 6. You deprioritize hobbies, leisure activities, and exercise because of your work. 7. You work so much that it has negatively influenced your health." (Andreassen, et al. (2012b) (para. 2).

Specialists also use other instruments such as: the WART (Work Addiction Risk Test), Work-BAT. "The first quantitative measure of work addiction or workaholism was the Work Addiction Risk Test (WART), developed in 1989 by Dr. Bryan Robinson" and, the most frequently used measure of workaholism is Workaholism Battery (Work-BAT) developed in 1992 of Janet Spence (*apud* Griffiths, 2012, para.3; para. 5). For example, in the USA there have developed several therapy groups of work addicts (Workaholic Anonymous Groups), such as the ones for alcohol addiction (AA, the group of anonymous alcoholics).

3. A study case from Romania

In Romania, little has been written and told over this addiction, but the focus appeared after a 31-year-old young woman named Raluca S., a financial audit manager in a multinational company, was found dead in 2007, in her apartment, alone, as she was unmarried and weight only 40 kilos. The young woman had been working hard, almost 24 hours a day with no relaxing days, under the pressure of deadlines. After the incident, the media started describing a *death out of too much work* and began pointing incriminatory to the "multinationals". The state

authorities responsible of respecting the work legislation began a series of inspections, including at the respective company, which was sanctioned with a slight amount for not respecting the working hours. The young woman belonged to a divorced family; her father had remarried and was working abroad as a building engineer. After the paternal grandparents had raised the parents' divorce, her and her younger sister, as the father had the children's custody. The loss of her grandmother in 2005 caused great grief to the young woman. Professionally, her grandparents had inspired her, as she had studied at an art school, having inherited the grandmother's painting talent, and having, afterwards, specialized in economy, as her grandparent. She started working during high school and after graduating her advanced studies she intended working in one of the financial consultancy multinational companies known under the Big4 appellation (PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG, Ernst & Young and Deloitte), where she even got accepted in 2004, despite her lack of experience. Because of the flow of personnel, the company accepted her as a *senior*, which implied experience. It is how the extra working hours emerged from the need of replacing the lack of audit experience. At first, she took part in team buildings, until the moment she was promoted an audit manager in 2006. She had only a few friends left, whom she seldom met and in relation to whom she had become distant, friends who believed she was working too hard and had lost control upon herself. They were reproaching her with being too focused on her career, doing everything as close to perfection as possible and working too hard. "For her, everything was a race, she wanted to be first and succeed everything", recounts Cristina D., a friend..."This is what I shall do my entire life, I shall work and become someone big" (Sandu, 2009, para.2). Meanwhile she had been offered another job, still in a multinational company, but she rejected it claiming that she had nowhere to promote to and they had no working weekends: « I cannot stay in this rhythm and do nothing ».

During the last 6 months, her health state had deteriorated, and although her parents had suggested her to visit a doctor, the medical exam was postponed due to the lack of time. Because of the fact that during the last two days of life she had fainted at work, she was taken to the private medical clinic (which offered medical services to the company) where she was examined and stabilized, according to the doctor. Later on, she went at home by herself, where she passed away. Because of her not answering the phone, her superior alerted the specialized services and after they broke in the house, they found Raluca dead. The forensic report showed that her heart had stopped beating due to the exhaustion state and chronic tiresome. The young woman had impressed the company staff and was about to be transferred at E&Y Luxembourg.

By analyzing the above-mentioned facts, we can observe that the young women belonged to a dysfunctional family, did not benefit of the mother's affection and nor to the father's, as he was absent during the two daughters' childhood. She started working early, since high school, finding in work the hiding place from her problems. The workplace stress, the taking over of the tasks of the subalterns' who had quit, the position of the young manager promoted as a *senior*, all conducted to work addiction. Perhaps the moment the addiction was triggered was during the faculty, when, after the first year, « she kept her nose to the grindstone in order to receive a scholarship », as she had paid herself for her studies from the beginning. Due to a weaker body (her step mother would afterwards state she had always been more sensitive), the lack of rest and relaxation time (« she would get bored if she would not work during weekends anymore ») led to exhaustion and death.

After this young woman's case, on forums and blogs there appeared voices incriminating the company: the non-observance of employees work hours, the great flow of personnel, the overloading with tasks. The parents did not blame the organization about which they knew it was a "people chopping machine", as they had seen their daughter being called at 11 o'clock in the evening by customers and thought she had consciously adopted the work rhythm. The young woman's case also became the subject of the bestseller, *Deadline*, which the author states that the youngsters had an obsession to work in "multinationals". "The corporate style honestly seems to me as a sort of brainwashing. It even provides you with a family, nicely wrapped as a *teambuilding*, or a party in nightclubs, so that you don't have any reason to go home" (interview Rosetti, 2010 *apud* Petruș, 2011, para.4).

The individual factors (an unhappy childhood, lack of affectivity, dysfunctional family of origin, wish to promote etc.) and those of the work environment (great flow of personnel in the company, lack of management control, poor delegation of tasks etc.) confirm the theories of several specialists on work addiction (Oates, 1971, Robinson, 1998; Fassel, 1993; Conroy, 1995; Andreassen *et al*, 2012).

A serious analysis of an *unhealthy* organisation which encourages work addiction can reveal communication issues, unsolved or unknown conflicts, unrealistic tasks or deadlines, a poor management, a poor control of the leadership, high level stress, aspects which decrease productivity and performance. The most work

addiction cases exist in fields considered to be the most “respectable” such as: advocacy, sales and finances or when employees have leading positions. To workaholics, the organisation is the place where work becomes obsessive and the other sides of personal life suffer. Should we think of layoffs, increased unemployment rate, lack of working place certainty, we find these as being far more serious than working after hours. Because of these fears, people involve their selves more and become workaholics. After the young woman’s case, on forums there appeared a series of for and against opinions towards “multinationals”. We quote the opinion of a young miss who accepted her addiction but had the power to withdraw. “For 8 years, I had been working 10 hours a day, at a surcharge of 16, plus the weekends. No one does explicitly ask you to do it, but otherwise one cannot learn, grow professionally, and fulfil his or her projects. The regular working hours are not enough, obviously the management knew it, but it wasn’t as if we were saying anything, either. They would take advantage, of course, but I used to think I was doing it for myself... It is a mirage of power; this is what the corporate environment offers you. And it also gives you some sort of addiction... I realized, though, at a certain point, that I wasn’t happy. My personal life did not exist anymore, I would only go home to sleep, I would eat over the keyboard, and it was fascinating! ... I didn’t like the way I had become; I was unfeminine, tough, cold, and sharp. Enough with all that! ” (Petruș, 2011, para 10).

In the article “9 workaholic entrepreneurs” published in the *Manager.ro* magazine, Bănilă (2012) presents 9 successful entrepreneurs who could be considered as workaholics. Among them there are: Howard Schultz (Starbucks), who works more than 13 hours a day and continues at home, and who could be a devoted consumer of the company’s products; Tim Cook (Apple) who checks his e-mail starting with 4.30 in the morning; entrepreneur Mark Cuban (owner of the basketball team Dallas Maverick) who had not have a vacation for the last 7 years; Ghosn, CEO (Chief Executive Officer) at Nissan and Renault, who works 65 hours a week, travels 48 hours a month by plane, 240.000 km a year; Maria Das Gracas Silva Foster, also called “Caveirao”, a name given by the Brazilian Police to armoured vehicles, the first woman manager of a Brazilian oil company; Marissa Mayer, who would work 130 hours a week at Google, would sleep under the desk and would be “extremely prudent” about showers, her critics claiming she could have worked 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; the CEO of the publicity giant WBB, Sir Martin Sorrell, considered to be a well-known workaholic who’s working day starts at 6 o’clock in the morning and never ends (writes *The New York Times*) and the list could go on...

4. Conclusions

New phenomena specific to the times we live in such as globalization, the socio-economic crisis can generate pressures upon employees and organization management. Work ethics and organisational culture encourages work and implicitly work addiction – developing into an addiction, the neatest addiction. The support of the family and friends, keeping equilibrium between family and professional life, and prioritization can reduce the degree of work addiction. Moreover, a successful management of the organization can minimize the addiction risk and conduct to performance and to the increasing of work quality. Modern organisations are confronted with new challenges which organisational management must properly manage. And sometimes the solutions are not so hard to find unless we find the equilibrium in everything we do.

References

- Andreassen, C. S.; Ursin, H.; Eriksen, H.R.; Pallesen, S. (2012a), The relationship of narcissism with workaholism, work engagement, and professional position. *Social Behavior and Personality*.40, 6; ProQuest Central. 881-890. DOI.org//10.224/sbp.2012.40.6.881
- Andreassen, C. S.; Griffiths, M. D.; Hetland, J.;& Pallesen, S. (2012b). Development of a work addiction scale. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*. 53, 3; 265-272. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-9450.2012.00947.x (http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2012-04/tuob-nmt042312.php) (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9450.2012.00947.x/abstract>)
- Bănilă, S.M. (2012), 9 antreprenori dependenți de muncă. *Revista Manager.ro. Antreprenariat*. (www.manager.ro/articole/antreprenariat/9-antreprenori-dependenti-de-munca-23998.html)
- Burke, R. J; Burgess, Z.; Oberklaid, F. (2003). Predictors the workaholic behaviors among Australian psychologists, *Career Development International*.8,6; ProQuest Central. 301-308; MCB UP Limited. DOI. 10.1108/13620430310496116.
- Durkheime, E.,(1922, [2001]), *Diviziunea muncii sociale*, (trans. C Pantelimon), Editura Albatros, București (original work Published Paris, 1922, *La division du travail social*, 4e edition)
- Fassel, D., 1993, *Working Ourselves to Death*. Retrieved from <http://psiholog.proeducation.md/parinti/7.html>; (para.2) http://books.google.ro/books/about/Working_Ourselves_to_Death.html?id=IDbHLAhoNr8C&redir_esc=y

- Griffiths M. (2012). *Job rule: The development of a new scale for workaholism*. Retrieved from <http://drmarkgriffiths.wordpress.com/tag/work-addiction-risk-test/> (para.3, 5)
- Laszlo, K.(2008), Stresul în muncă și sănătatea. In Avram, E.; Cooper, C. (coord.), *Psihologie organizațional managerială* (p. 546-577). Editura Polirom, Iași
- Maslow, A. (1957 [2007]). *Motivație și personalitate*. (third edition, USA 1987, trans), București, Ed. Trei
- Oates, W. (1971), *Confessions of a Workaholic*. (p. 11); Retrieved from <http://www.springerreference.com/docs/html/chapterdbid/363619.html>; (para.2).
- Petruș, L. (2011), Bună, mă numesc Corporatist si sunt workaholic. Retrieved from <http://revistaflacara.ro/%E2%80%9Ebuna-ma-numesc-corporatist-si-sunt-workaholic/>(para.4, 10)
- Porter, G. (2006); Profiles of workaholism among high tech managers, *Career Development International*. 11, 5; 440-462, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 1362-0436, DOI. 10.1108/13620430610683061; <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/1362-0436.htm>
- Robinson B. E. (1998), The workaholic family: a clinical perspective. *The American Journal Family Terapy*: Jan-Mar 1998; 26,1; ProQuest Central; 65-75
- Sandu, Ani (2009), Fata care muncea mult. Retrieved from www.tabu.ro/fata-care-muncea-mult/(para.2)
- Zlate, Mielu (2004), *Leadership și management*, Editura Polirom, Iași
- *****Los Angeles Time. Business Section*.(1999, June 07). Addicted to Work? In the End, Everyone Suffers. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/jun/07/business/fi-44996>