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Perfectionism in Employees:

Work Engagement, Workaholism, and Burnout

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Perfectionism in Employees

Perfectionism is a personality disposition characterized by striving for flawlessness and setting exceedingly high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Perfectionism is a prevalent disposition. Most people have at least one domain in life in which they are perfectionistic (Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009). Furthermore, the domain of life most affected by perfectionism is work, be it academic work (school, university) or professional work (Slaney & Ashby, 1996; Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009). There are many ways in which perfectionism can affect work. For example, perfectionists' exceedingly high standards of performance—seldom, if ever, is anything good enough—have been associated with reduced productivity and lower efficiency (Sherry, Hewitt, Sherry, Flett, & Graham, 2010; Stoeber & Eysenck, 2008). In addition, perfectionists tend to have a lower tolerance of ambiguity which may lead to reduced work satisfaction (Fairlie & Flett, 2003; Wittenberg & Norcross, 2001). Furthermore, perfectionists worry and ruminate more about work than non-perfectionists making it difficult for perfectionists to switch off and relax after work, and this may negatively affect their work-life balance, health, and well-being (Flaxman, Ménard, Bond, & Kinman, 2012; Mitchelson, 2009). Consequently, individual differences in perfectionism play an important role when regarding health and well-being in employees.

Despite perfectionism being most prevalent in the work domain, perfectionism research so far has mainly focused on students, athletes, and clinical samples paying relatively little attention to employees. The present chapter aims to redress this imbalance by focusing on perfectionism in employees (including students working part-time) and how perfectionism relates to three key variables in peoples' working life—work engagement, workaholism, and burnout—that have shown close associations with employee health and well-being.

Perfectionistic Strivings and Perfectionistic Concerns

Before looking at perfectionism's relationships with work engagement, workaholism, and burnout, however, we need to have a closer look at perfectionism itself to better understand the findings of the literature. The reason is that perfectionism is not a unitary characteristic. Instead, perfectionism has different facets and is therefore best conceptualized as a multidimensional personality disposition (see Enns & Cox, 2002, for a review).

To capture the multidimensional nature of perfectionism, researchers have developed a number of scales measuring the different facets of perfectionism. This diversity is welcome from

a research perspective and has produced many important insights into the differential relationships of multidimensional perfectionism. However, the multiplicity of perfectionism scales poses a challenge for readers unfamiliar with the literature who may find it difficult to achieve a good understanding of the findings from different studies using different scales. Fortunately, there is converging evidence that the various aspects of multidimensional perfectionism form two superordinate factors (Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993; see also Bieling Israeli, & Antony, 2004). The first factor has been termed *perfectionistic strivings* (or personal standards perfectionism) and captures those aspects of perfectionism associated with striving for perfection and setting exceedingly high standards of performance. The second factor has been termed *perfectionistic concerns* (or evaluative concerns perfectionism) and captures those aspects of perfectionism associated with concerns over making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation by others, feelings of discrepancy between one's expectations and performance, and negative reactions to imperfection (see Stoeber & Otto, 2006, for a comprehensive review). Table 1 gives an overview of multidimensional perfectionism scales and which of their subscales' scores represent indicators of the two factors.

The differentiation between the two factors is of central importance to the understanding of perfectionism. Whereas the two factors typically show large-sized positive correlations¹—most people who show elevated levels of perfectionistic strivings also show elevated levels of perfectionistic concerns—they show different, sometimes opposite, patterns of associations. Perfectionistic concerns are typically associated with negative characteristics, processes, and outcomes (e.g., neuroticism, avoidant coping, negative affect), indicating that perfectionistic concerns capture maladaptive aspects of perfectionism. In contrast, perfectionistic strivings are often associated with positive characteristics, processes, and outcomes (e.g., conscientiousness, problem-focused coping, positive affect), indicating that perfectionistic strivings capture aspects of perfectionism that may have an adaptive component (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

However, there are two important things to note. First, because the two factors show considerable overlap, the positive associations of perfectionistic strivings are often suppressed by

¹Following Cohen (1992), correlations with absolute values of .10, .30, and .50 are considered small-, medium-, and large-sized.

the negative associations of perfectionistic concerns.² Consequently, perfectionistic strivings' positive associations may only become apparent when the overlapping variance between strivings and concerns is taken into account and partial correlations or multiple regressions are calculated (R. W. Hill, Huelsman, & Araujo, 2010; Stoeber & Otto, 2006; see also Gaudreau, 2012). Second, the negative associations of perfectionistic concerns are usually stronger than the positive associations of perfectionistic strivings. Consequently, in studies computing an "overall perfectionism" score (i.e., lumping strivings and concerns together), perfectionism usually shows negative associations indicative of perfectionistic concerns. Furthermore, whereas perfectionistic concerns often suppress the positive associations of perfectionistic strivings, perfectionistic strivings rarely suppress the negative associations of perfectionistic concerns (or only to a much smaller degree; R. W. Hill et al., 2010). Hence, it is relatively safe to examine perfectionistic concerns without statistically controlling for perfectionistic strivings. In contrast, examining perfectionistic strivings without statistically controlling for perfectionistic concerns may lead to erroneous conclusions about perfectionistic strivings' maladaptiveness—which will become clear further below where we review the findings on perfectionism in employees and burnout.

Work Engagement, Workaholism, and Burnout

Work engagement, workaholism, and burnout are key variables in occupational and organizational psychology research on employee health and well-being. The reason is that all three have shown to predict indicators of employee well-being such as positive affect, life satisfaction, work satisfaction, and—as an inverse indicator—negative affect (cf. Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Moreover, they have been shown to be closely related to people's work-life balance which is a construct that is receiving growing interest in the literature because it predicts individual health and well-being (Matuska, 2010). In this, work engagement has been associated with better employee well-being (positive relationships with positive affect and satisfaction, negative relationships with negative affect) whereas workaholism and burnout have been associated with poorer employee well-being (negative relationships with positive affect and satisfaction, positive relationships with negative affect) (e.g., Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008). In addition, workaholism and burnout have been associated with poorer physical health

²For an in-depth discussion of these suppression effects and how to interpret them, the interested reader is referred to Stoeber, Kobori, and Brown (in press).

(e.g., Clark, Michel, Zhdanova, Pui, & Baltes, in press; Shirom & Melamed, 2005; Wojdyló, Baumann, Buczny, Owens, & Kuhl, 2013).

Perfectionism is a personality disposition predicting individual differences in work engagement, workaholism, and burnout. Hence it is important to gain a better understanding of how perfectionism is related to work engagement, workaholism, and burnout and examine whether the two superordinate factors of perfectionism—perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns—show differential relationships with each of these important work-related outcomes.

Perfectionism and Work Engagement

Work engagement is a state of mind in which employees consider their work to be personally meaningful, feel positive towards their work, and are involved in, committed to, and enthusiastic and passionate about their work (see Attridge, 2009, for a review). Over the past 10 years, work engagement has become a key concept in organizational and occupational psychology and human resource management (where it is often referred to as “employee engagement”). The reason is that work engagement has shown positive relationships not only with employee well-being, but with a whole range of other desirable outcomes at work such as work motivation and job performance (e.g., Bakker & Bal, 2010; Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; van Beek, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2011). Consequently, employees who are engaged are an important human resource for employers (van Beek et al., 2011). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that research on work engagement is flourishing and that work engagement is receiving increased attention also from practitioners, employers, and policy makers.

To measure work engagement, the great majority of studies has used a conceptualization of work engagement differentiating three aspects: vigor, dedication, and absorption (e.g., Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Vigor captures the effort that employees invest in their work and the energy they experience when working. Dedication captures the meaning and involvement in work and the purpose that employees experience when working. Absorption captures the extent to which employees are fully concentrated and engrossed in their work, sometimes to the extent that they have difficulties detaching themselves from their work. Vigor and dedication constitute the core aspects of work engagement representing positive energy and involvement in work whereas absorption is a more ambivalent aspect (cf. Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011).

Are perfectionists more engaged in their job than non-perfectionists? Despite the surge of

interest in work engagement over the past decade, there is a dearth of studies on perfectionism and work engagement. To our knowledge, only four studies so far have examined the relationships of perfectionism in employees with work engagement. All studies found perfectionistic strivings to be associated with higher levels of work engagement whereas perfectionistic concerns were not consistently associated with lower work engagement. The first study (Childs & Stoeber, 2010) examined a sample of employees from various sectors (e.g., public sector, law firms, retail). Taking a differentiated look at the perfectionism–engagement relationship, the study investigated perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns and looked at the three aspects of work engagement individually. When bivariate correlations were examined, perfectionistic strivings showed positive correlations with all aspects of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. In contrast, perfectionistic concerns showed a negative correlation with vigor but nonsignificant correlations with dedication and absorption. However, when the overlap with perfectionistic strivings was controlled for in multiple regressions, perfectionistic concerns also showed a negative relationship with dedication.

The remaining three studies did not investigate the different aspects of work engagement, but only examined overall work engagement (combining vigor, dedication, and absorption). The second study (Tziner & Tanami, 2013) examined a sample of employees working in the public sector. As in the first study, only perfectionistic strivings showed a positive correlation with work engagement. In contrast, perfectionistic concerns showed no significant negative correlation. The third study (Wojdylo et al., 2013) examined a sample of employees from different occupations (e.g., office workers, teachers). Unfortunately, the study regarded only perfectionistic concerns, not perfectionistic strivings. When correlations were examined, perfectionistic concerns showed no significant negative correlation with work engagement. The fourth and final study (Ozbilir, Day, & Catano, in press) examined a sample of Canadian and Turkish employees from different sectors (e.g., education, healthcare, administration). When the data were collapsed across nationalities, perfectionistic strivings showed a positive correlation with work engagement. Moreover, perfectionistic concerns showed a negative correlation with work engagement suggesting that employees high in perfectionistic concerns may show lower work engagement than employees low in perfectionistic concerns.

In sum, the findings suggest that only perfectionistic strivings consistently show positive relationships with work engagement whereas perfectionistic concerns are either unrelated to work engagement or show negative relationships. Because the same pattern—that is, perfectionistic

strivings being associated with higher levels of work engagement and perfectionistic concerns being associated with lower levels or unrelated to work engagement—has been found in studies with students that examined perfectionism and academic engagement (e.g., Shih, 2012; Zhang, Gan, & Cham, 2007), we are confident about the validity of this suggestion despite the small number of studies on perfectionism and work engagement.

Perfectionism and Workaholism

In contrast to work engagement, workaholism has been described as an uncontrollable need to work incessantly and is characterized by working excessively and compulsively (Schaufeli et al., 2008). In the words of Oates (1971), who is credited for coining the term, a workaholic is a person “whose need for work has become so excessive that it creates noticeable disturbance or interference with his bodily health, personal happiness, and interpersonal relations, and with his smooth social functioning” (p. 4). A recent meta-analysis conducted by Clark et al. (in press) found workaholism to be associated with high levels of burnout at work and low levels of satisfaction with life outside work. Furthermore, workaholism was associated with low levels of emotional well-being and high levels of psychological distress. In addition, workaholism was associated with high levels of psychosomatic symptoms and physical health complaints which have been linked to workaholics’ not getting enough leisure time, physical exercise, and sleep (see also Burke, 2000; Ng, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2007; Robinson, 2000; Snir & Harpaz, 2006). Consequently, workaholism is not a positive characteristic indicating a healthy passion and enthusiasm for one’s work, but an unhealthy characteristic that can have ruinous consequences for an individual’s emotional, social, and physical well-being.

Perfectionism has long been closely linked to workaholism, so close that Spence and Robbins’s (1992) multidimensional conceptualizations of workaholism considered perfectionism a key characteristic of workaholism differentiating workaholics from people who are enthusiastic about their work, but do not feel compulsively driven to work. Perhaps this is the reason why there are a significant number of studies that have investigated perfectionism and workaholism in employees so Clark and colleagues (in press) could use data from 10 studies for their meta-analysis.³ Using only findings from studies examining overall perfectionism and workaholism

³The cut-off date of Clark et al.’s literature search was July 2013, so their meta-analysis did not include Stoeber, Davis, and Townley (2013), Tziner and Tanami (2013), and Mazzetti,

(not differentiating perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns), the meta-analysis aggregated data involving more than 2,700 employees and found perfectionism to show an estimated population correlation of $\rho = .55$ with workaholism, which represents a large-sized effect confirming the close relationship of perfectionism and workaholism.

But how does the relationship look if perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns are differentiated? To our knowledge, five studies have investigated the perfectionism–workaholism relationship differentiating between the two superordinate factors of perfectionism. The first study (Clark, Lelchook, & Taylor, 2010) examined perfectionism and workaholism in students working part-time, additionally controlling for relevant demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, years in occupation) and the Big Five personality factors (see John & Srivastava, 1999). At the level of bivariate correlations, both perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns showed positive correlations with workaholism. Moreover, when regression analyses were computed controlling for the overlap between the two perfectionism factors (as well as the demographic variables and the Big Five), perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns showed significant positive regression weights⁴ indicating that both perfectionism factors contributed to the prediction of workaholism (and explained variance in workaholism beyond the Big Five). The second study (Taris, van Beek, & Schaufeli, 2010) examined perfectionism and workaholism in employees working in the head office of a retail organization, additionally controlling for relevant demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, salary level), job demands, and job control (Karasek, 1979). At the level of bivariate correlations, both perfectionistic strivings and concerns again showed positive correlations with workaholism. However, when regression analyses were computed statistically controlling for the overlap between the two perfectionism factors (as well as the demographic variables, job demands, and job control), only perfectionistic concerns were associated with higher levels of workaholism, indicating that perfectionistic concerns contributed to the prediction of workaholism beyond job demands and job control.

Schaufeli, and Guglielmi (2014). Moreover, it missed Taris, van Beek, and Schaufeli (2010).

⁴Regression weights are similar to partial correlations, with positive regression weights indicating a positive relationship and negative regression weights a negative relationship (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

Furthermore, when a mediation analysis⁵ was conducted, workaholism was found to be a mediator of the positive relationship between perfectionistic concerns and the exhaustion component of burnout (perfectionistic concerns → workaholism → exhaustion) suggesting that workaholism may be responsible for the link between perfectionistic concerns and exhaustion (detailed further below).

The third study focusing on the perfectionism–workaholism relationship is Tziner and Tanami’s (2013) study mentioned previously which examined a sample of employees working in the public sector. Like the previous two studies, the study found perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns to show positive correlations with workaholism. This was different in the fourth study (Stoeber, Davis, & Townley, 2013) which examined a sample of employees working in a professional services company and students working part-time. In addition, the study investigated employees’ self-regulated work motivation (Tremblay, Blanchard, Taylor, Pelletier, & Villeneuve, 2009) within the framework of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Differently from the previous studies, only perfectionistic strivings showed positive relationships with workaholism in both the bivariate correlations and the multiple regressions, but not perfectionistic concerns. Moreover, the study found that the relationship between perfectionistic strivings and workaholism was mediated by identified and introjected regulation of work motivation (perfectionistic strivings → identified/introjected regulation → workaholism). According to self-determination theory, identified regulation is characterized by personal importance and conscious valuing of reasons for work, and introjected regulation is characterized by ego-involvement motivated by internal rewards and punishments. Because identified regulation is a form of autonomous motivation whereas introjected regulation is a form of controlled motivation, the findings suggest that high levels of combined autonomous–controlled motivation may be responsible for the perfectionism–workaholism relationship regarding perfectionistic strivings.

The final study (Mazzetti, Schaufeli, & Guglielmi, 2014) examined perfectionism and workaholism in employees subscribing to a newsletter of a training and consultancy agency,

⁵A mediation analysis is a statistical procedure probing whether the relationship between two variables X and Y can be explained by a third variable called mediator (X → mediator → Y; see Baron & Kenny, 1986).

additionally controlling for overwork climate. Overwork climate was defined as employees' perception of "their work environments to be characterized by a climate that expects them to perform overwork (i.e., working beyond set work hours, doing unpaid overtime work, taking work home, and working during weekends or holidays)" (p. 11). When bivariate correlations were regarded, perfectionistic strivings showed a positive correlation with workaholism. Moreover, when moderated regression analyses were conducted investigating interaction effects, the positive relationship of perfectionistic strivings and workaholism was moderated by a significant interaction with overwork climate: Perfectionistic strivings showed a significant positive correlation with workaholism only in employees who perceived their organization to expect overworking. In employees who did not have this perception, perfectionistic strivings were unrelated to workaholism.

Whereas Mazzetti et al.'s (2014) study makes an important contribution to the search for moderators of the perfectionism–workaholism relationship,⁶ the study only measured perfectionistic strivings, but not perfectionistic concerns. Hence it is unclear whether perfectionistic strivings would have shown the same effects had the overlap with perfectionistic concerns been controlled for (cf. Taris et al., 2010). Still, taking the findings of the other studies into account—particularly Stoeber and colleagues' (2013) study which controlled for perfectionistic concerns—we believe that it is justified to conclude that both perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns show positive relationships with workaholism.

Perfectionism and Burnout

Job burnout is a complex syndrome that is commonly conceptualized as being comprised of three components: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (see Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, for a comprehensive review). Exhaustion (also called emotional exhaustion) is usually regarded the core component of burnout and is characterized by a feeling of being overextended and a depletion of one's emotional resources (feeling emotionally "drained"). Cynicism—in earlier research referred to as depersonalization—represents the interpersonal component of burnout and is characterized by a negative, detached, and depersonalized attitude towards one's work, coworkers, and the people who one's work is directed at (e.g., customers, clients/patients,

⁶For an explanation of moderators and how they differ from mediators, see again Baron and Kenny (1986).

students). Inefficacy—also referred to as ineffectiveness, reduced efficacy, or reduced personal accomplishment—is the self-evaluation component of burnout and is characterized by feelings of declining competence and productivity at work and of increased inability to solve problems that arise in one's work (Maslach et al., 2001). Besides being associated with health problems and reduced well-being, burnout has been associated with a range of problems on the job such as absenteeism, high turnover, low work morale, and reduced job performance (e.g., reduced quality of patient care) as well as marital and family problems (see Maslach et al., 2001; Shirom, 2002; and Taris, 2006, for reviews). Hence it is understandable that researchers have sought to identify contextual (e.g., job characteristics) and personal factors (e.g., personality dispositions) that predict burnout in employees. One of the personality dispositions they identified to predict burnout in employees was perfectionism.

Even though research on perfectionism in employees is limited, there is a substantial number of studies that have investigated the relationships of perfectionism and job burnout. Moreover, the majority of studies has differentiated perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns when examining the relationships (e.g., Caliskan, Arikan, & Saatci, 2014; Chang, 2012; Childs & Stoeber, 2010, 2012; Craiovan, 2014; Fairlie & Flett, 2003; Hrabluik, Latham, & McCarthy, 2012; Kazemi & Ziaaddini, 2014; Li, Hou, Chi, Liu, & Hager, 2014; Mitchelson & Burns, 1998; Ozbilir et al., in press; Philp, Egan, & Kane, 2012; Schwenke, Ashby, & Gnilka, 2014; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008; Taris et al., 2010; Tashman, Tenenbaum, & Eklund, 2010; Van Yperen, Verbraak, & Spoor, 2011).

What did the studies find? A number of them found perfectionistic concerns to show positive relationships with burnout and its components whereas perfectionistic strivings showed no significant relationships. Mitchelson and Burns (1998), for example, examined a sample of women working in sales and other occupations. Perfectionistic concerns showed positive correlations with exhaustion and cynicism (but not inefficacy) whereas perfectionistic strivings showed nonsignificant correlations with all three components. Fairlie and Flett (2003) examined perfectionism and emotional exhaustion in a sample of employees (including students) working over 20 hours per week. Differently from the previous study, Fairlie and Flett's study found perfectionistic concerns to show positive correlations with all three burnout components (exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy) whereas perfectionistic strivings again showed no significant correlations. Van Yperen et al. (2011) examined employees reporting mental health issues. Employees diagnosed in a clinical interview as suffering from severe job burnout showed

higher levels of perfectionistic concerns, but not higher levels of perfectionistic strivings than healthy controls. Finally, Kazemi and Ziaaddini (2014) examined employees working in executive organizations. Only perfectionistic concerns showed a positive correlation with overall burnout (combining exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy), not perfectionistic strivings.

Other studies found much the same pattern, except that perfectionistic strivings showed negative correlations with the inefficacy component. Li et al. (2014), for example, examined a sample of employees working in information technology and found perfectionistic strivings to be unrelated to exhaustion and cynicism, but showing a negative correlation with inefficacy. Perfectionistic concerns, on the other hand, showed positive correlations with all three burnout components. Caliskan et al. (2014) examined a sample of white-collar employees working in various small- and medium-sized enterprises. Perfectionistic strivings again showed nonsignificant correlations with exhaustion and cynicism, but a negative correlation with inefficacy. In contrast, perfectionistic concerns showed positive correlations with exhaustion and cynicism, but not with inefficacy.

Finally, some studies found perfectionistic strivings to show positive correlations with burnout. However, these were restricted to the exhaustion and cynicism component, and never showed for the inefficacy component (e.g., Hrabluik et al., 2012; Taris et al., 2010; Tashman et al., 2010). Moreover, the studies did not control for the overlap between perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns when examining the perfectionism–burnout relationships. Because research in other areas found that perfectionistic concerns not only suppress the positive associations of perfectionistic strivings, but also inflate their negative associations (R. W. Hill et al., 2010; Stoeber, Kobori, & Brown, in press; Stoeber & Otto, 2006), it is conceivable that the overlap with perfectionistic concerns was responsible for the positive correlations which perfectionistic strivings showed with exhaustion and cynicism and that the relationships would have been nonsignificant had the overlap been controlled for.

Unfortunately, only two studies investigating perfectionism in employees and burnout have controlled for the overlap between the two perfectionism factors. The first study (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008) examined a sample of teachers working at secondary schools. When correlations were regarded, perfectionistic strivings showed no significant correlations with any of the burnout components. However, when multiple regressions were regarded controlling for the overlap with perfectionistic concerns, perfectionistic strivings showed negative regression weights with all three components. The second study (Childs & Stoeber, 2010), mentioned previously, found

perfectionistic strivings to show nonsignificant correlations with the three burnout components but significant negative regression coefficients with both cynicism and inefficacy when the overlap with perfectionistic concerns was controlled for. By contrast, perfectionistic concerns showed significant positive correlations and positive regression coefficients with all three burnout components in both studies.

In sum, the findings indicate that only perfectionistic concerns consistently show positive relationships with burnout, not perfectionistic strivings. On the contrary, when the overlap with perfectionistic concerns is controlled for, perfectionistic strivings may show *negative* relationships with burnout. Consequently, when it comes to burnout, perfectionism in employees seems to be a “double-edged sword” (cf. Stoeber, in press). On the one hand, the concerns dimension of perfectionism represents a risk of employees burning out at the job. On the other hand, the strivings dimension of perfectionism seems to counteract this risk and protect employees from burning out. The findings, however, also suggest that perfectionistic concerns are a stronger risk factor than perfectionistic strivings are a protective factor. Consequently, if we have a look at the combined effects of perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns, “overall perfectionism” is a personality disposition putting employees at increased risk of job burnout.

Summary, An Intriguing Question, and Future Research

Summary

Despite the limitations of the studies reviewed in this chapter, it is safe to conclude that perfectionism is related to all three key variables in people’s working life: work engagement, workaholism, and burnout: However, when we differentiate perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns—the two superordinate factors of perfectionism (Stoeber & Otto, 2006)—we find differential relationships with two of the three variables: work engagement and burnout. Whereas both perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns appear to be positively related to workaholism, only perfectionistic strivings consistently show positive relationships with work engagement, and only perfectionistic concerns consistently show positive relationships with burnout. What is more, when the overlap with perfectionistic concerns is controlled for, perfectionistic strivings may show negative relationships with burnout.

An Intriguing Question

Because workaholism is closely related to burnout—Clark et al.’s (in press) meta-analysis found an estimated population correlation of $\rho = .40$ between workaholism and overall burnout

aggregating findings from 18 studies comprising more than 10,000 employees—the differential pattern of relationships that perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns show raises an intriguing question: Why do perfectionistic strivings in employees predict higher levels of workaholism, but not higher levels of burnout?

There are (yet) no studies on perfectionism in employees to answer this question, but there is other research that suggests potential reasons. One reason may be work engagement. Work engagement is said to be “the antipode of job burnout” (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008, p. 188). Perhaps it is also an “antidote” to job burnout. Work engagement shows only small-sized positive correlations with workaholism (Clark et al., in press, found an estimated population correlation of only $\rho = .05$), but shows large-sized negative correlations with burnout: In a meta-analysis summarizing findings from 54 studies with almost 30,000 employees (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010), the estimated population correlation of work engagement and burnout was $\rho = -.45$. With only perfectionistic strivings showing sizeable positive correlations with work engagement (but not perfectionistic concerns), it is conceivable that—for employees who are higher in perfectionistic strivings than perfectionistic concerns—the contributing effect that workaholism has on burnout is compensated, or even overcompensated, by the negative effect that work engagement has on burnout.

Another reason may be self-determined motivation. Research in sport psychology suggests that individual differences in autonomous versus controlled motivation may mediate the perfectionism–burnout relationship. Investigating athlete burnout, Jowett, Hill, Hall, and Curran (2013) found perfectionistic strivings to show positive correlations with autonomous motivation (comprising intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, and identified regulation) and controlled motivation (comprising introjected regulation and external regulation) whereas perfectionistic concerns showed a positive correlation only with controlled motivation. Furthermore, Jowett et al. found autonomous motivation to show a negative correlation with burnout whereas controlled motivation showed a positive correlation. When all variables were subjected to a mediation analysis, autonomous and controlled motivation mediated the relationship between perfectionistic strivings, perfectionistic concerns, and burnout: Perfectionistic strivings showed a positive path to autonomous motivation which showed a negative path to burnout. In contrast, perfectionistic concerns showed a positive path to controlled motivation which showed a positive path to burnout. (When the overlap with perfectionistic concerns was controlled for, the path from perfectionistic strivings to controlled motivation was nonsignificant.) Following Stoeber et al.’s

(2013) findings that perfectionistic strivings in employees showed positive correlations with all aspects of autonomous motivation (intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, identified regulation) whereas perfectionistic concerns showed positive correlations with all aspects of controlled motivation (introjected regulation, external regulation), the mediation model that Jowett et al. (2013) suggested for burnout in athletes may also hold for burnout in employees (see Figure 1, Panel A).

Finally, differences in the use of adaptive versus maladaptive coping styles⁷ could be a reason why perfectionistic concerns may lead to burnout, but not perfectionistic strivings. Theory and research on burnout have identified job stress to be a key factor for employees' developing symptoms of burnout (e.g., Maslach et al., 2001). People, however, differ in the ways they cope with stress with some people showing coping styles that are adaptive (because they reduce stress) whereas others show coping styles that are maladaptive (because they fail to reduce stress or even may increase stress) (cf. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Studies investigating perfectionism and coping have established that perfectionistic concerns show positive correlations with maladaptive coping styles such as avoidant coping and denial whereas perfectionistic strivings show positive correlations with adaptive coping styles such as problem-focused coping and planning (e.g., Dunkley, Blankstein, Halsall, Williams, & Winkworth, 2000; Gnilka, Ashby, & Noble, 2012; Stoeber & Janssen, 2011). In addition, Stoeber and Rennert (2008) found perfectionistic strivings in school teachers to show negative correlations with maladaptive coping. Taken together with other findings indicating that coping mediates the perfectionism–burnout relationship in employees (Chang, 2012; Li et al., 2014), the findings suggest that perfectionistic concerns may predict increased burnout by means of maladaptive coping, whereas perfectionistic strivings may predict decreased burnout by means of adaptive coping and an inverse relationship with maladaptive coping (see Figure 1, Panel B).

Future Research

Whereas the model depicted in Panel B of Figure 1 has found empirical support concerning perfectionism, coping, and burnout in athletes (see A. P. Hill, Hall, & Appleton, 2010), future

⁷With Compas (1987), we understand coping styles to represent individuals' preferred ways of coping in response to stress either across different situations or over time within a given situation.

research still needs to find support for the model in employees. The same goes for the mediation model of perfectionism, autonomous versus controlled motivation, and burnout shown in Panel A as well as the “antidote” effect that work engagement may have on the perfectionistic strivings–burnout relationship we suggested above.

Furthermore, future research needs to employ longitudinal designs to establish the temporal, and perhaps causal, links of the relationships suggested by the research detailed in the present chapter. To our knowledge, there is so far only one study that investigated longitudinal effects of perfectionism on burnout in employees. Childs and Stoeber (2012) examined two samples of employees—a sample of administrative and managerial staff working for the National Health Service and a sample of school teachers—and found that, across samples, perfectionistic concerns not only showed positive correlations with burnout, but also predicted increases in burnout over time.

Whereas Childs and Stoeber’s findings represent a first step in the right direction, further longitudinal studies on perfectionism and burnout in employees are needed. In addition, further studies on perfectionism, work engagement, and workaholism in employees are needed. In this, future studies should continue the search for mediators and moderators of the relationships that perfectionism in employees shows with work engagement, workaholism, and burnout. Moreover, future studies need to differentiate between perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns and be aware that perfectionistic strivings may show different relationships when the overlap with perfectionistic concerns is controlled for. If so, we are certain that future research will confirm perfectionism to be a key personality characteristic that can explain why some employees are engaged in and passionate about their work, why some employees become addicted to work and develop excessive and compulsive working habits, and why some employees burn out and become disengaged, cynical, and unproductive.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, future studies need to investigate how to help perfectionistic employees to keep their perfectionistic concerns in check so that they do not negatively impact their work-life balance, health, and well-being. There are two excellent self-help books available (Antony & Swinson, 2009; Shafran, Egan, & Wade, 2010) that may help employees to better understand their perfectionism and cope with the perfectionistic concerns and that could be recommended to employees whose perfectionism is negatively affecting their work and private life. Whereas unguided self-help has been shown to reduce perfectionism, however, guided self-help and face-to-face counseling have been shown to be more effective and to have

longer-lasting positive effects (Egan et al., in press; Pleva & Wade, 2007). Consequently, employers may want to consider offering group sessions of guided self-help involving trained psychologists to employees who are suffering from perfectionism. We hope that the present chapter will inspire such future research to help advance our knowledge about how perfectionism in employees contributes to work engagement, workaholism, and job burnout and how they affect employees' health and well-being.

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Table 1

Indicators of Perfectionistic Strivings and Perfectionistic Concerns: Examples

Scale	Perfectionistic strivings	Perfectionistic concerns
FMPS	Personal standards	Concern over mistakes
	Pure personal standards ^a	Concern over mistakes + doubts about actions ^b
HF-MPS	Self-oriented perfectionism ^c	Socially prescribed perfectionism
APS-R	High standards	Discrepancy
PI	Striving for excellence	Concern over mistakes
MIPS	Striving for perfection	Negative reactions to imperfection

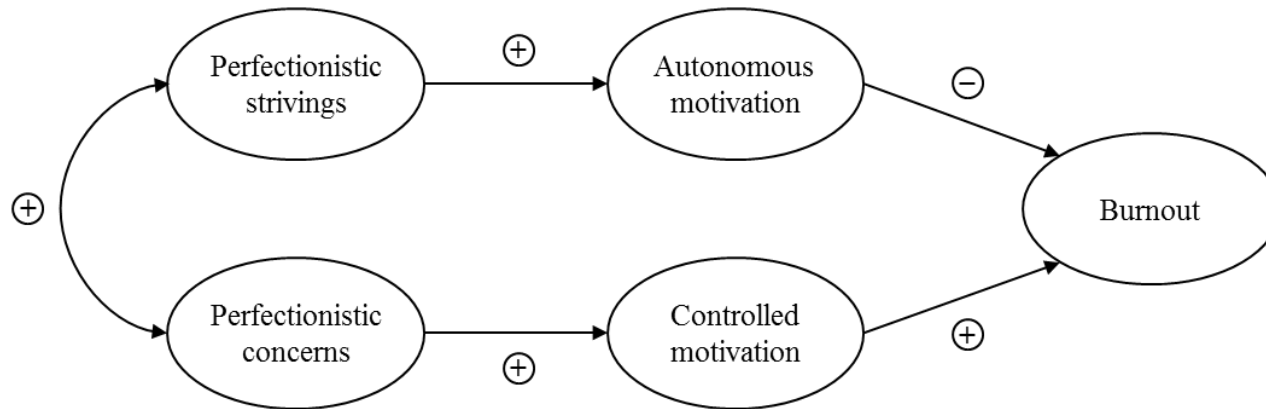
Note. Scales are listed in chronological order of their first publication. FMPS = Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990); HF-MPS = Hewitt-Flett Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991); APS-R = revised Almost Perfect Scale (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001); PI = Perfectionism Inventory (R. W. Hill et al., 2004); MIPS = Multidimensional Inventory of Perfectionism in Sport (Stoeber, Otto, Pescheck, Becker, & Stoll, 2007; for adaptations outside sport, see, e.g., Stoeber & Rennert, 2008).

^aSee DiBartolo, Frost, Chang, LaSoto, and Grills (2004).

^bSee Stöber (1998).

^cParticularly the subscale capturing perfectionistic striving (see Stoeber & Childs, 2010).

Panel A



Panel B

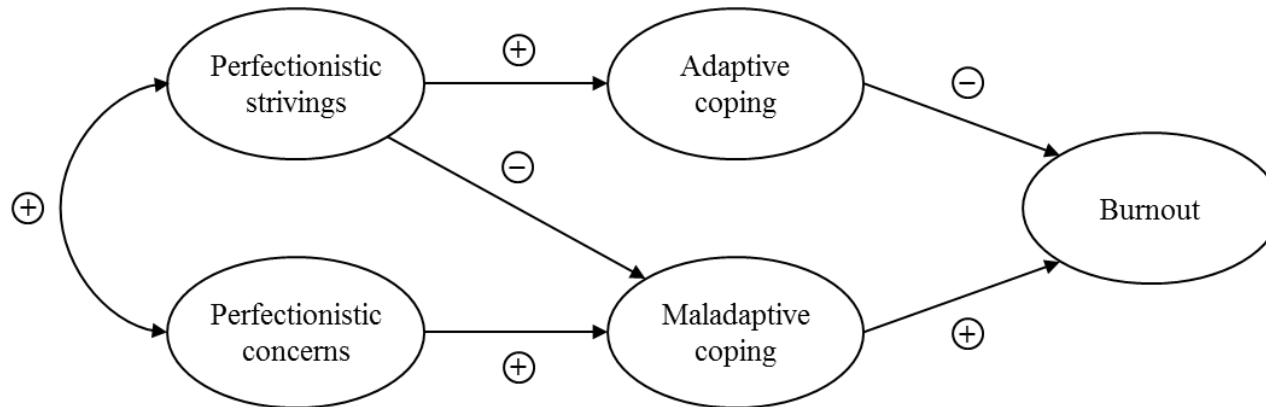


Figure 1. Why perfectionistic concerns may lead to burnout, but not perfectionistic strivings: The role of autonomous versus controlled motivation (Panel A) and adaptive versus maladaptive coping (Panel B).