

New study offers insight into how to best manage workaholics

May 22 2013, by Barbara Ash

(Phys.org) —Workaholics tend to live in extremes, with great job satisfaction and creativity on the one hand and high levels of frustration and exhaustion on the other hand. Now, a new Florida State University study offers managers practical ways to help these employees stay healthy and effective on the job.

Wayne Hochwarter, the Jim Moran Professor of Business Administration in Florida State's College of Business, and research associate Daniel Herrera studied more than 400 employees in professional and administrative occupations and found about 60 percent of these workers identified themselves as workaholics who characteristically "feel guilty when taking time off."

These self-identified workaholics reported positive and negative career consequences. For example, workaholics reported they gave more effort compared to other workers, but they also experienced more tension. They were more willing to help others, yet were more likely to view co-workers as feeling entitled.

"We found that there is an optimal level of workaholism for job effectiveness and positive health," Hochwarter said. "However, when in excessively low or high ranges, both the company and the employee are likely to suffer."

Identified workaholics were divided into those who had access to resources, such as personnel, rest, equipment and social support at work,

and those who did not.

"We discovered that workaholics really struggle when they feel that they are alone or swimming upstream without a paddle," Hochwarter said.

Workaholics who said they had access to resources reported a:

- 40 percent higher rate of [job satisfaction](#)
- 33 percent lower rate of [burnout](#)
- 30 percent higher rate of perceived job importance
- 30 percent lower rate of exclusion from others
- 25 percent higher rate of career fulfillment
- 20 percent lower rate of work frustration.

"Given the volatility in today's [work environment](#), the ability to work hard, contribute long hours and demonstrate value is at a premium," Herrera said. "Thus, workaholism will likely remain alive and well for years to come."

But there are ways to guide the efforts of workaholics in positive directions, researchers said.

First, leaders should meet with workaholics to determine what physical and social resources they need and then help increase their accessibility to those resources in fair and reasonable ways, according to the researchers. Managers often assume that workaholics simply want others to get out of their way. In reality, the goal of most workaholics is to contribute to the company, achieve personal success and see how their efforts affect the bottom line—objectives that are much more likely achieved with resources.

Second, managers need to have more realistic expectations, they said. Workaholics are often the company's most productive

employees—serving as the manager's "go-to" worker when an important project surfaces or a deadline looms. Because of their value, managers have a tendency to run workaholics into the ground, promising a future chance to recharge that often never happens.

"Having realistic expectations that take into account both the work and the person doing the work, is essential," Hochwarter said. The warning signs of burnout are recognizable and, if ignored, they will eventually lead to unwanted outcomes ranging from declining performance to death.

Provided by Florida State University

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