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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A PERCEIVED ETHICAL
LEADERSHIP STYLE AND WORKAHOLISM**

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Abstract

Academic literature has shown that an ethical leadership style might have positive as well as negative consequences for the organization. Some results show that it might contribute to employees' workaholism, but this relationship is still controversial. The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and employees' workaholism. The importance of employees' socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, education and years in organization) for this relationship was also tested. The study involved 302 (41 men and 261 women) employees working in different Lithuanian organizations. A perceived ethical leadership style was assessed with the help of Brown, Trevino & Harrison's (2005) questionnaire. The 10-item Dutch Work Addiction Scale developed by Schaufeli, Taris, & Bakker (2009) was used for the measurement of workaholism. The results revealed that workaholism of employees who consider their leaders as more ethical is lower than workaholism of those who consider their leader to be less ethical. The study results showed that the relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism is stronger for employees whose work duration in the current organization is shorter. Gender, education and age are not significant for this relationship. The conclusion may be drawn that employee attitudes towards their leader are important for the negative engagement with their work and proneness to workaholism. This means that ethical behaviour must be considered when addressing employees' workaholism. In future it is important to investigate the factors that may change employees' perception of the manager and working environment.

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Keywords: Perceived ethical leadership style, Workaholism.



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1. Introduction

According to Rodsutti and Świerczek (2002), no other organizational factors, such as competition strategy, market or technology, have such a significant impact on an organization and its employees as leadership. Various leadership styles are important for employees: authentic, transformational, transactional, participative, supportive, charismatic, laissez-faire and ethical (Yuan, & Lee, 2011; Gill, Flaschner, & Shachar, 2006; Russell, 2014; Zehir, Ertosun, Zehir, & Müceldili, 2011; Kanste, Kyngas, & Nikkila, 2007; Laschinger, Wong, & Grau, 2012). Charismatic, transformational, participating, authentic, and supportive leadership styles have a positive impact on both the organization and employees, and transactional, liberal styles are associated with a variety of negative consequences. The impact of ethical leadership on employees and organization is controversial. According to Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh (2013), although an ethical leadership style is interesting for a number of scientists, the authors argue that research on an ethical leadership and its impact is still needed.

Ethical leadership is defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120). An ethical leadership involves exhibiting traits such as altruism, reliability, integrity, empathy, fairness, justice, openness, responsibility in decision-making, co-leadership, detailed allocation of responsibilities to subordinates (Brown et al., 2005; Ehrich, Harris, Klenowski, Smeed, & Spina, 2015; Bouchamma & Brie, 2014; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2009). The most prominent features of an ethical manager are the following: personal morality, management skills and orientation to the subordinates (Chughtai, 2015). Previous researches demonstrated that an ethical manager can inspire subordinates to work ethically and to form an organizational vision in which both the social progress and organization’s growth are promoted (Chughtai, 2015; Brown et al., 2005), creates a pleasant working environment, improves employee engagement (Jaramillo, Mulki & Boles, 2013), and reduces employee anxiety and despair due to insufficient or incorrect appraisal of their work (Zheng, Witt, Waite, David, van Driel, McDonald, Callison, & Crepeau, 2015). As noted, an ethical leadership style is usually described as positive. On the other hand, some results suggest that it might negatively influence employees’ perceptions, habits, behaviour and well-being (Stouten et al., 2013).

An important phenomenon, which is mentioned in the context of an ethical leadership style, is workaholism. In the literature workaholism is usually described as an uncontrollable, compulsive need to work, motivation, tolerance, high time and effort investment, and determination of the problems in the physical and interpersonal levels (Andreassen, Griffiths, Hetland, Kravina, Jensen, & Pallesen, 2014; Griffiths, 2011; Aziz, Adkins, Walker, & Wuensch, 2010; Aziz & Tronzo, 2011). Positive and negative features of workaholics have been found. The positive characteristics of these employees can be attributed to a strong intrinsic motivation, independence, dynamism and initiative (Brady, Vodanovich, & Rotunda, 2008; Aziz & Tronzo, 2011; Youngkeun, 2013). Negative features are the reality distortion, need to control everything, denial, level of conflict, retreat in social situations, irritability, self-centeredness (Kubota, Shimazu, Kawakami, & Takahashi, 2014), impaired sense of identity, inflexible thinking, refusing to acknowledge the problems and seek compromise, self-righteousness (Aziz, Adkins, Walker, & Wuensch, 2010). Such employees lack imagination, spontaneity, open-response and do not trust those

around them (Tziner, & Tanami, 2013; Shifrin, & Reysen, 2011). The main negative outcomes of workaholism include: increased work-family conflict (Clark, Michel, Stevens, Howell, & Scruggs, 2014; Chamberlin, & Najjian, 2009; Shifrin, & Reysen, 2011), diminished well-being and poor employee health (Matsudaira et al., 2013; Shimazu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2010; Chamberlin & Najjian, 2009; Inanen et al., 2014; Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014; Schaufeli, Bakker, Van Der Heijden, & Prins, 2009; Aziz & Tronzo, 2011), lower levels of both life satisfaction and job performance (Piotrowski, & Vodanovich, 2008; Matsudaira, Shimazu, Fujii, Kubota, Sawada, Kikuchi, & Takahashi, 2013; Inanen et al., 2014; Piotrowski, & Vodanovich, 2008).

The research results of an ethical leadership style and workaholism relationships are controversial. According to Walumbwa & Schaubroeck (2009), ethical leaders focus on the business process rather than results. Ethical managers draw attention to the employees' efforts, initiative and progress (Ma, Cheng, Ribbens & Zhou, 2013). Employees may consider that in order to become well-appreciated they have to obviously show their initiative and efforts. This stimulates them to work more intensively (Andreassen et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2007). On the other hand, according to Russell (2013), there is a negative relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism. For example, according to Johnstone, & Johnston (2005), work pressure is an antecedent of workaholism, and if an organization implements a winner-take-all or star reward system, employees are more likely to exert greater effort because only the top performers are rewarded. This evokes peer competition in an organization. As a result, employees who perceive a competitive climate may invest greater efforts to be superior to colleagues and start feeling discomfort and guilt when not working (Keller, Spurk, Baumeler, & Hirschi, 2016). In this case, an ethical leadership style supports absolutely different organizational and employee performance management standards. An ethical manager is orientated to each employee's progress and this creates unfavourable environment for the peer competition and workaholism of the employees (Choi, 2013). Also, according to Choi (2013), one of the essential conditions of workaholism is a strong working control and pressure to be productive. Ethical managers are characterized by the fact that part of the responsibilities and powers is given to the employees. Such managers allow them to control certain work processes, independently solve the problems, procedural issues, etc. (Engelbrecht, Heine, & Mahembe, 2014; Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009). Due to this manager behaviour an appropriate relationship with the work of employees is formed. Employees feel that work processes depend on themselves. They can choose appropriate ways and conditions of meeting the targets. So the risk of workaholism decreases (Choi, 2013). As the definition of an ethical leadership provides more rationale for the positive impact of an ethical leadership, we hypothesized that employees, who perceive their manager as characterised by a more ethical leadership style, would have lower level of workaholism than those who perceive their manager as less characterised by an ethical leadership style.

Also, the relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and employees' workaholism may be different due to certain socio-demographic characteristics of employees. According to Montero-Marín, García-Campayo, Fajó-Pascual, Carrasco, Gascón, Gili, & Mayoral-Cleries (2011), employees' approach to the manager may be determined by work duration in the organization. The previous research, showing that employees working for a longer time in the organization perceive their managers more favourably (Andreassen, 2013) and the high attractiveness of the manager is associated with a lower probability of workaholism (Choi, 2013), leads to the following hypotheses: the relationship between a

perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism is stronger among employees whose work duration in the current organization is shorter than among those whose work duration is longer. Many authors agree that gender is another important predictor of managers' ethical behaviour perception. The previous research has revealed that women are much more sensitive to proper behaviour. Any positive and desirable managers' behaviour is more noticed and more valued by women. Ethical leadership perception is also related to employees' age. According to Feng (2011), older employees are more aware of the moral and ethical behaviour importance and benefits. This might lead to different associations between an ethical leadership style and workaholism in employees' gender and age groups. Results of the previous research provide some data for the hypotheses: the association between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism is stronger among men than women; and among younger employees than the older ones.

According to the authors, those with higher education are more curious, ambitious and discerning about their behaviour and performance improvement (Lopez et al., 2011; Kompier, 2006; Andreassen et al. 2014). They have increasingly high standards for themselves and tend to choose workplaces where working under pressure is a relatively common phenomenon (Maslach, Schaufel, & Leiter, 2001). So these employees more often tend to be workaholics. According to Andreassen (2014), employees with a higher level of workaholism are more sensitive to various characteristics of the organization including the leadership style. This might lead to different associations between an ethical leadership style and workaholism among employees with higher and lower education. Using the literature as a departure point, we hypothesize that the relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism is stronger for higher than lower education employees.

2. Problem Statement

We decided to explore the relationships between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism for several reasons. Firstly, such organizations as International Chamber of Commerce, HUB Initiative and Institute of Business Ethics draw attention to the highest standards of the behaviour of people in business and particularly emphasise the responsibility of organizations in promoting the importance of values. In 2006, The World Health Organization accepted a health declaration, in which the organizations are encouraged to pay more attention to the health needs of employees. The activity of the organization will be assessed not only in economic and legal, but also social and moral aspects; therefore, a better knowledge of the phenomenon is important in developing the formation of the guidelines for proper corporate governance standards and maintenance. Secondly, it is believed that a perceived ethical leadership style might be significant in workaholism, but these phenomena are mostly investigated separately. Thirdly, the impact of an ethical leadership style is controversial. Some authors claim that an ethical leadership can create favourable conditions for the emergence and development of workaholism. Others claim the opposite – an ethical leadership prevents the development of workaholism. This confirms the need for further research.

3. Research Questions

What is the correlation between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism?

Is the correlation between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism sensitive to socio-demographic characteristics of employees?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and employees' workaholism.

5. Research Methods

The study included 302 employees from various organizations in Lithuania. All respondents were non-executive employees. More women (261) than men (41) were involved in the study. The age range was from 20 to 79. The mean age was 44.20 years (SD = 12.65). Participants worked for the same organization from one month up to 45 years, with a mean of 12.72 years (SD = 10.60). The majority of respondents were higher education employees.

A self-report questionnaire for the employees consisted of three main parts: (1) Ethical Leadership Questionnaire; (2) Workaholism Questionnaire; (3) demographic questions (gender, age, education, working duration in the current workplace).

A 10-item questionnaire created by Brown, Trevino & Harrison (2005) was used to evaluate an ethical leadership style. Each item was evaluated according to a five-point Likert scale (1 – totally disagree, 5 – totally agree). A higher score indicates a more expressed ethical leadership style perceived by employees. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was 0.922.

Employees' workaholism was assessed by a 10-item Dutch Work Addiction Scale (DUWAS-10) developed by Schaufeli, Taris, and Bakker (2009). DUWAS-10 includes two subscales. Five items assessed working excessively and five items assessed working compulsively. Each item of the questionnaire is evaluated according to a five-point Likert scale (1 – never / almost never and 5 – always). The higher score shows that a respondent has a higher level of workaholism (Falvo, 2013). The internal consistency of this questionnaire was 0.806. The internal consistency of the working excessively subscale was 0.735; of the working compulsively subscale – 0.679.

The results were analysed with the help of the descriptive statistics, Student's t tests, and correlational analyses (see table1).

6. Findings

Table 01. Results of Student's t tests for a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism among different socio-demographic groups

	Employees' gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)	t	P value
Perceived ethical leadership style	Men	40	39.3500	7.17385	-1.787	0.075
	Women	256	41.3281	6.40418		

Workaholism	Men	40	24.9250	6.57262	-1.466	0.144
	Women	253	26.5217	6.37490		
	Employees' education	N	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)	t	p value
Perceived ethical leadership style	Lower education	94	41.1702	6.71323	0.165	0.869
	Higher education	200	41.0350	6.49343		
Workaholism	Lower education	94	25.2553	6.80597	-1.896	0.059
	Higher education	197	26.7766	6.20080		
	Employees' age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)	t	p value
Perceived ethical leadership style	Younger (aged 20-44)	127	40.2677	6.33891	-2.224	0.027
	Older (aged 45-79)	151	42.0132	6.66432		
Workaholism	Younger (aged 20-44)	127	26.4961	7.36883	0.253	0.800
	Older (aged 45-79)	149	26.2953	5.46550		
	Years in the organization	N	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)	t	p value
Perceived ethical leadership style	Shorter	161	41.0311	6.37811	-0.640	0.523
	Longer	118	41.5339	6.63413		
Workaholism	Shorter	161	26.0435	6.87418	-1.024	0.307
	Longer	116	26.8362	5.54969		

Partial correlation was used to test the first hypothesis. The results are presented in Table 02.

Table 02. The relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism (subscales), controlling for employees' age

	Ethical leadership style		
	Degrees of freedom (df)	r	p value
Excessive work	271	-0.149	0.014
Compulsive work	271	-0.144	0.017
	Ethical leadership style		
Workaholism (general)	267	-0.164	0.007

The results show that an ethical leadership style significantly correlates with employees' excessive work ($p < 0.05$). The relationship between an ethical leadership style and excessive work is negative. The study showed that an ethical leadership style is also significantly related to the employees' compulsive work ($p < 0.05$). This relationship is also negative. Lastly, we found a negative relationship of a perceived ethical leadership style with general workaholism ($p < 0.05$). Confirming the first hypothesis it was determined that employees who perceive their manager as characterised by a more ethical leadership style have statistically significant lower level of workaholism than those who perceive their manager as less characterised by an ethical leadership style ($p < 0.05$).

Fisher r-to-z transformation was used to compare the relationships in different groups of employees. The results are presented in Table 03.

Table 03. The relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism among different employees' socio-demographic characteristics

	Employees' gender	N	r	Z	p value
The relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism	Women	248	-0.165	-0.22	0.826
	Men	39	-0.126		
	Employees' education	N	r	Z	p value
The relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism	Higher education	194	-0.153	-0.02	0.984
	Lower education	91	-0.151		
	Employees' age	N	r	Z	p value
The relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism	Younger (aged 20-46)	125	-0.131	0.75	0.453
	Older (aged 47-65)	145	-0.4221		
	Years in the organization	N	r	Z	p value
The relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism	Shorter	158	-0.504	-1.57	0.043
	Longer	113	-0.101		

Table 03 shows no statistically significant differences of correlations in these socio-demographic characteristics of study participants: gender, education and age ($p > 0.05$). Our results revealed a significant relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism in different work duration in the current organization groups ($p < 0.05$). Confirming the second hypothesis we found that the relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism is stronger among employees whose work duration in the current organization is shorter than among those whose work duration is longer.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationship between a perceived ethical leadership style and employees' workaholism. Some findings were consistent with the previous research. Other findings did not support the previous research on a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism. The results reported in this study suggest that employees who perceived their leaders as characterised by a more ethical leadership style also reported lower levels of workaholism. The results confirmed the findings of Ma et al. (2013), Matsudaira et al. (2013), Walumbwa & Schaubroeck (2009), Choi (2013), Engelbrecht et al. (2014), Macey et al. (2009) and others who found that an ethical leadership style has a significant contribution to the development of workaholism. The results which approved the hypothesis can be interpreted in accordance with Walumbwa & Schaubroeck (2009). Ethical managers of the respondents, who participated in this study, are likely to have been focused on employees' performance process (rather than the results), more attentive to the individual employee progress, the amount of effort invested by the employee. As a result, employees did not feel tension to be superior to colleagues, continuously improve their productivity and the quality of work. The previous research suggested that ethical managers allow the employees to control certain work processes, independently solve the problems, procedural issues, etc. (Engelbrecht et al. 2014; Macey et al., 2009).

Our results extend these findings and suggest that such managers' ethical behaviour does not lead to the emergence of workaholic environment. It is therefore understandable that employees who have ethical managers have lower estimates of workaholism.

The study results showed that the relationship between an ethical leadership style and workaholism is stronger for those, who work in the current organization for a shorter time. The obtained results confirm the results of Montero-Marín et al. (2011), Andreassen (2013) and Choi (2013). It can be assumed that employees, who were dissatisfied with the applicable leadership strategy, left the organization earlier. Therefore, if an employee stays in an organization longer, it could mean that he/she is generally more satisfied with the organization and leadership styles. As a result, employees, who work longer in the organization, could evaluate their managers as more ethical. This decreases the estimates of their workaholism.

It was found that gender, education and age do not matter for the relationships between an ethical leadership style and workaholism. The obtained results did not approve the observations of Feng (2011), Lopez et al. (2011), Kompier (2006), Andreassen et al. (2014), Andreassen (2013), Maslach et al. (2001). Such results can be explained by the impact of factors which were not analysed in this research. For example, according to Jinfeng, Mingjie and Jianxin, (2016), Andreassen, Bjorvatn, Moen, Waage, Magerøy & Pallesen (2016), employees' personal characteristics have an important impact on various personnel-related factors. The study did not analyse the impact of employees' personal characteristics on the ethical leadership evaluation or their workaholism. It is possible that some respondents' personal characteristics effected stronger the ethical leadership awareness and workaholism. This could reduce the employees' gender, age and educational significance for the examined phenomena correlations. Also the results can be interpreted by the expression of the ethical leadership style characteristic traits. It can be assumed that examined employees' managers distinguished themselves with a very bright ethical leadership style characteristic. In this case, considering the managers' behaviour is rarely questioned. As a result, subordinates, regardless of their age, gender or education, could evaluate the behaviour of the managers similarly. For this reason, their workaholism could not vary.

There are several limitations of this study. Therefore, there is a possibility that the managers of the studied participants in the general population would reach a high level of ethical leadership. Secondly, objective instruments were not used for the collection of survey data. There is a possibility that the investigation occurred in a social desirability trend, which could distort the results of the test because of studied participants' propensity to assess an ethical leadership with high scores. To sum up, workaholism is defined differently by various authors. The discrepancies of this and previous studies were possibly influenced by different concepts of the phenomenon and different instruments used to measure it. Therefore, further researchers should first pay attention to the conceptual workaholism problems.

The results of the research indicate that the employees' opinions and subjective evaluation of the manager's behaviour is significant for the workaholism. Therefore, in order to avoid workaholism of the employees, it is proposed to pay attention to the manager's leadership and communication strategies with his subordinates and his ethical behaviour. It is worth to invest in the managers' development; managers should be introduced to the concept of an ethical leadership style and characteristics, its effects on employees and the benefits of their psychological and physical well-being, "healthy" employees' attitude towards work, fair working habits formation.

It is likely that certain organizational and employee characteristics' would allow explaining more relationships between a perceived ethical leadership style and workaholism. Therefore, in further studies it is worth to study these phenomena in conjunction with other employees' personal characteristics and organizational factors.

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