Received 18 September 2024
Revised 14 October 2024
6 November 2024
Accepted 6 November 2024

Psychological flexibility as a resource for preventing compulsive work and promoting well-being: a JD-R framework study

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Abstract

Purpose – In today's high-demand work environments, characterised by an expectation for individuals to possess resources to manage workloads effectively, workaholism poses a significant threat to employee well-being. This study aims to investigate the impact of work overload and psychological flexibility on compulsive work behaviours and well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – This study applies the Job Demands-Resources model and uses structural equation modelling to analyse data collected from 305 adult workers aged 19–65. Psychological flexibility and work overload are examined as antecedents of compulsive work behaviour, with flourishing and life satisfaction as outcomes.

Findings – The results indicate that compulsive work behaviour mediates the relationship between work overload and psychological flexibility on well-being outcomes. Psychological flexibility was found to be a crucial resource in reducing workaholic tendencies, leading to improved flourishing and life satisfaction.

Research limitations/implications – The implications for human resources include practical strategies and targeted interventions to help individuals navigate organisational demands, prevent compulsive work behaviours and improve overall well-being.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Ethics approvals: The study was approved by the Internal Ethic Review Board (IERB) of the Department of Educational Sciences, Section of Psychology, of the University of Catania, Italy (Prot. n° Ierb-Edunict-2022.10.14/2).

Data availability statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [A.R.], upon reasonable request.

Disclosure statement: The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

International Journal of Organizational Analysis
Vol. 33 No. 12, 2025
pp. 18-34
Emerald Publishing Limited
1934-8835
DOI 10.1108/IJOA-09-2024-4834

Originality/value – This study offers new insights into the role of psychological flexibility as a personal resource in reducing compulsive work tendencies and enhancing both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in high-demand work environments.

Keywords Work overload, Psychological flexibility, Compulsive work, Life satisfaction, Flourishing

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In contemporary work settings, marked by rapid pace and challenges, workaholism has emerged as a significant concern due to its implications for individual and organisational health. Defined an excessive and compulsive dedication to work activities (Andreassen *et al.*, 2017), workaholism is a ubiquitous phenomenon with multiple precursors, dynamics and trajectories (Hassell *et al.*, 2024) that negatively affects mental and physical health, potentially leading to psychological distress and reduced job performance (Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2009; Shimazu *et al.*, 2010) and reduced well-being and quality of working life (Taris and de Jonge, 2024; Akinwale *et al.*, 2023).

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework offers a valuable perspective for understanding how job demands, such as work overload, and personal resources interact to influence employee outcomes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Bakker and Demerouti, 2024). On the one hand, job demands are defined as the physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological efforts or costs (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). Among work demands, in work overload individuals perceive having to deal with too many duties and tasks at work, exceeding their limits (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b). On the other hand, personal resources are physical, psychological or social aspects of self that can stimulate positive work outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2023). Some examples of widely studied personal resources are emotional intelligence (Alwali and Alwali, 2022; Bakker and De Vries, 2021), optimism, self-efficacy and resilience (Alwali, 2024; Bakker and Demerouti, 2024). It is not the job demands themselves that reduce well-being, but rather the job demands that are coupled with limited resources to manage them (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018; Huppert and So, 2011; Molino *et al.*, 2016); this combination of low resources and high demands can lead to negative outcomes that in turn negatively influence well-being (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018).

Notably, psychological flexibility has been identified as a personal resource that mitigates the negative impacts of work stress, thus fostering well-being in work contexts (Hayes *et al.*, 2006, 2011; Kopperud *et al.*, 2021; Lucas and Moore, 2020). High levels of psychological flexibility allow individuals to manage stress more effectively, mitigating the negative implications of work overload (Kopperud *et al.*, 2021).

This study is based on the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018), which offers avenues for future theory development, resulting in a better prediction of workers' well-being (Galanakis and Tsitouri, 2022). Consistently with the literature (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Cornwell *et al.*, 2023), the study conceptualises well-being as two primary dimensions: hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. On the one hand, hedonic well-being encompasses life satisfaction, pleasure, happiness and contentment (Diener *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, eudaimonic well-being involves fulfilling one's potential and engaging in meaningful activities (Ryff and Singer, 2008) and spans from flourishing, a state of positive emotions and life functioning (Keyes, 2007; Seligman, 2011), to languishing, a lack of mental health. Specifically, this study aims to explore the dynamic interaction between work overload

demands, the resource of psychological flexibility and workaholism to understand how these factors influence workers' well-being, defined as life satisfaction and flourishing.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1 Compulsive work and well-being

The term "workaholism" was first used to describe an uncontrollable work addiction (Oates, 1971), characterised by working beyond typical hours (Mosier, 1983). The conceptualisation of workaholism remains debated in work and organisational psychology, regarding whether workaholics are perceived as driven individuals or individuals at risk of addiction, and whether workaholism is solely a result of putting in a considerable amount of effort or a combination of intense effort and intrinsic motivation to work hard (Taris and de Jonge, 2024). An eminent model conceptualised workaholism as a syndrome in which excessive and compulsive working co-occur (Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2009), contributing to negative outcomes such as increased anxiety, burnout, work–life conflict and poor mental and physical well-being (e.g. Clark *et al.*, 2016; Junker *et al.*, 2024; Rosario-Hernández *et al.*, 2024).

Compulsive working involves persistent thoughts and preoccupation with work activities even beyond regular working hours, whereas excessive working manifests in prolonged and intense work efforts (Bakker *et al.*, 2003; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008). Recently, Huyghebaert *et al.* (2018) suggested that these two facets of workaholism have differential antecedents and outcomes over time, emphasising the need to investigate both individual and organisational antecedents to understand how these distinct determinants interact to predict compulsive working. Furthermore, Ten Brummelhuis and Rothbard (2018) emphasised the distinction between working compulsively and merely working long hours concerning health outcomes. Foundational and recent studies suggest varying effects on mental health and work–life balance, highlighting an ongoing need to examine the compulsive component of workaholism (Spence and Robbins, 1992; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008; Huyghebaert *et al.*, 2018). Recent studies by Taris and de Jonge (2024) and Akinwale *et al.* (2023) suggest that working compulsively undermines overall well-being and quality of work–life. Therefore, we hypothesise that

H1. Working compulsively negatively predicts both flourishing (*H1a*) and life satisfaction (*H1b*).

2.2 Work overload, working compulsively and well-being

Work overload can be defined as perceiving a greater quantity or quality of work than the ability or resources to cope with it. Altaf and Awan (2011) identified that work overload can originate from both internal and external sources. Individuals voluntarily accept an increased workload, known as internal overload, while involuntarily imposing an additional workload leads to external overload.

According to the JD-R model, work overload can function as a job demand, influencing both negative and positive outcomes in individuals' work experiences, depending on the context (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Job demands can be categorised into hindrance and challenge demands (LePine *et al.*, 2005): hindrance demands involve excessive or undesirable constraints that interfere with or inhibit the individual's ability to achieve valued goals, while challenge demands require effort but have the potential to promote personal growth and achievement. The literature suggests that job demands can have different effects on worker outcomes, depending on whether they are perceived as hindering or challenging,

and new research is needed to uncover the conditions under which job demands act as hindrances versus challenges (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Several empirical studies have demonstrated a strong association between workload and the behavioural dimension of workaholism, specifically excessive working (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b; van Beek *et al.*, 2012). However, there has been less exploration of the relationship between workload and the compulsive aspect of workaholism. Recently, Xu *et al.* (2023) stressed the importance of separately analysing the dimensions of workaholism due to the inconsistent effects on job antecedents and outcomes between working excessively and compulsively. This study wants to explore whether workload can be conceived as a challenging demand because it positively influences life satisfaction and flourishing, but if placed in the context of working compulsively, then it becomes a hindrance demand.

On the one hand, job demands, such as workload, are related to well-being outcomes such as flourishing (Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013) and life satisfaction (Demirbağ and Demirbağ, 2022) and also to feel that one's life is satisfying and meaningful (Huppert and So, 2011). On the contrary, perceiving excessive workloads may lead to working compulsively (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018; Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2009; Bannai and Tamakoshi, 2014). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H2. Work overload positively predicts working compulsively (*H2a*), flourishing (*H2b*) and life satisfaction (*H2c*).

2.3 Psychological flexibility: a positive resource to prevent working compulsively and promote well-being

Psychological flexibility, defined as the ability to adaptively contact the present moment and act in accordance with one's values (Hayes *et al.*, 2006, 2011), plays a crucial role in managing work demands and emotional responses to work overload. Individuals with high psychological flexibility are more efficient in regulating their emotions and conserving resources that enable them to cope more effectively with work-related demands (Biron and van Veldhoven, 2012). Psychological flexibility also encourages an open, non-judgmental approach to work challenges, viewing them as part of the normal workday, which aids in mitigating stress from work overload (Kopperud *et al.*, 2021). A substantial body of literature demonstrated that psychological flexibility improves well-being and quality of life at work (for a meta-analysis, see Garner and Golijani-Moghaddam, 2021). Psychological flexibility serves as a valuable personal resource, reducing stress and severe work-related outcomes (Biron and van Veldhoven, 2012; Puolakanaho *et al.*, 2020; Yildirim *et al.*, 2024), promoting work-related well-being (Puolakanaho *et al.*, 2020; Lucas and Moore, 2020) and specifically life satisfaction and flourishing (Prudenzi *et al.*, 2023; Russo *et al.*, 2023; Russo *et al.*, 2024).

Framing these theories and findings within the framework of the JD-R (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) model, we conceptualise psychological flexibility as a personal resource that supports individuals' well-being and effective functioning in the workplace while simultaneously helping to prevent the emergence of unfavourable conditions, such as compulsive work. In support of this, the scientific literature has widely suggested the positive effects of psychological flexibility on the obsessive-compulsive spectrum (Twohig *et al.*, 2015; Philip and Cherian, 2021; Akhouri *et al.*, 2023; Lee *et al.*, 2023), but no study to the authors' knowledge has yet explored its relationship with the tendency to work compulsively. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H3. Psychological flexibility negatively predicts working compulsively (*H3a*) and positively predicts flourishing (*H3b*) and life satisfaction (*H3c*).

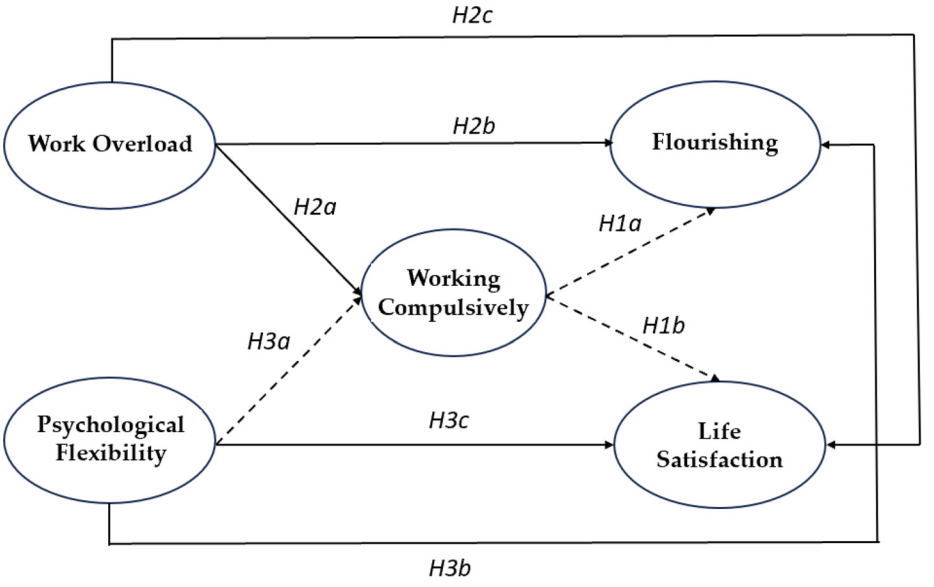
The relationships between the variables of the hypothesised model are reproduced in Figure 1.

3. Materials and methods

3.1 Participants

Our study involved 305 adult workers, aged 19–65 years (M = 36.18, SD = 13.40), 56% of whom were female (for an in-depth description, see below). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, using online platforms and social media channels to reach a diverse working population. Participants voluntarily and anonymously completed the online survey, providing informed consent regarding the research objectives and methods. They were aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time. The study was conducted between March 2023 and June 2023. The duration of data-gathering efforts was approximately 15 min to complete the survey. To ensure data quality, the survey was designed in a clear and concise manner, minimising the burden on respondents, and automatic checks were implemented to avoid incomplete submissions; specifically, if participants forgot to answer an item, the system would flag it before the final submission. Data was collected and processed by EU GDPR 679/2016 on the protection of sensitive and personal data.

The eligibility criteria employed in this investigation were as follows: individuals had to be of legal age (18 years old in Italy), below 66 years old (which aligns with Italy's retirement



Note: Negative relationships are represented by dashed lines
Source: Authors own work

Figure 1. Hypothesised model

age) and be engaged in employment (trainees and interns for at least six months were included). No protocols were excluded due to non-compliance with these criteria.

The minimum sample size for this study was determined *a priori* using Soper's Software (2023) for Structural Equation Models. Assuming an acceptable alpha error of 0.05, aiming for 90% power, considering 5 latent variables and 28 observed variables, the minimum sample size was found to be 288, considering an effect size of 0.25.

The distribution of participants' educational levels was as follows: 8.5% lower secondary school diploma, 51.1% high school diploma, 13.1% bachelor's degree, 19.7% master's degree and 7.5% postgraduate specialisation or doctoral degree. Regarding their employment status, 26.6% were employees in public institutions, 39% were employees in private companies, 17% were self-employed or freelancers, 4.3% were entrepreneurs, 3.3% were members of cooperatives and 9.9% were interns. Furthermore, concerning person–job fit, 18.4% reported having a job consistent with their interests, 23% a job consistent with their skills, 45.9% a job consistent with both interests and skills and the remaining 12.8% none of the above.

3.2 Measure

Personal information. Participants provided personal information including age, gender and educational levels and employment status.

Work overload. The short work overload scale (Bakker *et al.*, 2003) includes three items that refer to quantitative demanding aspects of the job (e.g. time pressure and working hard). Items are scored on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Sample item: "Do you have too much work to do?" In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.77.

Psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility was measured using the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II; Bond *et al.*, 2011; Italian validation Pennato *et al.*, 2013), composed of seven items measured in a seven-point Likert scale varying from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true). Items were inversely coded to produce one factor of psychological flexibility. The AAQ-II was chosen for this study as it is the most widely used measure of psychological flexibility in the empirical literature (Ong *et al.*, 2019). Sample item: "My painful experiences and memories make it difficult for me to live a life that I would value". In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.89.

Compulsive working. The five items of the compulsive working component of the Dutch Workaholism Scale (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b; Italian Balducci *et al.*, 2015) were used to assess the propensity to workaholism and, in particular, the tendency to work compulsively, feeling compelled to work and experiencing difficulties in relaxing and detaching from work. Responses are given on a frequency scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never) to 4 (almost always or always). Sample item: "I feel obliged to work hard, even when it's not enjoyable". In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.77.

Well-being. The Flourishing Scale (Diener *et al.*, 2010; Giuntoli *et al.*, 2017) assessed eudaimonic well-being, understood as socio-psychological prosperity characterised by positive relationships, feelings of competence and a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Participants responded on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Sample item: "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life". In our study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.86.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener *et al.*, 1985; Di Fabio and Gori, 2020) assessed the hedonic component of well-being, i.e. general life satisfaction through eight items on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Sample item: "I am satisfied with my life". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the study sample was 0.88.

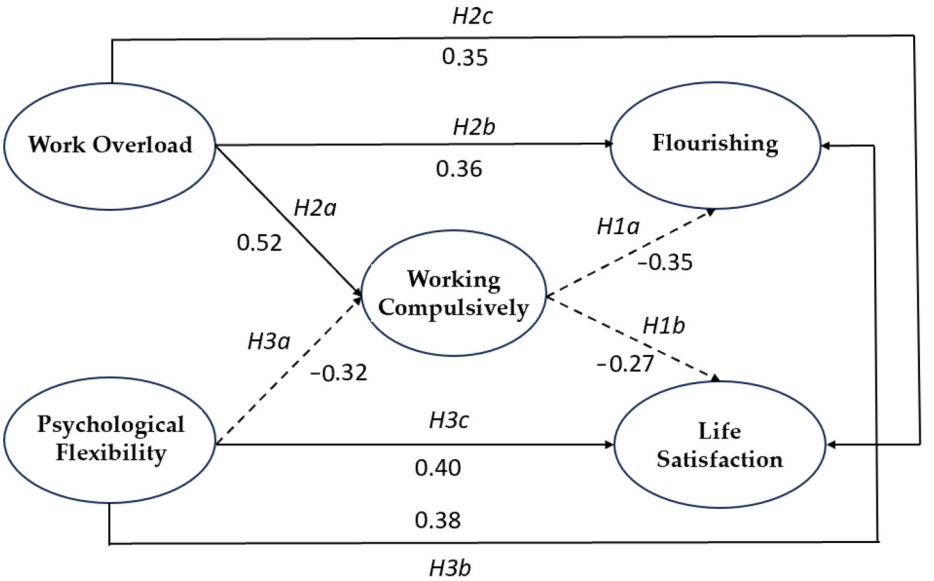
3.3 Data analysis

The preliminary analysis of the data was carried out using the SPSS 25 software. Descriptive analyses were conducted to assess the means and standard deviations of the variables, whereas Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to examine their relationships.

We used the lavaan package of RStudio software to perform structural equation modelling (SEM). The SEM approach, incorporating latent variables, was used. Predictor variables included work overload and psychological flexibility, with work compulsively of workaholism acting as a mediator, and flourishing and life satisfaction as outcome variables (refer to Figure 2). Parameter estimation was conducted using the Maximum Likelihood estimator.

The model's assessment was based on several fit indices, including the ratio between the Chi-square statistic and the degree of freedom (χ^2/df), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) and the standardised root mean residual (SRMR). To evaluate the goodness of fit, the following cut-off criteria were used: χ^2/df value below 3, RMSEA and SRMR values below 0.08 and a CFI and TLI exceeding 0.90 (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Little *et al.*, 2013; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

To examine mediation effects, we implemented the bootstrap procedure, generating 1,000 bootstrap samples from the original data set through random sampling, following the approach recommended by Lau and Cheung (2012). If the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (BC) for the mediation effect does not encompass zero, the indirect effect is deemed statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level.



Note: Negative relationships are represented by dashed lines
Source: Authors own work

Figure 2. Mediation model

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary analysis

The descriptive characteristics of the sample are found in Table 1. The distribution was normal as the Kurtosis and Skewness values were all between −1 and +1, hence parametric statistics were used. The correlation analysis showed small-to-medium associations between the variables involved in the mediation model; only the correlation between life satisfaction and flourishing was high (Table 1). Regarding the valence of the relationships, psychological flexibility was negatively correlated with working compulsively and positively correlated with both flourishing and life satisfaction. In contrast, working compulsively was positively correlated with work overload and negatively correlated with both flourishing and life satisfaction.

4.2 Structural equation modelling

The model analysis results show a good fit between the specified model and the observed data ($\chi^2 = 681.283$, df = 340, $p < 0.001$). Regarding the goodness-of-fit indices, the CFI is 0.915, the TLI is 0.905, the RMSEA is 0.057 (CI 0.051–0.064) and the SRMR is 0.056.

The direct effects of work overload on flourishing and life satisfaction were significant and positive (respectively, $\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$); furthermore, work overload was positively associated with working compulsively ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn was negatively associated with flourishing and life satisfaction (respectively, $\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = -0.27$, $p < 0.01$). The standardised indirect effect of work overload on flourishing via working compulsively was −0.18 ($p < 0.01$; bootstrap confidence interval has the lower limit of −0.521 and upper limit of −0.133). The standardised indirect effect of work overload on life satisfaction via working compulsively was −0.14 ($p < 0.05$; bootstrap confidence interval has a lower limit of −0.426 and an upper limit of −0.076).

The direct effects of psychological flexibility on flourishing and life satisfaction were significant and positive (respectively, $\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$); furthermore, psychological flexibility was negatively associated with working compulsively ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < 0.001$). The standardised indirect effect of psychological flexibility on flourishing via working compulsively was 0.110 ($p < 0.01$; the bootstrap confidence interval has a lower limit of 0.046 and an upper limit of 0.189). The standardised indirect effect of psychological flexibility on life satisfaction via working compulsively was 0.085 ($p < 0.05$; bootstrap confidence interval has a lower limit of 0.029 and an upper limit of 0.152).

The standardised total effect for flourishing in the model was −0.070 ($p < 0.05$; bootstrap confidence interval has a lower limit of −0.365 and upper limit of −0.067); instead, the

Table 1. Descriptive statistic and Pearson correlations

Variables	M (SD)	Range	1	2	3	4	5
1. Work overload	3.56 (0.84)	1–5	–				
2. Psychological flexibility	4.82 (1.45)	1–7	−0.11	–			
3. Working compulsively	2.41 (0.79)	1–4	0.44**	−0.33**	–		
4. Flourishing	5.48 (0.97)	2.75–7	0.09	0.42**	−0.23**	–	
5. Life satisfaction	4.66 (1.36)	1–7	0.13*	0.41**	−0.18**	0.71**	–

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$
Source: Authors' own work

standardised total effect for life satisfaction in the model was −0.054 ($p < 0.05$; bootstrap confidence interval has a lower limit of −0.381 and an upper limit of −0.039).

5. Discussion

This study, using the JD-R model, investigated the impact of work overload and psychological flexibility on compulsive work behaviours and well-being. The focus on compulsive work behaviours is driven by recent research suggesting that workaholism consists of two distinct dimensions – working compulsively and working excessively – which have different antecedents and outcomes (Huyghebaert *et al.*, 2018). In addition, Demerouti and Bakker (2023) emphasised that resources from various life domains can buffer the effects of demands on occupational health and well-being. Because psychological flexibility has been shown to have a positive effect on obsessive-compulsive tendencies (Twohig *et al.*, 2015; Philip and Cherian, 2021; Akhouri *et al.*, 2023; Lee *et al.*, 2023) and well-being (Puolakanaho *et al.*, 2020; Garner and Golijani-Moghaddam, 2021; Russo *et al.*, 2023, 2024), we examined how it influences the compulsive component of workaholism and its subsequent effects on both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

In our study, direct effects reveal that working compulsively alone predicts unfavourable worker outcomes, such as low flourishing (*H1a*) and low life satisfaction (*H1b*). On the one hand, the results obtained in the total models of flourishing and life satisfaction suggest that, although psychological flexibility and workload may have individual positive effects on flourishing and life satisfaction, the presence of compulsive work behaviour may negatively affect overall well-being. As suggested by Taris and de Jonge (2024), it is necessary to further explore antecedents of workaholism and how personal factors (such as demographic and personality factors, e.g. perfectionism; Girardi *et al.*, 2018) and work-related factors (beyond high job demands, e.g. overwork culture; Schaufeli, 2016) interact in predicting workaholism.

Regarding work overload (*H2*), the obtained results suggest that the positive relationship between workload and working compulsively (*H2a*) supports the theory that a high workload may lead to a greater propensity for compulsive work behaviour. This is consistent with the findings of previous research (e.g. Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b; Morkevičiūtė and Endriulaitienė, 2021), which found workload to be associated with workaholism.

Furthermore, the positive association between workload and flourishing (*H2b*), as well as the positive association with life satisfaction (*H2c*), reflects the JD-R theory, according to which job demands can enhance the impact of job resources on positive outcomes such as work engagement and work motivation (Bakker *et al.*, 2023). Indeed, perceiving excessive workloads can lead people to feel that their lives are satisfying and meaningful (Huppert and So, 2011). However, when psychological resources are scarce, demands may be perceived as excessive. As argued by Bakker *et al.* (2005), job resources have the potential to influence perceptions and cognitions triggered by job demands, moderate responses following the appraisal process or mitigate the adverse health consequences of such responses.

Regarding psychological flexibility (*H3*), the positive relationship between psychological flexibility and well-being, represented by flourishing (*H3b*) and life satisfaction (*H3c*), is consistent with the theory of psychological flexibility (Hayes *et al.*, 2006), which suggests that greater ability to adapt and regulate responses to stressful events is associated with better well-being outcomes. The findings of Lucas and Moore (2020) further support this notion by indicating a direct, positive effect of psychological flexibility on life satisfaction, underscoring its significance in promoting individual well-being.

Moreover, the negative relationship between psychological flexibility and working compulsively (*H3a*) indicates that those who are more capable of accepting and adapting to stressful work situations tend to engage in less compulsive work behaviour. This is in line

with previous research that has highlighted the role of psychological flexibility in preventing obsessive-compulsive diseases (e.g. Philip and Cherian, 2021; Akhouri *et al.*, 2023; Lee *et al.*, 2023) and mitigating the negative effects of work-related stressors among workers (e.g. Puolakanaho *et al.*, 2020; Yildirim *et al.*, 2024).

Overall, the analysis of the indirect effects of work overload and psychological flexibility through compulsive work on well-being highlights the mediating role of this behaviour in linking work conditions and personal resources to psychological well-being, supporting the JD-R model in the context of the compulsive component of workaholism.

The present study contributes to the body of knowledge suggesting that working compulsively is a function of both low levels of psychological flexibility and suboptimal work environments that foster work overload. In other words, workers with low levels of psychological flexibility who also experience work overload are less able to protect themselves from experiences of the compulsive component of workaholism. This is consistent with the study by Girardi *et al.* (2018), which shows that workload was positively associated with workaholism in managers. Furthermore, our results concur with Kopperud *et al.* (2021), indicating that psychological flexibility serves as a buffer or boundary condition for the negative impact of work overload.

6. Limitations and implications for future studies and practice

In the future, it will be crucial to address the limitations of this study, particularly the imbalance between employees and self-employed workers in the sample. Conducting further research with more diverse and balanced samples, including a purposive sampling approach, could help explore the influence of different types of employment on the relationships observed. Moreover, our study was cross-sectional and conducted using self-report measures (subject to the well-known bias) in Italy. The flourishing scale, for example, is based on a Western view of flourishing (Fowers *et al.*, 2023); therefore, future studies could test the applicability of this model in other cultural contexts. In addition, longitudinal designs will be crucial to suggest robust causal relationships and enhance the generalisability of findings regarding psychological flexibility's functions as a protective factor against workaholism, especially in the context of work overload. Moreover, future studies can provide further insight into potential moderators or mediators of the relationship between work overload, psychological flexibility and workaholic tendencies.

In the broader societal context, our findings suggest a pressing need for the development of public health policy, educational guidelines and career counselling interventions based on the recognition that compulsive work behaviour, contrary to popular belief, does not enhance job performance (Xu *et al.*, 2023) and can significantly compromise individuals' quality of life. As implications for work and organisational psychology professionals and human resource managers, it might be useful to enhance the psychological flexibility of workers to prevent the emergence of workaholism conditions and promote workers' well-being. When discussing the prevention of workaholism, three levels of prevention are typically referenced (Cossin *et al.*, 2021): at the first level, workaholism can be avoided by fostering a protective organisational culture; the second level of prevention focuses on training and individual counselling to mitigate the negative consequences of workaholism; the third level combines cognitive and behavioural interventions aimed at supporting the professional and social reintegration of individuals affected by workaholism. Given that training in psychological flexibility should be considered as one element of programs designed to increase the quality of life and well-being in workers (e.g. Bond *et al.*, 2010; Garner and Golijani-Moghaddam, 2021) and that acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) has been shown to be useful in reducing obsessive-compulsive symptoms through cognitive defusion (Lee *et al.*, 2023), the

findings of this study suggest that psychological flexibility may also be effectively applied to prevent the compulsive component of workaholism.

To foster psychological flexibility, organisations could implement short interventions as part of their well-being strategies, such as structured group training programs or individual career counselling services based on ACT, particularly in high-stress sectors and among vulnerable employee populations. Notably, ACT-based career counselling delivered through five group sessions has been shown to effectively enhance psychological flexibility and support sustainable career development (Russo *et al.*, 2024): these sessions help individuals to clarify their values within the context of their work activities, practice perspective-taking and present-moment awareness, strengthen cognitive defusion and experiential acceptance skills and promote value-driven actions in the short, medium and long term. In addition, ACT training can be delivered in various work settings, including online (Flores, 2021), to support remote workers in aligning their actions with personal values without becoming overwhelmed. Research highlights the effectiveness of brief, targeted programs; for example, three-month interventions have been shown to enhance psychological flexibility and mitigate negative impacts on well-being (Archer *et al.*, 2024).

7. Conclusions

Our study concludes that work overload and psychological flexibility significantly influence well-being, highlighting their roles in compulsive work behaviour, flourishing and life satisfaction. These findings contribute to a better understanding of workaholism within the Job Demands-Resources framework (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Bakker *et al.*, 2023). Summarising, we found that psychological flexibility can be considered a valuable resource in reducing the risk of developing the compulsive component of workaholism, especially when dealing with work overload. Namely, despite some work-related challenges, the personal resource of psychological flexibility can contribute to improving the overall experience of work-related well-being (e.g. Puolakanaho *et al.*, 2020; Russo *et al.*, 2023, 2024), even in the context of work overload and working compulsively. Individuals with a greater ability to adapt and manage stress may compensate for the negative effects of working compulsively, as indicated by Andreassen *et al.* (2017) and Huyghebaert *et al.* (2018), who advocate for interventions such as stress management training and the development of self-management skills for individuals exhibiting workaholism. Overall, promoting psychological flexibility is essential for preventing workaholism and enhancing well-being in today's work environments.

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Further reading

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