

# The Role of Leader in Work Addiction

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*Abstract. Over-attachment to work is an increasingly common phenomenon in the lives of people in organisations, and can also be a condition of work addiction. Whoever becomes involved in an organisation, be it a subordinate or even a manager, work addiction has a number of negative consequences at both individual and organisational level. Without being exhaustive, work addiction can have an impact on organisational performance, organisational effectiveness, workplace conflict, career prospects, health maintenance. In this paper, we aim to highlight the most relevant publications from the last five years to report on the impact in an organisation when work addiction arises among subordinates or managers, and how different leadership styles are associated with work addiction among organisational members. The publications were retrieved from Google Scholar and Scopus, and the results of 19 articles are presented in this paper after a review of 263 papers retrieved. The results show that transformational, servant and ethical leadership styles have ambiguous effects on work addiction, unlike laissez-faire or abusive leadership styles, the former enhancing and the latter reducing the incidence of work addiction in an organisation. Work addiction of managers also has a dual effect: on the one hand, it can enhance creativity, but it can also increase turnover among subordinates. Social support from the manager can be an antidote to subordinates' work addiction, but this effect may be modified by the quantity and quality of interaction between manager and subordinate, the sense of meaningfulness of the work, or even the organisational culture. Overall, the manager, as a key actor, can have an impact on work addiction in the organisation, but there is not always a consistent position in the research on the cases and the way in which this is done, which calls for further research in the future.*

*Keywords: Work Addiction, Leader, Leadership, Style of Leadership, Subordinates.*

## Introduction

Work addiction is a widespread phenomenon and can have many negative consequences for both individuals and organisations [13]. As a key actor in an organisation, the leader, in fulfilling his or her leadership role as defined in academic terms and beyond, influences and sets an example for the organisation through his or her behaviour. The success of the organisation and its potential for development depend, among other things, on the leader [44]. Leaders therefore have a key role to play in preventing and managing work addiction [38]. It is important that leaders take into account the factors behind overwork and proactively address them.

The aim of this paper is to explore the important link between leadership and work addiction by highlighting and summarising the studies considered most relevant from the publications published in the last five years, firstly, to get closer to the still under-researched phenomenon of work addiction,

secondly, to identify current analytical issues and thirdly, to define possible future research directions. On this basis, the main research questions of this paper are the following:

What might be the impact within the organization if the manager or subordinates are affected in terms of work addiction?

How might leadership style be related to work addiction in the organization?

## 1. Work addiction

The concept of work alcoholism was first used by Oates (1968), referring to the parallel between excessive work and alcoholism, because the workaholic is so attached to the object of his addiction - namely work - that he puts it before everything else in his life, be it his health or his family and social relationships [42].

Despite the fact that work addiction has been recognised for more than half a century, research has only started later [29], and there are early analyses that have tried to emphasise the positive effects of work addiction [33]. In contrast, several negative consequences have been identified in relation to work addiction, including exhaustion [27], distress [7], a number of health problems, mainly cardiovascular [5, 46], increased work-life imbalance [7], and reduced job and life satisfaction [49].

Workaholics are not productive workers despite their hard work, which is influenced not only by personality factors but also by environmental factors [38]. Organisational performance depends to a large extent on the work environment in which members of the organisation operate, their fit with the organisational culture [28], the perceived workplace climate, work ethic, the influence of colleagues, and the manifestations of leadership [40].

## 2. The role of leader in an organisation

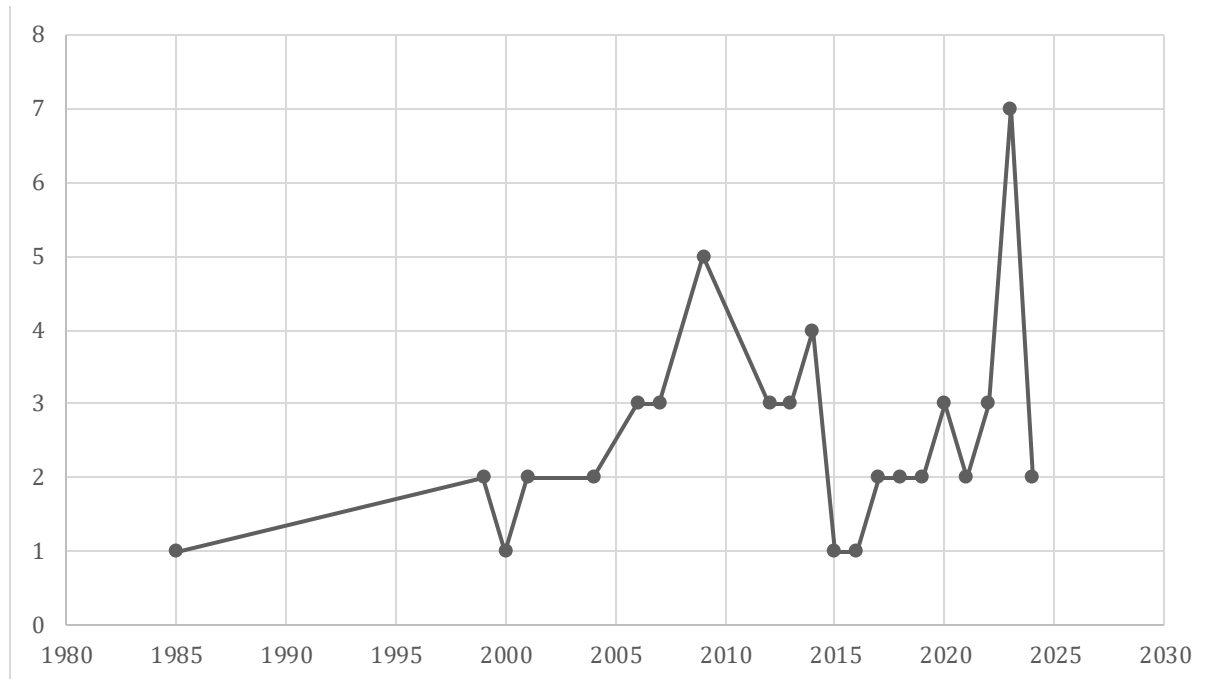
A leader is a key player in the life of an organisation, and his or her main tasks, beyond those defined in management science, include maintaining and developing the organisation, thus having a major impact on the organisation as a whole, including the employees [35].

Leadership is a social, human activity carried out by managers, in which tasks are distributed, planned, organised, controlled and coordinated in relation to work [16]. A large amount of research has addressed the issue of leadership, with early analyses focusing mainly on the leader as a person, with little emphasis on the relationship between the leader and subordinates, which is also a determinant of organisational performance [14]. If the relationship with the leader is not credible to employees, then following the leader is mainly driven by coercion or reward, and least of all by internal, employee conviction [17]. For a leader to become credible, he or she must not only be aware of him or herself, but also become aware of the context in which he or she is leading [51]. Developing the leader's ability to adapt to the work environment and the needs of the employees can help him or her in this regard [15]. It is necessary to develop and continually train a mindset in which leadership becomes a vocation [45]. If the leader does this successfully, he or she will also serve as a role model for employees through his or her behavioural manifestations and communication [18]. The ethical demonstrations and work ethics conveyed by the leader will be transmitted throughout the organisation. Thus, the manager has a great

responsibility for how employees relate to work [6] and how they draw the line between a healthy quantity and quality of work and their private lives, which can have an impact on work addiction.

### 3. Data and methodology

In the present study, articles in the field of management that analyse work addiction and leadership and the effects of the leader were searched.



*Figure 1. Number of hits for publications in the context of work addiction and management science*

*Source: Analysis of own data collection (2024)*

The publications come from two sources: Google Scholar and Scopus. The search terms and operators used in both Google Scholar and Scopus were "work addiction" OR "workaholism". Both platforms were searched exclusively in the management discipline in June 2024. The duplications after excluding, 263 papers remained, the abstracts of which were reviewed one by one. Of these, those publications were considered relevant that addressed the relationship between work addiction and an issue in management science. In the end, 54 scientific publications were found according to this specific search method, the number of hits is illustrated in Figure 1.

In 1985, the first scientific article on work addiction in the field of management was published in the above-mentioned search interfaces, linking the phenomenon to some aspect of management or leadership. Since then, there has been a steady stream of publications on the subject, with varying but mostly increasing numbers. From this searchable database of 54 articles, this paper aims to present the latest research findings and more specifically to answer the research questions raised by the 19 publications summarised in Table 1, which have appeared in the last five years.

<b><i>Title of publication</i></b>	<b><i>Author</i></b>	<b><i>Year</i></b>
Do dimensions of transformational leadership have an effect on workaholism?	Morkevičiūtė, M., Endriulaitienė, A., Jočienė, E.	2019
The relationship between psychosocial work variables and workaholism: Findings from a nationally representative survey	Andreassen, C.S., Nielsen, M.B., Pallesen, S., Gjerstad, J.	2019
The Unintended Effect of Perceived Transformational Leadership Style on Workaholism: The Mediating Role of Work Motivation	Endriulaitienė, A., Morkevičiūtė, M.	2020
Uncovering a relationship between leadership behaviour and employees' workaholism: a systematic review	Morkevičiūtė, M., Endriulaitienė, A.	2020
Sensation-Seeking and Workaholism: Implications for Serial Entrepreneurship	Simmons, S., Carr, J. C., & Hsu, D. K.	2020
The effect of ethical leadership on work engagement and workaholism: Examining self-efficacy as a moderator	Wibawa, W.M.S., Takahashi, Y.	2021
The interactive effect of leader-member exchange and psychological climate for overwork on subordinate workaholism and job strain	Afota, M.-C., Robert, V., Vandenberghe, C.	2021
Moderating role of perceived work addiction of managers in the relationship between employees' perfectionism and work addiction: a trait activation theory perspective	Morkevičiūtė, M., Endriulaitienė, A.	2022
Why Leader Workaholism is Linked to Subordinate Work Withdrawal? A Moral Licensing Perspective.	He, Y., Pak, S., Lee, S. H., Kramer, A.	2022
Double-edged Sword of Leader Workaholism: Subordinate Cognitive Appraisals and Work Outcomes.	Lee, S. H., Pak, S., He, Y., Kramer, A.	2022
The dark side of meaningful work-from-home: A nonlinear approach	Magrizos, S., Roumpi, D., Georgiadou, A., Kostopoulos, I., Vrontis, D.	2023
Workaholism and quality of work-life: a psychosocial pathway to brain-drain syndrome	Akinwale, O.E., Kuye, O.L., Akinwale, O.E.	2023
Heavy Work Investment, Workaholism, Servant Leadership, and Organizational Outcomes: A Study among Italian Workers	Loscalzo, Y., Tziner, A., Shkoler, O.	2023
Can social support moderate the relationship between workaholism and work-family conflict?	Kang, K.-J., Lee, Y.-M.	2023
A Daily Diary Study on the Mechanisms Linking Leader Workaholism and Subordinate Work Withdrawal.	He, Y., Pak, S., Lee, S. H., Kramer, A.	2023
Dedicated Founder or Obsessed Workaholic? The Role of Grit in Entrepreneurial Workaholism.	Kaes, M.	2023
When leader's workaholism meets the dark triad: understanding employee zero-sum mindset and resilience in relation to retention	Jin, D.	2023
Help or hindrance? The effects of leader workaholism on employee creativity	She, Z., Ma, L., Li, Q., Jiang, P.	2024
Employee Cognitive Workaholism and Emotional Exhaustion in a Digital Workplace: What Is the Role of Organisations?	Hynes, J., Koç, H.	2024

*Table 1. Publications from the last five years in the field of work addiction and management science*

*Source: analysis of own data collection (2024)*

## 4. Results – work addiction from a perspective of management science

The role of the manager in the organisation is unquestionable, beyond his/her traditional role, by shaping the style of leadership in the organisation, and by directly and indirectly influencing the relationship of employees to work through his/her behavioural traits, he/she can also have an impact on the prevention, development and treatment of work addiction.

The most recent publications presented have been selected to review their results in order to get closer to the impact of managerial factors on work addiction, whether the manager or the employee is the one affected by work addiction.

### 4.1. Impact of the leadership style on work addiction

At first glance, work addiction may seem like a highly individual problem. However, work addiction also raises important socio-cultural issues, its drivers being either the society or the community in which the individual operates [43]. A person spends a significant amount of time at work every day, so the experience of belonging to the workplace, and inevitably the manifestations of the manager, is a frequent and prolonged one. The way in which a leader influences his subordinates, usually directly and personally, in order to align individual and organisational goals is called leadership style [11]. Leadership style also includes the set of tools and ways of exercising power that a leader intends to influence his subordinates [10]. Thus, when analysing work addiction, the manager's leadership style should also be taken into account [38], given that leadership style refers to all interactions between the manager and the subordinate [52].

In the case of laissez-faire leadership style, where the leader has little or no leadership role, this can reinforce work addiction. Uncertainty, ambiguity and lack of feedback are high in laissez-faire leadership and can therefore increase overwork among employees. This over-working is an attempt by employees to attract and gain the attention of the manager or to manage themselves instead of the manager [3].

Abusive leadership, in which the experience of abuse and bullying can easily create an environment that leads to increased work engagement, has not been associated with employee work addiction, to the surprise of researchers [3]. Abusive leadership can be so threatening to employees that it increases employee avoidance behaviour, which provides a protection against overwork [41].

Wibawa and Takahashi (2021) investigated the impact of ethical leadership on two determinants of work attitudes, work engagement and work addiction. Their results showed that ethical leadership was positively related to work engagement, but the effect on workaholism was not significant [55].

Because of its many benefits, transformational leadership is a generally accepted positive leadership practice [54]. However, an unintended effect of transformational leadership was highlighted by researchers who found a significant positive association between perceived high expectations of the leader and employee over-performance. The research also suggested that high performance expectations may predict work addiction through higher levels of overwork on the part of employees

[37]. A year later, Endriulaitienė and Morkevičiūtė (2020) also found that the effect of transformational leadership on work addiction is not direct but through increased work motivation, more specifically, managers who use a transformational leadership style may increase the likelihood that their subordinates will develop internal pressure to work hard [12]. Conversely, Andreassen and colleagues (2019) found that transformational leadership style does not necessarily predict work addiction, as they were unable to detect a significant relationship between transformational leadership and work addiction [3]. Instead, they emphasize the benefits of transformational leadership, such as it can help to develop positive work attitudes, as several studies have shown a correlation in the same direction between transformational leadership and work engagement [20, 53]. The role of transformational leadership in work addiction is still not fully clear, and it may be worthwhile future research to address this relationship.

Other researchers have analyzed servant leadership and found that the emergence of servant leadership can increase either work addiction or work engagement, so it is definitely worthwhile for managers to be informed about employees' work engagement. Servant leadership also encourages employees to invest more time and energy in their work, i.e. to invest more effort. This high work effort can also be a predictor of both organisational citizenship behaviour and counterproductive work behaviour. The outcome depends on the work attitude of the employee, i.e. whether work engagement or work addiction is dominant behind his/her work manifestations. If work engagement is the dominant attitude, then organizational citizenship behaviour will be reinforced by servant leadership, if the employee is more work addicted then an increase in counterproductive work behaviour can be expected as a result of servant leadership [32].

## 4.2. The consequences of managerial work addiction

Examining work addiction among managers is an important task, given that recent research shows that the proportion of managers at risk of work addiction is increasing [4]. Moreover, managers, including middle managers, are more affected than non-managerial employees [40].

The perception of work addiction among managers is ambiguous across the literature, with early research reporting on the negative impact of work addiction among managers. More recently, however, a growing number of studies have shown that executive work addiction can have a positive effect as well as a negative one. In other words, in addition to the increased burden, managerial work addiction can in some ways be beneficial to an organisation [48], and managerial work addiction can even lead to improved organisational performance [47]. In fact, managerial work addiction can have two messages for employees. A leader's involvement with work addiction can be interpreted as both a challenge and a barrier for employees. The results show a positive relationship between the leader's work addiction and employees' organisational citizenship behaviour (mainly through the perception of the leader as a challenge) and a negative relationship between employees' counterproductive behaviour and the leader's work addiction through the perception of the leader as a barrier. This implies that increased managerial exposure to work addiction may increase employees' organizational citizenship behavior and decrease counterproductive behavior [30].

Workaholic leaders can either promote or inhibit employee creativity depending on how they are perceived and valued by employees. The importance of cognitive evaluation of managerial work

addiction is also emphasized by She et al [2024]. As mentioned above, managerial work addiction can be perceived by employees as a challenge or a hindrance and the effect varies depending on this on employee creativity. Taking account of employee flexibility, also known as employee resilience, is an important moderating factor between managers' work addiction and its outcome among employees. Employee resilience, as a critical coping resource for employees, enables them to resist managerial work addiction and amplifies its positive effects, which enhance their creativity, in addition to mitigating its negative consequences [48].

In addition to all the positive effects, the perceived work addiction of the leader may also have negative consequences for other employees in the same organisation. Research has shown that the more intense a leader's workaholic involvement, the greater the effect on the co-morbidity between subordinates' perfectionism and workaholicism [39].

Further research has found that employees working alongside workaholic managers may have an increased turnover intention, especially when a zero-sum, so-called distributive mindset is dominant in the organisation, i.e. success is achieved only at the expense of others. In terms of workplace well-being and employee retention, it is worth addressing managerial work addiction and reinforcing an integrative mindset rather than a distributive one, which reassures employees that it is possible to win together, that there are situations where everyone can win [24].

There is research linking work addiction on the part of managers to communication demands beyond working hours. He et al. (2023) found that a leader's work addiction can cause high psychological strain and emotional exhaustion for employees, as such a leader considers it commendable if subordinates are available through various communication channels beyond working hours. In practice, this increases the availability of subordinates after working hours, which has a negative impact on the next day's work, with a higher degree of disengagement [22]. The strength of the relationship depends in practice on the stability of the employees' family identity, i.e., in case of managerial work addiction the employee's stronger family identity as a protective factor resulted in a higher frequency of disengagement by the employee [21].

An interesting issue arises when the manager and the employee are the same person, in practice this is a question of work addiction among entrepreneurs. Kaes (2023) reports in his research that a common factor in entrepreneurship is the phenomenon of workaholicism and that it has a detrimental effect on the entrepreneur. Namely, the commitment and persistence to long-term goals that characterise an entrepreneur - i.e. entrepreneurial grit - may predict work addiction in entrepreneurship [25]. The relationship has also been observed in the opposite direction, as other research has found that those who act as self-managers, i.e. entrepreneurs, and are affected by work addiction, then their level of work addiction predicts their intention to start and sustain new and repeat entrepreneurial activities, regardless of previous business success or failure. Furthermore, if the individual has a history of previous negative entrepreneurial outcomes, the relationship between work addiction and the intention to start a new business was found to be stronger. Similar results were found for individuals who were increased experience seekers. Furthermore, workaholicism and experience-seeking behaviour, when they co-occur in the same individual, have a mutually reinforcing effect on entrepreneurial activity [50].

### 4.3. The case of employee work addiction

Leadership style is not the only key factor in work addiction. It has been confirmed that various ad hoc managerial behaviours can increase or decrease the risk of employees becoming workaholics [38].

Organisational social support from superiors, as experienced by employees, can reduce unpleasant manifestations of work addiction among employees, such as work-life conflict, poor health behaviour, and inadequate job performance [26]. A negative association of individualised managerial support with excessive and compulsive work behaviour has been reported. This suggests that a higher level of individual support may counteract the tendency to work addiction and promote healthier work behaviour among employees. [40] This positive effect may come from the fact that managerial support can increase the pool of resources that workers can use to cope with stressful situations while reducing their vulnerability. There are also situations in which increasing the amount of interaction between manager and subordinate may cause stress, in which case the moderating effect on employees' work addiction is lost [38]. In conclusion, as a manager, it is important to consider the factors of social support in relation to work addiction and anticipate both consequences [26], and to determine the quality of the manager-subordinate relationship.

It deals with the quality of the relationship between manager and subordinate and approaches work addiction by taking into account social influences, for example, the so-called LMX (leader-member exchange) approach [9, 36]. According to this theory, when the quality of the leader-subordinate relationship is high, the focus is on reciprocity and the relationship is characterized by material and emotional support as well as trust. In contrast, low quality relationships are limited to the requirement to fulfil contracts. A high level of LMX is thought to protect subordinates [19]. However, the manager-subordinate relationship does not operate in a vacuum, contextual factors such as organizational values and organizational culture must be taken into account [31]. If overload is a value in the organization, then a high quality LMX as a catalyst may increase employees' work addiction [1].

In a recent study, Akinwale and colleagues (2023), while analyzing the work addiction of Nigerian bank employees, shed light on the fact that this condition is significantly dependent on the coercive behavior of the management in the organization. They associate work addiction with factors such as long working hours, workload, job pressure, financial challenges, and career aspirations, all of which affect the quality of life of employees. At the very least, managerial coercive behaviour does not enhance work engagement, as would otherwise be the goal, but rather reinforces workaholic tendencies, thereby projecting further negative outcomes [2].

It is an important task for managers to provide employees with a sense of meaningful work, as work can have many positive effects for both the individual and the organisation. Especially when individuals believe that their work is particularly meaningful. Current research is increasingly focusing on a sense of meaningfulness at work and has shown a number of positive effects, but there are also findings that refer to the phenomenon of meaningfulness at work as a double-edged sword. It does not matter for which employee the manager is trying to enhance the sense of meaningfulness of the work.. For workers who are not at risk of work addiction, it is particularly beneficial and has a number of positive effects if the sense of meaningfulness of work is made more aware. For example, it increases commitment to work, as well as personal dedication to work and a sense of duty. However, for a worker at risk of work



addiction, this can backfire at some point and they may find the sense of meaningfulness of work "too much". From this point onwards they are unable to maintain a work-life balance and report increased work stress. Thus, it is an important first task for management to identify where employees lie on the work-addiction continuum before they decide to engage in any incentive activities, because the results can easily backfire. Furthermore, by leading by example and developing employees' soft skills, managers can help employees suffering from workaholism to more effectively balance work and personal life [34].

Among the many forms of work addiction, cognitive work addiction is when an individual constantly thinks about work in an uncontrollable way, even after working hours [8]. Today, with the changing work environment, where work does not necessarily require personal presence, and work tasks can be performed online and digitally, it is much harder to disengage from work after working hours, which is a precursor to cognitive work addiction. Recent research has observed that managers have a strong influence on the development and maintenance of cognitive work addiction. In the case of digital work, the influence of managers is mostly felt beyond working hours on the cognitive form of work addiction. Workers who have a looser relationship with their supervisor are more willing to work beyond working hours and show a higher work pace. This is significant with age and especially for women. They are unable to disengage from their work, they are always available and ready to respond, they are engaged in their work at the mental level beyond working hours, i.e. they have a higher level of cognitive workaholism, which then leads to higher levels of emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is further fuelled by workload, i.e. when managers do not necessarily distribute work appropriately among subordinates. Thus, digital workplaces can be seen as a two edged sword that challenges leaders in modern digital workplace organisations to develop sustainable workplace wellbeing [23].

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, it can be seen that the manager has an important responsibility in relation to work addiction in the life of an organisation. Given that the leader has a great influence in shaping the organisational culture and workplace climate, setting workplace boundaries, supporting and providing resources to employees, and implementing non-judgmental communication, the leader can also influence work addiction through behavioural manifestations and regular feedback and evaluation [43]. A leader has a special role to play in relation to work addiction, which includes, among other things, the turnover intention in the organisation, the experience of meaningfulness of work, the quality of work relationships, or even organisational social support. However, managerial behaviour can easily become a double-edged sword and the manager himself/herself can be vulnerable to work addiction, with a wide range of effects. Managers need to be aware that the lack of a healthy work environment can have serious consequences for both individual and organisational performance [40]. It is therefore crucial that managers play an active role in the management and prevention of work addiction, helping to achieve organisational and individual goals effectively.

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