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**THE RELATEDNESS OF ABSENTEEISM, PRESENTEEISM AND  
WORKAHOLISM WITH JOB PERFORMANCE (ESTONIAN AND POLISH  
WORKFORCE SAMPLES)**

Master Thesis

Supervisor: Professor Mare Teichmann

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I hereby declare, that this thesis is  
entirely the result of my own work and  
submitted for the Degree of Master of Science  
in Tallinn University of Technology  
For the present thesis no degree has been conferred  
on me before either in this or in any other university

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## ABSTRACT

The relatedness of absenteeism, presenteeism and workaholism with job performance  
(Estonian and Polish workforce samples)

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The objective of this study is to investigate the connection of absenteeism, presenteeism and workaholism to employee job performance. The second goal is to find out a possible connection between absenteeism and presenteeism. It is important for employers to recognize different behaviours that can affect the employee's occupational health or performance negatively so that the corporate rules and policies can be made in a way which does not encourage such behaviours. We also review four different concepts: absenteeism, presenteeism, leaveism and workaholism. There is not much existing research about the relationality of these concepts, but based on past studies investigating individual concepts, we speculate that the four concepts are cyclically connected. But first, we must lay the groundwork for further research. First, we will extend the findings on absenteeism, presenteeism and workaholism relation with work performance. We will also explore the question of whether absenteeism and presenteeism are connected to each other. The data was gathered from participants in Estonia and Poland using absenteeism-presenteeism test, workaholism test and performance test. The results showed that absenteeism, presenteeism and workaholism are all negatively correlated with performance. Absenteeism and presenteeism turned out to be positively correlated with each other. Since this analysis does not show causality, there are plenty of opportunities for future research.

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## **1. Introduction**

As technology continues to level the competitive landscape, globalization will only increase and margins will continue to decrease. As this trend continues, businesses will be forced to do more with fewer resources, one of the most expensive which is the employee. Consequently, organizations will run leaner as they remove redundancies and the means of production, e.g. the employee, assume an increased workload, i.e. more responsibilities.

However, with this decrease in redundancy, risk will ensue. Specifically, there is a greater impact to the organization's productivity when a means of production is rendered out of service because, unlike a machine that can merely be replaced, present employees' workloads will increase, which will result in an even further loss in production. Additionally, if the employee must be replaced, there will be a lag between recruiting and peak production.

An oblique and perhaps more insidious cost could also be incurred. Intact resources that assume an acute increase in workload may ultimately buckle under such strain if length of time under the increased load is sufficient. If left unchecked, a systematic cycle may be created wherein involuntary and voluntary absence is increased, resulting in a chronic state of sub-par production.

It is evident that organizations understand this, as employee wellness initiatives have increased in frequency and quality. However, such programs will be doomed to fail if the organization does not understand the underlying mechanisms of employee absence and/or is not willing to make substantive adjustments to influence those mechanisms. Fortunately, those mechanisms have been studied since the mid-twentieth century and have continued to evolve as organizations become intimately aware of the importance of employee retention in this new business environment.

The four operative concepts of absence culture that have been investigated are absenteeism, presenteeism, leaveism, and workaholism. Most research has been conducted on each concept individually, especially for absenteeism. Main reason for this is that absenteeism results in visible losses – employees not being present means decreased productivity, other employees having to take on extra workload, which can result in backlogs; when the employee returns to work, he/she needs to catch up which also takes time etc. It is not uncommon for companies to take on measures for decreasing absenteeism, but what are the hidden behaviours that these measures may drive instead? If absenteeism is frowned upon, the side effect of it can be that the employees will engage in presenteeism and/or leaveism.

The employee can feel pressured to prove that they are dedicated on their work, always present and engaged, which can result in coming to work while sick, working longer hours, reading and answering emails after working hours, on weekends or during vacation etc. Some of these traits are also characteristics of workaholism, which is where the question of relationality comes in. Are these behaviours eventually evolving into workaholism? Or is workaholism the root cause of presenteeism and leaveism?

Not much relational research about the four concepts has been completed. To remedy this, our focus of study will be on first establishing connections between absenteeism, presenteeism, workaholism and employee job performance – then any relationship that may exist between absenteeism and presenteeism. According to Ölcer (2015), job performance is a heavily researched area in work and organizational psychology because of the importance it holds in the life of an organization. The success and productivity of the organization depends heavily on the job performance of the employees and therefore it is obvious why the organizations need to be aware of different factors that can influence it. In our research, job performance is considered as the employee's subjective evaluation of their productivity.

Potential causality between the four concepts can be theorized about at this stage. Before our exploration can be endeavoured, we will define absence culture and the evolution of each concept's definition.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1. Absenteeism**

The concept of absence culture is valuable because it provides a new perspective on researching absence that recognizes how individual behaviour may be constrained by the collective reality of organizations (Johns & Nicholson, 1985). There will always be an inherent conflict between the preferences and needs of the individual employee and organization. The concept of absence culture was initially introduced by Hill and Trist (1953, 1955 as cited in Iverson, Buttigieg, Maguire, 2013) in an attempt to explain the association between absence and different phases in employee job tenure.

The understanding of absence culture has become more sophisticated, with Johns and Nicholson (1985) defining absence culture as “the set of shared understandings about absence legitimacy (...) and the established 'custom and practice' of employee absence behaviour and its control”. Specifically, the purpose of an absence culture appears to be an

attempt to balance the collective and individual's needs through counteracting the habit of trial and error absence behaviour via the establishment of rules and norms. With time, the employee should be able to recognize the formal and informal "ropes" of the organization's culture over time, resulting in more "legitimate" than "illegitimate" absences (Hill & Trist 1953, 1955 as cited in Iverson et al., 2003). The first concept of absence culture that we will explore, absenteeism, possesses the highest profile because an absent employee is most easily quantified.

As the concept of absenteeism has evolved, so has its granularity. Initially, absenteeism had been defined rather broadly, such as, "Any failure to report for or remain at work as scheduled, regardless of the reason" (Cascio, 1998). According to Cascio, it is not so much what precipitates the absence that is important, but whether or not there is an absence. However, further refinement is necessary to demonstrate volition, motivation, and proportionality.

Regarding volition, we can establish whether the absence is voluntary or involuntary thereby further refining the concept. Initial attempts considered voluntary absenteeism as the employee's avoidance of work and involuntary absenteeism as the consequence of illness or disability (De Boer, Bakker, Syroit & Schaufeli, 2002; Kessler 2003, 2004). However, Riggio provides a less prescriptive definition as to what constitutes voluntary or involuntary absenteeism. An unauthorized absence constitutes the former and the latter relies on the employee's control (Riggio, 2009). Consequently, we can now begin to measure impact. For instance, it has been estimated that 52% of employee absences are voluntary in nature (Cascio, 2000; Van Der Wall, 1998).

This begs the question as to the scope of the employee's control. Naturally, everyone agrees that illness is outside of the employee's control and should therefore be considered involuntary, but it seems that the inclusion of other issues is dependent upon who you ask. J. Mayfield & M. Mayfield (2009) not only include personal illness, but a family member's illness as well, so long as it is serious. Baxter et al. (2015) would likely agree because their definition of absenteeism appears to centre around if the circumstance can be planned for, for instance, childcare or maternity leave would not fall under the definition.

Nonetheless, such specificity may not be necessary and only contribute to confusion. Bierla, Huver and Richard (2013) attempted to differentiate between absence and absenteeism, where a behaviour is considered absenteeism if the reason is voluntary and not related to

health. On the other hand, an employee is considered absent if the absence is for the purpose of recovering from health problems. Considering the previous research and definitions on absenteeism, we will focus on absenteeism as being not present at work for health-related reasons, including those dependent upon the employee, such as childcare leave. As the reader has likely surmised, the one point that all researchers can agree upon is that personal illness is a justifiable reason to be absent from work. Regardless of how it is defined or measured, researchers agree that non-present employees negatively affect the organization (Moch & Fitzgibbons, 1985).

Often, that negative impact has been measured monetarily, such as when Trice and Belasco (1967) measured the cost of consistent employee absence due to alcoholism at three times that of present employees. Those costs, also known as direct costs, are primarily measured in salary paid to and/or fringe benefits provided for absent personnel, as well as the overtime costs associated with the necessity of other employees to assume the workload, and replacements costs, as measured in recruiting and training (Macy & Mirvis, 1976). However, there are indirect costs to be considered as well, such as a decrease in work efficacy and efficiency when fewer resources assume additional work and the resulting decrease in service quality, the impact of which is difficult to quantify (Cascio, 2000; J. Mayfield & M. Mayfield, 2009; Metzner & Mann, 1953; Morgan & Herman, 1976; Robbins, 2005; Steers & Rhodes, 1978).

If absenteeism is measured, supervisors will potentially be able to decrease its organizational impact because absenteeism may indicate impending employee turnover, as it may be indicative of avoidance of a stressful and/or dissatisfying job situation, resulting in the employee searching for alternative employment (Mobley, 1982; Steers & Mowday, 1981). In fact, when combined with low performance, high absenteeism is one of the best predictors of employee turnover (Keller, 1984). These findings were later supported by Riggio (2009), who demonstrated an association between absenteeism and organizational commitment, as employees who possess positive feelings about their positions and organizations 'should be less likely to be absent from work' than those who harbour negative attitudes.

Understanding the organizational impact of absenteeism and its indicative potential, what is the organizational impact of employees who remain at work when it may be better for them to leave? This is known as presenteeism and consensus as to what constitutes presenteeism has been just as difficult to reach as it has for absenteeism.



## 2.2. Presenteeism

One of the earliest conceptualizations of presenteeism was “on-the-job absenteeism”, wherein employees are merely physically present (Trice & Belasco, 1967). Cooper (1996) defined presenteeism as “being at work when you should be at home either because you are ill or because you are working such long hours that you are no longer effective.” Simpson (1998) echoes the latter sentiment, suggesting that presenteeism is when an employee stays at work beyond the time that is needed for effective job performance. In essence, all definitions of presenteeism will include suboptimal performance as a key indicator, regardless of the cause of decreased performance, e.g. illness, injury, or other circumstances (Hemp, 2004).

As with absenteeism, the majority of research conducted on presenteeism has primarily looked at the connection between impaired health and suboptimal performance. According to Suzuki et al. (2015), presenteeism refers to the decrease in productivity in employees who are present but not functioning at full capacity due to illness or other medical conditions. This is in line with the European behavioural approach, which refers to presenteeism as a phenomenon whereby a worker turns up at work despite feeling so ill that he or she judges sick leave would have been appropriate (McKevitt, Morgan, Dundas & Holland, 1997). Incidentally, much of the research conducted on presenteeism is found in the medical literature (D’Abate & Eddy, 2007). However, there are those that believe the concept should include factors unrelated to health, including as presentees those who are “at work, but not working”, at least not up to their full capacity (Johns, 2010).

In a nod to such dissection, De Beer (2007) distinguishes between health and non-health related presenteeism, categorizing health related impairment *impaired presenteeism* and impairment unrelated to health, such as boredom, distraction, or stimulation as *motivational* or *disengagement presenteeism*. D’Abate and Eddy (2007) further dissect presenteeism in describing *nonwork-related presenteeism*, wherein employees are at work, but spend a portion of the workday engaging in personal business on the job. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that other researchers have argued that such dissection is of little importance because regardless of origin, the outcome remains the same, that of suboptimal performance (D’Abate & Eddy, 2007; Schultz, Chen & Edington, 2009).

Looking beyond the mere impact of health on functionality, no employee works at peak capacity all of the time. Shamansky (2002) operationalizes this through conceptualizing

presenteeism as a comparison of physical and functional absence. This conceptualization can be structured as a spectrum wherein employees coming to work in spite of illness are on one end, i.e. *sickness presence/lost health-related work productivity*, and those that are overly present, e.g. consistently working long hours and refusing to take their full holiday quota, are on the other (Juniper, 2012).

CIGNA's survey on absenteeism and presenteeism supports the aforementioned structure. The research consisted of telephone interviews with 1149 part-time and full-time employees. The participants' employment consisted of both white- and blue-collar employment. On average, the employees surveyed admitted to spending an average of 2.5 to 5 hours per week addressing issues of a personal nature at work. Additionally, 61% of the respondents reported that they went to work in spite of sickness and personal issue, both of which had a negative impact on their performance. Of those that missed work, 47% said it was due to sickness, while 22% said they missed work for a family-related issue (Casale, 2012)

As with absenteeism, there is an attempt to simplify the concept through distinguishing the root word from the concept. Bierla et al. (2013) believe that attending work while healthy constitutes presence and attending while sick, presenteeism. Regardless of their conceptualization, what is of interest is what they found to be the motivation of presenteeism; it appears presenteeism is an attempt by the employee to express organizational loyalty—this is in line with prior research. Lowe (2002) described the motivation for one continuing to work after what was expected in an attempt to demonstrate commitment or deal with job insecurity. Middaugh's (2007) definition concurs, finding that presenteeism is remaining present, "even if one is too sick, stressed, or distracted to be productive; the feeling that one needs to work extra hours, even if one has no extra work to do". Unfortunately, it appears that an employee's attempt to demonstrate loyalty through attending work in spite of health concerns or remaining at work beyond what is misguided.

### **2.2.1. Presenteeism Leads to Absenteeism**

First, what results from illness-related presenteeism, experts argue, is reduced productivity and quality of work, e.g. working at a slower pace, repeating completed tasks, and mistakes. Second, insofar that presenteeism corresponds with attending work while ill, it is clearly visible that, due to a faster decline of health conditions, presenteeism today results in absenteeism tomorrow (Bierla et al, 2013). Lastly, attending work while ill puts other employees at risk of infection (Hemp, 2004). Hemp (2004) even goes so far as to propose

that presenteeism is much costlier than absenteeism. Further, it is perhaps an even more insidious problem because it is not always readily apparent; someone's absence is obvious and a supervisor can compensate accordingly, but with presenteeism, illness is not always obvious and it is difficult to quantify its hindrance on the employee's performance (De Beer 2014).

Of these, there are two major definitions: going to work despite feeling unhealthy, and productivity loss at work due to health problems (Johns, 2010). Again, when compared with the ease of tracking the consequences of absenteeism, the indirect costs of presenteeism are largely invisible to employers because illness affects both the quantity, e.g. people might work more slowly than usual, for instance, or task repetition, and quality, e.g. they might make more or more serious mistakes of production (Hemp, 2004).

There is research that roughly estimates a reduction in productivity by more than a third when there is an employee working in spite of illness or ongoing medical condition (Chatterji & Tilley, 2002; Goetzel et al, 2004 (as cited in D'Abate & Eddy, 2007); Hemp, 2004). In fact, Palo and Pati (2013) believe that one of the reasons for such interest is the growing concern among organizations over how presenteeism leads to decreased levels of employee productivity. This is generally the line of research pursued in the US; the focus being productivity loss as a consequence of this specific behaviour (Johns, 2010). For example, an absent employee may be replaced by a performing one, but an underperforming employee may create customer dissatisfaction which may not be gained back (Cetin, 2016). Hence it is not reasonable to focus narrowly on productivity loss, and disregard productivity gain compared to absenteeism.

Furthermore, as with absenteeism, there are innumerable indirect costs as well (Goetzel et al. 2004 (as cited in D'abate & Eddy, 2007); Hemp, 2004). The illness-related literature alone suggests that the consequences of presenteeism can be disastrous to both the individual and organization consequences, including work impairment, changes in communication and concentration levels, both of which directly contribute to overall productivity and quality, functional absence, whether unable to accomplish tasks or decreased employee engagement (D'Abate & Eddy, 2007). In addition to productivity loss, chronic underperformance may have serious negative externalities like work accidents, decreased work satisfaction, burnout or future sickness (Demerouti, Le Blanc, Bakker, Schaufeli & Hox, 2009; Aronsson & Gustafsson 2005).

It is important to note that presenteeism is not about feigning illness in an attempt to avoid professional duties, nor is it avoiding professional duties to attend to personal concerns (Hemp, 2004). Instead, it refers to productivity loss resulting from real health problems. Underlying the research on presenteeism is the assumption that employees do not take their jobs lightly and most want and even need to continue working if possible. In fact, Deery, Walsh and Zatzick (2014) discovered that demanding working arrangements bring out higher levels of presenteeism which in turn result in the reducing employee's mental or physical energy and ultimately lead to higher absence. Presenteeism focuses on episodic and chronic ailments such as seasonal allergies, asthma, migraines and other kinds of headaches, back pain, arthritis, gastrointestinal disorders, and depression. Some authors have additionally observed a prospective relationship between presenteeism and sick leave, indicating that attending work while being ill may be a risk factor for future absenteeism (Bergström, Bodin, Hagberg, Aronsson, & Josephson, 2009; Janssens, Clays, De Clercq, De Bacquer & Braeckman, 2013). This can further impact an organization's bottom-line through an increase in employee health costs through an increase in health plan costs (Collins et al, 2005).

This is through presenteeism indirectly harming the health of an employee through accumulated fatigue resulting from inadequate recuperation from illness (Janssens et al., 2016). Employees will be less likely to resolve minor illnesses, thereby feeding work strain and a weakened state of physical and mental well-being in the long-term (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005, Demerouti et al., 2009). Further, sickness presenteeism has not only been found to be an independent risk factor for future poor general health and physical complaints, but also for mental health problems, exhaustion, and burnout (Bergström et al., 2009; Conway et al., 2014; Demerouti et al., 2009; Gustafsson & Marklund, 2011; Lu, Cooper, Lin, 2013; Lu & Lin, 2013 (cited after Janssens et al. 2016); Tayloan et al., 2012). What this implies is that presenteeism is not only an aggravator of underlying health issues, but a source of health issues, both physical and mental.

Employees understand this and engage in presenteeism in spite of their knowledge. Johns (2010) found that employees believe presenteeism is important in the potential provocation of existing medical conditions, damage to the quality of working life, and feeling ineffectual at work due to reduced productivity. The latter is bore out of Aronsson & Gustafsson's (2005) definition that presenteeism is "the phenomenon that people, despite complaints and ill health that should prompt them to take rest and take sick leave, go to work in any case,"

distinguishing between work-related demands for presence and personally related demands for presence.

There are also implications for organizations in terms of reviewing their policies which might be unwittingly or purposely promoting sickness presenteeism. In fact, if the organization has a culture where sickness absence is not seen in good light, where it is seen as good organizational citizenship, even attracting praise, then employees are likely to report more sickness presenteeism (Palo & Pati, 2013). Regardless of organizational awareness and intent, presenteeism has a clear effect on employee engagement, which impacts productivity, which in turn impacts the obtainment of strategic objectives and profits. Thus, presenteeism is a human risk factor that has a negative effect on the realization of organizational goals (De Beer, 2014).

### **2.3. Leaveism**

Gerich (2015) found evidence that some employees tend to substitute sickness absence with presenteeism and presenteeism with leaveism. Thus, leaveism is viewed as the link between sickness absence and sickness presence, i.e. presenteeism. One definition of leaveism is an employee's use of personal time, in whatever guise, to avoid the workplace when they are unwell or to take work home to complete outside standard employment hours due to the sheer volume asked of them (overload) (Hesketh & Cooper, 2014).

Specifically, employee behaviour is considered leaveism whenever one of the three following components is evident:

1. "Employees utilizing allocated time off such as annual leave entitlements, flexi hours banked, re-rostered rest days and so on, to take time off when they are in fact unwell."
2. "Employees taking work home that cannot be completed in normal working hours."
3. "Employees working while on leave or holiday to catch up" (Hesketh & Cooper, 2014, Hesketh et al., 2014).

Like presenteeism, leaveism is difficult to identify because such behaviour is not obvious, at least initially, nor is it questioned. Understanding this, Churchard (2015) proposed the following as indicators of leaveism:

1. Employees making requests for holiday at very short notice without explanation.
2. Managers receiving work emails in the evening or while staff are supposedly on holiday.

### 3. Employees visibly struggling with workloads during the day.

As for underlying motivation, leaveism appears to follow in the steps of presenteeism as well. Researchers have proposed four explanations for leaveism: First, leaveism could be motivated by high job enjoyment and loyalty, which leads employees to reduce expenses for the organization by substituting sick leave with other types of leave. Second, fear of job loss or demotion as a consequence of frequently utilized sick leave. On the same spectrum, leaveism may be motivated by the expectation that frequently utilized sick leave will be an obstacle to promotion. Third, an organization's attendance policies may encourage substitution of leaveism for sick leave. Fourth, and most likely, employees engage in leaveism to compensate for work overload (Hesketh et al., 2014).

Again, it appears that such behaviour is largely a function of the organization's culture, both formal and informal. As an example, an organization may measure the number of times an employee utilizes sick leave for periods of three days or longer within a specified timeframe, e.g. six months. To compensate for such policies, employees utilize allocated leave entitlements, flexi days and such, with the goal of avoiding a scar on their personnel record, because the record is examined in consideration of any development opportunity, such as promotions and opportunities for specialization or training courses, and future downsizing (Hesketh & Cooper, 2014).

However, unlike absenteeism, presenteeism, and leaveism, workaholism appears to be an intrinsically driven behaviour.

## **2.4. Workaholism**

One of the first definitions of workaholism was the "addiction to work, the compulsion or uncontrollable need to work incessantly" (Oates, 1971 (as cited in Andreassen et al., 2010)). What is the behavioural profile of a workaholic, how can we operationalize this definition? A workaholic is an employee who continues to focus on work even when away from the work site, working beyond organizational or financial expectations, needs, or demands at the neglect and detriment of other areas of life, such as personal and social (Scott, Moore & Miceli, 1997; Ng et al., 2007).

Interestingly, researchers have also attempted to determine if workaholism can also be mediated externally. For example, Spence and Robbins (1992) split workaholism into two branches, enthusiastic and non-enthusiastic workaholics, on the basis of their self-report

scale, the WorkBAT. Andreassen et al. (2010) further developed Spence and Roberts's conceptualization and created three measurements to determine the branch, which they referred to as the *workaholism triad*.

First, there is Work Involvement, e.g. spends free time on projects and other constructive activities. Next is Drive, e.g. feels obligated to work even when it is not enjoyable. Last, there is Enjoyment of Work, e.g. does more work than is expected, just for the fun of it. Enthusiastic workaholics are characterized by high work involvement, internal pressure to work that underlies high drive, and high work enjoyment. Conversely, non-enthusiastic workaholics have lower work enjoyment, although they may demonstrate high work involvement and drive to work (Andreassen, 2010). However, consensus is missing among researchers surrounding the use of the workaholism triad, in particular, there is question as to the relevance of work enjoyment (Andreassen, 2014).

Workaholism follows the general criteria for addiction (Andreassen et al., 2012, Brown, 1993, Griffiths, 2005; Wojdylo, 2013, Andreassen, 2014)

1. Salience, i.e. preoccupation with work
2. Conflict, i.e. work is in conflict with personal and others' needs
3. Mood modification
4. Tolerance, also dependence
5. Withdrawal
6. Relapse
7. Consequences indicative of maladaptation, i.e. work to the detriment of health, relationships, etc.

Dependence, also described as tolerance, and withdrawal alone are enough to consider a concept in line with addiction (O'Brien, Volkow & Li, 2006). With all seven criteria evident, it appears that workaholism is effectively a form of addiction. Therefore, workaholism appears to include addictive and obsessive-compulsive tendencies, wherein satisfaction is derived only from work, due to intrinsic motivation, thereby enhancing the necessity to work, which results in inordinately long hours in order to experience the positive emotional positive state, and ultimately eclipses other areas of life (McMillan, O'Driscoll, Michael, Marsh, & Brady, 2001; Robinson, 1996, Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Snir & Harpaz, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative to distinguish someone who can be described as a workaholic and someone who is a hard worker.

Formally, Andreassen, Hetland, and Pallesen (2014) explain workaholism as “being overly concerned about work, to be driven by strong and uncontrollable work motivation, and to spend so much energy and effort into work that it impairs private relationships, spare-time activities and/or health.”

### **2.4.1. Impact**

Although some researchers have noted positive aspects of workaholism, such as high work motivation (Scott et al., 1997, Robinson, 2007), the evidence is overwhelming that the consequences of workaholism are predominantly negative consequences (Oates, 1971 (as cited in Andreassen, 2010) Shimazu et al., 2010, Robinson, 2007, Schaufeli, Bakker, Van Rhenen, 2009). In general, workaholism is associated with ill-health and poor job performance (Killinger, 1991; Spence and Robbins, 1992; Schaufeli et al., 2008, Taris et al., 2005, Kanai et al., 1996, Burke, 1999, 2001, 2006, Shimazu et al., 2010, Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009). Specifically, workaholics have demonstrated to be at an increased risk for heart disease, more likely to report subjective health complaints, higher levels of negative affect and other emotional difficulties, as well as increased job stress that leads to burnout (Burke & Matthiesen, 2004; Burke et al., 2004; Andreassen et al., 2007; Shimazu et al. 2010).

The effect is both direct and indirect. In one study, researchers examined the connection between workaholism and health-related outcomes from a sample of 199 staff members of a large Dutch retail organization. They found that workaholism had a direct effect on emotional exhaustion scores and an indirect effect on exhaustion via perceived job demands (Taris et al., 2005).

Those involved with the workaholic are unsurprisingly negatively affected, as workaholism has been linked to marital and other relational dissatisfaction to include increased levels of physical, psychological, and self-esteem issues in children (Killinger, 1991; Robinson et al., 2006; Chamberlin & Zhang, 2009). Although a workaholic may be an organization’s ideal employee at face, once examined, it appears they may in fact be detrimental to the organizations through inaccurate performance standards, decreased employee morale via increased toxic competition, engaging in trivial work activities, lacking creativity, and increased health costs. They may contribute slightly more to organizational performance than others, but the costs for the workaholic employees far outweigh the marginal benefit organizations may reap from holding this employee profile as the ideal (Fassel, 1990 (as



cited in Bovornusvakool, Vodanovich, Ariyabuddhiphongs & Ngamake, 2012); Mudrack, 2004; Naughton, 1987; Porter, 2001).

Ultimately, researchers can agree with the definition of workaholism, proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2008), “the tendency to work extra hard (the behavioural dimension) and being obsessed with work (the cognitive dimension), which manifests itself in working compulsively.” This definition agrees with the most recent analysis of scholarly definitions which conclude that working hard at the expense of other important life roles concurrent with a strong internal drive to work are the two defining of workaholism (Ng et al., 2007). Therefore, given the cost to self and external realms of influence, workaholism is a concept that organizations must also address and avoid encouraging.

### **3. Method**

It is our contention that all four concepts are connected and we will attempt to demonstrate one such connection. Additionally, the research has demonstrated decreased morale, job satisfaction, performance and consequent decreased customer satisfaction, increased turnover, and employee costs, e.g. healthcare, overtime, training, etc. Therefore, it is imperative for us to attempt to validate past findings and in this research we will find out whether presenteeism, absenteeism and workaholism are connected to employee performance and in which way.

The following are our hypotheses:

H1. Presenteeism has negative relationship with performance.

H2. Absenteeism has negative relationship with performance.

H3. Workaholism has negative relationship with performance.

We will also try to demonstrate a connection between absenteeism and presenteeism. As indicated above, it is our contention that the two are connected and our hypothesis is as follows:

H4. Presenteeism is positively correlated with absenteeism.

The method for gathering data within this research was a survey. The survey was administered to a sample of employees in Estonia and Poland. The request to participate in the study was sent to all participants by e-mail. The participants were asked to answer three surveys about absenteeism, presenteeism, workaholism and performance.

Participation in the study was anonymous and the participants were informed of their anonymity in the email request. The participant was given the option to enter their email address to receive feedback about their answers. Upon completion, the results of the survey were instantly forwarded to the server of Tallinn University of Technology where they were saved and automatically analysed. If the participant had opted to receive their results, they received an automated e-mail with a personalized analysis of their results. The e-mail included the reliability index of all responses, as well as the presenteeism and absenteeism indexes, workaholism index, and performance index with brief explanations for each topic. The total results were gathered and analysed using MS Excel. The data for absenteeism, presenteeism and job performance was analysed using correlation analysis. Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to determine strength and direction of the relationship between variables. P-value of 0.05 was chosen to determine statistical significance. Reliability for all surveys was determined using Cronbach's alpha.

### **3.1. Measuring instruments**

In this research, the following surveys were used: absenteeism-presenteeism, workaholism, and performance surveys.

The absenteeism-presenteeism survey was created in Estonia in 2015/16. The survey was validated and the reliability was checked in an Estonian-Polish study. 241 employees from Estonia and 225 employees from Poland participated in that study. The average age of Estonian employees was  $37.45 \pm 10.23$  and average age of Polish employees was  $25.9 \pm 9.98$ . Of the 241 participants in Estonia, 52 were men and 209 women. For Poland's 225 respondents, 91 were men and 132 women. The absenteeism-presenteeism survey was statistically analysed and proven to be valid. When assessing the reliability of the survey, the Cronbach alpha score was 0.85 – 0.90. A scientific article has been written about the study to evaluate the reliability and validity of the absenteeism-presenteeism survey and it will be published in a scientific journal 2016/17.

The first part of the absenteeism-presenteeism survey measures absenteeism-presenteeism work culture and consists of six statements that the respondent needs to answer on a 6-point Likert scale: Very strongly disagree = 1 point; strongly disagree = 2 points; disagree = 3 points; agree = 4 points; strongly agree = 5 points; very strongly agree = 6 points.

The second part of the absenteeism-presenteeism survey measures presenteeism at work and consists of 14 statements about sickness presenteeism and on-the-job presenteeism. As well, the respondent needs to answer the statements using a 6-point Likert scale: Never, extremely rarely = 1 point; very rarely = 2 points; rarely = 3 points; often = 4 points; very often = 5 points; extremely often, always = 6 points.

The third part of the survey measures absenteeism at work that is not related to the employee's health. In this section, there are 8 statements that the respondent needs to answer the frequency of using a 6-point Likert scale: Never, extremely rarely = 1 point; very rarely = 2 points; rarely = 3 points; often = 4 points; very often = 5 points; extremely often, always = 6 points.

The fourth part measures performance of the employees and consists of 16 statements regarding performance that the respondent needs to evaluate on a 12-point scale: Strongly disagree = 1 point; strongly agree = 12 points.

The workaholism questionnaire includes 7 statements that measure multiple aspects of workaholism which the respondent has to evaluate on a 6-point Likert scale (1=lowest and 6=highest). When assessing the reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.88-0.96.

The demographic questions include the respondents' gender, age, marital status, number of children, education level and work tenure.

### **3.2. Sample**

For the absenteeism and presenteeism test and performance test, the sample consisted of 266 employees in Estonia and 226 in Poland. Of the Estonian sample, 52 were male and 209 were female. The average age for the Estonian sample was 37.45.

Of the Polish sample, 91 were male and 132 were female. The average age for the Polish sample was 25.90.

For the workaholism questionnaire, the sample consisted of 356 employees from Estonia and 227 employees from Poland. Of the Estonian sample, 87 were male and 263 were female. The average age for the Estonian sample was 35.94.

Of the Polish sample, 89 were male and 133 were female. The average age for the Polish sample was 25.74.

Both of the samples were convenience samples and the participants were found using a snowball method.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Absenteeism

The means were calculated for all absenteeism questions and compiled into one overall absenteeism scale from  $\leq 2$  to 6 being the highest. The lowest given score was 1 and the highest 6 for both groups. The mean for Estonian respondents was 2,33 with a standard deviation of 1,32 while the mean for Polish respondents was 3,84 with a standard deviation of 1,34. This means that the Estonian respondents rate their absenteeism on average lower by 1,51 points than the Polish respondents. The standard deviations are almost the same for both sample groups.

**Table 1.** The number of Estonian and Polish respondents of the absenteeism questionnaire, the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum responses.

	EST	PL
N	266	226
M	2,33	3,84
SD	1,32	1,34
MIN	1	1
MAX	6	6

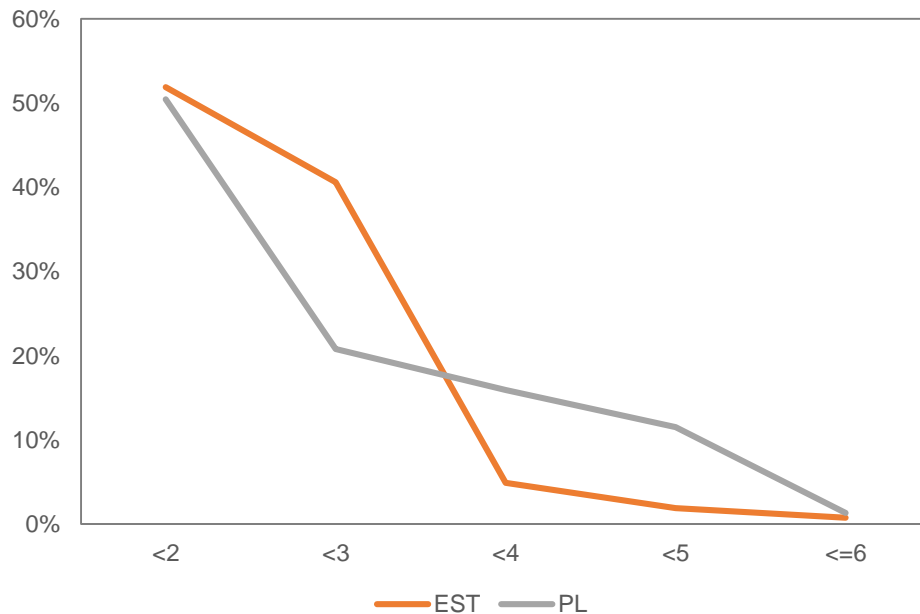
51,9% of the Estonian respondents rated 2 or lower on the absenteeism scale, 40,6% rated 3, and 4,9% rated 4.

50,4% of the Polish respondents rated 2 or lower on the absenteeism scale, 20,8% rated 3, 15,9% rated 4, and 11,5% rated 5.

This table illustrates how the majority of both sample groups rate low on the absenteeism scale, but the Estonian responses are skewed toward lower scores while the Polish responses are more evenly distributed across the scale.

**Table 2.** The Estonian and Polish results for the absenteeism questionnaire.

<i>Scale</i>	N		%	
	EST	PL	EST	PL
$\leq 2$	138	114	51,9%	50,4%
$2 \leq 3$	108	47	40,6%	20,8%
$3 \leq 4$	13	36	4,9%	15,9%
$4 \leq 5$	5	26	1,9%	11,5%
$5 \leq 6$	2	3	0,8%	1,3%
TOTAL	266	226	100%	100%



**Figure 1.** The Estonian and Polish results for the absenteeism questionnaire.

Absenteeism was demonstrated to be negatively correlated with performance  $r = -0.21$  ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $N = 789$ ). Even though the correlation is weak, it shows that our first hypothesis is confirmed and absenteeism has a negative connection to performance. The weak correlation could be due to absenteeism being a topic on which participants may answer how they think is more socially acceptable.

## 4.2. Presenteeism

The means were calculated for all presenteeism questions and compiled into one overall presenteeism scale from  $\leq 2$  to 6 being the highest. The lowest given score was 1,43 for the Estonian sample group and 1 for the Polish sample group. The highest given score was 5,64 for both groups. The mean for Estonian respondents was 3,21 with a standard deviation of

0,68 while the mean for Polish respondents was 3,18 with a standard deviation of 0,93. This shows that the presenteeism results are quite similar for both sample groups, there are no major differences.

**Table 3.** The number of Estonian and Polish respondents of the presenteeism questionnaire, the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum responses.

	EST	PL
N	266	226
M	3,21	3,18
SD	0,68	0,93
MIN	1,43	1,00
MAX	5,64	5,64

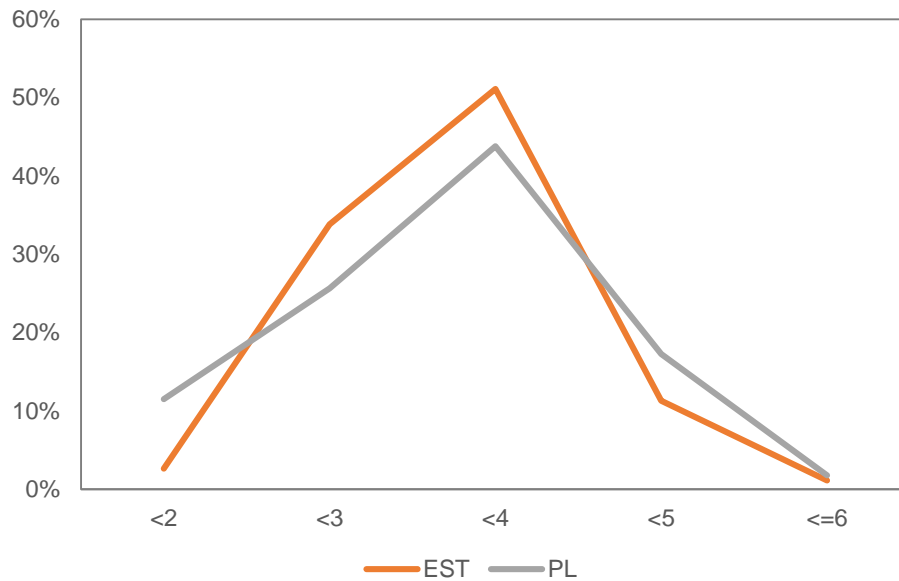
51,1% of Estonian participants rated 4 on the overall presenteeism scale, 33,8% rated 3, and 11,4% rated 5.

43,8% of the Polish participants rated 4 on the overall presenteeism scale, 25,7% rated 3, 17,3% rated 5, and 11,5% rated 2 or lower.

Like in the absenteeism results, it is also visible here that the Polish respondents are a bit more conservative with their answers and their results are distributed more evenly than the Estonian results. Estonian respondents have answered more radically than the Polish respondents.

**Table 4.** The Estonian and Polish results for the presenteeism questionnaire

<i>Scale</i>	EST	PL	EST	PL
≤ 2	7	26	2,6%	11,5%
2 ≤ 3	90	58	33,8%	25,7%
3 ≤ 4	136	99	51,1%	43,8%
4 ≤ 5	30	39	11,3%	17,3%
5 ≤ 6	3	4	1,1%	1,8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	266	226	100,0%	100,0%



**Figure 2.** The Estonian and Polish results for the presenteeism questionnaire

Presenteeism was demonstrated to be negatively correlated with performance  $r = -0.33$  ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $N = 789$ ). The negative correlation shows that our second hypothesis is confirmed. The correlation is also weak, but it could also be due to presenteeism being a topic where respondents answer in a socially acceptable way.

The absenteeism and presenteeism scales are positively correlated  $r = 0.47$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $N = 789$ ). This confirms our fourth hypothesis correct that absenteeism is positively related to presenteeism.

### 4.3. Workaholism

The workaholism test had a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 6. There were 356 Estonian respondents and 227 Polish respondents. The lowest given score was 1 and the highest score 6 for both sample groups. The mean score for Estonian respondents was 3,07 with a standard deviation of 1,11. The mean score for Polish respondents was 3,16 with a standard deviation of 1,17. Again, the results of Estonian and Polish sample groups are very similar and there are no major differences here.

**Table 5.** The number of Estonian and Polish respondents of the workaholism test

	EST	PL
N	356	227
M	3,07	3,16
SD	1,11	1,17
MIN	1	1
MAX	6	6

21,6% of the Estonian respondents rated 3,5 on the workaholism scale, 14,9% rated 4, and 14,0% rated 3.

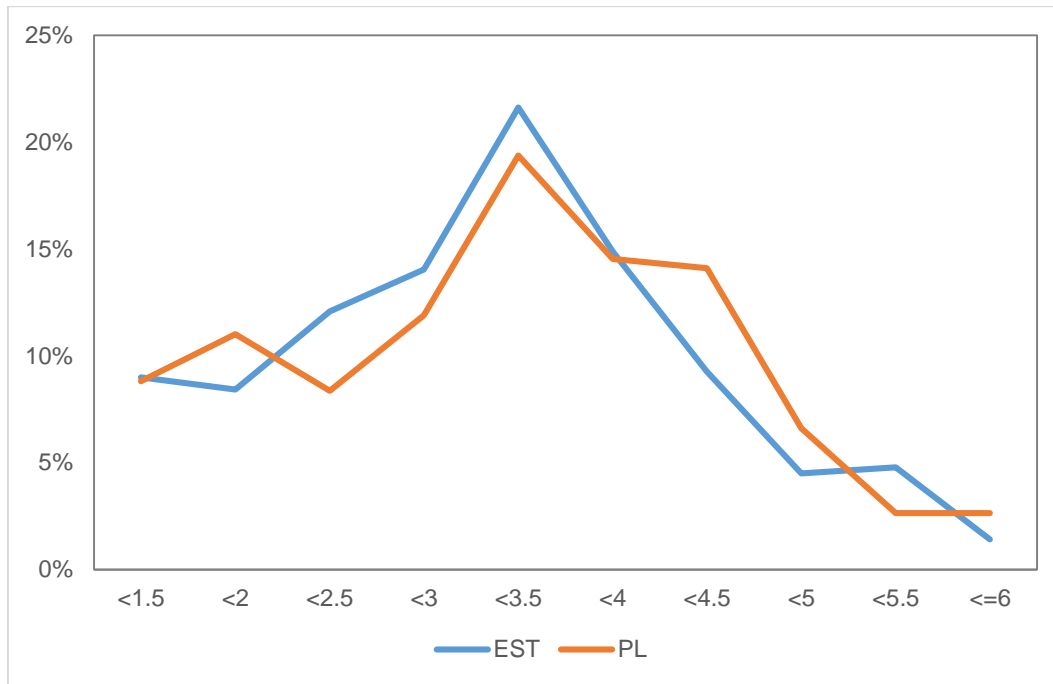
19,4% of the Polish respondents rated 3,5 on the workaholism scale ( $\leq 1,5$  to 6), 14,5% rated 4, and 14,1% rated 4,5.

The answers of Estonian respondents are distributed more on the lower part of the scale – the majority has scored between 2.5 and 4 whereas the Polish respondents answers are spread out more evenly – majority from 1.5 to 4.5.

**Table 6.** The Estonian and Polish total results of the workaholism test

<i>Scale</i>	EST	PL	EST	PL
$\leq 1.5$	32	20	9,0%	8,8%
$1.5 \leq 2$	30	25	8,4%	11,0%
$2 \leq 2.5$	43	19	12,1%	8,4%
$2.5 \leq 3$	50	27	14,0%	11,9%
$3 \leq 3.5$	77	44	21,6%	19,4%
$3.5 \leq 4$	53	33	14,9%	14,5%
$4 \leq 4.5$	33	32	9,3%	14,1%
$4.5 \leq 5$	16	15	4,5%	6,6%
$5 \leq 5.5$	17	6	4,8%	2,6%
$5.5 \leq 6$	5	6	1,4%	2,6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>100,0%</b>





**Figure 3.** The Estonian and Polish results of the workaholism questionnaire

Workaholism was found to be negatively correlated with performance  $r = -0.21$  ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $N = 148$ ). There is a weak negative correlation between workaholism and performance, which confirms our third hypothesis of negative connection between workaholism and performance.

**Table 7.** The correlations between absenteeism, presenteeism, workaholism and performance

	PERFORMANCE	ABSENTEEISM	PRESENTEEISM	WORKAHOLISM
PERFORMANCE		$r = -0.21$ ( $p < 0.05$ ; $N = 789$ )	$r = -0.33$ ( $p < 0.05$ ; $N = 789$ )	$r = -0.21$ ( $p < 0.05$ ; $N = 148$ )
ABSENTEEISM	$r = -0.21$ ( $p < 0.05$ ; $N = 789$ )		$r = 0.47$ ( $p < 0.05$ ; $N = 789$ )	
PRESENTEEISM	$r = -0.33$ ( $p < 0.05$ ; $N = 789$ )	$r = 0.47$ ( $p < 0.05$ ; $N = 789$ )		

## 5. Discussion

In this study, we were able to provide further evidence regarding the connections between absenteeism, presenteeism, workaholism and performance and demonstrate the existence of

a connection between absenteeism and presenteeism. Prior research has primarily focused on determining definitional consensus and the impact of individual behaviours to performance. As indicated above, absenteeism, presenteeism, leaveism, and workaholism have consistently been demonstrated to negatively impact performance. However, there has only been speculation as to whether there is a causal connection between any, if not all, of the concepts.

Our research supports past research indicating that absenteeism, presenteeism and workaholism are correlated with reduced performance. Additionally, we also provided striking evidence that there are exceptionally high levels of workaholism within the modern workforce. Lastly, and perhaps with the greatest implications to future research, we were able to provide evidence that absenteeism and presenteeism are related.

For the field, continued observation of phenomena increases the validity of the claim that such phenomena exist. In particular, given the mountains of evidence pertaining to the negative correlation between absenteeism, presenteeism, workaholism and performance, our findings that such correlations exist is unsurprising. As for workaholism, we were quite surprised and alarmed to find that over 60% of both Estonian and Polish respondents demonstrated workaholism levels of *high* and *very high*. While not providing much information on its face, the findings should motivate further research investigating potentially correspondent behaviours, such as presenteeism. The most interesting findings of our study are those that demonstrated a positive correlation between absenteeism and presenteeism. For the field, this is the first step in determining causality. If this relationship is repeatedly observed, other relationships can be explored, even leading to evidence of a causal chain.

The practical implications of the findings are obvious. As to our first set of hypotheses, all three were negatively correlated with decreased performance. Therefore, it is important for managers to maintain an awareness of how the organization's culture encourages either behaviour, respective levels of each behaviour, e.g. absenteeism, presenteeism and workaholism and their impact. The best use of this information is to influence HR professionals to assess their culture and create strategies to decrease the frequency and impact of both.

As for workaholism, if the evidence in prior and current research holds true, then such high rates of workaholism should be alarming to management. Given the countries' relatively recent entry into the modern economy, such high rates of workaholism could be indicative of an attempt at „catch up“ to other more established economies. Regardless, as with the

above behaviours, it is incumbent upon HR professionals to evaluate their organizations' cultures to determine how they are encouraging such behaviour and work to adjust that culture. This could be a difficult task depending on the overarching culture within which the organization operates, for workaholism may be a part of one's cultural identity. Persuading management and other employees to consider a less demanding culture may be impossible. However, given that performance is a subjective measurement, it is interesting to note that employees are apparently aware to some degree that the higher their rates of behaviours associated with workaholism, the less effective their work. Therefore, if employees are made acutely aware of the connection between specific behaviours and actual productivity, they may be more open to promoting cultural change. The first step in adjusting management strategy is comparing actual productivity measures with performance to determine agreement. If agreement can be established, then both management and employees may then be motivated to adjust and promote alternative work cultures.

Regarding our last hypothesis for absenteeism and presenteeism's relationality, the practical implications are endless. Now that a relationship has been observed, it will be important to create tools for managers that will allow them to identify presenteeism more precisely while also influencing policies that do not penalize an employee for leaving work to recover. Additionally, it will be important to replicate the findings before moving to the next phase of determining causality.

If causality can be determined, then management will have the justification to adjust policy to encourage what is sometimes counterintuitive. From there, or in concert, other relationships can be explored and causality determined.

For instance, does workaholism result in leaveism and/or presenteeism behaviours? If so, does presenteeism then lead to absenteeism? For instance, employees could be engaging in sickness presenteeism due to tendencies towards workaholism, coming to work sick and if it has lasted for a while, they are unable to perform and need to take sick leave. Ultimately, if researchers can continue to fine-tune definitions and parameters, whilst demonstrating relationship and causality, arguments for more employee-centric policies could be established which would ultimately result in greater productivity. However, these findings are only tentative as the study possesses minor limitations.

The first and probably most important limitation is how data was collected, as both a convenience and snowball sample. While such sampling methods allow for easier data collection, both methods are difficult to create external validity due to the factors included in the actual data gathering. For instance, with a snowball sample, community bias can occur

because a referral network is likely to have similar characteristics that may not generalize to the population at large. Additionally, as with all studies from westernized cultures, it may be difficult to generalize the findings to other cultures that may have different conceptual definitions. Lastly, the sample size was relatively small and the correlations weren't more than moderate. This could be a function of the sample size, the sample method, or a combination of both.

Therefore, randomized, larger samples with better controls will be necessary. Because it has been demonstrated that all behaviours in one way or another are related to decreased job performance, future research should begin to investigate conceptual relationality. Likewise, technology has enabled greater connectivity between employer and employee which will result in better opportunities to investigate and refine leaveism as a concept. Because of this, relationality of all concepts will be able to be explored. Once determined, then researchers can move onto causality. If this is the case, demonstrating reliable indicators of such behaviours will result in interventions that will sever the causal chain before performance is greatly diminished.

Despite some of the limitations of the study, given the current atmosphere wherein companies are beginning to offer perks such as unlimited vacation, remote working agreements, and reduced work hours to high status employees, it is likely that there is at least an intuitive understanding taking hold that building organizational culture upon past ideas of productivity is in fact counterproductive. Further research will likely uncover causality and once there is enough empirical evidence supporting causality, coupled with objective figures as to the cost of such behaviours and/or promotion of ideals, businesses will have no excuse not to generalize that practice to employees of all levels. Lastly, when employees are given more time to pursue other interests, spend time with family and friends, or merely protect their health, research on the indirect benefits can then be conducted that could have an impact on governmental policy. Regardless, if businesses want to increase productivity and gain an edge in their industries, it is imperative that they begin to create policies and foster cultures that are counterintuitive.

## **Resume**

As established from previous research, concepts of absenteeism, presenteeism and leaveism, even though fairly new, are gaining more and more importance in the modern world of work. Workaholism, which as a research topic is not as new, can now be seen to be connected to absenteeism, presenteeism and leaveism or can even be a possible cause. Although

organizations usually focus on the visible problems, such as absenteeism, now with the results from new research, they have the ability to see also the more hidden issues such as presenteeism and leaveism, which also can be the predecessors for absenteeism. Seeing the bigger picture helps organizations to find tools to prevent leaveism and presenteeism at an early stage and therefore make the whole organization healthier and more successful.

We believe that this research can be considered a successful first step towards investigating the connections between absenteeism, presenteeism and workaholism even further. Our findings show that there is a connection between absenteeism and job performance and also presenteeism and job performance. Causality is not defined here so absenteeism and presenteeism could be causing poor performance or it could be vice versa. It was also found that absenteeism and presenteeism are positively correlated, but again it is not known if one is causing the other and how. One way to discover more about the causality would be to start tackling presenteeism at the workplace by changing policies about coming to work while sick, subsidising first days of sick leave for the employees so they would not lose out on salary and raising awareness about the negative influence of coming to work sick on the employee's and also his/her colleagues' health. After that it would be possible to observe if and how absenteeism and performance rates change.

One recommendation for future research is also to incorporate leaveism – a very new concept in research world but since the technology today allows us to be in constant contact with our work, it is definitely worth investigating. This ties in with workaholism, which, even though a previously researched topic, has potential for new discoveries in relation with absenteeism and presenteeism. In conclusion, this study has laid the foundation for the next phase of research in work and organizational psychology.

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