

Contributing Factors: Work Addiction

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Psychological Health and Safety in the Occupational Therapy Workplace

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This presentation begins with the definition of work addiction. Afterwards, it highlights the differences between passion/engagement and workaholism. The main difference is that engagement refreshes and reduces the chances of burnout. Workaholics often feel stressed, pressured, and exhausted, yet also compelled to continue working. The 7 elements of addiction from the “Wellbeing in the Workplace,” article are briefly covered. The consequences of irrational and obsessive working patterns are examined before reviewing the factors of workaholism.

The main factors are: work culture, personality traits, technology/convenience, workaholic leadership, and high workload demands.

Work culture consists of the socio-cultural and economic context. As a capitalist society, there is heavy emphasis upon productivity and efficiency. As such, employees are encouraged to stand out by working hard. Employer's value these traits and are more likely to reward workaholics rather than fixing their habits.

Personality is relatively immutable. Employees that feel anxious, depressed, or guilty may distract themselves with work rather than facing their issues directly. Even when they know about the negative impacts to their health, it is hard for them to change their method of coping. The addiction tells them that they have not done “enough” work. Other employees may be unaware, or deny being workaholics in the first place. It is important to encourage people to be engaged, autonomous, and intrinsically motivated by their work, but not obsessed.

Technology has made it convenient to browse and work even when we are off site. The increased access also carries an expectation that Occupational Therapists will work and simultaneously research their evolving field of expertise. The increased blending of work and personal life removes boundaries that are essential to rest and relaxation.

Work addiction often has a high degree of emphasis on control. Refusing to delegate, and insistence on perfection are warning signs of work addiction. Workaholics that display commitment may garner promotions to administrative positions. Unfortunately, their high standards may cause coworkers to feel discouraged and resentful. Breakdown in communications and stressful working environments may actually reduce productivity.

Workloads are likely to increase as the ‘baby boomer’ population progresses in age. This higher demand for Occupational Therapy services is accompanied by a reduction in resources. The Corporate Work Model emphasizes maximum efficiency, which increases stress on employee's because some assessments require more funds. Absence of adequate finances will force Occupational therapists to find creative solutions, which costs time and energy. This also negatively impacts health by increasing sickness, like cardiovascular disease.

Work addiction is especially prevalent in Occupational Therapists due to our desire to connect with our clients. This desire to provide better service sometimes comes at the cost of our own health. We tend to ignore our own needs and this increases the risk of depersonalization, with coworkers and clients. Burnout must be combated by high levels of vigor, dedication and absorption. By increasing awareness of workaholic patterns, it is hoped that therapists will attempt to

balance their personal and work domains. Taking care of our own health is the first step in providing better care for our clients.

KEY REFERENCES AND URLs

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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