

The Effect of Employee Ambidexterity and Workaholism on Perceived Employability: An Empirical Study on the Private Banking Sector in Egypt

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to examine the relation between both employee ambidexterity and workaholism as independent variables and perceived employability as a dependent variable. In addition, the paper aims to test whether employee ambidexterity and workaholism can be considered as antecedents to perceived employability. Interviews were conducted with the employees in the private banking sector in Egypt to explore the relationship between the research variables. Common method bias techniques were adopted to avoid any errors and to reduce the bias. Three hundred survey questionnaires were distributed on a non-probabilistic sample that was specifically selected for the study due to its sensitive nature. The results suggest that there is a positive direct relationship between the independent variables “employee ambidexterity” and “workaholism” and the dependent variable “perceived employability.” Both independent variables were found to be antecedents to the dependent variable. Future research should include employees in the public banking sector in Egypt and other sectors and regions in order to help generalize the findings. To the best of our knowledge, there are no previous studies that examine how these two independent variables (employee ambidexterity and workaholism) can help employees achieve better job opportunities and act as antecedents to the dependent variable (perceived employability).

Keywords: employee ambidexterity, common method bias, Egypt, private banking sector, perceived employability, thematic analysis, workaholism

1. Introduction

The study examines how an employee with explorative and exploitative character traits (dimensions of ambidexterity) who is identified by their ability and willingness to work compulsively and excessively (dimensions of workaholism) will be able to achieve better internal and/or external job opportunities (dimensions of perceived employability).

The objective of the study was to gain a better understanding of the employee (banker) – organization (bank) relationship at different hierarchical levels by examining whether employee ambidexterity and workaholism are antecedents to perceived employability and if workaholism can be considered as a positive contribution rather than being a negative drawback. A qualitative study was conducted in order to examine whether the relationships proposed exist or not.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Employee Ambidexterity

Employee ambidexterity is defined as ‘*The behavioural orientation of employees towards combining exploitation- and exploration-related activities within a certain period of time*’ (Mom, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2007). That is to say, employee ambidexterity can be described as the employee’s attempt to explore and exploit the different available options (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Kang & Snell, 2009; Lulu, Rowley, & Dinh, 2018). Employees are encouraged to do two things that seem to be contradictory: follow the rules and comply with the existing work processes and at the same time be inventive and creative. The ability to do both those things is referred to as employee ambidexterity and consists of both pursuing explorative as well as exploitative activities in equal measures (March, 1991; Caniels,

Neghina, & Schaetsaert, 2017). Explorative activities are related to innovation, risk taking and experimentation, on the other hand, exploitative activities are linked to enhancing products, services, organizational and efficiency procedures (March, 1991; Holmqvist & Spicer, 2012). Exploitative activities and explorative activities are supposed to reinforce one another. The more heightened the level of explorative activities and exploitative activities the more heightened the level of ambidexterity which in turn leads to better organizational performance (Rosing, Frese, & Bausch, 2011). Employee ambidexterity can be viewed as an antecedent to perceived employability.

In this study, we adopt a contextual view of ambidexterity (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). This is a balanced view, where both explorative and exploitative activities are either present or absent in equal amounts. The other view of ambidexterity is a structural one (Lavie, Stettner, & Tushman, 2010). This is an unbalanced view, where one activity outweighs and dominates the other (Benner & Tushman, 2003; Puranam, Singh, & Zollo, 2006).

1.1.2 Workaholism

Workaholism can be defined as ‘*An excessive involvement in work that goes beyond normal job requirements*’ (Gillet et al., 2017). Employees who are usually explorative and exploitative will tend to work more than their colleagues and even sometimes experience the uncontrollable need to work intensively, i.e., workaholism (Oates, 1971). There are studies that indicate that there are two components to workaholism: work enjoyment and the drive to work (Malinowska & Tokarz, 2019). Previous research has also shown that workaholism can be considered as a three-dimensional construct, these dimensions are the affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions (Tokarz & Malinowska, 2014; Gillet et al., 2021).

There is no agreement or consensus in the previous research regarding the meaning and conceptualization of workaholism (Burke 2000; Johnstone & Johnston 2005; McMillan & O’Driscoll, 2006; Van Beek, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2011). It is viewed as a negative attribute in most studies (Lubatkin et al., 2006; Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009; Griffiths, 2011; Robinson, 2013) and as a positive attribute in others (Andreassen et al., 2014). From a negative perspective, previous research indicated that workaholism leads to conflicts that arise between the work-life and family-life. In addition, it has a negative effect on an employee’s well-being and health (Andreassen, 2013). From a positive perspective, workaholism can be considered as an employee’s ability to be more involved, committed and dedicated in their tasks and goals. Workaholism can be viewed as an antecedent to perceived employability.

1.1.3 Perceived Employability

Perceived employability can be defined as ‘*An individual’s chance of a job on the internal and/or external labour market*’ (Forrier & Sels, 2003). In other words, it is about seeking, gaining, and maintaining a new job opportunity (Berntson & Marklund, 2007; Veld, Semeijn, van Vuuren, 2016). Perceived employability can also be defined as ‘*The individual’s subjective perception of his/her capacity for obtaining and retaining a job and obtaining a new one if required*’ (S. Kim, H. Kim, & Lee, 2015).

The concept of employability was researched in several different disciplines such as: psychology, education, and management (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Santos, Ferreira, & Pinho, 2019). Since we are interested in perceived employability, we will focus on the psychological literature as it pertains to employability (Berntson et al., 2006; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Silla et al., 2009; Kirves et al., 2013). Vanhercke et al. (2014) found that perceived employability is linked to employee dispositions and competencies. They also indicate that not all aspects of perceived employability should be treated as if they are of equal importance (Philippaers et al., 2016). Perceived employability can be viewed as including the different “possibilities” of employment (Berntson & Marklund, 2007; Muhlbock, Steiber, & Kittel, 2020). These possibilities will depend on structural factors, personal factors, and the interaction between the two (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Ng et al., 2005; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007).

1.2 Contribution/Originality

To the best of our knowledge there are no previous studies that examine all three variables (employee ambidexterity, workaholism and perceived employability) together. The study’s contribution is to fill this gap in research by attempting to prove that a relationship exists between these variables. In addition, most of the previous research (Cao, Simsek, & Zhang, 2010; Junni et al., 2013; Zacher, Robinson, & Rosing, 2014) identified and described factors that led to organizational ambidexterity. Very few studies focused on employee ambidexterity (Janssen, 2000).

There is conflicting research on how to view workaholism, i.e., as a positive or a negative. This study will try to focus on proving the positive aspects of workaholism in relation with employee ambidexterity. Another contribution of the study is that it helps us examine how the meaning of certain terms (such as, workaholism) is comprehended differently across time. For example, most of the previous literature viewed the workaholism negatively and indicated that it was

one of the sources that contributed to job burnout. Our analysis views workaholism positively, as a competency that not all employees possess. Our study views workaholism as an addition and a skill to those employees that possess it. The study will also examine whether or not both employee ambidexterity and workaholism can be considered as antecedents to perceived employability.

1.3 Hypotheses

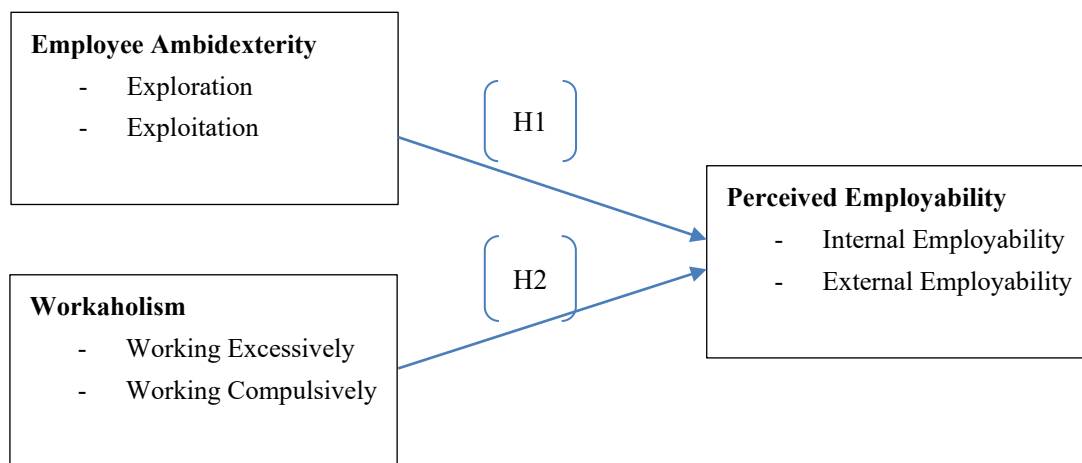
The presence of employee ambidexterity and workaholism, with all the capabilities and competencies that come with them can be considered as a competitive advantage and an inimitable skill for employees in their search for better jobs and better corporate positions, i.e., their perceived employability.

H1- There is a positive relationship between employee ambidexterity and perceived employability.

H2- There is a positive relationship between workaholism and perceived employability.

2. Method

2.1 Model



The aim of the model is to examine if a relationship exists between the independent variable (employee ambidexterity) and the dependent variable (perceived employability) and if a relationship exists between the independent variable (workaholism) and the dependent variable (perceived employability). Multiple linear regressions are used to test these two hypotheses.

$$Y1 = 1.733 + 0.184 X1 + 0.323 X2 \quad (1)$$

$$Y1 = 2.658 + 0.253 X4 \quad (2)$$

where,

Y1: Internal and external dimensions of perceived employability

X1: Exploration activities (Dimension 1 of employee ambidexterity)

X2: Exploitation activities (Dimension 2 of employee ambidexterity)

X3: Working excessively (Dimension 1 of workaholism) was removed because it was the only dimension whose p-value was above 0.05

X4: Working compulsively (Dimension 2 of workaholism)

The model also aims to examine if both of the independent variables are considered as antecedents for the dependent variable. The qualitative study was conducted by using in-person interviews with the participants. Those participants worked in the private banking sector in Egypt. The study is confidential and in order to assure the participants that their identity is kept anonymous, there was no recording of the interview and only handwritten notes were used. Thematic analysis was used to support the qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Thematic analysis is a tool used in data analysis by creating themes out of meanings and coding them with their meaning in context (Marks & Yardley, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme can be defined as a unique pattern found in the data and theme development is usually a difficult and time-consuming process (Joffe & Yardley, 2004; Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). Thematic analysis is useful and beneficial when it comes to examining interpretations and relationships among unexplored variables (Alhojailan, 2012). It is beneficial when researchers are examining data that has been collected in different situations, from different environments, at different time intervals (Alhojailan, 2012). This data could be collected through observations and/or questionnaires with interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The questions that were used in the interviews were structured and designed based on the original scales that were used in the questionnaire survey (scales are available in the Appendix). Common method variance (which is also known as common method bias) is maintained in this study. It is usually defined as follows “*the amount of correlation variance that might arise among the variables because of using the same measurement techniques, i.e., survey.*” (Tehseen, Ramayah, & Sajilan, 2017).

2.2 Data Collection

The data was collected using survey questionnaires that were distributed to bankers in different hierarchical levels working in the private banking sector in Egypt. The authors collected 300 survey questionnaires from employees working in the private banking sector in Egypt. This study uses a judgemental non-probabilistic sample. The authors will be recording the choices for the participants. This study relies on previously developed and validated scales and instruments. Using the same instruments in different studies facilitates comparison across cultures (Yu, Lee, & Woo, 2004). All the scales used in the study were developed in English, the questionnaires distributed to the participants will be in English since the Egyptian employees in the private banking sector have a good command of the English language, in order to allow them to perform their tasks.

After performing the normality test, it was found that the sample was not normally distributed and as a result, the authors decided to use the Spearman Correlation Coefficient to test both the strength (strong, moderate, or weak) and direction (direct or inverse) between the variables being examined.

The survey used in the study was divided into three main parts:

- Employee ambidexterity as an independent variable,
- Workaholism as an independent variable and
- Perceived employability as the dependent variable

2.3 Data Analysis

Frequency distributions of all the variables were checked for outliers, missing data and typos. Normal distributions of the dependent and independent variables were assessed, that helped the authors determine that the Spearman Correlation Coefficient will be used.

3. Results

The results regarding the sample characteristics are as follows:

There are 201 Male participants (67% of the total sample), and 99 female participates (33% of the total sample).

179 of the participants (59.7% of the total sample) were less than 30 years old, 94 of the participants (31.3% of the total sample) were between 30 to 40 years old, 12 of the participants (4% of the total sample) were between 40 and 50 years old and finally 15 of the participants (5% of the total sample) were less than 60 years old.

147 of the participants (49% of the total sample) were single, 99 of the participants (33% of the total sample) were married, 50 of the participants (16.7% of the total sample) were engaged and 4 of the participants (1.3% of the total sample) were divorced.

145 of the participants (48.3% of the total sample) were working at an entry/junior level job, 112 participants (37.3% of the total sample) were working at a middle/supervisory level job and 43 of the participants (14.4% of the total sample) were working at a top/senior level job.

The following table includes the findings of the measures used in the study:

| Employee Ambidexterity Scale | Workaholism Scale | Perceived Employability Scale |
|--|---|--|
| The first independent variable has two main dimensions: exploration activities and exploitation activities. The mean of the exploration activities is 3.825 and the mean of the exploitation activities is 3.813. Both of those activities are in the agree response interval according to the Likert scale. | The second independent variable has two main dimensions: working excessively and working compulsively. The mean of working excessively is 3.970 and the mean of working compulsively is 3.616. Both of those dimensions are in the agree response interval according to the Likert scale. | This is the dependent variable, and it has internal and external characteristics. The mean of the internal and external characteristics is 3.760. They are in the agree response interval according to the Likert scale. |

The positive means indicate that the reliability and validity of the scales are acceptable according to the Likert scale.

The findings show that there is a positive direct and significant relationship between employee ambidexterity and perceived employability and a positive direct and significant relationship between workaholism and the perceived employability.

4. Discussion

4.1 Research Implications and Limitations

Our findings are specific to private bank employees in Egypt and may not generalize to other sectors besides banking and other regions/countries. Public national (state-owned) bank employees in Egypt were not included in the study. The sensitive nature of the study led to the refusal to participate from a number of bank employees (mainly mid to top level managers) indicating that this could lead to negativity and resentment between employees. This has led to the sample being non-probabilistic judgemental in nature rather than probabilistic/random sample.

Future research could examine employees in the public banking sector in Egypt and other sectors and regions/countries in order to help generalize the findings. This could help explain whether employees in the public banking sector in Egypt are able to find better employment opportunities for themselves. Further research is needed regarding the effect of organizational factors and individual factors on employee ambidexterity. An area for future research could be to assess if we would get different results if the analysis is conducted on a probabilistic/random sample.

4.2 Practical Implications

The banks that participated in the study should be encouraged to provide training programs to their employees, in order to help examine the exploration and exploitation dimensions for the employee ambidexterity behavior as well as examining and testing their dimensions for working excessively and compulsively. This will help examine and test their workaholism behaviour. The training should also include a communication skills program for those newly hired employees.

There should also be regular meetings and a feedback program regarding the psychological wellbeing of the bank employees and how this can negatively affect their performance. Tailored assessment criteria can be conducted on bank employees to help assess how the bank can provide extra rewards to those employees who give more than is required of them. This can help in those employees in viewing themselves as an integral part of the bank and its success. The banks can also realize that fairness or the perception of fairness in how the employees are treated is of great impact. The bank employees should feel that they are being treated fairly regarding their assessments, compensation, annual salary increases and bonus incentives. There should be strict supervision in how managers treat the employees, in order to avoid bullying and unfair distribution of tasks.

5. Conclusion

The results supported previous literature that indicates that workaholism caused severe family-life conflicts and that led to males being the majority of employees in the private banking sector in Egypt. The results also showed that younger employees are more flexible and accepting of career changes leading to better job opportunities than the older employees. In addition to proving that both employee ambidexterity and workaholism are significantly positively related to perceived employability, the results also proved that employee ambidexterity and workaholism are antecedents to perceived employability.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Interviews were conducted with 300 employees at different managerial levels in the private banks selected for the study. The interview questions were structured based on the original scales that were used in the questionnaire survey.

The questions asked are listed as follows:

- Were you engaged in any activities that required some adaptability from you? If the answer is (Yes), how did you deal with it?
- Do you find yourself always busy and working hard even if you do not like what you do?
- Did you participate in activities which required you to learn new skills? If the answer is (Yes), what kind of training were you offered to help you?
- Were you put under pressure in a way that required you to multi-task various things at the same time? If the answer is (Yes), please provide some examples.
- Is it easy to find your same job elsewhere? If the answer is (Yes), what makes you say that?
- In your opinion, what kinds of competencies is an employee required to possess in your job?
- Under the current unstable economic conditions, are you willing to change your job or is it better to stay in your current job? Why?

Appendix B

Thematic Analysis of Interview Questions

The responses to the questions in Appendix A were coded and this resulted in the grouping of three themes, employee ambidexterity, workaholism, and perceived employability. The author(s) relied on previously designed scales that were used through their questions to receive responses that revealed the interrelationships between the three variables under consideration.

Theme one: Employee Ambidexterity:

The author(s) asked the participants to explain the nature of their job, what is required of them and how they deal with it on-a-daily basis. The author(s) were then able to reach the meaning of Employee Ambidexterity through the quotations of some of the participants as follows:

- It is all because of technology, that I am more aware of my capabilities.
- We are always in a continuous learning process to improve ourselves as well as our services.
- Last month, I was asked to perform a new task that required me to spend a whole day just learning how to do it and forgetting all about my day-to-day issues.
- Our career is mainly about the client, so yes, we always try to provide them with the best solution that suits their needs.
- I try to think out of the box.
- It is all in the VALUE ADDED, if lost, I will surely search for it elsewhere.

Theme two: Workaholism:

The author(s) were able to reach the meaning of workaholism based on the participants' explanation of their job features as follows:

- I find myself overloaded with work most of the time. It is so bad, that sometimes it is difficult to find time to even go to the toilet.

- I always stay late to finish my work.
- I really miss spending quality time with my family and friends.
- I am always driven to work more and more.
- It is this inner feeling that always drives me to work and makes me feel guilty if I do not finish my work on time.
- I consider that I have great competencies when it comes to work.
- I am indeed a multi-tasker.
- I consider myself to be a valuable asset to the bank I work for.

Theme three: Perceived Employability:

The author(s) depended on the participants' self-interpretation of their efforts and participation in order to reach the meaning of perceived employability through the quotations of some of the participants as follows:

- It is all about appreciation.
- My manager knows my value in this job.
- I do not think that they can easily replace me.
- Our economic future mainly depends on the role private and investment banking play in Egypt.
- I will never be affected by downsizing.
- I might start looking for better work opportunities soon.
- We are the future.

Appendix C

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to evaluate how ambidextrous employees who are characterized by their high levels of workaholism and dedication are able get new job opportunities for themselves.

Section 1: Employee Ambidexterity (Si & Lin, 2018)

Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job by choosing a number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

| No. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Exploration activities | | | | | |
| | <u>Last year:</u> | | | | | |
| 1 | I was searching for new possibilities with respect to products/services, processes, or markets | | | | | |
| 2 | I evaluated diverse options with respect to product/services, processes, or markets | | | | | |
| 3 | I focused on renewal of product/services, processes, or markets | | | | | |
| 4 | I engaged in some activities requiring some adaptability from my side | | | | | |
| 5 | I engaged in some activities requiring me to learn new skills | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

| Exploitation activities | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| | <u>Last year, I engaged in:</u> | | | | | |
| 6 | Activities of which a lot of experience has been accumulated by me | | | | | |
| 7 | Activities which serve existing customers with existing services/products | | | | | |
| 8 | Activities which can be conducted clearly | | | | | |
| 9 | Activities primarily focused on achieving short-term goals | | | | | |
| 10 | Activities which I can properly conduct by using existing knowledge | | | | | |
| 11 | Activities which clearly fit into existing company policy | | | | | |

Section 2: Workaholism (Koh, 2014)

Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job by choosing a number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

| No. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Working Excessively | | | | | |
| 1 | I always seem to be in a hurry and racing against the clock. | | | | | |
| 2 | I find myself continuing to work after my co-workers have called it quits | | | | | |
| 3 | I stay busy and keep many irons in the fire | | | | | |
| 4 | I spend more time working than on socializing with friends, on hobbies or on leisure activities | | | | | |
| 5 | I find myself doing two or three things at the same time, such as eating lunch and writing a memo while talking on the phone | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | Working Compulsively | | | | | |
| 6 | It is important for me to work hard even when I do not enjoy what I am doing | | | | | |
| 7 | I feel that there is something inside me that drives me to work hard | | | | | |
| 8 | I feel obliged to work hard, even when it is not enjoyable | | | | | |
| 9 | I feel guilty when I take time off work | | | | | |
| 10 | It is hard for me to relax when I am not working | | | | | |

Section 3: Perceived Employability (Khoa, Uen, & McConville, 2016)

Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job by choosing a number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

| No. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|----------|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I have good prospects in this organization because my employer values my personal contribution | | | | | |
| 2 | Even if there was downsizing in this organization, I am confident that I would be retained | | | | | |
| 3 | My personal networks in this organization help me in my career | | | | | |
| 4 | I am aware of the opportunities arising in this organization even if they are different to what I do now | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| 5 | The skills I have gained in my present job are transferable to other occupations outside this organization | | | | | |
| 6 | I could easily retrain to make myself more employable elsewhere | | | | | |
| 7 | I can use my professional networks and business contacts to develop my career | | | | | |
| 8 | I have a good knowledge of opportunities for me outside of this organization even if they are different to what I do now | | | | | |
| 9 | Among the people who do the same job as me, I am well respected in this organization | | | | | |
| 10 | People who do the same job as me who work in this organization are valued highly | | | | | |
| 11 | If I needed to, I could easily get another job like mine in a similar organization | | | | | |
| 12 | People who do a job like mine in organizations similar to the one I presently work in, are really in demand by other organizations | | | | | |
| 13 | I could easily get a similar job to mine in almost any organization | | | | | |
| 14 | Anyone with my level of skills and knowledge, and similar job and organizational experience, will be highly sought after by employers | | | | | |
| 15 | I could get any job anywhere, so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant | | | | | |
| 16 | People with my kind of job-related experience are very highly valued in their organization and outside whatever sort of organization they have previously worked in | | | | | |

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