Workaholism, Work Engagement, and Organizational Culture: Managing our Health through Humor and Leisure[1]

Dave Korotkov* | Lydia Amir | Arie Sover*****

For a chilling version of where this behaviour leads, look no further than Japan, where the locals have a word – *karoshi* – that means *death by overwork*…. Overwork is a health hazard in other ways, too. It leaves less time and energy for exercise, and makes us more likely to drink too much alcohol or reach for convenience foods. - Honaré (2004, pp. 6 – 7)

As 2015 becomes a reality, I find myself (DK) reflecting on how fast the year went by, what worked, what did not, and what I could do differently in order to find some calm. In doing so, it also prompted me to recall the premises of a book that I had read not so long ago, *In Praise of Slow*, by Carl Honaré. In the book, Honaré discusses the *slow movement* in relation to, for example, work, food, music, and physical activity, and how it impacts all of us in this often mad and fast paced world. For certain, it struck an eerie cord given my interests in resilience, survival, and peace. But there were other reasons for the book's attraction. As Lydia, Arie and I discussed in a previous editorial, the academy can be one of the most stressful environments in comparison to other occupational milieus. On face, slowing down seems like a doable option to help manage one's health and well-being. Or is it? After all, most or many of us are caught in a culture that praises speed and overly excessive productivity and accountability that makes it

[1] We are pleased to announce that the ISJHR is registered with the Directory of Open Access Journals: http://www.doaj.org/

*St. Thomas University, Canada
** College of Management Studies, Israel
*** Ashkelon Academic College, Israel

difficult to turn about face without some significant personal, social and technological backlash. In any case, I would argue that it is doable, healthy, and necessary, though obviously complex solution given the multiple and overlapping schedules of reinforcement that continuously operate in our life space that are needed to maintain the speed of life. It is probably culturally and/or institutionally bounded as well. Apart from culture, it also raises the question of where might this devotion to speed or deviation from slowness arise, though in the latter case, the slow movement is proceeding, despite often hovering below the radar. One possibility out of many pertains to the somewhat culturally constructed notion of *Workaholism*. Before we explain the possible roles of humor and laughter in workaholism and related processes, let us distinguish the latter from work engagement.

According to some scholars, workaholism defies simple definition. Instead, some writers such as Clark et al. (2014) suggest that it is best explained by examining three key components. According to Clark et al. (see also Malinowska & Tokarz, 2014), workaholism, with its associated cognitive (e.g., limited control of work), behavioral (e.g., time spent working), and affective (e.g., work enjoyment, anxiety) manifestations, seems to be characterized by an addiction to work, a compulsion and preoccupation with work, as well as by a need to work longer and harder. Workaholics, so to speak, appear to experience several negative effects including poor physical and psychological health, burnout, increased job stress, and work-family conflict. For some academics and the lay public, this is all too familiar. Workaholism should not be confused with *Work Engagement*, which refers to a more fulfilling and positive state of mind linked to states of absorption, vigor, and dedication; the link with humor and laughter should be somewhat apparent. Unlike workaholism, work engagement has been linked to several positive outcomes such as work satisfaction in addition to general health and well-being (Bakker et al., 2014). One often omitted variable in this workaholic and work engagement – health equation is organizational culture/climate – that is, those *masculine* based work cultures or environments that promote and reinforce an *over-*

work ethic or work philosophy (Mazzetti, Schaufeli, & Guglielmi, 2014). Thus, it is perhaps best stated that one's health and well-being is not just a function of the individual; instead, health is impacted directly by and through an interaction involving both individual and environmental factors, with culture and developmental variables as moderators. Given these inputs, one may now ask what role(s) humor and laughter play in all of this. Although we limit our discussion at this point, we suspect that both may help to moderate the effects of workaholism and organization climate on health; it may also play a key role in work engagement by directly influencing levels of affect (i.e., work as fun). In the latter case, we may derive significant pleasure in doing what we love, whether we spend our workdays in the academy, play music for a living, or minister to those who are less fortunate. However, we also speculate that both humor and laughter may have additional roles or be best situated and understood within a second, interrelated body of literature, that is, leisure, tourism, and recreational studies.

As we believe most would agree, leisure activity is an important ingredient for our psychosocial and psychophysiological recovery from the vagaries of work and stress. For certain, leisure has been associated with a plethora of health and well-being indicators, too vast to note (see e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, Oerlemans, & Sonnentag, 2012). However, a simple example based on the *Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure* that is concerned with the distinction between *Core* leisure activities or those experiences that are of low cost and accessible (e.g., everyday activities) versus *Balanced* activities that are novel and which occur less frequently (see e.g., Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2011), may help to further our discussion. Indeed, core activities do seem to benefit us much like the days in the week may help to gauge how we are feeling. In the latter case, for example, research by Helliwell and Wang (2011) suggests that we tend to report greater levels of happiness, enjoyment, as well as *laughter* (and less anger, worry, and sadness for that matter) on weekends, suggesting, albeit indirectly, that core activities are necessary though not sufficient. In any case, core activities can be *healthful* although we are careful not to exaggerate the benefits.

Differently, for example, Vacationing or Holidaying may be construed of as a time for activity that provides balance. Indeed, vacationing is an important part of life with its absence linked to illness and premature death (see e.g., de Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2013). Conversely, vacationing appears to exert several positive effects on health, quality of life, and well-being (e.g., de Bloom, Radstaak, & Geurts, 2014; Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012). Interestingly though, health and well-being vacation effects appear to be best understood through an inverted-U model whereby its most beneficial effects seem to occur somewhere in the middle of vacation time. Barring any unforeseen barriers or constraints, this suggests that there may be activities we can engage in during the beginning and end stages of our vacation that may enhance its effects (e.g., de Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2013; Lin, Kerstetter, Nawijn, & Mitas, 2014; Nawijn et al., 2012). In addition, length of vacation does not seem to play a significant role in terms of its benefits – that is, there does not seem to be a straight linear effect of vacation length or time on health/wellness. In adding to this, what some may not be aware of, though many may have incorrectly thought of as obvious, is that post-vacationers tend to experience what are called *Fade Outs* or diminishing positive vacation effects, post-vacation. Confusingly, it is here where the research appears both murky and illuminating. Somewhat disheartening, such fading appears to occur anywhere from 10 days to four weeks post-vacation (see e.g., de Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2011; Kuhnel & Sonnentag, 2011). One implication of these data is that instead of taking one long vacation, we should take several short ones (e.g., de Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2012). Furthermore, to put these effects in context and to speculate on what role(s) humor and laughter might have in fading, we should first look at what the literature suggests about our health and well-being experiences both prior to as well as during vacation, in relation to post-vacation.

What happens before we holiday is somewhat debatable but it appears that health and well-being plummet about two weeks to one week before vacation (on average); thus

anticipating one's vacation does not seem to confer any positive health benefits (Nawijn, de Bloom, & Geurts, 2013). Furthermore, pre-vacation workload (men and women) and pre-vacation homeload (for women only) appears to negatively affect health. But what happens during vacation? As one might possibly imagine, the literature seems to suggest that detaching oneself from all work-related activities (including Internet related work activity), engaging in private conversations with a partner, engaging in passive activities, savoring, deriving pleasure from activity, increasing personal control, and experiencing fewer negative incidents all appear to have a positive effect during vacation time as well as somewhat post-vacation (de Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2013). Interestingly, failing to detach during vacation may also negatively promote fade-out effects. Thus, what one does during vacation may also shorten any positive effects accrued through vacationing. Looked at one way, detaching oneself from work seems obvious but looked at differently, one cannot help but wonder the extent to which humor may promote such escapism.

Perhaps most interesting is a consideration of those moderators that attenuate and/or increase risk levels between vacation time and health outcome/fade-out effects. For certain, job demands post-vacation may increase the risk of fade-out as well as work during vacation (Kuhnel & Sonnentag, 2011). Rhetorically speaking, perhaps a better question might concern whether or not there are things we can do to minimize the risk of fade out. As alluded to, one possibility is to minimize any job demands that overtax our personal and social resources; this is perhaps easier said than done. We could also force ourselves to leave behind all work-related activities, thoughts, discussions, and job related technology, prior to beginning vacation. In addition, physical exercise, greater *effort* in maximizing balance in relation to work and relaxation also appear to be important (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, Oerlemans, & Sonnentag, 2012; de Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2011; Kuhnel & Sonnentag). Play, though not a panacea, may also be beneficial. According to Proyer (2014), play may be useful in both work and leisure contexts by promoting humor and laughter as well as well-being, coping, and mastery.

Despite these implications, it is wise to keep in mind that fade-out effects may not occur in all health related domains given that researchers have not examined all facets of health and wellness in relation to vacation time (e.g., psycho-physiological functioning; de Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2013; Kuhnel & Sonnentag, 2011).

Furthermore, as de Bloom et al. aptly puts it, vacation memories may also increase well-being, albeit temporarily – thus, our memories are important as well. As psychological research reminds us, reminders of fun days gone by (e.g., photos, videos, fridge magnets) may trigger memories and behaviour. We suspect positive affect via state-dependent effects or how we feel and think at a given time may be experienced as well. In addition, the role of traits, in particular broad domain traits as well as humor style, should not be left out of the analyses. For example, humorous extraverts and introverts may experience their own health benefits via distinct routes. To simplify, for extraverts, humor may be derived from social activity engagement while for introverts, humor may be more beneficial with fewer people in more isolated settings. Of course, these are mere speculations for these supposed impacts, although there is a literature, albeit biased in the favor of extraversion. Curiously though, one has to wonder whether *staying in type* is beneficial or whether for example, an extravert *wannabe* introvert benefits more post-vacation in attempting various extraverted activities. Perhaps staying within, for example, one's comfort zone post-vacation is more beneficial, at least in minimizing or increasing various biopsychosocial challenges.

In sum, what can we conclude about the role of humor and laughter in relation to workaholism, work engagement, and leisure? Despite our speculations, humor and laughter may influence how we come to experience overload, workaholism, work engagement, and vacationing. As alluded to, humor may moderate the work stress – health relationship. However, its effects are far more reaching given various cultural and developmental considerations. Humor may also manifest and most necessarily so when on vacation through play and social relationships, as well as post-vacation via similar

mechanisms. Although we remain cautious in these assertions, we nonetheless suspect that humor and laughter plays some role in minimizing such fade-out effects that many studies have found, and in moderating workaholism/work engagement. To this end, we celebrate the contributions by the authors of this volume in helping us to further our understanding of humor, its links to affect with indirect implications for the fade-out phenomenon and work – humor moderation, as well as how culture may be linked to the total humor experience. In the first article by Nicholas Kuiper, Caitlin Comeau, Dana Klein, and Nadia Maiolino, entitled *The Role of Humor Styles in the Clark and Wells Model of Social Anxiety*, the authors examine how social anxiety may be impacted by humor style in particular self-defeating and affiliative humor, especially in interaction with stress and negative affect, variables often found in the work place. Our second psychological based article, *The Development of 3 – 5 – Year – Old – Children's Sense of Humor and the Relationships among Children's Temperament and Parents' Humor Style in China*, by Wen Liu, Guo-Qi Wen, and Liang Li, examines how both gender and age, as well as temperament, [the later of which may be incidentally associated with the compulsive nature of workaholism at an elementary level] interact in influencing the development of children's sense of humor. The next paper, *'I Have a Split Personality,' said Tom, being Frank: Punning in Tom Swifties*, written by Anna Litovkina, addresses some of the more fascinating, micro linguistic nuances of humor, in particular those concerned with the relationship between Tom Swifty and punning. In the anthropological based article entitled *The Use of Code-Switching in Stand-up Comedy: Gabriel Iglesias*, Lucia Aranda examines how code-switching (i.e., going back and forth with two languages) is used in the comedic performances of Mexican-American Gabriel Iglesias; despite impersonating accents from many cultures, the Spanish language appears to be primary in subtext. Once again we see how culture may subtly influence the humor response. Lastly, we present a concise and detailed book review by Leah Gilula for the Eli Rozik text, *Comedy: A Critical Introduction*. In the review, Gilula clearly outline's the structure of the text, which discusses the comedy genre and how it has evolved throughout time. Furthermore, each genre (e.g., farce) and theory in the text is

clearly explained through the highly interpretable writings of Rozik. Though abstract, the text material appears to provide us some idea as to how to use humor or how it has been used across context, a critical goal when transitioning from fun and relaxation to the demands of life. In alluding to the text's audience and its ease of understanding beyond academia, Gilula asserts,

> *The book's structure reminds a university course, but it intends to reach out not only to students, university teachers or theatre scholars, but also to a wider audience interested in theatre art. Indeed, each chapter is devoted to one aspect of comedy, described concisely and clearly, not in the convoluted discourse characteristic of theories' discussions. A considerable achievement, not to be taken for granted, since the main difficulty of understanding theories are not the ideas themselves, but their presentation in an obscure language that ennobles the writer but baffles the reader.*

Taken together, the articles in this volume provide us with an enhanced understanding of the role of psychology, anthropology, as well as linguistics in explaining the humor experience. As always, we strive to present a multidisciplinary understanding of this significant human experience.

At this point, the editors of the ISJHR would like to thank the authors as well as the Board/reviewers for their assistance in supporting us. We also thank those who provided us with access to the humor text reviewed herein. In addition, we encourage once again our readership to submit their scholarly endeavors to the ISJHR. We once again and most wholeheartedly, thank the contributors to the Journal – your contributions aid us in understanding how we can *conscientiously* incorporate this valued human characteristic and/or tool into our lives for the betterment of all. We look forward to the first edition of 2015.

References

Bakker, A.B., Demerouti, E., Oerlemans, W., & Sonnentag, S. (2013). Workaholism and daily recovery: A day reconstruction study of leisure activities. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *34*, 87-107.

Bakker, A.B., Shimazu, A., Demerouti, E., Shimada, K., & Kawakami, N. (2014). Work engagement versus workaholism: A test of the Spillover-Crossover Model. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *29*, 63-80.

Clark, M.A., Michel, J.S., Zhdanova, L., Pui, S.Y., & Baltes, B.B. (2014). All work and no play? A meta-analytic examination of the correlates and outcomes of workaholism. *Journal of Management*, *20*, 1-38.

de Bloom, J., Geurts, S.A.E., & Kompier, M.A.J. (2012). Effects of short vacations, vacation activities and experiences on employee health and well-being. *Stress and Health*, *28*, 305-318.

de Bloom, J., Geurts, S.A.E., & Kompier, M.A.J. (2013). Vacation (after-) effects on employee health and well-being, and the role of vacation activities, experiences and sleep. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *14*, 613-633.

de Bloom, J., Radstaak, M., & Geurts, S. (2014). Vacation effects on behaviour, cognition and emotions of compulsive and non-compulsive workers: Do obsessive workers go 'Cold Turkey'? *Stress and Health*, *30*, 232-243.

Dolnicar, S., Yanamandram, V., & Cliff, K. (2011). The contribution of vacations to quality of life. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *39*, 59-83.

Helliwell, J.F., & Wang, S. (2011). *Weekends and subjective well-being.* Working paper. National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Honaré, C. (2004). *In praise of slow: How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed*. Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada.

Kuhnel, J., & Sonnentag, S. (2011). How long do you benefit from vacation? A closer look at the fade-out of vacation effects. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *32*, 125-143.

Lin, Y., Kerstetter, D., Nawijn, J., Mitas, O. (2014). Changes in emotion and their interactions with personality in a vacation context. *Tourism Management*, *40*, 416-424.

Malinowska, D., & Tokarz, A. (2014). The structure of workaholism and types of workaholic. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, *45*, 211-222.

Mazzetti, G., Schaufeli, W.B., & Guglielmi, D. (2014). Are workaholics born or made? Relations of workaholism with person characteristics and overwork climate. *International Journal of Stress Management*, *21*, 227-254.

Nawijn, J., de Bloom, J., & Geurts, S. (2013). Pre-vacation time: Blessing or burden? *Leisure Sciences*, *35*, 33-44.

Nawijn, J., Mitas, O., Lin, Y., & Kerstetter, D. (2012). How do we feel on vacation? A closer look at how emotions change over the course of a trip. *Journal of Travel Research*, *52*, 265-274.

Proyer, R.T. (2014). Perceived functions of playfulness in adults: Does it mobilize you at work, rest, and when being with others. *Revue europeenne de psyhologie appliquee*, *64*, 241-250.