

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's Degree in  
Management from the NOVA – School of Business and Economics.

**The paradox of grit: Various dimensions in recruitment**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this work project is to do research about the term called ‘grit’, and the important concepts connected with it (its origin, impact of overgrittiness, main features, and elements), to see if people working in recruitment are aware of its existence, and what impact it has on the work performance of the employees. Therefore, the target of this work project is recruiters. Although, the research was conducted in recruitment, the focus was not only on the recruiter himself, but also on the concept, if grit should be used as a determinant, which a candidate should be checked on while being interviewed by a recruiter. The goal was, also to find out if the work of a recruiter is more successful if the recruiter is gritty, and if it can be improved by gaining more grit, and if it is even possible to be grittier,

## **Keywords**

consistency, grit, gritty, origin, overgrittiness, paradoxes, recruiter, recruiting, recruitment, results,

## **INTRODUCTION**

Too high level of employee turnover, and all the consequences connected with that phenomena - as frustration (every time it happens some people lose their engagement in the job), or wasted time, (an average time of training a new hire is 28 weeks) and money (a cost of a single replacement can cost up to 28,000 pounds) - in a company can have a huge impact on its future (Social Talent 2017). In case of money waste, it can be crucial especially, regarding the SMEs (medium sized enterprises), however no matter what size is the business, not only recruitment costs can be impacted, but also the overall performance, engagement of employees, and even the productivity of the whole company. Therefore, regardless what industry or country all the firms worldwide should try to avoid it as much as possible, using all possible methods, and all that starts with the job and personality of a recruiter – a person looking for new hires – and the ways in which he chooses the potential employees. The target of this work study will be recruiter, and what is the importance of grit (meaning will be explained in the following paragraphs) in several dimensions in recruitment, is the research question of this study.

## **GRIT IN RECRUITMENT**

‘Since, we know that turnover is detrimental to our business, hiring managers should make thoughtful decisions (...) grit is the one distinguishing factor to be considered when selecting your next new hire’ (Stoltz, 2017). As explained in new study presented by Paul Stoltz, nowadays (consciously or not) 98% employers worldwide, as the main determinant of success of a potential employee choose grit, which he describes as growth, resilience, instinct, and tenacity. Meaning that it is very important to make right decisions while recruiting employees, and who knows it better than the specialists in that area – employees of the recruitment agency?

According to various research from the last year’s there is one unique quality, that differs good candidates from all the other, and it was given the term ‘grit’ (Strategic Solutions 2017). Grit’ is not a commonly used, or well-known expression, what makes it interesting, and challenging to perform a deep study about it. Moreover, it is associated with a couple of paradoxes (created by the author of this project basing on existing theories, and own study), which will be explained in this research below. Also, the challenge would be to show the truth about grit to recruiters, and therefore give them a chance to improve their performance basing on the results, of the study. That is why the target of this study is recruiters. Researchers believed, that grit makes people, in this case candidates for a potential job, being able to succeed in their lives, and therefore as well in their jobs, what makes them good candidates for the appropriate positions.

## **GRIT OF A RECRUITER**

Moreover, according to some experts from the discussed area, recruiting is an exciting and challenging job at the same time, and it's very fulfilling to help people get jobs, yet it does take a certain type of person (Ken Leiner Associates 2012). It seems that already starting from the search of a candidate, when going through hundreds of CV's a person needs to be gritty enough to find the right candidate. Later, even more to be faster than his colleagues in approaching, understanding, and finally placing the candidate, being focused on this goal, and remaining the high quality of the service at the same time, but also not forgetting about all the other candidates, being already engaged in recruitment processes, or even those placed (with a job found by the recruiter) to follow up, and make sure, that they (or their friends or relatives) do not need any help regarding their careers.

Does this ideal personality of a recruiter really include the trait of grit? Is it helpful or maybe even necessary to be gritty to succeed in recruitment? Does grit bring any risk with itself, that can have miserable consequences in a job of a recruiter? What are those risks? And what really is grit? Does it have the same meaning for everyone? Are people usually aware of the existence of it in recruitment?

## **VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF GRIT NOT ONLY IN RECRUITMENT**

On the other hand, referring to the definition of one of the main grit researchers' psychologist Angela Duckworth grit is passion and perseverance for very long-term goals, having stamina, sticking with the future, day-in, day-out, not just for a week, or a month, but for many years, working hard to change the future into reality, and living life, as if it was a marathon, not just a sprint (Duckworth et al., 2007). In the job of a recruiter, at least in theory there are long-term goals set as target, and to achieve them you need to sometimes give up on something on your way. For example, when you have an urgent position to close, that will give you income soon, or you know that one position will give you more money, than the others, you focus only on the one most urgent or profitable, while ignoring the others. In addition, grit has been related to the overall career success, even more than IQ. According to this, if we think of a job of regarding the job of the recruiter, people that have a high IQ could maybe focus on all the positions and close them finally, but still if as a gritty person you choose the most profitable ones, and you close them fast you can succeed easier, and start working on another target, as a job of a recruiter is a never-ending chase after the long-term goals.

Moreover, nowadays we are bombarded by loads of messages as 'Champions never quit' or 'Never give up' (mainly on the Internet or on inspirational posters). However, according to a commonly used expression more than enough is usually too much, but does it make sense, also in the case of a trait being known as an asset of successful people? Can a person be too much gritty? Does overgrittiness exist? Is

it more common among risk seekers? How we can see that a person is too much gritty? And what could be the consequences of that? Could it have a negative impact on the persons' professional or personal life? Although, it is not difficult to justify, that grit gives a variety of benefits, such as going through hard times, dealing with obstacles more smoothly, and being able to maintain passion for the main long-term goals, and finally achieving success. According, to several research studies all that is true, as grittier individuals achieve higher grades during their education, and later have more successful career paths, however what can those people become too much gritty? There are various opinions on this topic, but some of the researchers say that it is true indeed.

After several studies, researchers from two universities (University of Southern California and Northeastern University) found out that being too much gritty (having features of overgrittiness), can have very bad results (Schutz 1967). The first reason is related to the effort, that normally decreases whenever you do not get results after a time, but grittier people increase it accordingly, and although persistence is good usually, in some cases it can have a negative impact. For example, while taking an exam, whenever you encounter an exercise that you are not able to solve straight away, you should try to do next one, and come back later. Unfortunately, the mentioned group would rather stick to that difficult exercise until they finish, sometimes even till the end of the test, what effects in the overall score being worse, because of their perseverance to focus on each exercise one by one in order. This is called 'blind persistence', which relates to the steadfastness in refusing to give up in a losing battle, that can have destructive results.

What is interesting and surprising researchers found in a new study about grit, that grittier individuals in a situation of inevitable failure, would not be convinced to give up on their goals even by financial incentives (Forbes 2016). It can be shown while an entrepreneur of a failing company wants to continue even though the risk of bankruptcy is growing, or a leader that decides to focus on one area of the business, not looking at the whole situation of the firm. In recruitment, we could think about recruiters, that have a target, as a long-term goal for this month, and even if there is a position for next month, which is much better paid than the others for this month, they do not care and still only focus on this month, instead of spending at least few hours weekly to fill the profitable vacancy for the following month.

Another perspective, looking now at the example from the childhood when in opinion of some researchers' grit is already important, as it is a future, which you are born with. Looking at two talented children, the gritty one focusing only on one instrument, and the second trying different instruments, which one would be more successful? Although, Angela Duckworth, and her colleagues will probably say the first one, the truth is both could achieve success, but in different areas, and maybe it is not good

to push our focus artificially onto one thing, if it does not make us happy, and passionate enough, as passion and perseverance may be good only for some individuals.

According to Vallerand's dualistic model of passion' there are two types of passion: harmonious and obsessive (Psychology Today 2014). Therefore, if passion is art of grit, only the first one would give positive impact, and the second combined with the unwillingness to stop trying will contribute to a failure. Also, an education writer believes that grit has several flaws, as the advantages of failure are extremely overstated, as he does not think that people after big failures will try again harder in a good way, so even if they will not give up probably they will be fighting for something not achievable or for a very costly success (Washington Post 2014).

In addition, according to the recent research (Rimfeld et al., 2016, 780 – 789) grit and success during education (that in fact is like the later success at work), are not connected with each other. However, before mentioned studies were developed Duckworth said, that she believes that grit differs from the eye colour or shoe size, in the sense, that it does not depend only on the natural origin, and people can learn how to be gritty. Her vision created an increasing movement to test grit (instead of IQ and other measures) during school years, and believe, that the research on grit is conclusive, what also made some people worry, that grit is a way to blame young people for their failures from the beginning of their lives, instead of focusing on improvements in the educational systems. Nonetheless, no one has clearly proved, if grit could be taught and developed. Even though, Duckworth came up with this conclusions during her research, there is not enough studies to make it clear.

Moreover, Duckworth claims, that she does not have any information, that would prove as being extremely gritty would have a negative impact. On the other hand, the individuals she characterised as extremely gritty usually are also highly successful, and happy about their lives. Nonetheless, she wrote in the final chapter of her book (Duckworth et al., 2007), that although there is no proof coming from any studies, maybe this is still possible, that being too much gritty can be bad. She even explained, that a person can be too stubborn about the mid-level and low-level goals (thinking about them as long-term goals, deciding to be gritty about everything, not only the long-term goals, as the real grit is), constantly spending money on projects, that are a failure from the early beginning, and staying blind to new opportunities. However, Angela believes, that those issues happen mostly regarding the less important goals.

Perhaps the best option would be to diversify between the short-term (as urgent positions to fill by a recruiter, that would not give much money anyway), and long-term goals (as the monthly or yearly targets) stay flexible, and to know what to focus on, when to commit, and when to quit, but where is the balance between being enough and too much gritty?

## **METHOD**

The method used for this research is called grounded theory (GT), which is nowadays one of the most common, and influential methods in different fields, and geographical locations. It helped to carry out the qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin, 1997).

Grounded theory is an overall methodology, that includes structured general rules regarding the process of gathering, and analysing data to formulate a middle-range theory. The name of the concept comes from its main idea for the researchers not only ability, but even necessity to develop their theories starting with extremely thorough, and careful analyses of the empirical data. The stages of the whole analytical process are following: coding the data, formulating, examining, and integrating theoretical categories, and creating analytical narratives during the whole analysis (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). The grounded theory can be performed using different tools, one of them is a survey, which was chosen for this study (please see Appendix 1).

Regarding the topic of grit, and the environment where the research was performed – one company, where even in a friendly atmosphere, everyone can be focused more on not losing his job or face in front of his colleagues, what can affect his answers. To avoid it the categories are not decisive, as well as there is a possibility of existence of various interpretations, and the explanation presented for the collected data is not the only one possible (Berger and Luckman, 1966).

On the other hand, thanks to the fact, that the data was based on the recruiters' answers, collected from their perspective, in their work environment, and formulated from their categorical points of view (Glaser and Strauss, 1965), the analysis was set in the sense-making of the analysed group (Schutz, 1967). However, it was not taken as a restriction of an analysis, as the analysis started from the members' categories, and grew into consecutive stages of meaning, from the prosaic, to more conceptual.

Not only according to the mentioned earlier professional environment of this research, but in general, feelings, and views are not easy to reach, and understand in a correct way, unless we use the self-reported information (Kim et al., 2012). Thanks to the use of it, as well as semiotic clustering analysis, the answers of employees were understood in a deep sense, what resulted in the composition of the three-column table (see graphics on page 12). In the first column, we can see the first order concepts, that came directly from the used data, which was in that case primarily the interviews. Therefore, this information was based only on the own language of the examined group, regarding their understanding, and knowledge of grit.

After conducting more semi-structured interviews, the second column was formulated as thematic categories, that emerged from the unpolished ideas from the first column. It was possible due to thematic association of the points from the first order concepts (Clark et al., 2010). This middle part of the table

is not only understanding the information collected before, but also analysis of the existing theory in the examined field (Suddaby, 2016).

In the end, the second column presented eight themes (long-term success, failure and obstacles, negative impact, positive impact, natural origin, experience, flexibility, and commitment), which emerged into four deep dimensions. The last column is a further analysis, though more abstract conceptually than the previous. The final concepts were expressed as following paradoxes (created by the author, basing on findings from interviews, and existing theories): the paradox of results, the paradox of too much grit, the paradox of origin, and the paradox of consistency, in the third column.

The interview questionnaire consisted of two parts.

The first part of the questionnaire aimed at learning about respondents' knowledge and understanding of grit. Several questions have been asked to see, if people were aware of the existence of this trait before responding to the survey, and to find out, if the term 'grit' was known by them, how they see and understand it, what impact it has, and if they think that it is useful in their job, if it can be cultivated, and how it differs from some other adjacent ideas.

The second part of the survey was constructed basing on Duckworth's short eight item grit scale (Duckworth and Quinn, 2009). It is a quantitative measure, but according to the grounded theory definition, the theory 'can be used with any data, (...) It is an inductive methodology. Qualitative data does not define GT; GT just uses qualitative data mostly — but among many possible data. "All is data" for GT, since all data has latent patterns. It can use any data and any data in any way and in any combination: it can use qualitative data and quantitative data solely or in any combination' (Glaser, 99-113), I used not only the qualitative data, but also made a Grit Scale basing on the one created by Duckworth, to measure levels of grit (as quantitative data), and see how gritty are all as a company sample, and each of the respondents as separate recruiters, looking at the same time at their position in the company, and achievements (see Appendix 3). using modified questions in a way on one hand suitable for a recruitment agency environment (only open questions, to get more information and avoid impacting the work environment in a negative way, for example by asking about the failures of employees in a way to make them feel unsuccessful or not good enough), and on the other hand still clear enough to evaluate the level of grit. Therefore, the scoring was also adequately adapted (please see Appendix 2), and the level of grittiness of all respondents was calculated using Excel, and presented in a table (please see Appendix 3). In the end, results were presented to each respondent, and to the management of the company to achieve a positive impact on the performance of each recruiter, and the company overall.

## **Sampling process**



The sample for this study was made of answers of twenty-five employees coming from two sister companies SpotOn - international recruitment solutions, and career consultancy for all industries across Europe (SpotOn Connections 2017) and Betting Connections - a leading provider of igaming recruitment solutions, and ongoing career advice (Betting Connections 2017). Some of the respondents were their former workers. Although, all of them during their career worked or have been working under the same brand, they were chosen randomly out of a group of over fifty current employees and dozens of other people (including both current and former employees), what effected in forming a group of people of different ages (age ranging between twenty-two – one of the youngest employees - and thirty-six – one of the oldest employees), years of experience in recruitment (in a range from less than one to eight years), and in the mentioned companies (starting from the newbies with less than a month of experience, and ending with people of five years of experience; please bear in mind that the first company was started seven years ago), and other differentiating traits.

To discuss the meaning of grit recruitment was chosen for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, as explained before a role of a recruiter (regarding a great, meaning successful recruiter not just an average one) is about among others being target-oriented, confident, proactive, independent, resistant, and patient (never giving up), as their ‘product’, which is called a candidate (a free human being) is unique, and in that sense much more difficult, as you cannot control people or some other factors concerning them, that can have an impact on the recruitment process, in the way that the recruiter cannot prevent it from happening. (Social Talent 2017).

Secondly, recruiters need to search for some personality traits in people, and therefore they not may not only possess grit on their own (either on purpose, or just unconsciously), but also be able to investigate on the existence of it in their candidates, meaning that if they do it they for sure need to have a good - either natural or gained during their education or work experience - knowledge of the topic.

Thirdly, as recruiters deal with people, they should have appropriate knowledge of people’s personality and psychology, and from their own experience have enough ideas to share to answer the questions in a way that can be helpful for this study, and research. Also, thanks to their highly developed communication skills it should be easy to understand the meaning of their statements, and make clear conclusions.

## **Data collection**

The data was gathered over a two-month period, starting with the end of the first month of working in the company (June), and ending in August 2017. After getting permissions from the team leader, the most senior recruiter in the office, the head of recruitment, and from the boss and the owner of both companies, data was collected from randomly chosen current, and former employees. Data was accumulated using semi-structured interviews (Miles and Gilbert, 2005). The interview protocol with

ten main questions (some of them including two additional questions) was used to get the needed information. The questionnaire consisted of a personal details part (name, age, years in recruitment, and in the companies), and two parts of questions regarding the two main dimensions, such as grit knowledge (six questions) and level of grittiness (four questions) of the respondent. The author conducted twenty-five interviews – either oral or written - in some cases asking additional questions later, if required for the data saturation of the topic. The process finished as soon as there was enough information to make the full research and formulate the findings, in other words as the theoretical saturation was achieved (Strauss and Corbin, 1999). All interviews were conducted separately, and the respondents were guided to answer the questions not only alone, but also according to their own opinion, and not to share the answers or feelings regarding the questionnaire with their colleagues. Thanks to this the risk that any answer would be biased by other people was decreased. The data was collected in a relaxed atmosphere, during breaks in the office or out of the office, and all the respondents took part in the survey voluntarily.

Later, after getting all the information, to enrich the research, and the results, some additional conversations with randomly chosen respondents, that were willing to contribute more to the study, took place (Fossey et al., 2002).

## **FINDINGS**

The primary interview screening of semi-structured interviews helped to develop eight first order themes. According to the grounding theory rules it was not a direct process (Clark et al., 2010). The data has been coded in various ways, until it was arranged in a way to ground the coding conceptually with the existing theory (Weston et al., 2000). Studying the data from the conversations, and literature about paradoxes of organizations (especially parts regarding short-term vs long-term, and embeddedness vs flexibility), and grit deeply, led to formulating overarching dimensions (Clegg, 2002). Throughout the analysis, it became visible, that not everyone was aware or understood the term of grit, what showed that the final results, were not easy to see in the first data, but only later in the process of looking for the common themes to create the abstract concepts. According to that, there was a possibility to use the first and second order themes to develop more abstract overarching dimensions. The graphics on the next page, presents all three interpretive orders, that resulted from the analytical strategy, and appendix 4 shows representative illustration of the data from the interviews represented by quotes of respondents, that were a basis for formulating the second order themes. The text gives just a notion, and the table shows much more comprehensive evidence for the first order concepts. There were four paradoxes identified: sacrificing short-term goals to achieve the long-term ones (paradox of results), both the advantages, and the disadvantages of being too much gritty (paradox of choice), comparing natural origin with the one gained with experience (paradox of origin), and the matter of being flexible, and committed at the same time while being gritty (paradox of commitment).

**FIRST ORDER CONCEPTS**

**SECOND ORDER THEMES**

**OVERARCHING DIMENSIONS**

Focus on achieving a long-term goal.  
Having a powerful drive to succeed.  
Mix between tenacity and drive, the longing for a goal and the pursue of its conquer.  
High turnover.  
Ambitious and bold moves.

Not allowing negativity to distract from final goal.  
Effort and mindset to overcome and dodge obstacles.  
Valuing the process and actions of employees, no matter what the results are.

With other personality traits can hurt others.  
Blindness belief in not achievable, can cloud judgment.  
High levels of frustration, nonappreciable personality, and over competitiveness.  
Too much ambition might mislead.  
Abdication of other less important goals.

Useful in achieving success and good results.  
Major motivation that makes difficult things possible.  
Not connected directly with unethical actions.  
Challenges make life more interesting and bring happiness.

Find the natural motivation.  
In-born attitude.  
Congenital passion.

Educational system.  
Gritty work environment.  
Self-awareness and learning from others.

Flexibility in thinking.  
Adaptation to a situation to achieve the goal.  
Learning the behaviours to change and succeed.

Focused on the end goal no matter what.  
Determination and belief in your capabilities.  
Persistence, perseverance, resilience, and patience.

LONG-TERM  
SUCCESS

FAILURE AND  
OBSTACLES

NEGATIVE  
IMPACT

POSITIVE  
IMPACT

NATURAL  
ORIGIN

EXPERIENCE

FLEXIBILITY

COMMITMENT

PARADOX OF RESULTS

PARADOX OF TOO MUCH GRIT

PARADOX OF ORIGIN

PARADOX OF CONSISTENCY

## **Paradox of results**

Two primary groups of first order concepts were focused on the role and importance of the success, as well as of the failure and obstacles.

### *Second order theme (a): Long-term success*

Not being sure, if people fail in short-term perspective (abandon their goals) to reach the long-term goal, is the major limitation of one of the studies about grit (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2013), that is why this work project focused on that aspect. However, among recruiters from our sample it is quite clear, that they believe, that sacrificing everything for a long-term goal is part of grit. They also associate it with ambitious and bold moves, as well as:

‘(...) a mix between tenacity and drive; the longing for a goal and the pursue of its conquer (...) a good example of gritty people is professional athletes - their aim to achieve an Olympic medal and how they dedicate all their careers to get it.’ Also, grit was explained as ‘(...) a personality trait, that is related to the wiliness to have goals, and fight to achieve them not having to be frustrated if there is no immediate result/satisfaction, but being happy as long as you are pursuing them in your life, and fighting for it’ (see Appendix 4).

Often in recruitment the only way to meet the targets for the month is to focus only for that month, trying not to get distracted by the vacancies open for the other months, even if it seems easier to close those. On the other hand, looking in the long-term perspective we need to focus on all the vacancies for the quarter, however still the best strategy is to focus on the current month, as next month we will be able only to fill vacancies for the future not from past, and all that counts for the quarter targets, and later for the yearly targets.

### *Second order theme (b): Failure and obstacles*

Recruiters believe in valuing the actions and processes of the employees no matter what the outcomes are, as well as in ignorance of any negative situations on the way to a final goal. Usually there are a lot of obstacles in a daily life of a recruiter, as we deal with people, we cannot predict everything, but we need to stay positive and fight even more every single day. As one of the recruiters’ mentioned:

‘In a job like ours, I think it is visible mainly when a Consultant fails to deliver what is expected from her/him, however keeps working everyday as it was a new day, not allowing negativity or down moments to distract him/her from the final goal. For example, there would be consultants that after a drop out or a bad week, have even worse following days, because they let the negativity put their focus

on what happened ‘drop out’, which can’t be changed as in the past, instead of getting over that fact and focus on what can be done now to get their goal.’

According to Kirsten Hamilton, looking from the employers’ perspective, it is not important to win at the first or take risks, but to know how to fail, and what lessons to take out of the failure itself, as gritty people do: ‘When I hire, I look for the person who failed the first time around and came back a second time with an arsenal. I don’t just want the risk-takers, I want the people who use those risks and failures to learn. Grit is resilience’ (World Economic Forum, 2014).

#### *Overarching dimension of the paradox of results*

The first overarching dimension states, that both above mentioned second order themes can give something, that was called in this study a paradox of results, meaning that both long-term success, and failures, and obstacles regarding the short-term goals, are essential part of grit, all they seem to be too opposing concepts. According to, that theory even the short-term negative results, should not make the gritty person give up, but should enhance them to be even more focused while working hard on achieving the main goal, and in a way later contribute to the positive long-term outcome, as Duckworth believes, that ‘part of what it means to be gritty is to be resilient in the face of failure or adversity’ (Perkins – Gough, 2013).

#### **Paradox of choice**

Next two first order categories referred to the impact (positive and negative) of being too gritty.

#### *Second order theme (c): Positive impact*

Looking at the results from the Grit Scale (Appendix 3), we can see that, all people from the sample, that have senior positions (are team leaders) have high level of grit – between 2,5 to 3 (the highest score), it means that grit has a positive impact on a job of a recruiter. Regarding their opinions, it is visible that at least some respondents are aware of that, as mentioned below:

‘It is good because it can be very useful in achieving success, and results in your line of work’ and ‘grit is a positive trait, a major motivation that makes possible difficult things. A gritty person aims to achieve their goals by overcoming difficulties and trying to dodge all the obstacles that lie in their way. An individual may be as gritty as possible while he/she does not take unethical actions. Grit is not justification to harm other people or jeopardize other people’s well-being.’ (see Appendix 4).

On the other hand, there is only one score of 3, meaning that others do not have the highest level, and are not at risk of being too gritty.

*Second order theme (d): Negative impact*

Although Duckworth, stated that there is no scientific evidence, that too much grit can have a negative impact on an individual, and there are few studies from other researchers, that would give any notion that it is true, most of the respondents mentioned at least one negative consequence of being too much gritty. Regarding the existing studies, they were either on different areas than recruitment, or not deep enough to have straightforward results. Nonetheless, as it is evident, that recruiters see the negative aspects of grit, especially being related to other personality traits, it can hurt others:

‘For instance, a ‘selfish and gritty’ person would do whatever it takes to achieve his/her goals, no matter what they have to do or if someone else gets hurt in the way. For this person and the people around his/her grit can be bad and even damaging (see Appendix 4).’

As we can see too much ambition can mislead, cause over competitiveness, nonappreciable personality, as well be frustrating, and even mislead from achieving the load:

‘with regards to recruitment, companies may feel that the candidate is too ambitious and will outgrow their position within the company and be more likely to move on,’ and ‘when you're too gritty you lose the ability of coldly look at the situation and when needed, you might not be able to understand that is better to delay this goal/give up on it (see Appendix 4)’

*Overarching dimension of the paradox of too much grit*

This two second order themes led to creating a paradox of too much grit, as analysing the impact of overgrittiness, we can see that ‘Grit is a positive trait, a major motivation that makes difficult things possible. A gritty person aims to achieve their goals by overcoming difficulties and trying to dodge all the obstacles that lie in their way. An individual may be as gritty as possible while he/she does not take unethical actions. Grit is not justification to harm other people or jeopardize other people’s well-being’, but if we combine grit with some personality traits as for example selfishness, and stubbornness, we are not really talking anymore not only about grit, and then the analysed trait can have a bad impact, but not alone, only in combination with other characteristics, that are known for its negative impact, and can be emphasised by grit.

## **Paradox of origin**

Later, the origin of grit was categorized in grit with natural origin (as an inborn personality trait), and grit gained from experience (education, training, work environment etc.).

### *Second order theme (e): Natural origin*

Many respondents mentioned the origin of grit in their answers, showing the importance of it. Most existing literature about grit focuses on teaching it (although there are no straightforward studies, that it is possible besides Angela's Duckworth beliefs) is about teaching grit, but not about the natural origin, meaning that grit can be in born. Many informants believe, that it is impossible to implement grit later, as the informants stated:

'(...) you can't be trained, it is about attitude and passion, that you are born with, and about the personality (...) it's more important to find the things that motivate you naturally and then you will have it.'

### *Second order theme (f): Experience*

On the other hand, other answers shown, that many recruiters believe in the same as Angela Duckworth, supposing that grit can be trained, and even born during the lifetime, thanks to the:

'(...) educational system (family, school, and environment) that does not value just the results, but the process involved to get to the results. In a company environment, a good manner of developing this concept is rewarding the gritty employees and showing how important this kind of attitude is to be more efficient.'

In SpotOn Connections and Betting Connections in training, targets, goals, and competition, and assuming, that not everyone was born with grit, but still the average level of grit in both sister companies is quite high, there is a chance, that it is successful.

### *Overarching dimension of the paradox of origin*

The third pair of themes, was related to the origin of grit, according to Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1923) we are born just with our Id, which is our most instinctive, and primitive behaviour, so as babies we cry whenever we cannot get what we want, but the rest of our personality traits are imparted, through our

interaction with the world around us. On the other hand, no one has proved that you can be gritty, unless you were born like that. Though, Angela Duckworth found out of her study, that you can develop grit, her colleagues in the field her evidence is not enough to believe in the theory (Slate, 2016). They do not think that grit is more important for achieving success, than other more familiar and well examined characteristics. They, even say that believing only in growing grit, equals to single-mindedness, that can be dangerous. This intense disagreement among the researchers in the existing literature led to the creation of the paradox of origin. This topic - because of the attention and interest, paid by the recruiters to it, and as there are no many studies about it, though it is crucial to know, if it is possible to grow grit or not - will be elaborated more in the discussion part. Especially that some of the recruiters have mixed feelings about it:

‘I am not sure that it can be cultivated unless from a very early age and environment, and considering that the individual brings other personality traits that empower grit. I don’t think an adult can become gritty with training.’

### **Consistency paradox**

Last, but not least the focus to reach a goal, as well as well the type of flexibility needed were presented.

#### *Second order theme (g): Flexibility*

Like, the importance of not giving up on small failures on the way to a bigger goal, is the idea of being flexible – ‘a ready capability to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2017) can be associated with grit as:

‘There is a flexibility in thinking, because doing what needs to be done is not about them (meaning the gritty people). It’s about doing, or achieving it, full stop (...) gritty person learns out of the behaviours and changes to succeed.’

Therefore, an example of being flexible is giving up on achieving a small goal after failing on it, or implementing some changes into your plan to focus 100% on the main goal. It is the way how recruiters work as well, whenever they use methods, that do not give results or stopped being successful, they try to find a new way, for example while sourcing (searching for) candidates, changing methods to find the best candidate.

#### *Second order theme (h): Commitment*



It is not surprising, that to achieve something, especially to maintain it in a long-term perspective specific actions, and focus are needed, as grit means achieving a long-term goal even if we have failures on our way, as described before in the paradox of results, and as the recruiters said being gritty is:

‘When you are perseverant and patient enough to reach whatever you decided to reach, no matter the difficulties, (...) believing in a higher purpose, (...) when someone achieves their goals and expectations, even if that requires a big effort during a long period of time.

Regarding recruitment it can be seen basically every day, on various examples, if a person is gritty they do not give up on the job easily after the first withdraw (resignation from the process of a candidate), or drop out (giving up on the job after accepting the job by the candidate), or even after several of them. A successful recruiter needs to know his main long-term goal (which can be the monthly, quarterly or yearly target), and also be aware of the obstacles mentioned before, that he can encounter while achieving the short-term goals – looking for candidates, and maintaining relationships with them throughout all the stages of a recruitment process to close vacancies on the daily basis.

According to studies performed on the samples of college students in Canada and in the United States (Hill et al., 2014), it was also confirmed that grittier students, shown much more commitment, as well as were more successful – which is the efficient part of grit – and shown, that commitment is a variable which can be used as a predictor of grit, what was only confirmed in this survey for this work project.

#### *Overarching dimension of the paradox of consistency*

The consistency paradox was formulated, because of the conflict between the features, mentioned before by researchers, that gritty people need to have. It shows, that on one hand grit means long-term commitment as gritty people need to focus on end goal and be assertive, knowing what they want to achieve (perseverance which is always mentioned as one of main grit components by Duckworth and others), though at the same time they need to stay flexible. They are not supposed to be stubborn, but highly adaptable in the short-term perspective.

#### **Reliability check**

After the revision of the interpretations, by some of the interviewed recruiters, they assume that I accomplished what I wanted to prove, though some people also change along time, due to different factors, so it should be taken into consideration as well. In addition, they believe, that you have to have the traits of grit in order to succeed in recruitment, though having throughout the whole life is not obligatory, as well as grit depends a lot on the main personality traits of the person. The reliability check thus suggests, that the interpretation might be considered credible.

## DISCUSSION

The findings regarding the term ‘grit’ in recruitment, and the main concepts about it what was of main importance in this study, show that grit is a paradoxical concept. Paradoxes relate to opposing, though related with each other ideas, that make sense only when appearing together (Lewis, 2000). This was already visible in the answers from the interviews. Based on the findings, grit shows to have two types of origin, either natural or gained throughout the life experience, as well as be related with flexibility in the short-term perspective, but also commitment to the long-term goal, resigning from the short-term goals to achieve the long-term one, and being a source of bad and good results depending on its level, and circumstances. Duckworth basing on her studies on cadets, regarding perseverance and resilience of gritty people (Duckworth et al., 2007), determined, that grit is not only resilience in failures, but also loyalty to many years of commitment. She realised, that cadets at West Pole reached their goals, basing much more on grit, than on any other features, including talent (Duckworth and Quinn, 2009). In this study we can see, regarding getting over failures and obstacles cadets from Duckworth’s examination have a similar approach as recruiters from our study.

According to an inductive study in the interviews, it was proofed that most of the examined recruiters were neither aware of the term of ‘grit, nor ever realized that such personality trait exists, and the overall level of grit among them was high (see Appendix 3) - the average being 2,42 out of 3 on the special scale made for this research, and only three people having results under 2 – what shows the awareness of grit does not have an impact on the result, but maybe it means also that people can be born with grit and use it naturally, and unconsciously. On the other hand, the respondents that knew grit before had high results (between 2 and 2,5), though not the highest scores, which were performed by people that had no idea about the discussed trait. Also, the three lowest scores were achieved by people, that never heard about grit before.

What if the results were improved to the highest level of grit? Is it possible to improve them?

All results could be improved. However, the research shown, that not everyone believes, that it is possible to cultivate grit (question 4 in the questionnaire). Many people say there are different ways of cultivating grit. Some of them require help of others, such as sharing the experience, teaching the process, and showing its importance and the positive impact, it can have on results and success since the beginning of education or in a training (especially at young age in high pressure working environments), setting targets, and goals and showing that it is important not to forget them in a long-term perspective, and other show that cultivation of grit requires the individual to proceed with actions on his own. Among examples provided were gaining experience, and self-awareness, understanding the job, and the solutions or only tools to solve the problems, having your own and individual targets (monthly and

annual with good rewards), and visualizing achieving it, starting work every day with a goal oriented attitude, having clear things to achieve every day, and something to compete for with others. A founder of a tutoring school believes, that teaching grit can be defined as figuring out how to coach students through difficult moments in learning—moments that every student will encounter regardless of their ability or learning style. (Professional development, 2017).

However, there are some opponents of those two approaches, saying that you can either be born with grit, and find natural motivation to pursue it or not, or maybe develop it but only at a very early age, or just grow grit to a very low level, when being supported by an HR professional.

### **Limitations and boundary conditions**

There is no research without limitations, therefore there is a couple of reasons why the study may be limited, or have some boundaries, presented below, ordered by significance of its potential impact.

Firstly, in this case the study was conducted only in one recruitment agency, based in two countries: Malta and Portugal, though working on an international market, and recruiting employees from different countries mainly for multilingual, gaming, financial jobs. However, we do not know what the results would be, if the study would be made in different countries, or even on a sample of recruiters having candidates from different job areas, and positions, or with recruiters themselves with different backgrounds, then the ones chosen.

Secondly, as the research was conducted in a company, by one of the employees, and the results were supposed to be announced, in theory some respondents could not be fully honest, or try to make their answers sound right. In this company, the risk of this was though quite low as most employees now each other for a long time, and everyone is quite close to each other, thanks to various social activities, such as weekly Friday beers, and the work environment – everyone in the same room no matter of the position, and places are changed every week to learn different ways of working from each other and exchange various ideas, to improve the performance of the whole agency. Anyway, to avoid any mistakes the questions were constructed in a smart way, for example not asking if someone is hard-working, but how they see a hard-working person looking at their example, so a respondent would not have a personal feeling about the answer.

In addition, the research needed to avoid impacting not only the credibility of the answer of the respondent, but also on the work performance or their self-confidence in a negative way. Therefore, while asking about failures, they were not asked directly if they have failures, but how they react, if they encounter a difficulty.

### **CONCLUSION**

The aim of this research was to understand grit from the perspective of a recruiter, as well, as its importance in recruitment using grounded theory, and basing on interviews among the group of interest. The ideas associated with grit, that came out of the surveys, were transformed into four dimensions, which together created one comprehensive conceptualization. Grit does not only mean achieving the final goal, but also not giving up on many small failures on the way, and therefore it requires both commitment for the final win, but also flexibility, while getting through all the difficulties towards our long-term aim. In addition, we need to be aware that overgrittiness (being too much gritty), can have both good and bad impact both on the person, and his environment.

A sample of recruiters was used to develop reliable theorizing about grit based upon the answers of employees from a recruitment agency, as those are the people that, because of the type of the work they do they seem to need to have the trait of grit. The importance of grit in recruitment was confirmed in the research, meaning that the grittier the recruiters are, the more success they achieve, as all the team leaders in the company have high levels of grit. Also, the respondents claim, that it is possible to develop grit during the life experience, however more research is needed on this theory.

Although, the results of the survey, thanks to the use of the grounding theory, gave the four paradoxes (created by the author, based on existing theories, and findings from the interviews), which resulted in the conceptualization of grit, all that can still evolve in many ways. One key question is when being too much gritty stops having positive impact, and starts to have negative consequences, and as stated in the limitations, it would be interesting to conduct the same research on recruiters from different companies to see, if the results differ, and in which exact dimensions.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Interview protocol**

##### Personal details

Name:

Age:

Number of years in the company:

Number of years in recruitment:

##### Grit knowledge

(1) What is grit?

- a. Did you hear this name before I told you about the interview or where you aware of this trait?

(2) When is it visible? (please give me some examples)

(3) Do you think it is useful? (explain)

- a. Do you think someone can be too much gritty and is it good or bad?
- b. Could you please let me know if it is useful in a job as a Recruiter? (explain)

(4) How it can be cultivated?

- a. Do you think it is more for risk seekers?

(5) And what is the difference between being gritty and some adjacent ideas (for example being stubborn)?

##### Level of grittiness

(6) How do you perceive a hard-working person? Please answer on your example.

(7) Do you consider that you are easily distracted by new ideas and projects?

- a. Why?

(8) Do you consider yourself as a person who finishes whatever you started? Please explain the reasons of your answer.

(9) Do you consider that you achieve your goals? (please specify examples such as: in life, overall and in the job basing on targets)

(10) How do you react when you encounter a difficulty while aiming to achieve your goals? (looking at an example of a recruitment process)



## Appendix 2

*Scoring* (regarding the questions from seven to ten)

For questions: 7, positive answer – 1, mixed answer – 2, negative answer - 3

For questions: 8, 9, positive answer

For question: 10 positive answer – 3, mixed answer – 2, negative answer - 1

Points from all questions should be added up, and divided by 4. The highest score on the scale is 3 (very gritty), and the lowest is 1 (not gritty at all).

## Appendix 3

*Level of Grit*

Number	7	8	9	10	Result	Team Leader
1	1	2	2	1	1,5	Not there anymore
2	2	2	3	3	2,5	no
3	1	2	2	2	1,75	no
4	2	3	3	3	2,75	no
5	3	1	3	3	2,5	Not there anymore
6	1	3	3	3	2,5	no
7	1	3	2	2	2	no
8	2	2	3	3	2,5	yes
9	2	2	3	3	2,5	yes
10	2	2	3	3	2,5	Not there anymore
11	1	1	1	1	1	no
12	2	3	3	3	2,75	Not there anymore
13	3	3	3	3	3	yes
14	3	3	3	2	2,75	yes
15	3	1	2	3	2,25	no
16	3	2	3	2	2,5	Not there anymore
17	3	3	2	3	2,75	yes
18	1	3	3	2	2,25	no
19	2	3	3	3	2,75	Not there anymore
20	3	2	3	3	2,75	no
21	1	1	3	3	2	Not there anymore
22	3	2	3	2	2,5	no
23	3	2	3	3	2,75	no
24	3	2	3	3	2,75	no
25	2	3	3	3	2,75	no