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## The Effects of Positive and Negative Perfectionism on Work Engagement, Psychological Well-Being and Emotional Exhaustion

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effects of positive and negative perfectionism on work engagement, psychological well-being and emotional exhaustion. Previous studies indicate that positive and negative perfectionism lead some desirable and undesirable consequences on employees' work and social life. Accordingly, the study consists of some positive and negative results of the perfectionism. In this context, the data were collected by using a survey method from 146 employees who work as supervisors and managers of hotels. The obtained data were analysed with structural equation modelling technique. The result of the study shows that positive perfectionism affects work engagement and psychological well-being positively, whereas it has no direct effect on emotional exhaustion. In addition to this, negative perfectionism affects psychological well-being negatively but it has no direct effect on work engagement and emotional exhaustion. Therefore, it can be seen that psychological well-being has a fully mediator role in the relationships between negative perfectionism and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, psychological well-being has a fully mediator role in the relationships between positive perfectionism and emotional exhaustion.

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*Keywords:* Positive perfectionism, negative perfectionism, work engagement, psychological well-being, emotional exhaustion

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### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the term of perfectionism is rooted in people's life because of humans' competitions in workplaces become higher and organizations have a tendency to employ individuals who possess specific personality characteristics (Khodarahimi, 2010). One of the personality characteristic which reflects the employee's disposition to engage in over activity, to strive flawlessness and to set excessively high performance standardises are characterized as a perfectionism (Stoeber and Rennett, 2008; Appleton et al., 2009; Cumming and Duda, 2012). Perfectionism refers to an "extreme or obsessive striving for perfection, as in one's work". However, the concept of perfectionism has been regarded as a multidimensional personality trait comprising both positive and negative

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aspects (Dykstra, 2006; Butt, 2010). Positive perfectionism refers to the cognitions and behaviors which direct individuals to achieve high-level goals by positive reinforcement and willingness to gain success, whereas negative perfectionism represents individuals striving for unrealistically performance standards and includes negative reinforcement and a fear of failure (Stoeber, and Rambow, 2007; Kung and Chan, 2014). Accordingly, it can be said that positive and negative perfectionism which affect individuals' work and social life from different perspectives may lead positive and negative consequences both for individuals and organizations (Ram, 2005). Therefore, theoretical and empirical research interests about perfectionism and its consequences have grown considerably over the last decade (Bieling et al., 2004). Thus, the study will examine some of the consequences of perfectionism. In other words, work engagement, psychological well-being and emotional exhaustion concepts are evaluated as scope of the consequences of perfectionism. In this context, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of positive and negative perfectionism on work engagement, psychological well-being and emotional exhaustion.

## **2. Literature Review**

Positive and negative perfectionism are characterized as one of the most important feature and emotional state which differentiate individuals from each other and bring about some changes in their lives (Forghani et al., 2013). Positive perfectionism includes high level of personal standards and trying to do best, whereas negative perfectionism comprise of individuals worries about making mistakes, fear of criticisms of others and fear of discrepancy between results and standards (Geranmayepour and Besharat, 2010). Both positive and negative perfectionism require individuals to have high personal standards for their work or behavior but individuals response are different or varied when they face with failure. For example, positive perfectionists may have low levels of distress when they could not reach their standards, while negative perfectionists experience high levels of distress in the same boat (Beauregard, 2012). Researchers suggested that positive perfectionism has been described as a normal, healthy, or adaptive perfectionism, and it has positive correlations with indicators of desirable outputs such as positive affect and positive workplace attitudes and behaviors. However, they asserted that negative perfectionism labelled as neurotic, unhealthy, or maladaptive perfectionism and it is related with some negative statements such as depression, anxiety, stress etc. (Besharat and Shahidi, 2010). In literature, researchers suggested that positive perfectionism has a positive effect on workaholism, work involvement, enjoyment of work and achievement of individuals. Moreover, it has been asserted that positive perfectionist employees have a high-level of self-esteem and self-efficacy, positive affects, more positive family dynamics and increased life satisfaction, psychological well-being and work engagement (Ram, 2005; Stoeber, and Rambow, 2007; Mitchelson, 2009; Stoeber et al., 2013; Haase et al., 2013; Tziner and Tanami, 2013; Gnilka et al., 2013).

Work engagement refers to individual possessing a persistent, positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind at work which is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor includes individual having a high level of energy and mental resilience while working and it is related with the willingness to invest effort. Dedication is defined as an individual's strong involvement in work which involves a sense of enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized the status of someone who is deeply engrossed in work and is unable to detach himself or herself from the work (Shih, 2012; Lu and Guy, 2014; Rayton and Yalabik, 2014). Accordingly, individuals who have positive traits and perceive their work environment favourable and fulfil their expectations may have a high level of engagement. Because work engagement emerges depending on the situational and individual factors. In literature, perfectionism is considered one of the individual components that lead to work engagement. Researchers suggested that positive perfectionism related with work engagement positively (Zhang et al., 2007: 1537; Childs and Stoeber, 2010; Tziner and Tanami, 2013). However, positive and negative perfectionism related with psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is defined as an individual's perception and assessment of their lives. In other words, it refers to some combination of feeling good or positive affective states and functioning effectively social life (Rasulzada, 2007; Huppert, 2009; Winefield et al., 2012). Psychological well-being is a broad concept which includes subjective experiences such as self-confidence, self-efficacy or some personality characteristics, presence of positive emotions and absence of negative emotions and global judgement about one's whole life (Rathi, 2011).

In literature, researches indicated that perfectionism has some negative consequences for individuals such as anxiety, depression, chronic insomnia, social phobia, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, eating disorders, psychosomatic disorders etc. Furthermore, it leads to suicidal ideation, chronic sense of failure, indecisiveness, procrastination, shame, negative affect and burnout (Bieling et al., 2004; Molnar et al., 2006; 1374;

Chan, 2007; Stairs, 2009; Besharat and Shahidi, 2010; Tashman et al., 2010; Philp et al., 2012). Moreover, studies suggest that positive perfectionism which is considered as a healthy and desirable feature could affect psychological well-being positively. On the other hand, negative perfectionism involves high levels of distress associated with psychological well-being negatively. For example, researchers asserted that positive perfectionism result in low levels of depression while negative perfectionism bring about psychological distress (Chang, 2006; Chan, 2007; Butt, 2010; Cumming and Duda, 2012; Black and Reynolds, 2013; Kung and Chan, 2014). Therefore, positive perfectionism makes individual feel enjoyment and satisfaction and it facilitates them to have psychological well-being, and reinforces their mental health. Accordingly it can be said that while positive perfectionism leads to positive emotions and decreases psychological distress; negative perfectionism results in negative effects on mental health (Geranmayepour and Besharat, 2010). Furthermore, it has been expected that negative perfectionism causes some other unfavourable outcomes on both individual's work and social life which is called as an emotional exhaustion.

Emotional exhaustion is characterized as feelings of individuals such as emotionally overextended, extreme tired and depleted. However, emotional exhaustion represents feeling of energy loss and a sense of being completely drowned from emotional and physical perspective. Emotional exhaustion is considered the first and basic stage of burnout which indicates individuals stress levels (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Akpınar et al., 2013). Accordingly, emotional exhaustion emerges when an individual regularly works under stress that is triggered by interpersonal interactions and working conditions (Wu and Hu, 2009). In literature it has been considered that there are several organizational and individual factors lead to emotional exhaustion. Researchers mainly focus on some factors such as demographic variables, personality and social support as the scope of individual determinants of emotional exhaustion. Moreover they have suggested that some of the personality traits like hardiness, locus of control, Type A behavior, self-esteem, achievement motivation and perfectionism play an important role in the development of emotional exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2002; Houkes et al., 2003; Basım et al., 2013; Pervichko et al., 2013). Therefore, it is possible to express that employee who is a negative perfectionists is confronted with emotional exhaustion much more than a positive perfectionist in work environment. In the literature researches indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship between negative perfectionism and burnout dimensions (Stoeber and Rennert, 2008: 45; Appleton et al., 2009; Gotwals, 2011; Schwenke, 2012; Shih, 2012; Li et al., 2014).

In this context, it is possible to express consequences of perfectionism whether they are positive or negative depends on individuals' perfectionism type. In other words, individuals who have a positive perfectionism can meet positive consequences with their work and social life. Otherwise, individuals who tend to be negative perfectionists meet with unfavourable outcomes in their life. Accordingly, it is expected that individuals with higher levels of perfectionism are more tend to engage their works and have a higher level of psychological well-being. However, employees who are characterized as a negative perfectionists experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and lower levels of psychological well-being. Therefore, it can be said that perfectionism lead some desirable and undesirable results in people's life. In the literature, there are some researches indicating the consequences of positive and negative perfectionism in working life. However, there is not any research investigating the relationships among positive-negative perfectionism, work engagement, emotional exhaustion and psychological well-being together in the existing literature. Thus, this study aims to investigate the relationships among these variables and attempts to add contribution to the literature. Within the scope of research, it is assumed that positive and negative perfectionism affect work engagement, emotional exhaustion and psychological well-being. In order to test the relationships among them research hypotheses are developed.

H1: Positive perfectionism affects emotional exhaustion negatively.

H2: Positive perfectionism affects work engagement positively.

H3: Positive perfectionism affects psychological well-being positively.

H4: Negative perfectionism affects emotional exhaustion positively.

H5: Negative perfectionism affects work engagement negatively.

H6: Negative perfectionism affects psychological well-being negatively.

### **3. Research Method**

#### *3.1. Sample and Procedures*

The sample of the research is composed of four and five-star hotels in Muğla city which is located in Turkey. The sample used for the study consists of approximately 200 staff, who works as a supervisors and managers in 10 different hotels which were determined via convenient sampling method. However, questionnaire survey method is used for data collection. Questionnaire form that was used in the survey contains four different measures related to research variables. From the 200 questionnaires that have been sent out, 150 were returned, representing a response rate of 75%. After elimination of cases having incomplete data and outliers 146 questionnaire (73%) were accepted as valid and included in the evaluations.

### 3.2. Measures

Measures used in the questionnaire forms were adapted from the previous studies in the literature. Measures were adapted to Turkish by following the method of forward backward translation from the lecturers and for the validity of these measures pilot study was conducted. As a result of the conducted pilot study, some corrections were done in questionnaire forms.

**Perfectionism Scale:** Employees perfectionism levels were measured with 20 items from Haase and Prapavessis's (2004) study. Exploratory factor analyses using principle component analysis with varimax rotation was applied to the adapted scale for checking the dimensions. As a result of the varimax rotation of the data related to perfectionism variables, 9 items were removed from the analysis due to the factor loadings under 0.50 and two factor solutions were obtained as per theoretical structure. Factor loadings of the item ranged from .52 to .82. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the perfectionism scale items is 0.73.

**Psychological Well-Being Scale:** Psychological well-being was measured with 39 items which was developed by Ryff (1989) taken from Springer and Hauser's (2006) study. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted for the psychological well-being scale. As a result of the varimax rotation of the data related to psychological well-being variables, 22 items were removed from the analysis due to the factor loadings under 0.50 and three factor solutions were obtained as per theoretical structure. Factor loadings of the item ranged from .54 to .83. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the psychological well-being scale items is 0.83

**Emotional Exhaustion Scale:** Employees exhaustion levels were measured with 8 items from Karatepe's (2013) study. Exploratory factor analyses were conducted for the emotional exhaustion scale. As a result of the exploratory factor analyses of the data related to emotional exhaustion variables, all items have sufficient factor loading. Factor loadings of the item ranged from 0.68 to 0.90. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the emotional exhaustion items is 0.92.

**Work Engagement Scale:** Employees work engagement levels were measured with 17 items taken from Kanten's (2012) study. This scale was adapted to Turkish in sample of Turkish employees by Kanten (2012). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the work engagement scale items is .85

After the exploratory factor analyses, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted by Lisrel 8.8 for all scales. Goodness of fit indexes is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Goodness of fit indexes of the scales

Variables	X <sup>2</sup>	df	X <sup>2</sup> /df ≤ 5	GFI ≥ .85	CFI ≥ .90	NFI ≥ .90	NNFI ≥ .90	RMSEA ≤ 0.08
Perfectionism	113.27	63	1.80	0.89	0.95	0.90	0.93	0.074
Psychological Well-Being	155.56	86	1.81	0.87	0.95	0.89	0.93	0.075
Work Engagement	75.57	40	1.89	0.91	0.97	0.93	0.96	0.078
Emotional Exhaustion	12.77	8	1.60	0.97	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.064

## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1. Respondent Profile

55% of employees are male and 45% are female. Majority 70% of the employees are between the ages 21-35. In terms of education level, 55% of them have vocational school education and 45% of them have bachelor's and master's degree. 53% of employees are supervisors, while %47 of them are managers. %50 of employees are work at food and beverage department, 28% of them are work at front office department and %22 of them are work at administrative units.

#### 4.2. Descriptive Analysis

Correlations, standard deviations and means were computed which is related with negative and positive perfectionism, work engagement, psychological well-being and emotional exhaustion. Table 2 illustrates them:

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations of the study variables

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
Positive Perfectionism	4.05	0.70	1				
Negative Perfectionism	2.74	0.79	-.193*	1			
Psychological Well-Being	3.80	0.54	.370**	-.223**	1		
Work Engagement	3.81	0.58	.638**	-.090	.388**	1	
Emotional Exhaustion	2.68	0.95	-.244**	.443**	-.536**	-.168*	1

\*.  $p < 0.05$       \*\*.  $p < 0.01$

As can be seen in table 2, employees' positive perfectionism levels are higher than their negative perfectionism levels. Employees' work engagement and psychological well-being levels are relatively higher than their emotional exhaustion levels. Correlation results shows that there is a positive relationship between positive perfectionism ( $r = .370$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and psychological well-being and there is a positive relationship between positive perfectionism and work engagement ( $r = .638$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). However, positive perfectionism is negatively related to emotional exhaustion ( $r = -.244$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). In addition to this, negative perfectionism is negatively related with psychological well-being ( $r = -.223$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), whereas it is related positively with emotional exhaustion ( $r = .443$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

#### 4.3. Measurement Model

For the verification of the model two step approaches by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was used. According to this approach, prior to testing the hypothesized structural model, first the research model needs to be tested to reach a sufficient goodness of fit indexes. After obtaining acceptable indexes it can be proceeded with structural model (Yüncü, 2010: 86). As a result of the measurement model, it can be seen that 4 latent and 45 observed variables. Observed variable consist of 11 items related with work engagement, 13 items related with perfectionism, 15 items related with psychological well-being and 6 items related with emotional exhaustion. For accepting measurement model goodness of fit need to be considered. Therefore indexes of measurement model are;  $\chi^2$ : 893.16, df: 586,  $\chi^2/df$ : 1.52; RMSEA: 0.06; CFI: 0.93; IFI: 0.93, NFI: 0.85, SRMR: 0.08. These values indicate that measurement model is acceptable (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003: 52; Meydan and Şeşen, 2011: 35).

#### 4.4. Structural Equation Model

After the correlation analyses and measurement model, the study applied a structural equation model to verify hypotheses for the causal relationships between variables in accordance with literature. The proposed model that was used to test the relationships is shown in Figure 1. The results of the structural model are;  $\chi^2$ : 284.80; df: 142;  $\chi^2/df$ : 2.00; RMSEA: 0.083; GFI: 0.83; CFI: 0.92; IFI: 0.92; NFI: 0.86; NNFI: 0.90. These results indicate that structural model has a weak fit with the data and it was not considered in the acceptable range. (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003: 52; Yılmaz and Çelik, 2009: 166; Meydan and Şeşen, 2011: 37).

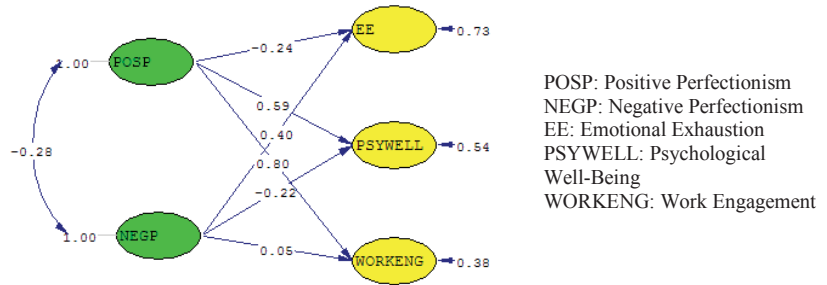


Figure 1. Path results of proposed model.

On the basis of the results, proposed model was revised according to the theoretical framework due to the lower and unacceptable values thus more significant model was obtained. The revised model that was used to test the relationships is shown in Figure 2. The results of the revised model are;  $\chi^2$ : 246.15; df: 140;  $\chi^2/df$ : 1.75; RMSEA: 0.072; GFI: 0.85; IFI: 0.94; CFI: 0.94; NNFI: 0.97. Revised model results were much higher than proposed model. Therefore, it is possible to express that all values in revised model get better and this model has a better fit with the data than the proposed model.

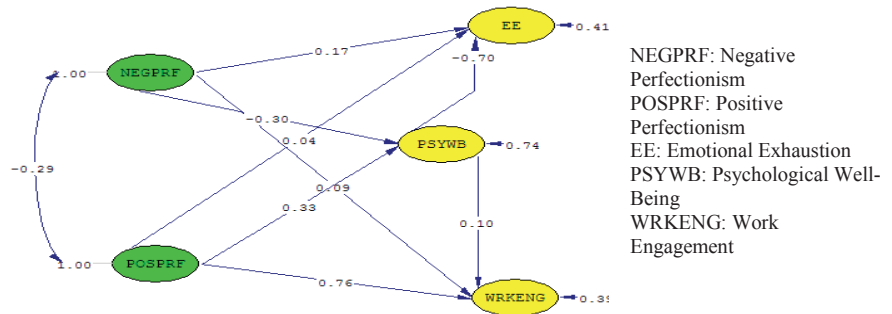


Figure 2. Path results of hypothesized model

According to the results of revised model, the path parameter and significance level show that positive perfectionism has no direct effect on emotional exhaustion and H1 hypothesis was rejected ( $\beta=0.04$ ;  $t=0.37$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). However, positive perfectionism effects work engagement ( $\beta=0.76$ ;  $t=7.23$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and psychological well-being ( $\beta=0.33$ ;  $t=2.80$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) positively. Thus H2 and H3 hypothesis were supported. In addition to these findings, negative perfectionism had no direct effect on emotional exhaustion ( $\beta=0.17$ ;  $t=1.74$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) and work engagement ( $\beta=0.09$ ;  $t=0.91$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) so H4 and H5 hypothesis were not supported. Moreover, negative perfectionism had a negative effect on ( $\beta=-0.30$ ;  $t=-2.48$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) psychological well-being and H6 hypothesis was supported. Consequently, in this study two models were tested and compared. In the proposed model, insufficient results were obtained therefore model needed to be revised. In the revised model, psychological well-being was taken as a mediator variable. When psychological well-being was considered as a mediator, results revealed that psychological well-being fully mediated the effects of negative perfectionism on emotional exhaustion. However, results indicate that psychological well-being has a fully mediator role in the relationships between the positive perfectionism and emotional exhaustion.

## 5. Conclusion

Perfectionism is considered as a positive and negative personality trait from the perspective of individuals in working environment. In other words, perfectionism type whether it is positive and negative may have some positive and adverse effects on individuals' work and social life. For example, employees who possess a negative perfectionism trait can feel lower level of psychological well-being, work engagement, life and job satisfaction. However, their distress, depression and emotional exhaustion levels get higher than positive perfectionist individuals. Conversely, it is expected that positive perfectionism results in work engagement, psychological well-being and life satisfaction, decreasing of stress and emotional exhaustion levels. Therefore, it can be said that positive perfectionism is a desirable personality trait in the 21st centuries' working conditions. Because organizations need to employ qualified and perfect employees who have a high levels of personal standards, purposes and achievement motivation in order to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. Especially positive perfectionism is thought to be an important factor an employee's attitudes and behaviors towards customers and their organizations in hospitality industry. Accordingly, it is possible to state that employees who are positive perfectionist can demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors such as work engagement, job embeddedness, extra-role and organizational citizenship behaviors etc. On the other hand, positive perfectionist individuals have a positive mood, higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence and psychological well-being as they have achieved their performance standards. Furthermore, employees who have positive perfectionist trait are more willing to learn new things, have a tendency to perform work roles efficiently and to take additional responsibilities. In this context, it can be said that both positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism are remarkable personality traits which need to be managed carefully in organizations because of their important consequences.

Concordantly, this study aims to determine some of the consequences of positive and negative perfectionism. As a result, the research findings revealed that the purposed model of the study needs to be revised due to its statistical values. In other words, the purposed model was tried to be modified according to the theoretical framework to acquire more significance results. In this context, psychological well-being was taken as a mediator variable in the revised model and considerably important outputs were obtained. For example, positive perfectionism effects both work engagement and psychological well-being positively. Therefore H2 and H3 hypothesis were supported. But not any direct effect of positive perfectionism was found on emotional exhaustion, and therefore H1 was hypothesis rejected. When the psychological well-being was considered as a mediator, it was seen that psychological well-being had a mediating role between positive perfectionism and emotional exhaustion. In other words, positive perfectionism affects employees' psychological well-being positively at first, and then in times their emotional exhaustion levels affected negatively based on their psychological well-being levels. Moreover, research results indicate that negative perfectionism affects employees' psychological well-being negatively so H6 hypothesis was supported. On the other hand there occurred no direct affect between negative perfectionism-work engagement and negative perfectionism-emotional exhaustion hence H4 and H5 hypothesis were not supported. However, it can be said that psychological well-being has a mediator role in the relationships between negative perfectionism and emotional exhaustion. That is, negative perfectionism affects employees' psychological well-being negatively at first then their emotional exhaustion levels get affected from the negative perfectionism due to the psychological well-being. All of these results show that individuals' work engagement, psychological well-being and emotional exhaustion levels are affected positively or negatively depending on the perfectionism type. In this context, it is possible to say that positive perfectionist managers will confront work engagement and psychological well-being while negative perfectionist managers meet with undesirable outputs in hotels' scope of the research. For future studies, the research model can be tested on larger samples then consequences can be compared to the degree of the managers' levels. Furthermore, the study can be expanded by adding other variables which are classified as important consequences both for individuals and organizations such as life satisfaction, job satisfaction, workholism, positive affect etc.

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