

# The Effects of Motivational Factors on Work Behavior

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## INTRODUCTION

The 40-hour work week, typically Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., has been around since the 1920s and officially part of the Fair Labor Standards Act since the 1930s (Horowitz-Ghazi, 2021). However, many people work beyond this schedule. Especially with the convenience of technology, it is easier than ever to work after hours, from home, or on Saturdays. Despite the increase in the self-care narrative, people are still overworking, intentionally or not.

The traditional assumption is that people overwork to earn more money, but the purpose of this study is to determine various motivating factors behind overworking. This study assumes that there are multiple motivating factors at play. Several researchers have looked into what overworking looks like and how it has changed throughout the years. However, in the current literature, there is little known knowledge on why people exhibit overworking behaviors. This paper investigates “What are the motivational factors behind overworking?” and compares motivating factors to work behaviors. Specifically, it collects data on hours worked and attempts to determine the why behind it through navigating various potential internal and external motivating factors.

This research is significant because overworking is directly linked to someone’s quality of life, from their mental to physical to emotional well-being (Doerrmann et al., 2020). Additionally, it supports more of an understanding of why people overwork, which can be used to inform a proactive approach that encourages a more balanced relationship between the work and life domains.

There are many terms that are going to be used throughout this paper. Overworking is defined here as working more than 40 hours a week. Motivational factors are looked at in terms of Alderfer’s ERG theory, breaking down motivation into existence, relatedness, and growth. Existence needs are those that are needed for survival, which include Maslow’s physiological and safety needs. Relatedness needs are those that refer to our interpersonal relationships, which relates to Maslow’s social and external self-esteem needs. Finally, growth needs are those referring to personal growth and self-image, including Maslow’s self-esteem and self-actualization needs. Alderfer’s ERG theory differs from Maslow’s in that the levels do not have to go in a certain order and that they are not mutually exclusive. ERG theory suggests that people can be motivated by multiple different needs at once, and one action can aim to support multiple needs. Therefore, overworking is compared to these three motivating factors simultaneously, and the motivating factor can be a combination of multiple levels.

To limit the scope, this study only focuses on people in the business field with traditional workdays. All participants must be full-time, salaried employees who work on the business side of companies. This excludes people such as, but not limited to, hourly workers, skill jobs, STEM workers, and those in academia.

This study assumes that people overwork for reasons in their control and that they are not being forced to work extra hours and that people accurately report their behaviors and personal information.

The remainder of this paper focuses on a review of literature regarding overworking and motivational factors. It then presents the research methodology used and data collected. The analysis follows with a discussion of the findings and recommendations for future research. The paper concludes with implications for the future of work and how individuals as well as businesses can address overworking as a means to improve human well-being.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The dangers of overworking have been presented in prior research, but overworking persists. It may be an expectation and therefore limits the ability for an employee to not adhere if promotion or compensation is desired. The members of Gen Z (individuals born from 1990 to 2010) may be the pressure that is needed to adopt a new working expectation. With desires to work in an environment that aligns with their values, this generation may resist the overworking culture and be the changemakers (The Economist, 2022).

### Work-Life Balance

The concept of “work-life balance” is not new, but its definition may be changing. Defining “work” and defining “life” can possibly be different for everyone based on their values, so it is hard to determine the level of work-life balance amongst different people (Kelliher et al., 2019). Work-life balance today looks very different than it did even just a few years ago due to the influx in work technologies and changing generational expectations. Millennials are seen as “lazy” and “privileged,” but this may be because of their differing definition of “work” and “life” in work-life balance (Gani, 2016). This balance is often viewed as important but is highlighted as the deterrent of success. At some levels in the organization, overworking is an expectation. For example, C-Suite executives have been expected to engage in overworking behaviors for decades with increased pressure in the late 1990s due to technology advancements that enabled working at-home after-hours (Industry Week, 1998). Since then, the ability to work anywhere, anytime has blurred the 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. lines. Back in 1908, a solid work-life balance was linked to “increased productivity, decreased overtime and sick leave, and better service” (Anderson, 1998, 128). Yet despite the time that has passed since this discovery, little has changed, and people are possibly working even more. People are still trying to convince companies of this “working less is not bad” phenomenon. In order to get the attention of people in charge of this change, it is important to highlight the positive relationship between work-life balance and work engagement (Wood et al., 2020). Without showing this relationship, companies and their employees have no incentive to cultivate a better work-life balance.

### Overworking and Workaholism

Society glorifies working hard and working long hours. It can be regarded as a badge of honor to overwork and give more than expected to the company. However, people fail to see overworking as an addiction. Work addiction, also known as workaholism, is a problematic behavior that is not studied enough (Atroszko et al., 2019). Overworking has been correlated

with negative health outcomes, such as increased obesity and cardiovascular issues (Doerrmann et al., 2020). Although overworking is potentially decreasing the health and wellness of employees, it is not regarded as problematic since those affected are contributing members of society.

On a deeper level, however, people—workaholics or not—know the faults in this behavior but are unwilling to stop it. Workaholics have high levels of intrinsic motivation to work so much (van Beek et al., 2012). While intrinsic motivation is good for all employees to have, in some people, the lack of control of this motivation can cause an unhealthy relationship with work. There are many factors that cause someone to be a workaholic, including their personal characteristics, like their level of intrinsic motivation mentioned previously and the societal standard of overworking (Mazzetti et al., 2014). Some companies expect more extreme work hours than others, which can create a cascading effect of overworking throughout the company because the cultural norm is to do so. If the company culture encourages employees to respond to emails on weekends, then people will put in hours on Sundays. While there are situations that encourage overworking, there are also indicators of how this behavior can be decreased. Having committed family relationships is one way to decrease the chances of a person becoming a workaholic (Huml et al., 2021). This shows the importance of values in determining hours worked. However, not all people with strong family values are at lower odds of becoming a workaholic, so other variables must be present as well to support a decrease in workaholic tendencies.

## Burnout

One of the most significant consequences of overworking is burnout. Burnout is defined as prolonged overworking to the point that any and all desire to work is nonexistent. Burned-out employees can be at any stage of their career and can ebb and flow from their burned-out state. Companies have to determine how to motivate underperforming employees without creating a culture of overworking (Muller and Schotter, 2010). While good in the short term, overworking can eventually cause burnout, which is known to reduce accomplishment and overall well-being, hurting workplace productivity and environments (Calitz, 2022). Burnout has also been associated with low levels of intrinsic motivation (van Beek et al., 2012). Therefore, companies have to find ways to extrinsically motivate the underperforming employees, despite extrinsic motivation not being sustainable.

## The Shifting Workplace

Work from home is a highly controversial topic at the moment. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, work moved from the office to the home. People began working from home at rates never seen before, and for some people this shift increased their work-life balance and decreased work-related stress, which in turn increased job satisfaction (Iranwanto et al., 2021). Employees were able to spend more time at home and focus on their personal responsibilities. However, switching back and forth between work and non-work tasks is difficult and makes it harder to be productive (Grotto et al., 2022). Being at home exacerbates this problem since it is more difficult to stay fully focused on work during work hours and fully focused on home after work hours. The lines were blurred and, in some cases, began to completely overlap. The ability to focus on non-work tasks without the interruption of work tasks and, vice versa, is important to well-being and work-related outcomes. Now, with the finishing of the pandemic, companies are beginning to enforce return to work policies. This is having an effect on work-life balance because employees got used to more lenient schedules and are now struggling to re-find work-life balance while being in the office for a full work week.

## Gender Differences

Women are historically at a bigger disadvantage in the workforce because of the expectation to overwork in order to find success. Women are at a disadvantage in the job market, especially in executive positions with long expected hours because of their unwillingness to overwork and the need for flexibility in their job (Galagan, 2012). This could be one explanation for the gender pay gap that has transcended generations of women fighting for and beginning to receive equal rights and opportunities (Flèche et al., 2020). Gender norms still control our society and still put women at a disadvantage in the workforce.

## Alderfer's ERG Theory

Motivation plays a critical role in working behaviors. With a plethora of research on motivation for decades and many theories to explain it, this study focuses solely on Clayton Alderfer's ERG Theory. This theory focuses on three levels of motivation: existence needs, relatedness needs, and growth needs, rather than the five seen in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Existence needs are those that are purely there for survival, such as our physiological and safety needs. Our relatedness needs are those that are interpersonal, such as social and esteem needs. Finally, our growth needs are our personal needs, such as other esteem needs and self-actualization needs (Caulton, 2012). Contrary to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, these three levels

of needs are not exclusive to one another, meaning that someone can be motivated by multiple levels at once. Job performance is highly dictated by need satisfaction and our self-esteem needs, which are both relatedness and growth needs (Arnold & Boshoff, 2002). Alderfer's three levels can help better define the motivation behind certain work behaviors, including overworking (Thangal, 2021).

## METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methods used for this study to identify motivating factors behind overworking and compares these behaviors to Alderfer's ERG theory. The purpose of this study is to add a factor of “why” to the existing literature of the “what” of overworking.

To answer the research question, “What are the motivational factors for overworking behaviors?” a Qualtrics survey was created to gather demographic information, working behaviors, and motivation factors. Potential participants were contacted through personal networks and online platforms, like LinkedIn. Participation was voluntary with eligibility criteria presented first and then a prompt to agree to participate. All participants had an opportunity to exit the survey at any point. After they received the link to the survey and agreed to participate, it was presented in three parts.

The survey began by gathering participants' demographic information. The first three questions determined a participant's eligibility for the study. The first criterion ensured that the participants were over the age of 18. The second criterion was in regard to how long the participant had been a full-time employee. Participants must have worked full-time for at least one year to be eligible for this study. People who have been working for less than one year are less likely to have solidified thoughts on their behavior. Finally, all participants could not be hourly workers, as this would directly influence their motivational factors. These criteria resulted in 94 eligible participants. The following list shows the demographic information collected.

- Age
- Number of years as a full-time employee
- Pay structure (salary based, hourly based, commission based, combination, other)
- Industry
- Gender
- Current annual income
- Economic status of childhood

The second and third sections used Likert scales that allowed each participant to rank themselves on a scale based on how much they agreed with the statement. The options on the scale are listed below.

- Not at all like me
- Somewhat not like me



- Neither like or not like me
- Somewhat like me
- Completely like me

In the second section, participants ranked their work behaviors on this scale. The four behavioral prompts are listed below.

- I work more hours than required of me often.
- My work demands that I communicate (ex: answer emails, respond to messages, etc.) outside of work hours.
- To get promoted at work, I have to work more than expected.
- I struggle every day with the demands of my work taking away from my core priorities.

The survey concluded with nine motivational factor questions, each of which aligned with one of Alderfer's three motivational factors. The prompts and their corresponding motivational factors are listed below.

#### *Existence*

- If I didn't work as much as I do, I would not be able to put food on my plate or pay for housing expenses.
- I work to provide more than the essentials for my family.

#### *Relatedness*

- My community depends on me doing my job.
- I find self-worth in providing for myself and/or my family.

#### *Growth*

- I find self-worth in excelling in my job.
- I find self-worth in working more than my coworkers.
- My work is meaningful to my life.
- I find meaning in my life from the work I do.
- If I didn't work, my life would be meaningless.

The following parts of this paper analyze the findings from this methodology and create conclusions and recommendations for the future.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Demographics - Section I

The survey concluded with 94 eligible participants. The age of participants ranged from 22 to 70, with 28 being the most common. The number of years as a full-time employee ranged from 1 to 42 years. Most participants (56.4%) were in the business industry, with others from healthcare, engineering, government, education, fine arts, and other. 52.1% of the participants were female, 46.8% were male, and 1.1% preferred not to say. The annual income ranged from less than \$25,000 to greater than \$500,000, with the most common answer selected being the \$100,000-\$150,000 range.

### Work Behaviors - Section II

The work behavior section of the survey was intended to address the overworking tendencies of the participants. Each participant rated each of the four statements that informed individual work behaviors and overworking tendencies.

In the first prompt, "I work more hours than expected of me often," the number of participants that selected from "Not at all like me" to "Completely like me" were 6, 9, 13, 32, and 34, respectively. After assigning a numeric value to each of the options in the Likert scales, with "Not at all like me" equaling 1 and "Completely like me" equaling 5, the average response was 3.84, which falls between "Neither like or unlike me" and "Somewhat like me." This is the highest average of the four prompts, meaning it was the most agreed with statement.

In the second prompt, "My work demands that I communicate (ex: answer emails, respond to messages, etc.) outside of work hours," the number of participants that chose each Likert option were 14, 18, 10, 23, and 29, respectively. The average response was 3.37, which again falls between "Neither like or unlike me" and "Somewhat like me" but is less than the average from the first prompt.

In the third prompt, "To get promoted at work, I have to work more than expected," the number of participants that chose each Likert option was 8, 8, 17, 37, and 24, respectively. The average response was 3.65, falling between the averages for the first and second prompts.

In the fourth and final prompt, "I struggle every day with the demands of my work taking away from my core priorities," the number of participants that chose each Likert option was 21, 22, 20, 22, and 9, respectively. The average response was 2.74, so unlike the first three prompts, it falls between "Somewhat not like me" and "Neither like or unlike me." This is the lowest average of the four, meaning it is the least agreed with statement.

Across all four prompts, the most common response was “Somewhat like me,” the second most common response was “Completely like me,” and the least common response was “Not at all like me.” This demonstrates a left-skewed graph that shows that the participants are more likely to agree with these overworking statements than disagree.

### Motivational Factors - Section III

In this section, the nine prompts were not separated by need category (existence, relatedness, or growth) but were analyzed accordingly. For the purpose of analysis, each Likert scale option was given a corresponding numerical value, with “Not at all like me” corresponding to a 1, “Completely like me” corresponding to a 5, and the rest of the options corresponding accordingly.

In the first existence prompt, “If I didn’t work as much as I do, I would not be able to put food on my plate or pay for housing expenses,” the distribution of choice selection from the Likert scale as before was 25, 17, 17, 20, and 15, respectively. This made the average response 2.82, meaning that it leaned more towards disagreement than agreement. In the second existence need prompt, “I work to provide more than the essentials for my family,” the distribution of the Likert scale was 0, 5, 3, 13, and 41. This prompt is unique because it highlights a personal definition of survival rather than a universal one. The average response to this question was 4.45, the highest rate of agreeableness of any of the prompts. Therefore, this factor was highly motivating. Between the two prompts, there is a fairly evenly distributed but still left skewed graph with the most common response being “Neither like or unlike me” (See Appendix A).

Secondly, in the first relatedness prompt, “My community depends on me doing my job,” the number of participants answering at each level of the Likert scale was 5, 12, 12, 18, and 15, respectively, making the average response 3.42. In the second relatedness prompt, “I find self-worth in providing for myself and/or my family,” the distribution of choice selections was 1, 5, 3, 28, and 57, respectively, making this average 4.44, the second highest average among all of the motivation prompts. While in different need categories, the two highest scores among the prompts both had to do with family, one with survival and one with connection. Between the two prompts, the graph of the relatedness prompts is left skewed with the most common response being “Somewhat like me” (see Appendix B).

There are five growth prompts. In the first growth prompt, “I find self-worth in excelling in my job,” the number of participants per Likert level was 1, 3, 8, 35, and 47, respectively, with an average response of 4.32. In the second growth prompt, “I find self-worth in working more

than my coworkers,” the number of selections per level was 14, 10, 13, 16, and 9, respectively, with an average of 2.94. In the third growth prompt, “My work is meaningful to my life,” the numbers were 13, 7, 14, 36, and 24, respectively, with an average of 3.54. In the fourth growth prompt, “I find meaning in my life from the work I do,” the numbers of each selected Likert scale option were 1, 5, 11, 27, and 18, respectively, creating an average of 3.90. Finally, in the fifth growth prompt, “If I didn’t work, my life would be meaningless,” the number of participants per Likert scale option was 25, 10, 13, 12, and 2, respectively, with an average of 2.29—the lowest average of all the prompts meaning that participants agreed with this prompt the least. The graph of the combined growth prompts is fairly evenly distributed, with the most common response being “Neither like or unlike me” and very few responses towards the extremes (see Appendix C).

## Correlations

To find the correlation between people who overwork and their motivations, the following analysis focuses solely on the group of participants deemed overworkers as defined within this study. A participant was defined as overworking if they selected 3, 4, or 5 on the Likert scale, which corresponds to “Neither like or unlike me,” “Somewhat like me,” and “Completely like me,” on average on the behavior section (section II). This means that the participant’s numerical equivalent average must be greater than a 3 to be considered someone who overworks because they, on average, agree with the overworking work behavior prompts. Of the 94 total participants in the study, 71 (75.5%) met this criterion.

By looking solely at the participants in this overworking group, the correlations between work behaviors and motivational factors can be analyzed. Each motivational factor is looked at holistically and not divided by prompt. All three motivational factors showed a positive correlation with work behavior, indicating that as people agreed more on the work behavior prompts, they also agreed more on average for each motivational factor. The slope of the existence line was .5966, the slope of the relatedness line was .0137, and the slope of the growth line was .0433. Based on these slopes, the change in agreeing with the experience needs prompts was the most positively correlated with work behaviors, and the change in agreeing with the relatedness prompts was the least positively correlated with work behaviors. The y-intercepts of the existence, relatedness, and growth lines were 1.0576, 4.0954, and 2.6967, respectively. While relatedness had the lowest correlation compared to work behaviors, it had the highest y-intercept, meaning that the rate of agreeableness among the relatedness prompts was always high among all levels of overworkers.

However, while they were all a positive correlation, none had a significant correlation. The highest correlation coefficient value was among the existence needs with a value of .1050, showing that about 10% of the correlation between work behaviors and the existence needs can be explained by our data. The growth needs had a correlation coefficient of .0433, meaning that about 4% of the correlation between work behaviors and growth needs can be explained by our data. The relatedness needs had the lowest correlation coefficient, with a value of .0001, meaning that only .01% of the correlation between relatedness needs and work behaviors can be explained by our data. This indicates that there may be other factors to consider in determining work behaviors besides these three motivational factors, which is to be expected (see Exhibits 4, 5, & 6).

Each participant had a need that they scored higher on across the prompts than the other two needs. Of the 71 overworking participants, 36 related most to the existence needs prompts, 29 related most to the relatedness needs prompts, and only 2 related most to the growth needs prompts (see Appendix G).

## DISCUSSION

### Interpretations

One of the simplest interpretations from this data is the fact that 71/94 (75.5%) of eligible participants met our definition of overworking. This shows that this is a common problem among workers. Despite efforts to encourage a work-life balance and place limits on workloads, overworking still persists.

Of the three needs, existence needs were most correlated with overworking behaviors. This means that the need to survive and provide is most directly tied to their degree of overworking. As a participant agreed more with the overworking behavior prompts, they were more likely to agree the most with the existence needs prompts than the other two needs. It is interesting to look at this trend when also considering the economic status of our participants. Despite having a fairly high annual income average, the participants who overworked the most felt that they needed to overwork to meet their existence needs, and those who overworked less rated their agreeableness to existence needs prompts lower. While it may seem reasonable to think that working more would satisfy existing needs, the opposite is true. Those who overwork more might feel the need to overwork in order to meet those needs. While existence needs were the most correlated, relatedness needs had the highest overall rating among overworkers, showing that despite the rate of overworking, the need for work to meet relatedness needs was high. Our participants agreed with the prompts that had their jobs meeting their relatedness needs, despite how much they overworked.

In terms of finding the highest rate of agreeableness among the three different needs, those who overwork are most likely to rate their existence needs the highest and are significantly less likely to rate their growth needs the highest. People who overwork have the desire to meet existing needs more than the desire to meet their other needs through their job. These overworkers see their job as a means to meet these needs. However, at the opposite end of the spectrum, with only 2 participants rating their growth needs as the most met through their job, it can be concluded that jobs are the least likely to be the source of someone meeting their growth needs. While the growth needs could still be rated high, they were only rated higher than the other two needs among the two participants. People who overwork are least likely to be motivated to overwork by their growth needs.

### Implications

There are three key findings in this study, with the first being that people who need to merely provide for themselves and others are the most likely to overwork. Because of this

finding, it is important to start looking for those who feel the burden of providing and to help them mitigate their overworking behaviors. It is important to highlight that while someone may feel that their overworking behaviors correlate with their ability to provide, no data has shown that. People who do not overwork have a similar, if not the same, capacity to provide. Family members who rely on another member's income should look for signs of overworking and try to minimize that person's overworking by communicating that their existing needs are being met. Since everyone's definition of survival is different and ever-changing, it is important to take a step back sometimes and realize that basic needs are being met and all other needs have been fabricated through one's experiences.

In a similar sense, the second key takeaway is that employees should be able to meet their existing needs without overworking. Existence needs are at the bottom of the hierarchy of needs for a reason; in order to meet other needs, existence needs need to be met. The fact that those who overwork feel that they need to in order to meet existing needs shows a fundamental flaw in our work culture. Existence needs are basic needs that should not encourage people to work more than a full-time job. Existence needs should be met by working a normal work week. Employees should not feel the pressure to overwork in order to maintain that survival stability. Employers should not be putting that pressure on employees and should instead be encouraging them to find comfort in the fact that their job does and will provide the means for meeting their existing needs.

The third and final takeaway is that those who focus on their growth needs are the least likely to fall to the pressures of overworking. These people are the least likely to meet their growth needs through their jobs. This is important because growth needs are the highest on the pyramid of needs, and those who are looking to find their sense of self and purpose in life are the least likely to overwork. Employees should be encouraged to look for a sense of self outside of their work, as this could lead to better work behaviors and balance.

## Limitations

This data shows insights but should be viewed conditionally due to the limitations of the method of collection. There are aspects that were not controlled for. This survey was not a random sample of participants but instead was an optional survey sent out to our personal networks. This means that all the participants were people willing to fill out surveys, which is not indicative of the general population. Additionally, because it was not a random sample, the demographics of the survey do not accurately represent the population being studied. The vast majority of our participants were in the business industry, and the most common annual income

range was \$100,000-\$150,000, showing that the participants have high financial means. Additionally, the survey was short in nature, taking participants between 3 and 5 minutes to encourage participation. This means that the data is not very comprehensive and does not have enough questions to negate any reliability concerns. Finally, it was intended for gender differences to be analyzed, but the data was instead looked at holistically.



## CONCLUSION

Although individuals differ, there are trends in the causes of overworking. The motivational factors behind overworking tend to stem from an individual's desire to meet their existence and relatedness needs and not from their desire to meet their growth needs. Individuals and people who care for them should be aware of how these motivational factors impact overworking in order to help mitigate the possibly problematic behaviors. In the future, this study should be looked at under various lenses. A similar study could focus on the impacts of gender, age and generation, income, and socioeconomic status. It would be valuable to see how or if these factors impact the motivational factors behind overworking. From a company perspective, understanding the efficiencies that have emerged through technology that can do the same job with less time can maximize productivity, avoid burnout, and ultimately create a culture shift that focuses on a better work-life balance. Overall, the idea of overworking needs to be studied more because of its prevalence and perseverance throughout time. Overworking may seem inevitable, but through proper education and cultural shifts, it may be possible to facilitate more balance between the work and life domains for an improved quality of life.

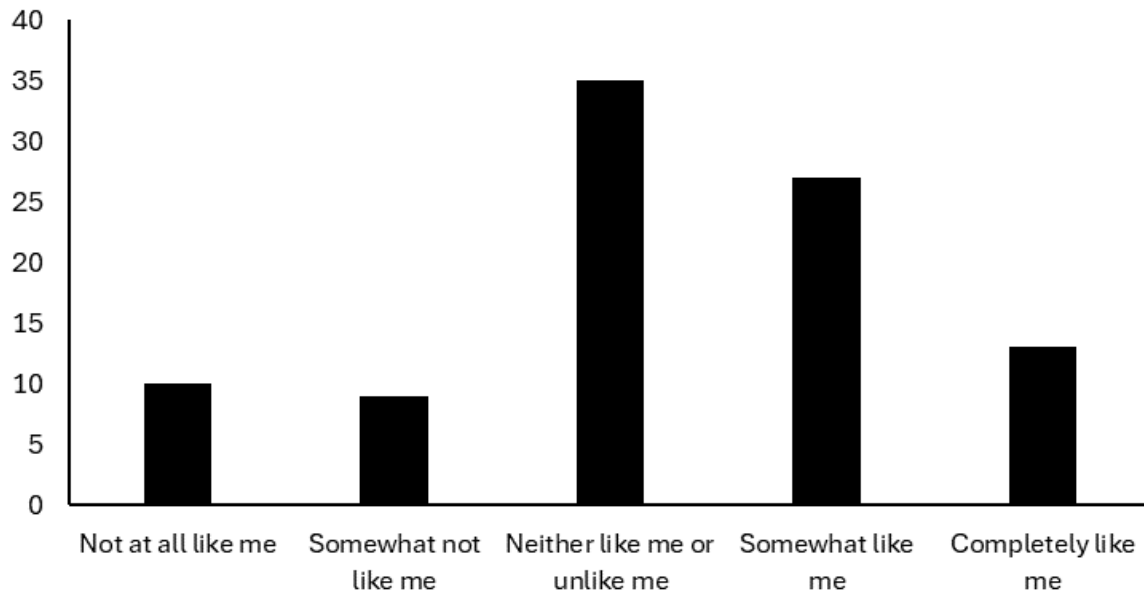
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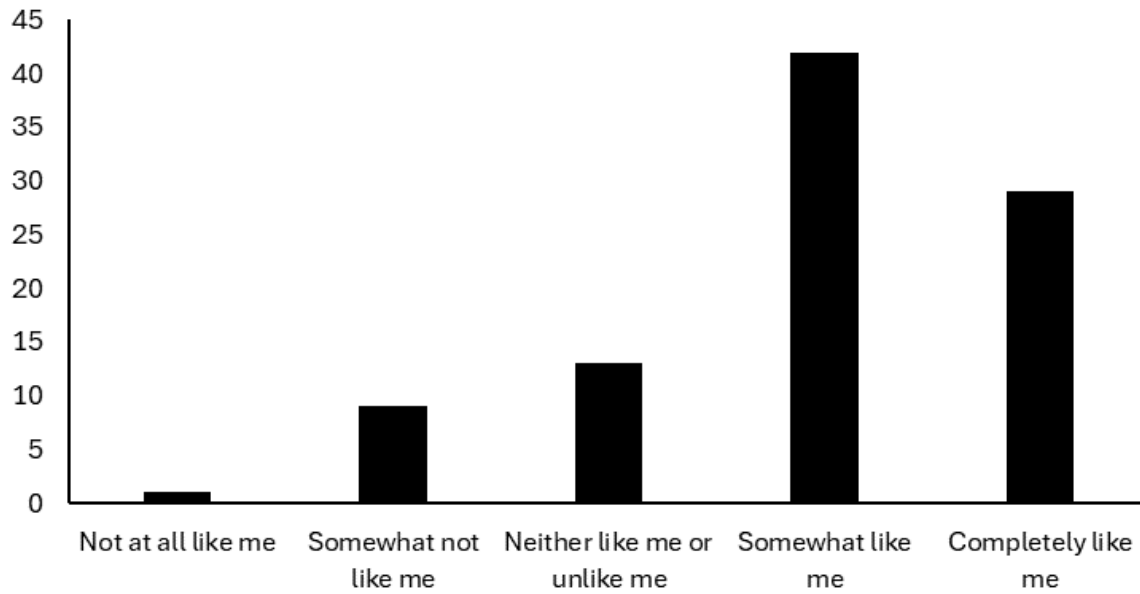
## APPENDIX A

### Existence Needs



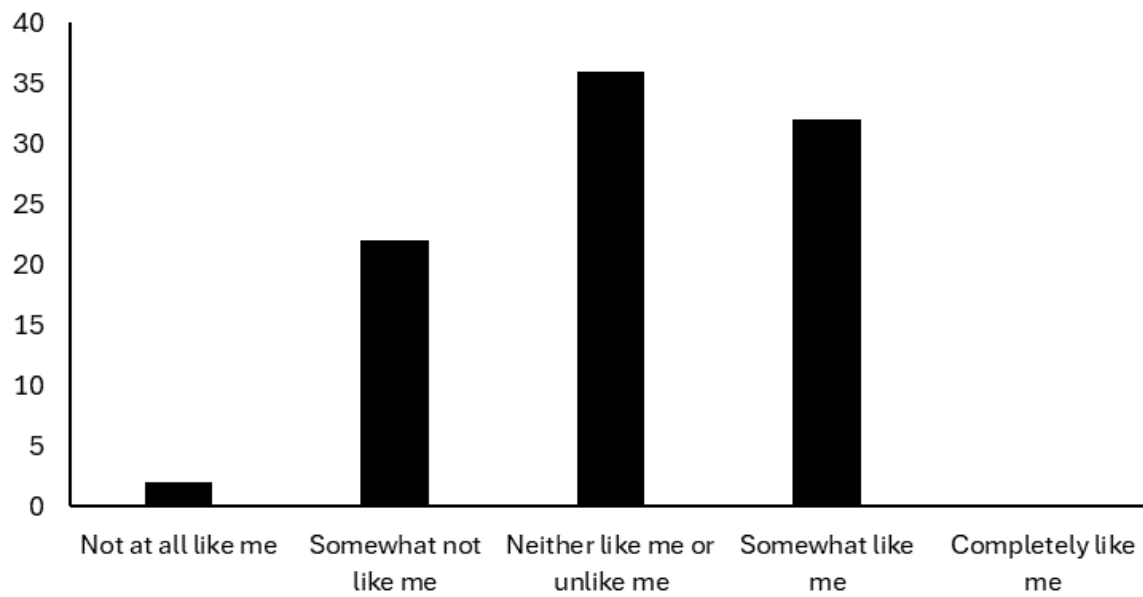
## APPENDIX B

### Relatedness Needs

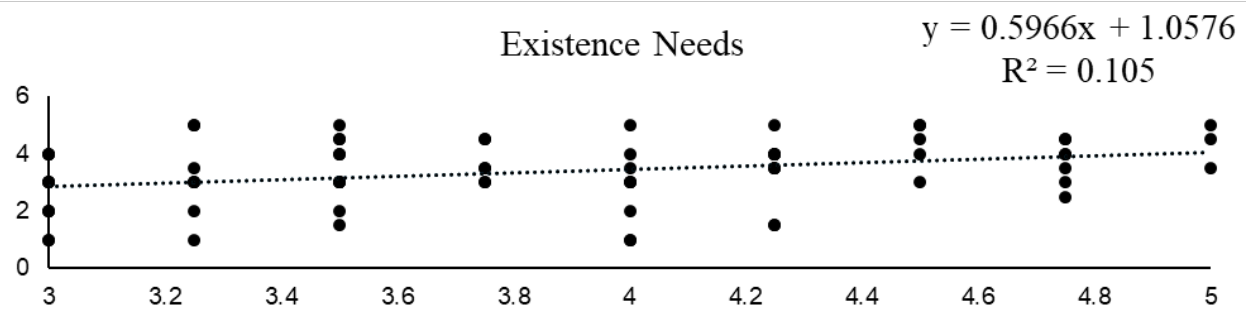


## APPENDIX C

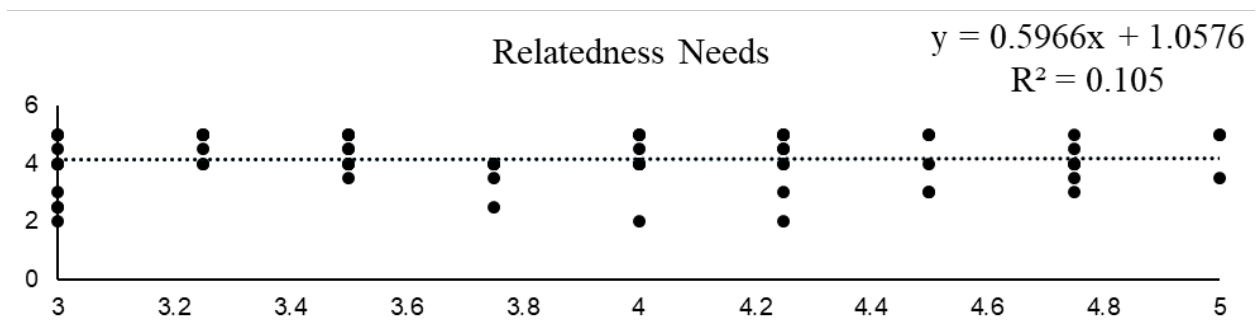
### Growth Needs



## APPENDIX D

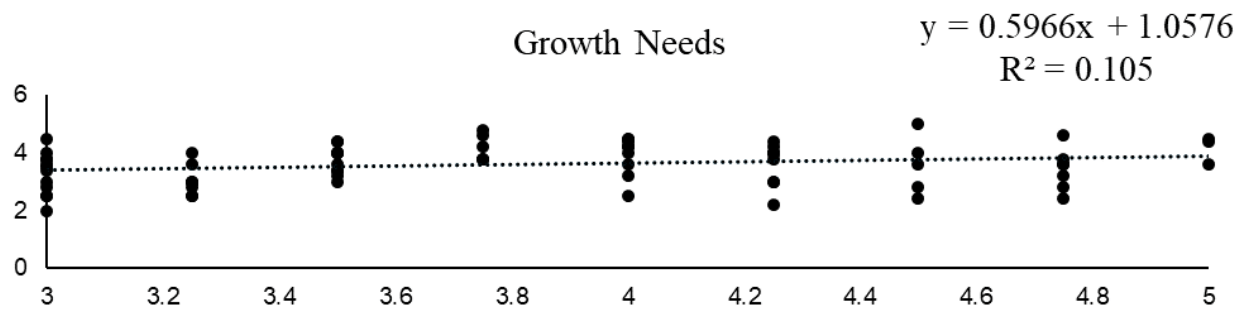


## APPENDIX E





## APPENDIX F



## APPENDIX G

Highest Need Among Overworkers

