

To Work or not to Work: The Measurement of Non-financial Employment Commitment

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Abstract

A useful indicator of non-financial employment commitment (NFEC) is the classic lottery question: Imagine you won a lottery or inherited a large sum of money and could live comfortably for the rest of your life without working. What would you do about work? (1) I would stop working, (2) I would continue to work at the same job, (3) I would continue to work but under different conditions. Answers 2 and 3 are both considered an expression of a desire to continue working, and are usually combined. However, some claim that the dichotomous classification of a desire to continue/stop working is misleading. Furthermore, the exact nature of the so-called 'different conditions' after a hypothetical win concerning the number of desired weekly work hours, as well as the expected relative centrality of work, are unclear. Two studies examined these claims and present two modified NFEC measures.

Keywords: non-financial employment commitment, measurement, classic lottery question

Introduction

The distinction between instrumental and intrinsic aspects of work is discussed extensively in the literature (e.g., Arvey, Harpaz, & Liao, 2004; Pinder, 1998; Snir & Harpaz, 2009; Warr, 1982, 2008). Warr (1982) refers to non-monetary motivation for working as non-financial employment commitment (NFEC). This kind of employment commitment has some important implications concerning actual behavior in the work place. For example, Warr and Lovatt (1977) found that individuals in every age group with high NFEC were significantly more likely to be employed six months after closure of their plant than were respondents with low NFEC. NFEC is also significantly predictive of the negative psychological impact of unemployment, with high scorers on NFEC suffering more than low scorers when unemployed (Stafford, Jackson, & Banks, 1980; Warr, 1978). Hence, unemployed people with a high level of NFEC are likely to be suitable candidates for participation in occupational training/reemployment programs. On the other hand, they may need more psychological counseling than others. A useful indicator of NFEC is the classic lottery question, which was first posed by Morse and Weiss (1955) in their study on the function and meaning of work.

It envisages a situation where the economic rationale or necessity of working is removed, so as to set the stage for assessing a person's non-financial or psychological commitment to work. It is phrased thus: Imagine that you won a lottery or inherited a large sum of money and could live comfortably for the rest of your life without working. What would you do about work? (1) I would stop working, (2) I would continue to work at the same job, (3) I would continue to work, but under different conditions (Snir & Harpaz, 2002a). Answers 2 and 3 are both considered an expression of a desire to continue working, hence are usually combined (e.g., Harpaz, 2002; Quinn & Staines, 1979; Tausky, 1969; Weaver, 1997). The Meaning of Work project has been conducted in eight countries in the early 1980's. In that project, responses to the lottery question indicating the wish to continue working ranged from a low of 69 and 70 percent in Britain and Germany, respectively, to a high of over 93 percent in Japan (Harpaz, 1989).

However, some suggest that the dichotomous classification of a desire to continue/stop working is misleading. For example, Paulsen (2008) differentiates a specific NFEC to the present job, as manifested by choosing answer 2, from a general NFEC which is not tied to a certain job, as manifested by favoring answer 2 *or* answer 3 over answer 1. One may also claim that for full-time workers, whereas answer 1 represents a low NFEC level and answer 2 a high level, answer 3 expresses a weaker commitment to work than answer 2, as manifested in the vague term 'working under different conditions,' and thus represents an intermediate NFEC level. Accordingly, those who would continue to work after a hypothetical win, but under different conditions, differ from both those who would stop working and those who would continue to work at the same job.

Even if the three-answer format of the classic lottery question is preserved, it still has two major faults. First, the exact nature of the so-called 'different conditions' is unclear. For some, working under different conditions may mean changing the existing job for a more suitable one, or perhaps opening one's own business. However, to assess the level of NFEC, the number of desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win must be highlighted. For example, a wish to work only few weekly hours is closer to work discontinuity than to work continuity.

Second, the expected relative centrality of work after a hypothetical win is also unclear. Work centrality is the degree of general importance that working has in one's life at any given time (MOW-International Research Team, 1987). The work centrality construct has two major theoretical components, each with specific properties. The first, absolute work centrality, involves a belief in, or value orientation to work as a life role. The second, relative work centrality, involves a decision orientation about preferred life spheres for behavior. The relative work centrality component parallels Dubin's (1956) central life interests and Barker's (1968) theory of behavioral settings. In normal (i.e., non-win) circumstances, work is usually considered more important than leisure, community, and religion, and in several studies ranked second only to family (MOW-International Research Team, 1987; Harding & Hiksboers, 1995; Harpaz, 1999; Snir & Harpaz, 2005).

Accordingly, this paper describes two studies of *full-time* workers. Study 1 aimed to: (1) present a modified NFEC measure, which provides a deeper understanding of the number of desired work hours after a hypothetical win; (2) examine whether those who would continue to work after a hypothetical win, but under different conditions, indeed differ from both those who would stop working and those who would continue to work at the same job; and (3) examine the construct validity of the modified NFEC measure. Study 2 aimed to present a second modified NFEC measure, which provides a deeper understanding of the expected relative centrality of work after a hypothetical win, and to examine its construct validity.

Study 1

The first modified NFEC measure

In the first modified NFEC measure, a choice of two answers to the classic lottery question is offered: Imagine that you won a lottery or inherited a large sum of money and could live comfortably for the rest of your life without working. What would you do about work? (1) I would stop working; (2) I would continue to work a total of ___ weekly hours.

Those who would continue to work, but under different conditions, as a distinct group

Those who would continue to work after a hypothetical win, but under different conditions, are obviously expected to work more weekly hours than those who would stop working. However, their emphasis on the so-called 'different conditions' may reflect a desire for a reduction of the weekly work hours of a full-time job to some measure of a part-time job. Accordingly:

Hypothesis 1a: Those who would continue to work after a hypothetical win, but under different conditions, will desire to work more weekly hours than those who would stop working, but fewer weekly hours than those who would continue to work at the same job.

One's response to the classic lottery question may be influenced by one's current level of job satisfaction. A positive relation was found between job satisfaction and a desire to continue working after a hypothetical win (Harpaz, 2002; Vecchio, 1980). If one's job satisfaction is high, one may wish to continue working at the same job, regardless of a greater personal wealth. On the other hand, if one's job satisfaction is low, one may wish to stop working altogether after a hypothetical win. However, if one's job satisfaction is moderate, one may wish to continue working after a hypothetical win, but under different conditions (e.g., in a different, more satisfying job). Hence:

Hypothesis 1b: Those who would continue to work after a hypothetical win, but under different conditions, will score higher in job satisfaction than those who would stop working, but lower than those who would continue to work at the same job.

Construct validity of the first modified NFEC measure

Construct validity refers to how well a study's results support the theory or constructs behind the study (Graziano & Raulin, 1988). Based on past findings positive relations exist between NFEC and other work attitudes, such as work centrality (Harpaz, 2002; Mannheim & Rein, 1981) and job satisfaction (Harpaz 2002; Vecchio, 1980). Since according to Hult (2008) the most important motivator for NFEC is interesting work, a positive relation between NFEC and work enjoyment, which is a component of work enthusiasm (Spence & Robbins, 1992), is also expected.

Snir and Harpaz (2002b) found that work-oriented individuals work more weekly hours than leisure-oriented individuals. Harpaz and Snir (2003) also found a positive relation between work centrality and workaholism. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is a discretionary behavior that is not part of an employee's formal job requirements but nevertheless promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). Work attitudes, such as job satisfaction (Organ & Ryan, 1995) and job involvement (Diefendorff et al., 2002) are robust predictors of OCB. Similarly, positive relations are expected between NFEC and work investment behaviors, such as present weekly work hours and organizational citizenship behavior. Based on all of the above:

Hypothesis 2: There will be positive relations between NFEC, as measured by the desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win, and the following variables: (a) absolute work centrality, (b) job satisfaction, (c) work enjoyment, (d) present weekly work hours, and (e) organizational citizenship behavior.

Study 2

The second modified NFEC measure

The second modified NFEC measure states: Imagine that you won a lottery or inherited a large sum of money and could live comfortably for the rest of your life without working. What would be the relative centrality of each the following domains in your life? (1) Leisure (like hobbies, sports, recreation, contact with friends), (2) Community (like voluntary organizations, the union, political organizations), (3) Work; (4) Religion (like religious activities and beliefs); and (5) Family. Divide a total of 100 points among these domains to indicate their relative centrality. The number of points allocated to work reflects the expected relative centrality of work after a hypothetical win. This measure is an adjusted version of the relative work centrality measure (Snir & Harapaz, 2005).

Construct validity of the second modified NFEC measure

Similarly to Study 1, it is expected that:

Hypothesis 1: There will be positive relations between NFEC, as measured by the expected relative centrality of work after a hypothetical win, and the following variables: (a) absolute work centrality, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) work enjoyment.

The second modified NFEC measure addresses expected relative work centrality after a hypothetical win, whereas the first addresses desired weekly work hours after such a win. Petty and Cacioppo (1996) claim that the general notion underlying consistency theories of attitudes is that people tend strongly to maintain consonance among elements of a cognitive system. If so, the higher the expected relative work centrality after a hypothetical win, the higher the desired weekly work hours after such a win. Hence:

Hypothesis 2: The expected relative work centrality after a hypothetical win will be positively related to the desired weekly work hours after such a win.

Method

Samples and procedure

A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit respondents for the two studies, through intermediaries. As a part of their research seminar requirements, undergraduate students were instructed to ask their acquaintances or relatives, who work full-time (35 weekly hours or more) to participate in a study on work-related attitudes and behaviors. In each study respondents completed two questionnaires. The second questionnaire was administered four weeks after the first; each took an average of 15 minutes to complete. Respondents were assured complete anonymity and confidentiality by means of an internal coding system.

In Study 1, the sample consisted of 238 full-time workers, with 35.9% men and 64.1% women; 46.0% of the respondents were married. Mean age was 33.7 years ($sd=10.5$) and mean education level was 14.3 years ($sd=2.4$). Ninety-eight of the 238 respondents (41.2%) agreed to answer the second questionnaire as well. In Study 2 a *different* sample consisted of 251 full-time workers, with 42.1% men and 57.9% women; 48.6% of the respondents were married. Mean age was 34.7 years ($sd=11.1$) and mean education level was 14.4 years ($sd=2.2$). Of the 251 respondents, 129 (51.4%) agreed to answer the second questionnaire as well.

Measures

Study 1 measures - First questionnaire

NFEC. NFEC was measured by the classic lottery question (see the Introduction).

Absolute work centrality. A Likert-type scale on which respondents indicate the overall importance of work in their life, from 1- "low" to 7 - "high" (Harpaz & Snir, 2003).

Job satisfaction. A Likert-type scale on which respondents indicate their global job satisfaction, from 1 - "not at all" to 7 - "to a great extent" (Carnall & Wild, 1974).

Work enjoyment. The Enjoyment-revised scale (McMillan, Brady, O'Driscoll, & Marsh, 2002), which is a part of the Workaholism Battery, includes seven items on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 - "disagree" to 5 - "agree"). A sample item is "My job is so interesting that it often doesn't seem like work." Item 6 is reverse-coded. The overall score was computed as the average of scores in the seven items. The scale had a previous alpha coefficient of 0.85 (McMillan, Brady, O'Driscoll, & Marsh, 2002). In the current study $\alpha=0.83$.

Present weekly work hours. Respondents were asked to indicate the total number of hours they invest in paid work in a typical week, including work taken home.

Study 1 measures - Second questionnaire

NFEC. NFEC was measured as the desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win (see Introduction).

Job satisfaction. Five items, each addressing the respondent's satisfaction with a specific job dimension (work nature, supervisor, relations with co-workers, pay, promotion opportunities) out of a six-item index (Tusi, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). A sample item is "How satisfied are you with the nature of work you perform?" Responses were on a scale from 1 - "not at all" to 7 - "to a great extent." The overall score in this multi-dimensional measure of job satisfaction was computed as the average of scores in these five items. The scale had a previous alpha coefficient of 0.73 (Tusi, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). In the current study $\alpha=0.66$.

Organizational citizenship behavior. This was Organ's (1988) 16-item measure with a 5-point Likert response scale (from 1- "not at all" to 5 - "to a great extent"). Respondent were asked to indicate to what extent the behavior described in each item reflected their behavior at work. A sample item is "I help others who were absent." Items 1, 11, 12, and 16 are reverse-coded. The overall score was computed as the average of scores on all items. In the current study $\alpha = 0.78$.

Study 2 measures - First questionnaire

NFEC. NFEC was measured as the expected relative work centrality after a hypothetical win (see the Introduction).

Absolute work centrality. See Study 1 measures - First questionnaire.

Job satisfaction. See Study 1 measures - First questionnaire.

Work enjoyment. See Study 1 measures - first questionnaire. In the current study, the Enjoyment-revised scale (McMillan, Brady, O'Driscoll, & Marsh, 2002) had $\alpha = 0.86$.

Study 2 measures - Second questionnaire

NFEC. NFEC was measured as the desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win (see the Introduction).

Results

Study 1

The first modified NFEC measure: Descriptive statistics

The average desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win were 20.90 ($sd=15.80$).

Those who would continue to work, but under different conditions, as a distinct group

Three one-way ANOVAs tested whether those who would continue to work, but under different conditions, are indeed differ from both those who would stop working, and those who would continue to work at the same job with the desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win, and job satisfaction (as measured by its global and multi-dimensional measures).

The first one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for NFEC on the desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win ($F(2,91)=15.67, p<0.001$). Means and standard deviations of the desired weekly work hours in the three categories of the classic lottery question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Means and standard deviations of the desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win, and of global and multi-dimensional job satisfaction, in the three categories of the classic lottery question

NFEC	Desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win			Global job satisfaction			Multi-dimensional job Satisfaction		
	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>N</i>
	Those who would stop working	4.17	9.96	12	4.42	1.44	24	4.28	1.03
Those who would continue to work but under different conditions	20.77	13.45	65	5.04	1.37	159	4.93	0.96	67
Those who would continue to work at the same job	33.24	16.95	17	5.95	0.91	44	5.36	0.62	19

Contrast tests showed that those who would continue to work, but under different conditions, stated that they would work more hours than those who would stop working ($t(91)=3.84, p<0.001$), but fewer hours than those who would continue to work at the same job ($t(91)=-3.32, p<0.001$). Hence, hypothesis 1a was confirmed.

The second one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for NFEC on global job satisfaction ($F(2,224)=12.71, p<0.001$). Means and standard deviations of job satisfaction (as measured by its global measure) in the three categories of the classic lottery question are presented in Table 1. Contrast tests showed that those who would continue to work, but under different conditions, scored higher on job satisfaction than those who would stop working ($t(29.62)=2.00, p<0.05$), but lower than those who would continue to work at the same job ($t(102.38)=-5.19, p<0.001$).

The third one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for NFEC on multi-dimensional job satisfaction ($F(2,95)=5.07, p<0.005$). Means and standard deviations of job satisfaction (as measured by its multi-dimensional measure) in the three categories of the classic lottery question are presented in Table 1. Contrast tests showed that those who would continue to work, but under different conditions, scored higher on job satisfaction than those who would stop working ($t(95)=2.25, p<0.05$), but lower than those who would continue to work at the same job ($t(95)=-1.81, p<0.05$). Thus, hypothesis 1b was also confirmed.

Construct validity of the first modified NFEC measure

Indications to construct validity of the desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win version of the lottery question were found. The desired weekly work hours were positively correlated with absolute work centrality ($M=5.55, sd=1.11, r=0.30, p<0.005$), job satisfaction as measured by its global measure ($M=5.08, sd=1.38, r=0.37, p<0.001$), job satisfaction as measured by its multi-dimensional measure ($M=4.93, sd=0.95, r=0.36, p<0.001$), work enjoyment ($M=3.08, sd=0.76, r=0.48, p<0.001$), present weekly work hours ($M=46.72, sd=8.36, r=0.26, p<0.01$), and organizational citizenship behavior ($M=3.66, sd=0.44, r=0.28, p<0.005$). Hence, all five components of hypothesis 2 were also confirmed.

Study 2

The second modified NFEC measure: Descriptive statistics

The expected relative centrality of each of the five major life domains after a hypothetical win is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Expected relative centrality of each of the five major life domains after a hypothetical win

Major life domains	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>
Leisure	27.25	14.30
Community	7.79	7.48
Work	20.39	15.84
Religion	2.50	6.67
Family	42.07	16.82

In such circumstances work would be less important than family and leisure, but more important than community and religion.

Construct validity of the second modified NFEC measure

Indications of construct validity of the expected relative work centrality after a hypothetical win version of the lottery question were found. The expected relative work centrality was positively correlated with absolute work centrality ($M=5.45$, $sd=1.11$, $r=0.33$, $p<0.001$), work enjoyment ($M=2.98$, $sd=0.82$, $r=0.34$, $p<0.001$), and job satisfaction as measured by its global measure ($M=5.05$, $sd=1.28$, $r=0.22$, $p<0.001$). Hence, all three components of hypothesis 1 were confirmed. The expected relative work centrality after a hypothetical win was positively correlated with the desired weekly work hours after such a win ($M=21.63$, $sd=15.39$, $r=0.50$, $p<0.001$). Thus, hypothesis 2 was also confirmed.

Discussion

This paper reports two studies on the measurement of NFEC among full-time workers. Study 1's results indicate that those who would continue to work after a hypothetical win, but under different conditions, indeed differ from both those who would stop working, and those who would continue to work at the same job. This is reflected not only in their desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win, but also in their level of job satisfaction (as measured by its global and multi-dimensional measures). Hence, as Paulsen (2008) states, the dichotomous classification of a desire to continue/stop working in response to the classic lottery question as a NFEC measure is not recommended.

Study 1's results also indicate that the desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win version of the lottery question has high construct validity. The desired weekly work hours were positively related with the following relevant variables: absolute work centrality, job satisfaction as measured by its global and multi-dimensional measures, work enjoyment, present weekly work hours, and organizational citizenship behavior.

Study 2's results indicate that the expected relative work centrality after a hypothetical win version of the lottery question also has high construct validity. The expected relative work centrality was positively related with the following relevant variables: absolute work centrality, work enjoyment, job satisfaction as measured by its global measure, and the desired weekly work hours.

In each of the two studies some variables were measured at Time 1, the others at Time 2, with a four-week interval. This lessens concerns of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Results of both studies show that when asked in specific terms, NFEC is neither low nor high: respondents reported that they would work at a half-time job after a hypothetical win, and their relative work centrality would be 20.39 out of 100 (in third place out of five, after family first and leisure second). As compared with past studies conducted in Israel on relative work centrality in normal (i.e., non-win) conditions (Harpaz, 1999; Sharbi & Harpaz, 2007; Snir & Harpaz, 2005), work changes places with leisure. These not too high NFEC levels add to the credibility of the two modified NFEC measures.

The overall merit of both studies is the introduction of two complementary general NFEC (i.e., which is not tied to a certain job) measures. The first addresses desired weekly work hours after a hypothetical win, whereas the second addresses expected relative work centrality after such a win. These two short measures have high construct validity. Thus, on the practical level each of them can be included in selection and promotion processes for a preliminary indication of a candidate's relevant attitudes (absolute work centrality, work enjoyment, and job satisfaction) and behaviors (present weekly work hours and organizational citizenship behavior).

Basic Income (BI) is a universal income grant available to every citizen without means test or work requirement. Each of the two modified NFEC measures can also be included in BI research, to provide some insights into the possible socioeconomic effects of introducing BI programs. People with a high level of NFEC would be less likely to approve of programs based on this notion, *if they equate such programs with work discontinuation*. Arvey, Harpaz, and Liao (2004) found that individuals who won large amounts of money in the lottery were less likely to quit work if they had a high degree of work centrality. In another study, Hamermesh and Slemrod (2005) found evidence that high-income, highly educated people exhibited workaholism in that they were more likely to postpone earlier plans for retirement.

However, the opposite mechanism could also be plausible. Since BI is often defended as a reform which would allow individuals to freely choose more self-realizing, autonomous and pleasant working activities; the existence of high NFEC levels might enhance rather than weaken preferences for BI. Furthermore, as employment is not the only kind of work; people with a high level of NFEC would be more likely to approve of a BI program, if it contains an option of volunteer work. BI programs could also include a feature of leisure skills development, which might help us to derive self-esteem and sense of accomplishment from our hobbies. The present studies have some limitations. First, since their data were gathered through a convenience sampling technique, we cannot generalize their finding to a population of full-time workers. For high external validity, future research on this topic should rely on probability sampling.

Second, these studies deal with a highly hypothetical situation: winning the lottery. Since it is very unlikely that a person will experience such a sudden increase in wealth, it is a mistake to surmise that individuals' answers to any version of the lottery question will be directly predictive of actual post-award behavior (Warr, 1982). Research on behavior of winners in the standard lottery (e.g., Arvey, Harpaz, & Liao, 2004), and in its Win for Life version (a lottery which grants a lifelong monthly unconditional income to its winners), would make a substantial contribution to advancing our knowledge on NFEC further.

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