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Are gritty leaders happier? It depends on prudence

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Are gritty leaders happier? It depends on prudence

Abstract

As the perseverant pursuit of long-term goals, grit is a sought-after resource for leaders and employees that typically results in greater success and well-being, but with potential downsides. We hypothesize that the relationship between grit in leaders and their affective well-being (AWB) via work-to-family conflict (WFC) is conditional on their *self-regulatory* resource of prudence. The sample comprises 102 leaders with self-, subordinate- ($n = 487$) and peer- ($n = 838$) ratings. Findings suggest that grittier *and imprudent* leaders experience higher WFC and lower AWB, whereas grittier *and prudent* leaders experience lower WFC and higher AWB. We therefore conclude that the *agentic* resource of grit in leaders may be either positively or negatively related to their well-being depending on their prudence. We also demonstrate that even though grit and prudence are among the suggested facets of conscientiousness, that should not prevent treating the two as resources that operate interactively.

Keywords: Grit, Prudence, Work-to-family Conflict, Affective Well-Being, Leadership

Introduction

Grit is an agentic individual resource defined as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p. 1087). As a two-component construct characterized by perseverance of efforts and “passion” (i.e., consistency of interests), grit captures “the ability to stay focused for as long as it takes to complete a task or achieve a goal, neither giving up nor out, nor giving in to any diversions.” (Motro, Comer, & Lenaghan, 2021, p. 370). The construct has been garnering scholarly attention as it predicts success, performance, and well-being (Duckworth, 2016). The enthusiasm for grit as an important predictor of success and performance spilled over into the domain of leadership (e.g., Lee & Duckworth, 2018), with grit extolled as making leaders more effective in handling the demands of their jobs. However, grit’s predictive validity has been inconsistent (Credé, Tynan, & Harms, 2017), potentially because of the downsides of the resource (Jordan, Ferris, Hochwarter, & Wright, 2019), including inappropriate persistence (Howard & Crayne, 2019) and an overcommitment to work that may interfere with family responsibilities and goals. Whether grit results in positive or negative outcomes for leaders likely depends on boundary conditions such as how grit is regulated (Jordan, Ferris et al., 2019).

The case of Lloyds Bank former CEO, António Horta-Osório, is illustrative (Florent-Treacy & Manzoni, 2012). In 2011, he became physically and mentally exhausted as a result of the way he had immersed himself in running the company. He said “My family is complaining they haven't seen me very much these last few weeks. I have to make it up to them. It's been very tough.” (in Treanor, 2011). Following medical advice, he took a two-month sick leave, acknowledging that he dedicated himself too much and took things too seriously, and neglected everything else to focus entirely on the bank. This case suggests that unless gritty leaders *also* adopt a prudent stance (e.g., having “a farsighted and deliberative concern for the consequences of their actions and decisions”; Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 478), they may

become overcommitted and spend excessive time and resources at work, leading to higher work-to-family conflict (WFC) and, as a result, lower well-being (Clark, Michel, Zhdanova, Pui, & Baltes, 2016). As Lancefield (2020) observed, “given its demands, the leadership role can take over your life if you let it. By the time you realize that it’s resulted in collateral damage to you and those whom you care about, it’s often too late. (...) Relationships with spouses, children, and friends can suffer from neglect.”

This is where our article positions. We rely on the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018) and the dual-systems model of self-regulation (Hofmann, Friese, & Strack, 2009) to examine prudence as a key boundary condition that moderates the relationship between grit in leaders and their affective well-being (AWB) via WFC. Grit and prudence are proxies of, respectively, the impulsive system and the reflective system facets of the dual-systems model of self-regulation. Prudence is a self-regulatory resource defined as “a cognitive orientation to the personal future, a form of practical reasoning and self-management that helps to achieve the individual’s long-term goals effectively” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 478). Prudence may buffer grit’s downsides as it encompasses moderation and balance in the pursuit of goals, and a flexible approach to goals and their attainment. Further, grit is among the psychological resources whose maintenance requires expending other resources and may therefore lead to net resource loss and missed opportunities to regain resources in other domains (Schonpflug, 1985) without adequate self-regulation. Specifically, if gritty leaders are not prudent, they risk making poor choices, and “other resources that are related to well-being, such as intimate family ties, may be diminished” (Hobfoll, 2002, p. 316). In line with this reasoning, we propose that grit’s influence on leader AWB is not only moderated by prudence to avoid poor choices, but also mediated by WFC.

Considered a key resource (Hobfoll, 2002), grit facilitates tenacious goal pursuit behaviors that enhance coping with stress and setbacks, thus enabling leaders to handle the

stressful demands of their roles. It reasons that gritty leaders would experience more success in goal attainment, although the influence of grit on leader well-being is less straightforward. When grit pushes leaders to overcommit and consume resources and energies at work that make them less able to handle the demands of family life, WFC increases (Andreassen, Hetland, & Pallesen, 2013), resulting in reduced AWB. We interpret prudence as a kind of “switching” regulatory resource that, when switched on, lights up the bright side of grit but, when turned off, allows the manifestation of its dark side. Drawing on the dual-systems model of self-regulation, we posit that the focused perseverance of gritty leaders increases their AWB via lowering WFC *only* when the leader also activates the reflective system ingrained into their prudence. Without prudence, grit results in a behavioral pattern that leads to higher WFC and lower AWB. In sum (Figure 1), we argue that grit in leaders may cause them to experience greater or lesser WFC (and, respectively, lower or higher AWB) depending on their prudence.

Figure 1 about here

This study makes several contributions. First, despite its potential, the role of grit in the work context has been understudied (Jordan, Wihler, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2019), and empirical research about grit in leaders is still scarcer. While some scholars have questioned the validity of grit (e.g., Credé et al., 2017; Ponnock et al., 2020), we consider that grit at work, and grit in leaders in particular, is worth being explored, and provide a balanced perspective regarding the merits and potential downsides of grit in leaders and in individuals in general. We do not argue that exploring grit and prudence in *non-leaders* is of secondary importance, rather we argue that the idiosyncrasies of the leadership role (including time pressure and the highly interactive and fast-paced nature of the leader’s work, with consequences for WFC; Debus et al., 2019; Porter & Nohria, 2018) may require more prudence to regulate a gritty stance than the level of prudence required to regulate grit in performing non-leadership roles. Second, by demonstrating that grit’s influence on leaders’ WFC and AWB is moderated by

leaders' prudence (a fundamental resource also underrepresented in empirical research about leadership; McGrath, 2020), we empirically support the notion that the study of grit may advance by considering its boundary conditions (Credé et al., 2017). We also contribute to COR research by investigating how resources interact, thus responding to Hobfoll et al. (2018, p. 116), who recommended "moving forward [on] understanding how resources interact, particularly because no study can effectively address all of the resources that affect someone within a given environment". By investigating how grit and prudence interact, we further support the dual-systems model of self-regulation by showing that the positive outcomes of focused perseverance materialize only when the reflective system is activated, in this case through prudence. Third, we contribute to an understanding of how personal characteristics predict WFC. This topic deserves more research attention because personal characteristics may be stronger determinants of WFC than are situational demands (Allen et al., 2012). Fourth, considering that leaders' well-being spills over to employees' well-being and performance (Jin, Seo, & Shapiro, 2016), and affects team and organizational performance (Quick, Cooper, Gavin, & Quick, 2008), we indirectly contribute to a more balanced perspective regarding the role of leaders' grit on leader and follower effectiveness.

Theory and Hypotheses

The main tenet of COR theory is that people are driven to acquire and protect resources valued for goal attainment, and that the use or loss of resources without replacement results in stress and reduced well-being. Resources, defined as anything perceived by individuals that help them to attain their goals (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014), include objects (e.g., personal transportation), sources of "energy" (e.g., time), conditions (e.g., social support), and personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem; grit). Resources such as grit may be valued for their facilitation of goal attainment, which typically results in rewards of additional resources (Hobfoll, 2002; Ilies, Ju, Liu, & Goh, 2020). However, grit is also in a

subset of resources that depletes other resources (e.g., time) through its expenditure, thereby exposing it to more potential downsides. We thus argue that the tenacious pursuit of goals inherent to grit limits the gritty individual's capacity to change course when necessary, unless regulated by prudence. Before elaborating about such an interaction between grit and prudence, it is necessary to address the construct validity of grit.

Grit

While several authors (e.g., Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Duckworth et al., 2007; Jordan, Ferris et al., 2019) have considered grit as a distinct construct, other scholars have questioned its construct validity, suggesting it may be redundant with, or a facet of, conscientiousness (Credé et al., 2017; Ponnock et al., 2020). Other critics have gone as far as suggesting that the construct of grit is “dispensable” (Ion, Mindu, & Gorbanescu, 2017, p. 167). We therefore respond with three reasons why the continued study of grit is both important and necessary, and that its abandonment in management research would be both premature and detrimental to the field.

First, conceptual differences support the consideration of grit and conscientiousness as different constructs. While the perseverance facet of grit shares similarities with the *proactive* aspects of conscientiousness (Schmidt, Fleckenstein, Retelsdorf, Eskreis-Winkler, & Möller, 2019), the consistency of interests is only modestly represented in conscientiousness, and the *dependability* or *inhibitive* facets of conscientiousness are only weakly present in grit. We do not claim that these differences alone warrant the designation of grit as a distinct construct (Jordan, Ferris, et al., 2019) as opposed to a facet of conscientiousness (MacCann & Roberts, 2010). Rather, we defend that there are compelling conceptual reasons to believe that grit captures something that is unique and distinguishable from current conceptualizations of conscientiousness.

Second, the establishment of grit as distinct from conscientiousness requires both conceptual arguments and empirical evidence. Recent research of Rego et al. (2021) found that

the high correlation between the two constructs may be explained, at least in part, by common method bias (i.e., both grit and conscientiousness being self-reported; Credé et al., 2017). These authors (p. 1159) argued that “while this bias has been considered problematic for studying the predictors-outcomes relationship, the same criticism has not been applied to the relationships among predictors”, including among grit and conscientiousness. Their research demonstrated incremental predictive validity of grit on employee outcomes even when controlling for conscientiousness, thus providing empirical evidence of distinctiveness.

Finally, grit is a domain-specific construct (Cormier, Dunn, & Dunn, 2019) that has shown promise and predictive validity in organizational work settings. Most criticisms targeted at grit are based on studies carried out in non-work domains, mainly in the academic one, which is overrepresented in Credé et al.’s (2017) meta-analysis (see also Ponnock et al., 2020, whose criticisms targeted at grit are based on student samples and on how grit predicts students’ grades). Abandoning the construct of grit in management research because of an empirical pattern found in non-work contexts would be inappropriate as well as harmful to broadening collective knowledge on how this contextually valuable resource operates at work. We advocate that researchers continue exploring the role played by grit and its boundary conditions in the work context, especially in the understudied domain of leadership.

Further, we treat prudence as a separate, self-regulatory resource that should enhance the positive outcomes of grit and buffer its potentially negative consequences. While prudence has also been a suggested facet of conscientiousness (Lee & Ashton, 2004; see also Hogan & Hogan, 1997, who name conscientiousness as prudence), we argue and empirically support that any commonalities between grit and prudence as potential facets of conscientiousness should not prevent treating the two as operating interactively rather than additively or in parallel. As Saucier and Ostendorf (1999, p. 625) argued, “a broad [personality] factor is not so much one thing as a collection of many things that have something in common”.

Grit and AWB

Subjective well-being is defined as an individual's cognitive and affective evaluations of his/her life, with the cognitive and affective components positively related (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). In this research we focus on the latter component, more specifically on experiencing positive emotions as an indicator of AWB (Fisher, 2010), with the extant research indicating that grittier people typically experience higher AWB (Disabato, Goodman, & Kashdan, 2019; Jiang et al., 2020; Jin & Kim, 2017). A possible explanation for such an effect is that grit enables the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs (Jiang et al., 2020; Jin & Kim, 2017). However, these studies were not carried out in the work context, which means we know little about how grit applied toward work goals affects personal well-being. The idiosyncratic demands of leadership further complicate the relationship between grit in leaders and their AWB. Leaders are often agenda-driven, submitted to strong time pressures, and confronted with a great number of tasks and responsibilities (Debus, Fritz, & Philipp, 2019; Porter & Nohria, 2018), and they have to be highly involved in their roles to be effective. When pursued with grit, these role demands may deplete resources such as time and energy (Hobfoll et al., 2018), potentially yielding negative consequences for leader AWB.

The Mediating Role of WFC

Work-family conflict is “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Two types of conflict may be considered (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996): (1) work interfering with family life (work-to-family conflict, WFC) and (2) family life interfering with work responsibilities (family-to-work conflict, FWC). We focus on WFC for three interrelated reasons. First, work has a more negative impact on family life than family life has on work (Frone, 2003). This is especially valid for leaders,

considering the demands of their work role (Debus et al., 2019; Porter & Nohria, 2018). Second, WFC versus FWC has stronger relationships with affective (Speights, Bochantin, & Cowan, 2020) and well-being consequences (e.g., Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011; Frone, 2003; Zhao, Zhang, & Foley, 2019). Third, grit is domain-specific (Cormier et al., 2019), and our study focuses on how grit *at work* interferes with the family domain to ultimately influence AWB. To discuss how such interference operates conditionally, it is necessary to understand first that grit, while being a characteristic with resource qualities, has the potential to both *reduce* and *increase* WFC.

Considering that gritty individuals are self-effective and perseverant in threatening contexts, grit has been positioned as capable of reducing employees' vulnerability to contextual stressors (Jordan, Ferris, et al., 2019) and to negative emotional experiences caused by performance failures (Motro et al., 2021). Therefore, grit operates as a "resistance resource" that reduces "threat vulnerability" (Jordan, Wihler et al., 2019, p. 65), thus contributing to lower WFC. This is consistent with an important corollary of the COR theory: compared to those with few resources, individuals with greater resources are less vulnerable to resource loss and more able to gain resources. A complementary explanation for how grit may reduce WFC is consistent with the job demands–resources model: gritty leaders interpret demands at work more as challenges than as hindrances, thus being more engaged at work (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). Consequently, gritty and engaged leaders develop resources that are useful to pursue both work and family goals (Ilies et al., 2020), thus experiencing lower WFC.

From the arguments above, one could derive that grit in leaders, with its goal-setting and perseverance components, is an agentic resource useful to handle demands at work, preventing the depletion of resources, and facilitating the leaders' pursuit of goals in both the work and family domains, even in the face of disappointment and failures (Crawford et al., 2010; Ilies et al., 2020; Motro et al., 2021). However, the case for the opposite effect is also strong.

According to COR theory, as individuals acquire resources, they invest to obtain additional resources. Because they tend to invest in ways that maximize their returns and that most fit with the specific resource invested, workplace resources acquired through grit are more likely reinvested at work. From a scarcity paradigm perspective (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), by expending and reinvesting resources at work, gritty leaders may find themselves with less resources to spend in the pursuit of family goals, thus experiencing higher WFC. Additionally, gritty leaders tend to be more involved in their role, as such an involvement is necessary to persevere in pursuing long-term work goals. High levels of involvement in the work role make it more difficult to engage in family activities (Andreassen et al., 2013). Role theory, resource drain theory, and compensation theory all suggest that role involvement may lead to WFC (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011).

The involvement of gritty leaders in their work role is even more problematic, in terms of WFC, because of the demands of leadership (Debus et al., 2019; Porter & Nohria, 2018). As Dierdorff and Ellington (2008) noted, jobs that require high levels of accountability for other workers may lead to a significant resource drain for those jobholders. Debus et al. (2019, p. 640) also observed that “although burnout can occur across all occupations, individuals in managerial positions are at particular risk for this symptom due to the highly interactive and fast-paced nature of their work”. Further, while the many hours of sustained, deliberate practice that lead gritty individuals to succeed in school, arts and sports are compatible with a structured and predictable, although intense agenda, the multiple unexpected contingencies faced by a leader working with many stakeholders require the leader to fit his/her heavy workload into a highly unpredictable agenda that requires responding reactively to events as they unfold, ultimately reducing the capacity to meet family obligations. It is here that prudence may work as a self-regulatory resource that “tames” possible excesses, and enhances the positive

potential, of grit. Borrowing from the COR theory, we consider that grit allows acquiring and protecting resources valued for goal attainment only when prudence plays its regulatory role.

Prudence as a Moderator

As a meta-resource, prudence facilitates self-regulation (Hirschi, Shockley, & Zacher, 2019), and should enhance the positive outcomes of leader grit while buffering the leader from negative outcomes. Prudent leaders “show a farsighted and deliberative concern for the consequences of their actions and decisions, successfully resist impulses and other choices that satisfy shorter term goals at the expense of longer-term ones, have a flexible and moderate approach to life, and strive for balance among their goals and ends” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 478). Therefore, prudence should allow gritty leaders to more effectively regulate their grit and enable them to cope better with the multiple demands they face, not just those inherent to the work and leadership roles but also family demands and obligations (Baltes, Zhdanova, & Clark, 2011). Gritty *and* prudent leaders regulate their perseverant efforts in ways that maximize outcomes (Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009).

To substantiate our argument, we draw from the dual-systems model of self-regulation (Hofmann et al., 2009). Consistent with various dual-process models (e.g., Strack & Deutsch, 2004), this theory asserts that resource allocation and self-regulation are informed by two distinct processes: (1) the impulsive system that reflects instincts and inclinations; (2) the reflective system that relies on “people’s higher-order resources for exerting flexible, deliberative control, consciously reflecting on one’s thoughts and actions” (Amarnani, Lajom, Restubog, & Capezio, 2020, p. 817). We posit that, if the reflective system is not activated, the focused and tenacious pursuit of work goals may become the impulsive default. This can result in inappropriate persistence, as well as overcommitment, in which goal pursuit saps resources required for well-being and the leader fails to recognize or act on the need to replenish those resources through the required means, such as spending quality time with loved ones. As

valuable as grit is for success and goal attainment, its potential to make goal-seeking behaviors an impulsive response makes it a dual-edged sword capable of harming leader well-being.

To avoid the potential downsides of tenacious goal pursuit, leaders must rely on the reflective system. We consider that prudence is a cognitive meta-resource that informs such a system, shaping the resource allocation stimulated by grit in several ways (Amarnani et al., 2020; Halbesleben et al., 2009): (1) optimizing how gritty leaders allocate their resources efficiently in the pursuit of their goals; (2) adopting a proactive coping approach that allows gritty leaders to prepare for anticipated resource investment; and (3) enabling gritty leaders in activities that allow detaching psychologically from work during nonwork time (e.g., interacting with friends and loved ones; Debus et al., 2019), and thus replenishing lost resources. Specifically, prudence helps gritty leaders invest and recuperate resources more efficiently at several levels of the self-regulation process.

First, prudent gritty leaders demonstrate deeper judgement regarding the consequences of their grittiness at work for their family role and goals, including a greater willingness to listen to and take advice from family members (Hirschi et al., 2019). Second, based on judgments made from careful consideration, prudent gritty leaders act with wisdom to achieve balance between work goals and family responsibilities (Dahm, Glomb, Manchester, & Leroy, 2015). Prudent gritty leaders are also more likely to recognize and disengage from secondary goals that are not key to long-term success, and to revise and abandon unattainable goals, thereby avoiding inappropriate persistence (Hirschi et al., 2019). When gritty leaders are prudent, they remove barriers and create resources that allow them to pursue their work goals via a proactive and perseverant stance and, at the same time, maintain balance in their pursuit of family goals to facilitate well-being.

This is not to argue that gritty individuals have an impulsive disposition. We rather consider that the focused perseverant stance of gritty leaders may lead them to overinvest

resources at work that, from the scarcity paradigm perspective (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), have a negative impact on family goals. Refraining from following those tendencies and preventing the respective negative consequences requires prudence. We synthesize our reasoning as follows: to get optimal results, the gritty leader – who, by definition, perseveres in the pursuit of long-term goals – must use reason not to succumb to overindulgence in that focused pursuit. Conversely, when poorly regulated, grit is potentially damaging. A high level of grit is not adaptive unless it is accompanied by the ability to engage in reflection, self-monitoring, and self-regulation, all indicators of prudence. We thus consider that an imprudent gritty leader is more likely to fall into the traps of overcommitted efforts at work that lead to WFC. First, such a leader is more likely to embark in inappropriate persistence (Howard & Crayne, 2019), spending time and other resources in the relentless pursuit of work goals despite the risks of loss and failure (Lucas, Gratch, Cheng, & Marsella, 2015). The imprudence of a gritty leader also makes him/her more vulnerable to the sunk cost fallacy (Jordan, Ferris et al., 2019), thereby expending effort beyond that which is reasonable. Second, weak prudence causes that gritty leader to either underestimate the consequences of his/her gritty stance at work for his/her family goals or be less able to resist the impulses nurtured by a gritty approach (Dahm et al., 2015; Hofmann et al., 2009) that negatively affect his/her family goals. Third, an imprudent gritty leader is less willing to carry out help-seeking behaviors (Credé et al., 2017) that would help him/her to soften the burden of the relentless pursuit of goals. Therefore, an imprudent gritty leader is more likely to spend time and resources in dealing with unwise although preventable decisions and actions, with consequences for WFC. Hence:

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between grit in leaders and their WFC depends on their prudence, in that the relationship (H1a) is positive if leaders are imprudent, and (H1b) is negative if leaders are prudent.

WFC and AWB

COR theory posits that stress emerges when key resources are threatened with loss, or are lost, or when there is a failure to gain key resources after significant efforts. From a COR perspective, the stressful and challenging nature of WFC should decrease AWB, as resources such as time and energy need to be expended to amend relationships and achieve better balance between the two roles. WFC also makes recovering from intense workloads more difficult, as resources are not as readily restored through satisfying time with family, which can lead to psychological distress (Bakker, Demerouti, Oerlemans, & Sonnentag, 2013). The perception of work as a threat that harms family life causes a feeling of resource loss or a sense that gaining key resources necessary to perform the family role is inviable, the consequence being lower AWB. The extant empirical literature supports this reasoning, suggesting that WFC is positively related to several detractors of AWB (e.g., Amstad et al., 2011; Fiksenbaum, 2014). Further, negative relationships have been found between WFC and multiple positive indicators of AWB (see, e.g., Amstad et al., 2011). Hence:

Hypothesis 2: Leaders' WFC relates negatively with their AWB.

Considering that grittier leaders are more or less likely to experience WFC depending on their prudence (H1), and that WFC is negatively related to AWB (H2), we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: There is a moderated indirect relationship (via WFC) between grit in leaders and their AWB, in that the relationship (H3a) is positive for prudent leaders, and (H3b) negative for imprudent leaders.

Method

Sample and Procedures

The sample comprises 102 middle and top managers (57.8% males; Mean age: 38.49, SD: 6.69) who participated in a leadership development program carried out in a European business school and had been rated by at least three subordinates ($n = 487$; mean = 4.8) and three peers ($n = 838$; mean = 8.2). These managers worked for 74 organizations operating in several sectors

(e.g., banking, healthcare, pharmaceutical, energy, packaging, molds, agri-food). They performed roles such as production manager, CEO, financial manager, HR manager, chief creative officer, and commercial manager. Part of the leadership development program was a 360° survey in which the leaders invited all subordinates and peers who knew them well, to assess them on numerous variables, including the focal variables of this study. The items used to measure the variables included in the 360° survey came from two sources: adaptation from the literature, and new items designed for the leadership development program. The scales' development was carried out through an iterative process, conducted by the first author, in which both scholars and practitioners participated. The goal was developing scales that were valid, but also parsimonious enough to not burden the raters in the 360° survey and thus reduce their participation rate.

To minimize the risks of common method variance, different sources were used to measure different variables. AWB, as a subjective experience, was reported by the leaders themselves. WFC was also measured by the leaders themselves because they directly experience the tension between their work and family roles. Grit and prudence were measured with data from subordinates, who reported how their leaders operated at work. For each leader, the subordinates were randomly split into two subsamples (#1, #2), one being used to measure grit (#1), the other to measure prudence (#2). This procedure seemed to substantially reduce common method variance, as the correlation between the two variables was much lower when different ($r = .24, p < .05$) versus the same subordinates ($r = .71, p < .001$) rated the two variables. For robustness, the hypothesized model was also tested with grit being measured with data from all subordinates, and prudence with data from peers. The empirical pattern is similar when grit (prudence) is measured with data from peers (subordinates).

Measuring grit and prudence in leaders through others' ratings is not only recommendable to reduce the risks of common method bias, but also preferable because self-

assessments are affected by several errors and biases (e.g., avoiding observing or recalling information disconfirming desired self-perceptions). Credé et al. (2017) observed that individuals are generally not aware of their true level of grit. Self-reported prudence is also susceptible of several biases (e.g., imprudent individuals may be so blind of their own imprudence that they describe themselves as being prudent). As found by Connelly and Hülshager (2012, p. 603), observers versus self-raters “have clearer lenses for viewing target’s personality traits”. The meta-analysis of Connelly and Ones (2010) also suggested that using other-reports to measure personal characteristics is both valid and useful.

Aggregating Data

ICC(1) is .27 for grit (large effect; LeBreton & Senter, 2008) and .12 for prudence (medium) as measured with data from subordinates, and .11 for prudence (medium) as measured with data from peers. ICC(2) are .64 for grit and .39 for prudence as measured with data from subordinates, and .50 for prudence as measured with data from peers. In order to compute the expected variances that allow calculating r_{wg} values, several researchers (e.g., Biemann, Cole, & Voelpel, 2012; LeBreton & Senter, 2008) recommend using several defensible null distributions. Thus, expected variances of grit and prudence were estimated assuming both a uniform null distribution (“the most natural candidate to represent nonagreement”; Cohen, Doveh, & Nahum-Shani, 2009, p. 149) and a slightly skewed distribution. We considered slightly skewed distribution based on an earlier study (Rego et al., 2021) where a measure of grit in leaders as reported by subordinates was included. For prudence, we also considered it reasonable to expect a slightly skewed distribution, because of a possible leniency bias on the part of the followers when describing the leader prudence (see Rego et al., 2021 for conscientiousness as reported by subordinates). r_{wg} values (uniform/slightly skewed distribution) are .88/.81, and .85/.77, respectively for grit and prudence as measured with data from subordinates, representing strong interrater agreement (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). When

data from peers are used to measure prudence, r_{wg} value is .85/.77 (a strong interrater agreement). Although the ICC(2) for prudence is below the recommended cut-off, this value does not prevent aggregation if aggregation is theoretically justified and r_{wg} is high. We thus proceeded with aggregated data.

Measures

All items were assessed on a six-point scale, with measures adapted from the literature translated (English→Portuguese) and back-translated. We followed the recommendation of Disabato et al. (2019) to use the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; see also Motro et al., 2021) to obtain more reliable scores for *overall* grit ($\alpha = .90$, aggregated data from both all subordinates and the subsample #1 of subordinates). Considering that grit is domain-specific (Cormier et al., 2019), subordinates were asked to focus on how their leaders behave at work. Four items measured consistency of interest (sample item, reverse coded: “My supervisor often sets a goal but later chooses to pursue a different one”), and four measured perseverance (“...finishes whatever he/she begins”).

Prudence ($\alpha = .70$ and $.80$, aggregated data from, respectively, the subsample #2 of subordinates and all peers) was also measured through four items. Two items were adapted from Riggio et al. (2010; sample item: “My supervisor analyses a problem from all angles and reaches the best decision for all parties involved”). The other two items were adapted from Ashton and Lee (2009).

WFC ($\alpha = .75$) was measured through three items. Two items were adapted from Netemeyer et al. (1996; sample item: “The amount of time I spend at work makes it difficult to fulfil my family responsibilities”). The third item (“I can easily balance my work and my family life”; reverse-coded) had been written specifically for the 360° feedback tool. AWB ($\alpha = .62$) was measured by asking the leaders to report the extent to which they had experienced joy, contentment, and happiness at work over the last two months. Although the reliability is

lower than the standard yet arbitrary cut-off value of .70, it is still in the acceptable range according to several authors (Price & Mueller, 1986).

Age of the leader was included as a control as a proxy for life stage, as it is associated with how leaders are vested in their jobs and families and thus with their experiences of WFC (Schooreel & Verbruggen, 2016). Leader gender was included because social role theory suggests that men and women are socialized to comply with prescribed gender roles, and the internalization of those roles' norms may affect work and family priorities as well as WFC and its consequences (Livingston & Judge, 2008; Zhao et al., 2019). Leader education was included because the well-educated tend to occupy jobs that lead them to experience more work-family role blurring activities (Schieman & Glavin, 2011). Leaders self-reported optimism was included because it aids the process of stress resistance (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and may help leaders avert conflicting work and family demands (see Allen et al., 2012). Optimism ($\alpha = .83$) was measured with two items (sample item: "I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work"; Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, & Avolio, 2015).

Discriminant Validity

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted to assess the discriminant validity among the four key constructs of our hypothesized model plus optimism. Given that grit is a two-dimensional construct, two parcels/components were considered. Because we tested the hypothesized model with two "profiles" of data, CFA was applied to each profile separately: (#1) grit measured with data from the subsample #1 of subordinates, prudence measured with data from the subsample #2 of subordinates, and both WFC and AWB measured with leaders' self-reported data; (#2) grit measured with data from all subordinates, prudence measured with data from all peers, and both WFC and AWB measured with leaders' self-reported data.

For data from profile #1, the five-factor structure fits the data well ($\chi^2_{[67]} = 87.48$; RMSEA = .06; SRMR: .07; GFI = .89; CFI and IFI = .94) and better than the following models:

(1) WFC and AWB merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[4]} = 28.98, p < .001$); (2) variables measured with self-reported data, i.e., WFC, AWB, and optimism merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[7]} = 51.27, p < .001$); (3) grit and prudence merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[4]} = 69.21, p < .001$); and (4) all variables merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[10]} = 180.38, p < .001$). For data from profile #2, the five-factor structure fits the data in a modest although acceptable way ($\chi^2_{[67]} = 138.78$; RMSEA = .10; SRMR: .08; GFI, CFI and IFI = .84) and better than the following models: (1) WFC and AWB merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[4]} = 26.38, p < .001$); (2) optimism, WFC, and AWB merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[7]} = 48.29, p < .001$); (3) grit and prudence merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[4]} = 49.69, p < .001$); and (4) all variables merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[10]} = 204.79, p < .001$). Considering the aforementioned controversy regarding grit being redundant with, or a facet of, conscientiousness (Credé et al., 2017), and that prudence has been a suggested facet of conscientiousness (Lee & Ashton, 2004), it is important to pay particular attention to the distinctiveness between these two constructs: the five-factor structure fits the data better than the four-factor model in which grit and prudence are merged¹.

Findings

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations. Grit and prudence as measured with data from different raters do not intercorrelate or correlate modestly (the same pattern emerged when each component of grit is considered separately; not shown on Table 1). Both grit (as well as each of its components, not shown on Table 1) and prudence do not correlate with WFC neither AWB, while WFC correlates negatively with AWB. We tested our hypotheses with and without including the controls, the empirical pattern being very similar in the two conditions. For conservative reasons, we present the findings with controls included. We used a bias-corrected bootstrap analysis (PROCESS macro; model #1; Hayes, 2018) to first test the conditional effect of grit on WFC using both data profiles described previously. When

¹ The correlation between self-reported grit and self-reported prudence (a facet, or a proxy, of conscientiousness) is 0.49 ($p < .001$), much lower than the correlation (.84) between self-reported grit and self-reported conscientiousness found in the Credé et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis.

grit (subsample #1) and prudence (#2) are measured with data from two different subsamples of subordinates, grit alone does not predict WFC (effect = $-.03$, $SE = .11$, $p = .84$; LLCI = $-.24$, ULCI = $.20$), but the interaction between grit and prudence does (effect = $-.57$, $SE = .18$, $p < 0.01$; LLCI = $-.93$, ULCI = $-.20$; R^2 change: $.08$, $F = 9.62$, $p < .01$). The conditional effects are: (a) effect = $.28$, $SE = .13$, $p < .05$; LLCI = $.02$, ULCI = $.53$ (*low prudence*); (b) effect = $-.06$, $SE = .11$, $p = .64$; LLCI = $-.29$, ULCI = $.18$ (*medium*); and (c) effect = $-.36$, $SE = .17$, $p < .05$; LLCI = $-.70$, ULCI = $-.005$ (*high*). When grit is measured with data from all subordinates and prudence with data from peers, the same pattern emerges: while grit does not predict WFC (effect = $.001$, $SE = .14$, $p = .99$; LLCI = $-.29$, ULCI = $.29$), the interaction between grit and prudence does (effect = -1.35 , $SE = .43$, $p < .01$; LLCI = -2.20 , ULCI = $-.50$; R^2 change: $.09$, $F = 9.98$, $p < .01$). The conditional effects are: (a) effect = $.49$, $SE = .19$, $p < .05$; LLCI = $.11$, ULCI = $.88$ (*low prudence*); (b) effect = $-.04$, $SE = .15$, $p = .77$; LLCI = $-.34$, ULCI = $.25$ (*medium*); and (c) effect = $-.49$, $SE = .23$, $p < .05$; LLCI = $-.94$, ULCI = $-.03$ (*high*).

Table 1 about here

Therefore, for the two data profiles, while grittier leaders experience higher WFC if they are not prudent, they experience lower WFC if they are prudent. Figures 2a and 2b depict graphically the effect of grit on WFC for the three levels of prudence (low: mean – 1 SD; mean; high: mean + 1SD). Consistent across both data profiles, the two figures corroborate a negative relationship between grit and WFC for prudent leaders, and a positive relationship for imprudent leaders. H1 is thus supported.

Figures 2a and 2b about here

We also assessed the conditional indirect model with a bias-corrected bootstrap analysis (Table 2). For the two data profiles, the interaction between grit and prudence is significantly related to WFC, and WFC is negatively related to AWB. Table 3 depicts the direct and conditional indirect effects of grit on AWB through WFC: across both data profiles, while the

direct effect is not significant, the indirect effect is. Thus, gritty leaders experience *lower* AWB through higher levels of WFC if they are *imprudent*, and they experience *higher* AWB through lower levels of WFC when they are *prudent*. Therefore, H2 and H3 are supported.

Table 2 and 3 about here

Discussion

One of the challenges for future research on resources is understanding how they interact, as the effect of a specific resource may be conditional on other resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018), an issue considered particularly important regarding work-family balance. Our study supports the notion that the outcomes of grit are not always beneficial, with the effect of grit in leaders on their AWB via WFC depending on their prudence. Gritty and imprudent leaders experience greater WFC and, therefore, lower AWB. A deficit in prudence orients gritty leaders to make unwise choices that result in overcommitting energy and resources at work, thus jeopardizing their family goals. Differently, gritty *and* prudent leaders experience higher AWB via lower WFC. For these leaders, grit operates as an individual resource capable of not only reducing their vulnerability to contextual stressors, but also of orchestrating resource gains that make them more able to effectively handle work and family demands and goals.

Therefore, our findings both corroborate and diverge from the literature suggesting that grit relates positively with subjective well-being (e.g., Jiang et al., 2020): the outcome is dependent on their prudence. This empirical pattern is consistent with the two-systems model of self-regulation, in that the focused perseverance of gritty leaders can become the impulsive response even when inappropriate, and to the leaders' own detriment. Prudence activates the reflective system of self-regulation, which then allows grit to yield positive outcomes of reduced WFC and increased AWB. Our findings also corroborate researchers who have argued that, to advance the study of grit in workplaces, it is necessary to consider its boundary

conditions. Prudence is one of those conditions, and future studies may test if the empirical pattern found here replicates with non-leaders.

Our study also provides important and unexpected findings regarding the role played by prudence. While prudence does not relate directly with WFC and AWB, the way it operates in interaction with grit provides insights about its paradoxical nature (Ardelt, Achenbaum, & Oh, 2013): while prudence helps gritty leaders experience higher AWB via lower WFC, the highest level of WFC emerges for prudent leaders who are not gritty (Figures 2a and 2b). Because prudent leaders have a farsighted and deliberative orientation toward the consequences of their behaviors (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), they are more aware of the potential negative consequences of their demanding work-role for their family domain. If they are gritty enough, their prudence mitigates the potential dark side of grit and reinforces its bright side. However, if prudent leaders are not gritty, they may experience a kind of powerlessness to deal effectively with the demands of their leadership role. Those leaders are likely to see demands at work more as hindrances than as challenges (Crawford et al., 2010), and this stance may cause them to interpret the context as unsupportive and thus experience higher WFC (Fiksenbaum, 2014). By anticipating potential negative consequences of their demanding job for pursuing their family goals, and feeling unable to protect valuable resources such as time to pursue family goals, those leaders develop a stronger sense of WFC. Having a self-regulatory resource like prudence may be psychologically draining (Hofmann et al., 2009) if such a resource is not included in a caravan of resources where grit is also included (Hobfoll et al., 2018). At least regarding its impact on WFC, prudence is more a meta-resource that enables leaders to allocate grit more effectively (Amarnani et al., 2020; Halbesleben et al., 2009; Hofmann et al., 2009) than a resource that directly helps leaders to find work-family balance. In short, workplace leaders' optimal functioning requires a dual-stance: agentic/perseverant and self-regulatory/reflective.

Limitations and Future Studies

Our study suffers from several limitations. First, the method does not support causality, and other causalities may operate (e.g., high WFC drains resources that lead to weaker self-regulation; AWB acts as a resource that protects from WFC). Future studies may adopt longitudinal or diary designs that allow within-person variations in WFC (French & Allen, 2020), make causality more plausible, and directly test the role that prudence may play in allocation of gritty efforts that then affect WFC and AWB. Second, our study includes a single mediator and a single moderator, and future studies may consider a more complex model. For example, it is possible that the relationship between grit and WFC is mediated by engagement at work (Halbesleben et al., 2009), selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) behavioral stress-coping strategies (Baltes et al., 2011), and the number of work hours (Frye & Breugh, 2004), and that such a mediated relationship is influenced by the marital status, number of children, childcare responsibilities and employment status of the partner. Work centrality and family centrality (Min, Matthews, Wayne, Parsons, & Barnes-Farrell, 2021), supervisor, co-workers, and organizational support, and leader values may also operate as moderators (e.g., a gritty leader who values work more than family may not experience WFC, while a gritty leader whose family is particularly salient to him/her may develop a higher sense of WFC).

Third, our study was carried out in a single culture, and future studies should be carried out in other cultures that place different weights on the importance of work and family. In cultures where family is regarded with high importance, work may be interpreted as a pathway to nourish the family well-being and status (Zhao et al., 2019). For example, Chinese workers tend to be more tolerant of WFC conflict than Western counterparts (Jin, Ford, & Chen, 2013), and therefore less likely to view WFC conflict as a threat to their well-being. Fourth, our study uses measures designed for a leadership development program that may have limited content-validity. We acknowledge the limitations inherent with the measures and suggest that future research expand upon our model with fully-validated measures for each variable. Future studies

may also include (a) a more valid measure of grit than the Grit-S, which does not capture fully the passion component (Jordan, Ferris et al., 2019). Finally, our measure of AWB has modest reliability. We consider that this is not problematic for our study, for three interrelated reasons. First, as mentioned above, some authors consider reliabilities higher than .60 to be acceptable. Second, reliability is sensitive to the number of items, and our measure includes only three. Third, and most importantly, literature has suggested that WFC relates to AWB, and the main goal of our study is not targeted at that path, rather it is at the relationship between grit and WFC as moderated by prudence. Future studies may include a more robust measure of AWB that includes both positive and negative emotions (or even measure both the affective and the cognitive components of SWB), adopt a more sophisticated measure of WFC (Min et al., 2012), include the three components (time-based, behavior-based, strain-based; Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000), and a multidimensional measure of prudence.

Conclusion

Grit is surrounded by controversy. Some critical scholars (e.g., Ion et al., 2017; Ponnock et al., 2020) question the validity of the construct and its potential to predict individuals' success. Other scholars (e.g., Credé et al., 2017; Jordan, Ferris et al., 2019) point out the inconsistent findings about grit outcomes and recommend considering boundary conditions. Still others (mainly Duckworth, 2016), as well as practitioners (e.g., Michelson, 2018), are more enthusiastic about grit and consider it an important resource for individuals' success, performance, and well-being. When it comes to leaders in work settings, grit has been extolled as a crucial resource for their effectiveness and career advancement (see, e.g., Lee & Duckworth, 2018). In this paper, we defend that it is premature to consider grit as dispensable, and that grit at work deserves being explored, including in leaders. However, we adopt a balanced approach and suggest that grit is not exempt of risks, at least for leaders: gritty leaders, if they are imprudent, may experience higher WFC and, as a consequence, lower well-being.

Only when grit is regulated through prudence will it result in leaders' optimal functioning and the recuperation of resources to continue persistence toward work and family goals. This seems to have been realized by Horta-Osório, Lloyds Bank former CEO whose case we mention in the Introduction. His traumatic experience led him to “switch on” his resource of prudence in the pursuit, not only of his own well-being, health, and effectiveness, but also of implementing healthier organizational and leadership practices in workplaces (Horta-Osório, 2018), including in the City, in which an “all-hours working culture” has prevailed (Altman, Morton, Cotton, Kline, & Altman, 2015). In short: by adopting policies and encouraging prudence in the gritty pursuit of work goals, organizations can protect their leaders' well-being, resulting in a healthier workplace, recharging of resources, and grit that can endure. When selecting leaders, organizations may consider not only the gritty stance of the candidates, but also their prudence. Leader development programs may also pay attention to these two resources – the agentic and the self-regulatory.

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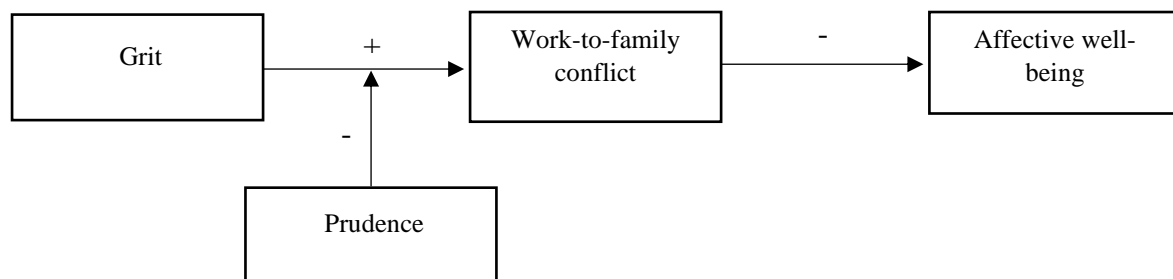
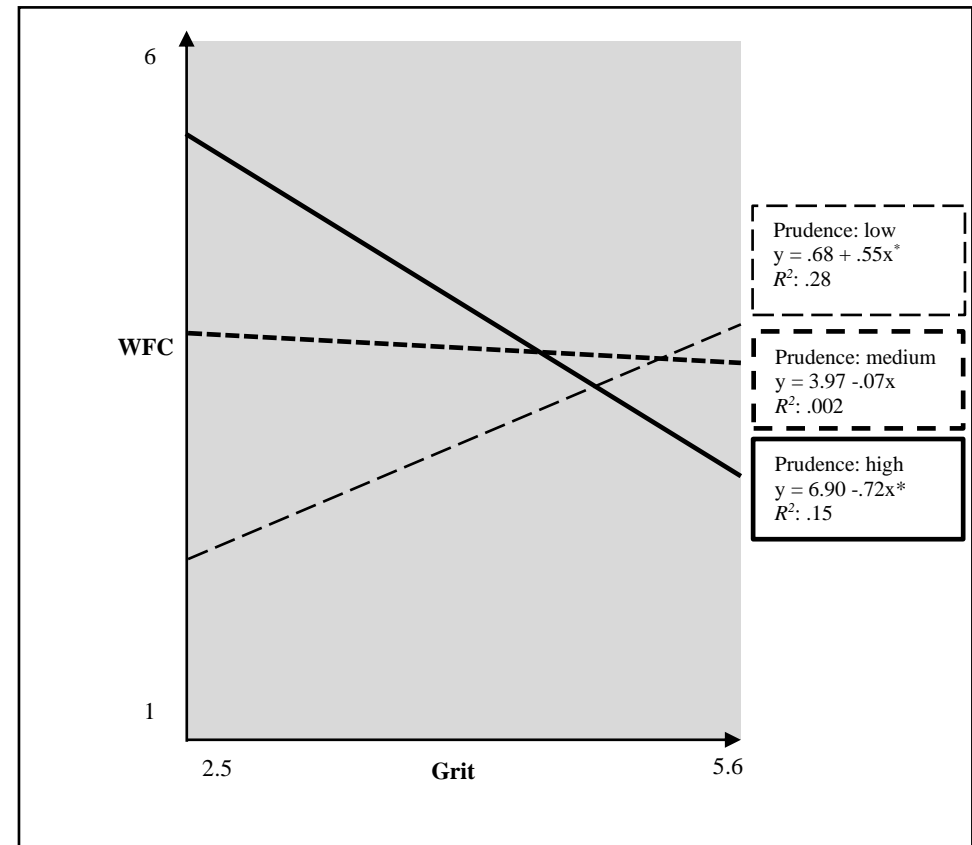
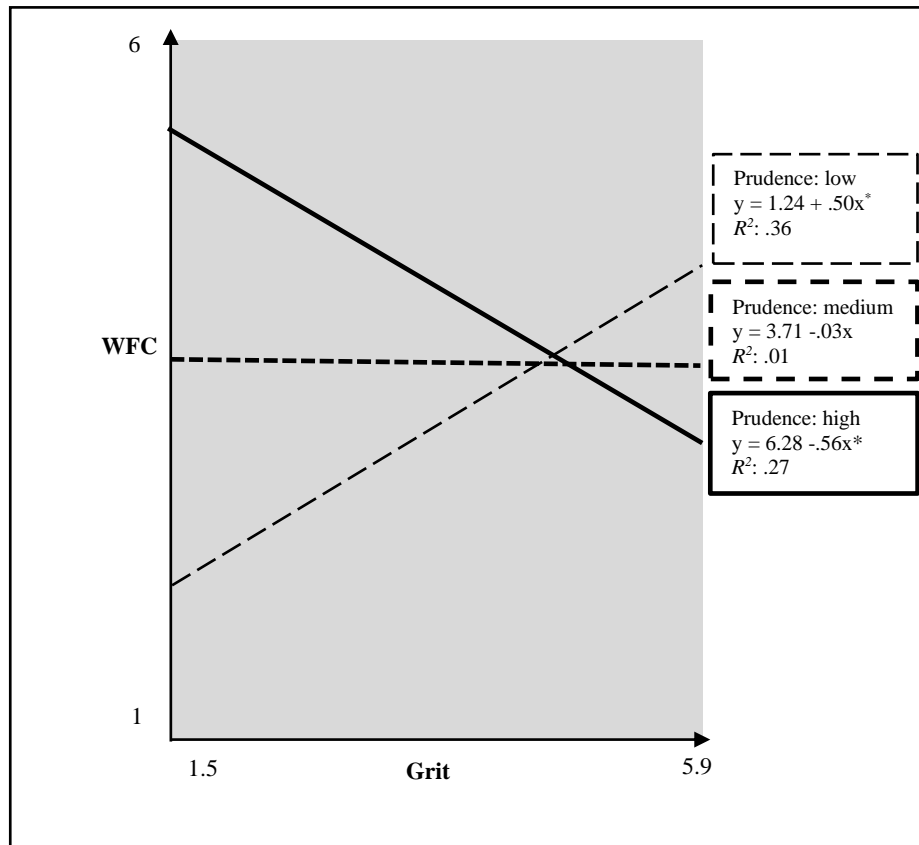


Figure 1. Hypothesized model



Figures 2a and 2b. Prudence moderating the relationship between grit and WFC

(Left: grit measured with data from subsample #1 of subordinates, and prudence measured with data from subsample #2 of subordinates; Right: grit measured with data all subordinates, and prudence measured with data peers)

* $p < .05$

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5.1	5.2	6.1	6.2	7
1. Age	38.72	6.53	-								
2. Gender (a)	-	-	-.09	-							
3. Education (b)	2.29	.61	-.09	-.14	-						
4. Optimism	4.53	.77	.00	.01	-.09	-					
5.1. Grit (data from subordinates, subsample #1)	4.77	.64	.04	.10	.13	.01	-				
5.2. Grit (data from all subordinates)	4.79	.47	.05	.01	.09	.05	.89***	-			
6.1. Prudence (data from subordinates, subsample #2)	4.88	.52	-.04	-.08	.07	.12	.24*	.48***	-		
6.2. Prudence (data from peers)	4.97	.36	.08	.13	-.04	.25*	.09	.13	.22*	-	
7. WFC	3.55	.71	.10	-.01	-.06	-.28**	.05	.05	-.06	.04	-
8. AWB	4.63	.59	.03	-.29**	.09	.55***	-.16	-.08	.13	.06	-.38***

Notes: $N = 102$; (a) 0: female; 1: male; (b) 1: not graduated; 2: graduated; 3: Master degree; 4: PhD

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2. Bootstrap regression analysis (5000 samples; Model #7, Hayes, 2018)*1st line: grit (prudence) measured with data from the subsample #1 (#2) of subordinates**2nd line: grit (prudence) measured with data from all subordinates (all peers)*

Variables	Outcome: WFC			Outcome: AWB		
	B	SE	[Bias corrected 95% CI]	B	SE	[Bias corrected 95% CI]
Age	.01	.01	[-.01, .03]	.00	.01	[-.01, .02]
	.01	.01	[-.02, .02]	.00	.01	[-.01, .02]
Gender (a)	-.08	.14	[-.35, .20]	-.32***	.09	[-.50, -.14]
	-.09	.14	[-.36, .18]	-.34***	.09	[-.52, -.15]
Education (b)	-.09	.11	[-.32, .13]	.11	.08	[-.04, .26]
	-.12	.11	[-.34, .10]	.09	.08	[-.06, .24]
Optimism	-.23**	.09	[-.41, .07]	.38***	.06	[.26, .50]
	-.29**	.09	[-.46, -.11]	.39***	.06	[.26, .51]
Grit (subordinates, subsample #1, SS1)	-.02	.11	[-.24, .20]	-.13	.07	[-.27, .01]
Grit (data from all subordinates)	.00	.14	[-.29, .29]	-.12	.10	[-.32, .07]
Prudence (subordinates; subsample #2, SS2)	-.02	.13	[-.28, .24]	-	-	-
Prudence (data from peers)	.22	.19	[-.16, .60]	-	-	-
Grit (SS1) x prudence (SS2)	-.57**	.18	[-.93, -.20]	-	-	-
Grit (all subordinates) x prudence (peers)	-1.35**	.43	[-2.20, -.50]	-	-	-
WFC	-	-	-	-.20**	.07	[-.33, -.07]
	-	-	-	-.20**	.07	[-.33, .07]
F	2.98**			14.36***		
	3.23**			13.78***		
R ²	.18			.48		
	.19			.47		
R ² change (after entering the interaction term)	.08			-		
	.09			-		

*Notes: N = 102; (a) 0: female; 1: male; (b) 1: not graduated; 2: graduated; 3: Master degree; 4: PhD*** $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$*

Table 3. Direct and conditional indirect effects of grit on AWB through WFC (Bootstrap regression analysis, 5000 samples; Model #7, Hayes, 2018)

1st line: grit (prudence) measured with data from the subsample #1 (#2) of subordinates

grit (prudence) measured with data from all subordinates (all peers)

	B	SE	[Bias corrected 95% CI]
Low prudence	-.05	.04	[-.17, .02]
	-.10	.05	[-.21, -.003]
Middle prudence	.01	.02	[-.04, .06]
	.01	.03	[-.05, .08]
High prudence	.07	.04	[.01, .25]
	.10	.06	[.01, .22]
Direct effect	-.13	.07	[-.27, .01]
	-.15	.10	[-.32, .07]
Index of moderated mediation	.11	.06	[.02, .25]
	.27	.12	[.05, .53]

Note: N = 102.