










# “Employee perfectionism and its impact on mental health and well-being: Evidence from Hungary”

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# EMPLOYEE PERFECTIONISM AND ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING: EVIDENCE FROM HUNGARY

## Abstract

This study examines how two forms of perfectionism – self-doubt-driven and purpose-driven – affect employees' mental health and well-being. Our study distinguishes between maladaptive and adaptive perfectionism and examines their relationships with burnout and job satisfaction. A quantitative online survey was conducted in Hungary with 478 participants (67% women, with a mean age of 29) via social media. The survey covered the staff of both Hungarian and foreign-owned companies, which were of different sizes. Participants were employed adults selected to obtain a varied sample across regions, education levels, and job positions. Data were analyzed using t-tests, ANOVA, factor analysis, and K-means clustering in SPSS to evaluate three hypotheses regarding the relationships between perfectionism and gender, job role, company ownership, burnout, and life satisfaction. Results showed that self-doubt-driven perfectionism strongly correlated with a higher burnout rate, whereas purpose-driven perfectionism was linked to greater life satisfaction. Contrary to assumptions, demographic factors such as gender, role, or company ownership did not consistently predict perfectionism levels. Two main perfectionism patterns – demanding perfection and doubt-driven – were identified, each producing different psychological outcomes.

## Keywords

perfectionism, exhaustion, well-being, satisfaction, mental health

## JEL Classification

D23, M19, M54

## INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly competitive and psychologically demanding workplace, perfectionism has become a key factor influencing employee well-being and performance. Although often associated with high achievement, perfectionism has a dual nature: it can motivate excellence, yet the pressure for flawlessness and constant self-evaluation can also impose significant mental strain on individuals (He & Chen, 2024). While the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism is well established, it remains unclear which mechanisms determine whether high expectations foster resilience or result in chronic self-doubt.

Most existing research focuses on student or clinical populations, leaving a limited understanding of how perfectionism manifests among employees who confront organizational expectations and performance pressures. This is particularly important because, although perfectionism may enhance commitment and accuracy in professional settings, it can also contribute to burnout, stress, and heightened sensitivity to feedback. Beyond the workplace, maladaptive perfectionism likewise affects interpersonal relationships and emotional well-being (Flett & Hewitt, 2024).

As societal expectations continue to intensify, perfectionism is increasingly recognized as a broader mental health concern closely associated with anxiety, depression, and burnout. This underscores the need to better understand how perfectionistic tendencies develop, how they shape behavior in organizational contexts, and how they influence overall psychological health.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Perfectionism can be both a force of performance and a source of mental fatigue in workplace environments, as the demand for flawlessness and continual self-criticism has a significant impact on individual happiness as well as organizational efficiency. While adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism have been discussed in the literature, it is not clear what motivational and emotional forces determine whether the same high expectations lead to resilient, satisfying behaviors or to chronic self-doubt and burnout. Perfectionism is a multidimensional psychological construct involving the setting of excessively high standards, critical self-evaluations, and a strong concern over mistakes (Smith et al., 2022). While it may be perceived as a motivator for high performance, perfectionism is also associated with negative psychological outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout (Flett & Hewitt, 2020; Simon et al., 2025).

Perfectionism frequently originates from a lack of self-confidence and a persistent sense of self-doubt (Juwono et al., 2022; Rassaby et al., 2021; Aruta et al., 2021a). According to Aruta et al. (2021b), insecure individuals may pursue perfection as a compensatory mechanism, seeking approval and avoiding criticism. Perfectionistic concerns – a core dimension of maladaptive perfectionism – are strongly linked to low self-esteem and fear of failure (Sagar & Stoeber, 2009). Individuals characterized by such concerns tend to internalize external standards and often experience chronic self-doubt, questioning their abilities regardless of previous achievements (Piotrowski et al., 2023; Pannhausen et al., 2022; Gil et al., 2023).

Chen et al. (2019) and Ying et al. (2021) highlight the role of early life experiences – particularly critical parenting styles and emotionally invalidating environments – in fostering self-doubt and con-

ditional self-worth. The internalization of conditional acceptance may push individuals toward perfectionistic tendencies, leading them to believe that only flawless performance will make them worthy of approval or love. Consequently, perfectionism often becomes not a genuine aspiration for excellence but a coping mechanism for deeper insecurities (Larijani & Besharat, 2010; de Jonge-Heesen et al., 2021).

Not all perfectionism stems from insecurity. Some individuals exhibit perfectionism as an intense internal drive to achieve excellence. This dimension, known as perfectionistic strivings, is characterized by the pursuit of high standards and a desire for mastery (Harvey et al., 2017). According to Bieling et al. (2004), this form of perfectionism can be adaptive, leading to high academic or professional achievement when it is not accompanied by excessive self-criticism. Contemporary psychology, therefore, distinguishes between adaptive (or healthy) and maladaptive (or unhealthy) forms of perfectionism. Adaptive perfectionism involves striving for high standards while maintaining self-compassion and resilience in the face of setbacks (He & Chen, 2024).

However, even high strivings can become maladaptive if they are rigid and leave no room for mistakes or flexibility. Maladaptive perfectionism is typically characterized by excessive self-criticism, fear of failure, and chronic dissatisfaction (Brennan-Wydra et al., 2021). Stoeber et al. (2020) and Hill and Curran (2015) found that while perfectionistic strivings may be associated with conscientiousness and goal attainment, they are also predictive of burnout when combined with perfectionistic concerns. Such concerns constitute a core dimension of maladaptive perfectionism and are strongly linked to low self-esteem, fear of failure, and rumination. This duality is supported by meta-analytical evidence: Stoeber et al. (2020) and Madigan (2019) confirmed that perfectionistic strivings correlate with positive outcomes such as performance and motivation, whereas perfec-

tionistic concerns are consistently associated with negative psychological outcomes, including depression and anxiety.

Importantly, recent scholarship highlights that even adaptive perfectionism has its limits. Xing and Cheong (2021) argue that so-called adaptive perfectionism may produce harmful consequences in environments characterized by high stress or insufficient social support. In contrast, Endleman et al. (2021) emphasize that the adaptive dimension remains beneficial – promoting academic success, personal growth, and goal achievement – so long as it is not accompanied by perfectionistic concerns. The interplay between striving for excellence and self-critical tendencies, therefore, determines whether perfectionism functions as a constructive motivational force or evolves into a source of psychological strain.

Perfectionism may be associated not only with high performance but also with a range of negative psychological outcomes. A substantial body of evidence links perfectionistic tendencies – particularly their maladaptive forms – to mental exhaustion and emotional burnout (Hill & Curran, 2015). Perfectionists often overwork themselves, set unrealistically high expectations, and engage in constant self-monitoring, and over time, this psychological strain depletes their mental resources. According to Kawamoto et al. (2022), maladaptive perfectionism is a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion and contributes to depression and anxiety, especially among individuals working or studying in high-pressure environments. The fear of failure and persistent rumination on perceived shortcomings further intensify these effects, often leading to cognitive fatigue. Hill and Madigan (2017) found that individuals with high levels of perfectionistic concerns report greater emotional exhaustion and reduced enjoyment in their activities. Similar mechanisms appear across various contexts, where perfectionism correlates with broader mental health symptoms, including sleep disturbances and chronic stress (Suh et al., 2024). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that maladaptive perfectionism exerts a pervasive and detrimental impact on psychological well-being. Persistent self-criticism, heightened fear of failure, and the internal pressure to meet unrealistic standards create a pattern of emotional strain

that increases vulnerability to burnout and other mental health difficulties.

Perfectionism can manifest differently across life domains. In professional contexts, perfectionists may exhibit high dedication, but often at the cost of work–life balance and overall well-being. According to Zhang et al. (2022), employees with high levels of perfectionistic concerns frequently struggle with delegation, fear being judged by colleagues, and engage in counterproductive work behaviors such as procrastination and micromanagement. These workplace patterns suggest that perfectionism not only shapes performance-related attitudes but also affects interpersonal dynamics and the ability to collaborate effectively.

In personal life, perfectionism can similarly hinder relationships and contribute to emotional distress. Flett and Hewitt (2024) describe how socially prescribed perfectionism – the belief that others demand perfection – is linked to interpersonal difficulties and conflict avoidance. This dynamic may result in reduced authenticity and intimacy in relationships, as perfectionists often fear vulnerability and the exposure of personal flaws. Such tendencies highlight how perfectionism constrains emotional expression and may undermine supportive social connections.

Interestingly, Harren et al. (2021) indicate that the rise in perfectionism across generations may be influenced by social media and broader societal expectations that blur the boundaries between private and public life. The constant pressure to “perform” both at work and in personal arenas contributes to increased psychological strain. These trends illustrate that perfectionism is not only an individual psychological characteristic but also a socially reinforced pattern that reflects contemporary cultural norms.

Perfectionism in the workplace is a multifaceted construct that can significantly impact employee well-being, job performance, and organizational outcomes. Gender plays a pivotal role in shaping perfectionist tendencies and their workplace manifestations (Cheung et al., 2020). Women often exhibit higher levels of perfectionism compared to men, influenced by societal expectations and gender norms (Beauregard, 2012). Burke et al. (2024)

found that women are penalized for displaying pride at work, highlighting the competence–warmth trade-off that affects their professional perceptions. Similarly, Abraham (2023), examining over 100,000 performance reviews across 170 companies, found that women tend to rate their own performance lower than men, reinforcing the notion that gendered expectations shape self-evaluations and workplace behavior.

Age also influences how perfectionism develops and manifests in organizational settings (Daniilidou, 2023). Evidence suggests that perfectionism is increasing over time, with younger generations reporting higher levels of perfectionistic concerns, while older employees may demonstrate more adaptive forms of perfectionism characterized by continuous improvement and mastery. Salès-Wuillemin et al. (2023) further show that the perceived quality of working life varies across gender and organizational status, with women experiencing a greater discrepancy between ideal and actual working conditions. Such age-related and generational distinctions may reflect broader shifts in workplace values, expectations, and social pressures.

An employee's position within an organization also significantly affects how perfectionism is experienced (Zhao & Huang, 2025). Individuals in leadership roles may exhibit higher levels of perfectionism, and Otto et al. (2021) found that leaders' perfectionistic tendencies are linked to specific monitoring behaviors and leadership styles. In contrast, employees in lower-level positions may develop perfectionistic tendencies as a response to job insecurity and the perceived need to meet organizational expectations. In these roles, perfectionism is often associated with lower levels of conscientiousness and engagement, suggesting that perfectionistic pressure may become counterproductive at certain hierarchical levels.

Finally, organizational context plays a further role in shaping perfectionism. The type of organization – corporate, public sector, or non-profit – can influence both the prevalence and expression of perfectionistic tendencies among employees. Harari et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis revealing that excellence-seeking perfectionism is strongly associated with higher levels of engage-

ment and motivation, but also with elevated stress and anxiety, indicating that organizational cultures centered on high performance may inadvertently amplify perfectionistic pressures.

Although perfectionism has been widely examined in psychological research, most existing studies rely on student or clinical populations. Consequently, there is limited evidence on how perfectionism manifests among working adults, particularly in organizational environments where performance expectations and workplace pressures may substantially alter its expression and impact. This gap is especially concerning, considering the rising prevalence of burnout and the growing recognition of perfectionism as a potential occupational risk factor. Given these trends, experts emphasize the importance of distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive forms of perfectionism and understanding how these dimensions interact across both professional and personal domains. Such distinctions are essential for capturing the nuanced ways in which perfectionism can promote achievement in some contexts while contributing to psychological strain in others. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine two forms of perfectionism among Hungarian employees: purpose-driven perfectionism, representing a more adaptive orientation, and self-doubt-driven perfectionism, reflecting a maladaptive pattern. The paper focuses specifically on how these two forms relate to burnout and overall life satisfaction. By investigating these associations, the study seeks to clarify the internal psychological factors that motivate adaptive or nonadaptive expressions of perfectionism. In doing so, this research contributes to a more refined understanding of perfectionism within workplace contexts and offers insights that may inform organizational practices aimed at supporting employee mental health and promoting long-term well-being.

The literature review analyzes adaptive and maladaptive forms of perfectionism and their implications for mental health and workplace functioning, with particular emphasis on their associations with burnout and life satisfaction. It underscores that the motivational and emotional underpinnings of perfectionism – whether grounded in purpose-driven striving or in self-doubt – play a

decisive role in determining whether perfectionism operates as a facilitator of performance or as a source of psychological strain.

We have formulated three hypotheses based on the research aim:

- H1: *The private aspects of perfectionism can be differentiated according to gender, position and company ownership.*
- H2: *Individuals who are perfectionistic in their need for perfection are more likely to have burnout than those who are characterized by self-doubt and constant doubt.*
- H3: *Respondents whose perfectionism is motivated by the need for perfection are more satisfied with their lives than those who have doubts.*

## 2. METHOD

Questionnaire-based research has been conducted since 2024 using the snowball method, which examines the emergence and characteristics of perfectionism. The questionnaire was made available on the Internet and on social media platforms, where respondents could voluntarily fill it in. The data were collected anonymously, and the response rate was neither measurable nor representative, but we believe the dataset provides an adequate picture of the issue. A pilot questionnaire was administered before the questionnaire was sent out, and the questions were found to be understandable and clear. We asked respondents with work experience to fill it out. Since high

school students in Hungary are required to complete 60 hours of volunteer work, many people could fill out the questionnaire.

Respondents were informed, upon completing the questionnaire, that the investigation would comply with GDPR, that their responses would be anonymous, that the data could not be traced back to respondents, and that the results would be used only for research purposes.

The questionnaire structure is illustrated in Table 1. The questionnaire started with specific questions, such as gender, place of residence, age, and job characteristics (e.g., workplace size, company ownership, and job title of the respondent). This was followed by questions on private perfectionism, followed by questions on workplace perfectionism. Finally, respondents were asked about psychological and job burnout.

After presenting the question sets, the specification was displayed. In terms of the respondents' ages, the youngest respondent is 17, the oldest is 78, and the average age is 29. The data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 clearly shows that the majority of the questionnaires were completed by women (67%). 19% of respondents live in Central Hungary, and 47.5% in Budapest. The majority of the respondents have either a secondary education with a school-leaving certificate or a university degree. The majority work in large companies, but there is also a high number of people working in medium-sized companies. More than half of the respondents work in a Hungarian-owned company in a managerial position.

**Table 1.** Structure of the questionnaire: Demographics, perfectionism, and burnout measures

Section	Subcategory	Item/Variable	Type
Demographics	Gender	Male / Female	Categorical
	Age	Age	Categorical
	Residence	Place of residence	Categorical
	Company ownership	Hungarian/Joint venture/foreign-owned, not working	Categorical
	Organizational activity	Field of activity	Categorical
Perfectionism	Private perfectionism	How true is it for you? I strive always to be perfect. I find it hard to forgive myself if my performance is not flawless	Likert-scale
	Workplace perfectionism	How true is it for you? I often feel uncertain when I make a decision. I always check my work again and again before I finish.	Likert-scale
Burnout	Emotional exhaustion	Have you ever felt emotionally burnt out?	Binary
	Physical exhaustion	Have you ever felt physically burnt out?	Binary

**Table 2.** Respondent characteristics by demographic and organizational factors (N = 478)

	Details	Number	Percent
Gender	Male	157	33%
	Female	321	67%
Residence	Northern Hungary	43	9%
	Northern Great Plain	46	9.6%
	Southern Great Plain	16	3.3%
	Central Hungary	91	19%
	Central Transdanubia	29	6.1%
	West Transdanubia	19	4%
	South Transdanubia	7	1.5%
	Budapest	227	47.5%
Highest level of education	Primary education	3	0.6%
	Secondary education without school-leaving certificate	3	0.6%
	Secondary education with A levels	227	47.5%
	Tertiary education (OKJ)	42	8.8%
	Higher education (graduate)	203	42.5%
Workplace size	Micro enterprise 2-8 persons	34	7.1%
	Small business 9-49 persons	79	16.5%
	Medium enterprise 50-249 persons	90	18.8%
	Large company 250 persons and more	217	45.4%
	Sole trader	26	5.4%
Company ownership	Currently not working	32	6.7%
	Hungarian ownership only	262	54.8%
	Joint venture	76	15.9%
	Wholly foreign-owned	95	19.9%
Position	Currently not working	45	9.4%
	Subordinate	321	67.2%
	Junior manager	38	7.9%
	Middle manager	43	9%
	Top-level manager	30	6.3%
	Currently not working	46	9.6%

### 3. RESULTS

The responses were analyzed using SPSS with various statistical methods (ANOVA, independent *t*-tests, and factor and cluster analyses).

The first hypothesis examines the private aspects of perfectionism in relation to various specific factors. The private aspects of perfectionism can be differentiated according to gender, position, and company ownership. Table 3 shows in which cases the analysis shows differences between the groups.

It can be observed that the first hypothesis is rejected, as there is no clear difference in any of the cases. Some differences are observed across certain variables, which may warrant further investigation. The differences were most pronounced with anxiety and negative characteris-

tics, i.e., in the case of maladaptive perfectionism beliefs. Overall, it cannot be said that differences in the private aspects of perfectionism can be distinguished by gender, position, or company ownership.

The second hypothesis was also tested using the same Likert-scale questions, and after examining the means and variances, the statements were grouped into factors for further research. Most of the statements were factorizable. The KMO-Bartlett test was .773, the chi-square was 1881.570, the degree of freedom was 36, and the significance was <.001. Factors were constructed using Varimax rotation, and the explained coefficient of variance was 64.61%. The first factor has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.837, and the second factor has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.800, so both factors are reliable. Table 4 presents the findings.

**Table 3.** Comparison of the private aspects of perfectionism across demographic and organizational factors (t-test, ANOVA,  $p = 0.05$ )

Statements (Question 8)	Gender (independent samples t-test)	Ownership of the company (ANOVA)	Title, position (ANOVA)
I strive to be as perfect as possible.	no difference	no difference	F: 3.404 df: 4 sig: 0.009
I always have to strive for perfection to feel "right" in my own skin.	no difference	no difference	no difference
I could never respect myself if I stopped striving for perfection.	no difference	no difference	F: 2.829 df: 4 sig: 0.024
I never settle for anything less than perfection.	no difference	F: 6.057 df: 3 sig: 0.000	F: 2.818 df: 4 sig: 0.025
As I strive to be as perfect as possible, I feel I am worthy of it.	no difference	F: 3.230 df: 3 sig: 0.022	no difference
People are disappointed in me if I do not do something perfectly.	t: 2.18 df: 476 sig: 0.30	F: 3.922 df: 3 sig: 0.009	no difference
I find it hard to forgive myself if my performance is not flawless.	no difference	no difference	no difference
I am never sure if I am doing things right.	no difference	no difference	no difference
I have doubts about everything I do.	no difference	F: 3.348 df: 3 sig: 0.019	F: 3.432 df: 4 sig: 0.009
The thought of making a mistake terrifies me.	no difference	no difference	no difference
I feel insecure about most things I do.	no difference	F: 3.784 df: 3 sig: 0.011	F: 3.053 df: 4 sig: 0.017
I am the absolute best at what I do.	t: 4.219 df: 476 sig: <0.001	no difference	no difference
I am entitled to special treatment.	t: 2.955 df: 476 sig: 0.003	no difference	no difference
Others secretly admire my perfection.	t: 3.272 df: 273.324 sig: <0.001	no difference	no difference
I expect those close to me to be perfect.	t: 4.366 df: 275.324 sig: <0.001	no difference	F: 2.704 df: 4 sig: 0.030
I get frustrated when others make mistakes.	t: 2.705 df: 476 sig: 0.007	F: 2.841 df: 3 sig: 0.037	no difference
Everything that others do must be flawless.	t: 4.174 df: 282.350 sig: <0.001	F: 2.879 df: 3 sig: 0.036	no difference

**Table 4.** Factor analysis results for perfectionism dimensions

Factors	Claims	Average	Source	Component	
				1	2
Perfectionism demanding perfectionism	I never settle for anything less than perfection.	3.15	1.057	0.823	
	I could never respect myself if I stopped striving for perfection.	3.32	1.144	0.784	
	I always have to strive for perfection to feel "right" in my own skin.	3.74	1.031	0.784	
	I strive to be as perfect as possible.	4.19	0.819	0.745	
	As I strive to be as perfect as possible, I feel I am worthy of it.	3.43	1.065	0.728	
Perfectionism between doubts	I have doubts about everything I do.	2.25	1.255		0.881
	I am never sure if I am doing things right.	2.71	1.226		0.868
	The thought of making a mistake terrifies me.	2.69	1.287		0.800
	I find it hard to forgive myself if my performance is not flawless.	3.1	1.178		0.527

Two factors have been developed, which are clearly differentiated according to what makes someone a perfectionist, and what is the motivating "force". In the case of perfectionism, the variance is slightly lower, and the mean is higher than in the case of perfectionism with doubts. We investigated whether there was a difference between demanding perfectionism and perfectionism in terms of whether respondents felt psychologically burnt out. Using the ANOVA test, perfectionists with a need for perfectionism did not show a significant ( $F:0.221$ ;  $df: 3$ ;  $sig: 0.882$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) difference along the lines of psychological burnout, whereas a significant difference was observed between per-

fectionists with a doubt and the frequency of psychological burnout ( $F: 18.771$ ;  $df: 3$ ;  $sig. < .001$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). In this group, on average, those who often or always felt burnt out were more pronounced. The hypothesis is thus rejected; the opposite is the case, i.e., individuals who are more prone to mental burnout are those who are characterized by perfectionism between doubts.

The third hypothesis seeks to address the relationship between perfectionism and life satisfaction. Factors were used to form clusters for the analysis of this hypothesis using a K-means procedure. The cluster centers are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Cluster analysis of perfectionism dimensions

Factors	Cluster		
	1	2	3
Perfectionism demanding perfectionism	-1.25449	0.00055	0.71346
Perfectionism between doubts	-0.68462	1.02421	-0.60732

Based on the cluster centers, the following clusters have been formed. For Cluster 1, the respondents did not feel either perfectionism or ambiguity. For Cluster 2, perfectionism between doubts is pronounced, and perfectionism is weak. For Cluster 3, the respondents are characterized by perfectionism and less instability.

We then examined whether clustering is correlated with respondents' life satisfaction. The Chi-square test showed a significant correlation (Chi-square: 32.350; df: 6; significance: <.001). Table 6 shows the number of respondents in each cluster.

**Table 6.** The number of respondents in each cluster

Cluster number	Question 14: Are you satisfied with your life? (N)			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	1	17	71	18
2	7	62	96	18
3	2	29	115	42

People who are never satisfied with their lives, or only sometimes satisfied, are mostly in Cluster 2, i.e. they live their lives in doubt. Most of those who are often or always satisfied with their lives belong to Cluster 3, i.e. they are characterized by the need for perfection and are not very unstable. Thus, the third hypothesis is accepted, that those

**Table 7.** Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Decision	Thesis
1 The private aspects of perfectionism in the sample can be differentiated by gender, position, and company ownership.	Rejected	In the sample studied, no distinction can be made between the private aspects of perfectionism by gender, position, or company ownership.
2 Individuals in the sample are more likely to be burnt out, who are perfectionists in their quest for perfection, than those who are characterized by self-doubt and constant doubt.	Rejected	In the sample, individuals whose perfectionism is motivated by self-doubt and constant doubt are more likely to be mentally burnt out than those who are perfectionists because of the need for perfection.
3 Respondents whose perfectionism is motivated by the need for perfection are more satisfied with their lives than those who have doubts.	Accepted	Respondents whose perfectionism is motivated by the need for perfection are more satisfied with their lives than those who have doubts.

whose perfectionism is motivated by the need for perfection are more satisfied with their lives than those who have doubts.

Based on the research results, we can make the following conclusions regarding the sample (Table 7).

## 4. DISCUSSION

The paper clearly indicated that maladaptive perfectionism (especially the perfection concerns dimension) is a key factor in burnout and emotional exhaustion among Hungarian employees, in close agreement with previous international results. Hill and Curran (2015) and Stoeber et al. (2020) also found that perfectionism concerns are more important in terms of emotional exhaustion and burnout, while perfectionistic strivings, at the same time, are positively or negatively correlated. The novelty of our work is that, for a Hungarian sample, the strength of the relationship between perfectionism issues and burnout is greater.

Regarding gender differences, our results corroborate Cheung et al. (2020) and Burke et al. (2024) (for women) by suggesting that their levels of perfect imperfection are more aggressive and their relationship to burnout is stronger than that found for men. While earlier studies have shown this in Western European and North American samples, this study also found it among Central and Eastern European (Hungarian) employees.

This paper has explored the multifaceted nature of perfectionism in professional and personal contexts, specifically examining its correlation with burnout and life satisfaction. The results highlight the nuanced role that different forms of per-

fectionism play in individuals' mental well-being and life satisfaction. Through statistical analysis of questionnaire responses, the paper offered insights into the different manifestations and consequences of perfectionism. An important issue is the stronger association between burnout and perfectionism driven by self-doubt rather than by a desire for excellence. This aligns with Egan et al. (2011), who argue that self-critical perfectionism is a greater predictor of psychological distress than perfectionistic strivings, particularly in high-pressure settings. Kawamoto et al. (2022) found that self-critical perfectionism is a significant predictor of psychological distress, including burnout, especially in high-pressure environments.

Although earlier studies (Cheung et al., 2020; Beauregard, 2012) reported clear gender differences in perfectionism, our results did not replicate these patterns. This discrepancy suggests that gender-related perfectionism differences may be less pronounced in Hungarian workplace contexts, possibly due to cultural, organizational, or generational shifts. Another explanation is that private aspects of perfectionism may be more strongly driven by individual psychological traits than by demographic variables. Despite prior literature suggesting these factors may play a role in shaping perfectionist tendencies, our data did not support this assumption. While some variation existed, it was insufficient to validate a consistent or generalizable relationship, suggesting that perfectionism may be more deeply rooted in psychological and personality traits than external characteristics.

Crucially, the study distinguished between two types of perfectionism: perfectionism driven by the need for perfection and perfectionism characterized by self-doubt. These two orientations revealed contrasting psychological outcomes. This finding contradicts some earlier models that emphasize the harmful nature of high personal standards. Instead, our results align more closely with

studies highlighting the central role of self-critical tendencies in predicting burnout. The stronger burnout effect of doubt-driven perfectionism in our sample may indicate that emotional factors – such as fear of failure and chronic insecurity – play a larger role than achievement motivation in determining mental exhaustion. This suggests that the emotional toll of perfectionism is less about high standards per se and more about the internal conflict and fear of inadequacy that often accompany them (Stoeber & Gaudreau, 2022).

Life satisfaction, in contrast, was highest among those whose perfectionism was purpose-driven rather than doubt-driven. This aligns with existing research that recognizes adaptive perfectionism as a potential asset when combined with self-compassion and emotional resilience.

Our findings refine the adaptive–maladaptive distinction by showing that even the striving-oriented, adaptive form may become risky when embedded in a low-support organizational context. Conversely, self-doubt-driven perfectionism shows a consistently harmful pattern, suggesting that emotional vulnerability, rather than high standards per se, explains burnout levels. This nuance is less emphasized in earlier literature and highlights the importance of contextual moderators. The findings of this study underscore the importance of distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive forms of perfectionism when evaluating psychological well-being. While perfectionism as a whole is often pathologized, the results highlight the importance of context and motivation. Understanding these nuances can help mental health professionals tailor interventions to mitigate burnout risks without discouraging healthy ambition (Rice & Liu, 2020). The current study's findings are consistent with recent literature emphasizing the multifaceted nature of perfectionism and its wide-ranging effects on mental health, cognitive processes, and occupational outcomes.

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## CONCLUSION

The study aimed to examine the impact of two types of perfectionism – maladaptive perfectionism stemming from a lack of self-confidence and adaptive perfectionism – on the mental health of Hungarian employees. Moreover, it sought to identify the correlations between perfectionism, psychological burnout, and general life satisfaction.

In the given sample, it was possible to identify that perfectionism stemming from a lack of self-confidence was closely related to increased burnout and a decline in quality of life. However, goal-oriented perfectionism was a negligible factor in the development of burnout and was consistently associated with a higher quality of life.

Contrary to our assumptions, demographic and organizational factors such as gender, job position, and company ownership structure did not have a systematic effect on changes in perfectionism levels. This suggests that the nature of perfectionism is influenced more by an individual's internal psychological and emotional patterns than by external factors.

The results suggest that the emotional aspect and underlying cause of perfectionism are much more decisive than an individual's level of personal expectations: constant self-criticism and insecurity make high expectations a major source of emotional exhaustion, while the pursuit of excellence driven by internal motivation can be psychologically protective and even beneficial.

Work environments and mental health programs should focus on reducing self-critical tendencies and promoting self-compassion and goal-oriented ambition in order to reduce burnout, increase employee well-being, and maintain performance without sacrificing mental health.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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