Perfectionism, Decision-Making & Workplace Performance: a JD-R Perspective

The study adds to our understanding of perfectionism in the workplace by considering decision-making as an important behavioural pathway through which performance is affected.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is widely accepted as a multi-dimensional trait (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). **Excellence seeking behaviours** drive high standards, which may support good workplace performance. In contrast, **failure avoiding** aspects of perfectionism are linked to detrimental mental health outcomes and potentially poorer workplace performance (Harari et al., 2018; Bellam & Curran, 2025). Importantly, levels of perfectionism are increasing in society. This is particularly true of failure avoiding or socially prescribed perfectionism, which has shown quadratic growth amongst Western student populations over the last 30 years (Curran et al., 2026).

Decision-Making Style

How we make decisions is recognised as contributing to organisational efficiency and workplace performance (Ceschi et al., 2017). The study considers **whether maladaptive (or less effective) decision-making (MDM) styles form a behavioural pathway that explains the impact of Failure Avoiding Perfectionism (FAP) on workplace performance**. MDM encompasses procrastination, buck-passing (shifting responsibility to others) and hypervigilance (panic-like decision-making). In contrast, vigilant decision making (VDM) occurs when the decision-maker carefully assesses the alternatives before deciding and is seen as adaptive (good) decision-making behaviour (Mann et al., 1997).

Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R)

The study draws on the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) which suggests that effective performance and wellbeing outcomes occur where the demands of the job are balanced by the personal or organisational resources to do the job. The study proposes a theoretical **JD-R-Perfectionism-Decision-Making model** (JD-R-P-DM) (fig. 1) in which FAP is seen as a **personal demand** that results in poorer performance through the mechanism of MDM. Conversely ESP provides a potential **personal resource**, that where evident alongside FAP, may mitigate the negative performance effects of failure avoiding behaviour.

What the Study Tested

1. Is higher FAP associated with more maladaptive decision-making, and in turn poorer self-rated work performance?

2. Does MDM explain the relationship between FAP and performance?

3. Can having high levels of ESP weaken, or *buffer*, the negative pathway between FAP and performance?

The Study

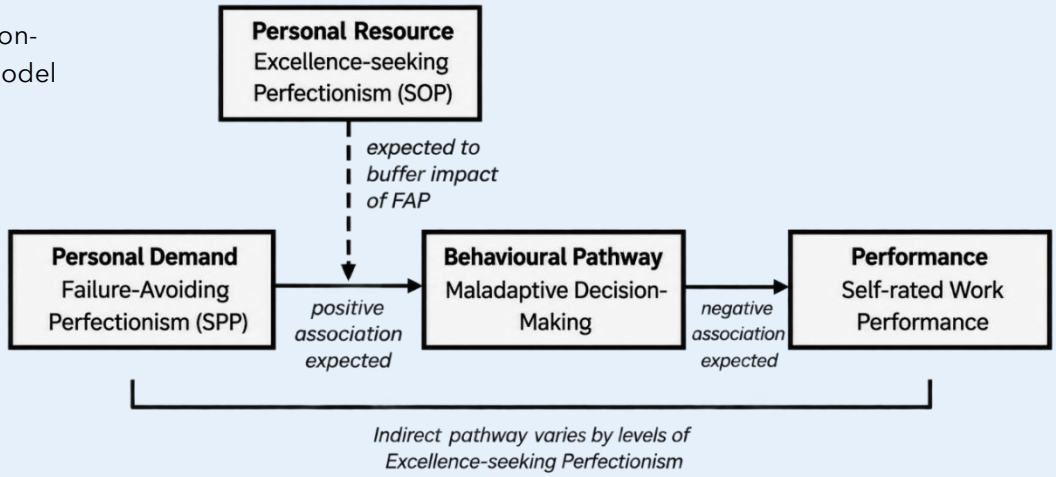
The study was conducted via an anonymous survey of current employees who self-identified as having some control over their decision-making. 237 participants met the inclusion criteria, with 217 completing all parts of the questionnaire. 83% lived in the UK and 78% held leadership, managerial or professional roles. 52% were female, with the median age falling in the 35-44 bracket.

Established psychological questionnaires measured perfectionism, decision-making style and self-rated workplace performance. Job autonomy was also measured and controlled for in the analysis.

Findings

The clearest finding was that **MDM was a significant behavioural pathway that links FAP with poorer self-rated performance**. Although FAP was directly associated with weaker performance ($r = -.158$, $p = .020$), **MDM was shown to account for 70.6% of the association between FAP and performance**. Once MDM was included in the relationship, the remaining direct association between FAP and performance was no longer statistically significant.

Figure 1:
Proposed JD-R-Perfectionism-Decision-Making model



When the study examined ESP, it only showed a very limited positive effect on performance, explaining just 2.5% of the variance. In line with that, **having high levels of ESP did not significantly reduce the negative effects of high FAP.** The findings remained largely unchanged after accounting for job autonomy.

Extending the study: Vigilant Decision-Making

Whilst ESP did not provide the anticipated protection, exploratory analysis suggested a potentially more promising alternative in VDM. The results suggested that MDM and VDM may represent distinct rather than opposing decision-making behaviours.

More importantly, **higher VDM weakened the negative relationship between MDM and performance**, although it did not completely eliminate it. It also reduced the strength of the indirect FAP-performance association through MDM. Whilst these findings are interesting, their exploratory nature and weaker reliability of the VDM scale mean they should be treated cautiously.

Theoretical Implications

1. Although FAP can be seen as a trait-based personal demand within the context of the JD-R framework, the findings suggest that much of the relationship is **through the impairment mechanism of MDM**.

2. The research adds clarity to the uncertain picture surrounding ESP and performance, with ESP showing **only a weak positive association with self-rated performance**.

3. The exploratory findings suggest that VDM may be a more promising personal resource than ESP. As it is more closely aligned with the behavioural pathway, **VDM may be better placed to buffer the negative relationship between MDM and performance**.

Practical Implications

1. Employers should be **cautious about the assumed benefits of perfectionism in the workplace**. This is important because perfectionism is often proffered as a "false weakness", for example in interviews. The performance implications of that should be examined.

2. The research highlights the importance of **decision-making as a modifiable pathway** through which the negative associations between FAP and performance may be mitigated. Potential interventions might focus on reducing decision-making fear (Zhou et al., 2020), supervisor support (Bakker et al., 2003) and clear decision-making rules (Ceschi et al., 2017)

3. **Developing VDM behaviours may offer a promising intervention opportunity**. Approaches could include encouraging reflection and gathering enough information (Miller & Byrnes, 2001), a balance-sheet approach (Janis & Mann, 1976), and holding pre-mortems (Klein, 2007).

4. Whilst the study concentrates on workplace performance, by using the JD-R model in understanding perfectionism, organisations are well-placed to consider its **wider implications for wellbeing**.

Limitations

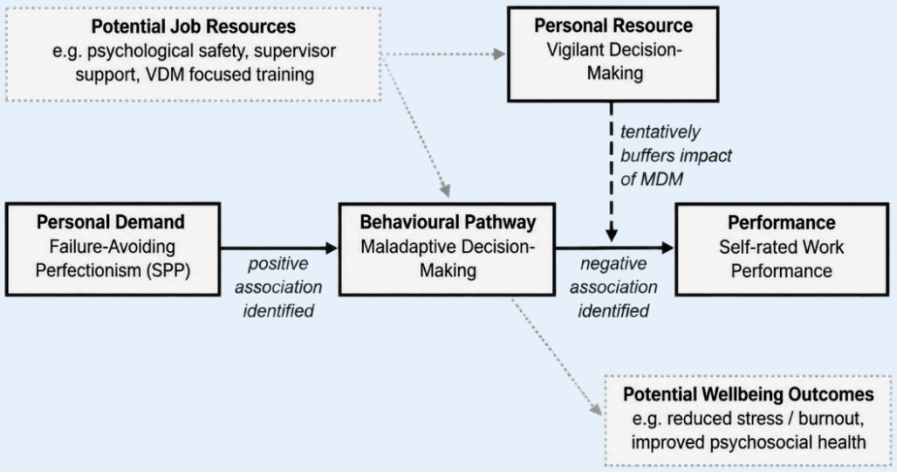
As with all research, the study recognises several limitations. Causal claims cannot be confirmed without further longitudinal study and common method bias may also be present. The self-report nature of the questionnaire is also noted, particularly recognising that perfectionists may report performance over-harshly.

Conclusion & Future Research

The study proposes **a revised JD-R-P-DM framework** (fig. 2) which identifies VDM as a potential personal resource that may buffer the negative relationship between MDM and performance. Future research should test this possibility, examine other personal and job resources that may support better decision-making, and explore wider outcomes, including wellbeing.

Ian Glen, October 2026

Figure 2:
Proposed future research pathways for the JD-R–DM-P model



Note: solid arrows represent identified relationships from the proposed model. Dashed arrows represent the tentative interactions associated with Vigilant Decision-Making. Grey dotted arrows represent the proposed pathways for future research

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