

Dominant Working Style Profiles of Early-Adolescents: A Study of Eighth and Ninth-Grade Students in North Macedonia

Tome Kitanovski

OOU Goce Delcev, Vasilevo, North Macedonia

Aleksandar T. Dimitrov, Bosko Boskovski, Ana Tomova, Beti Andonovic

Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, Skopje, North Macedonia

Abstract

The concept of Working Styles, rooted in Kahler's driver theory and later operationalised by Hay, offers a lens for understanding how individuals habitually approach tasks and interpersonal demands. This study investigates the prevalence and configuration of Working Styles among 40 eighth- and ninth-grade students (20 per grade) at "Goce Delchev" Primary School in Vasilevo, North Macedonia. A convergent mixed-methods design combined Julie Hay's 25-item Working Style Questionnaire with descriptive statistics and qualitative profile interpretation. Quantitative scoring (0–40 per style) revealed distinct patterns: 8th-grade students were predominantly driven to "Please Others" supported by "Work Hard," while "Hurry Up" emerged as their weakest style. Conversely, 9th-grade students exhibited a dominant "Be Perfect" orientation, a strong "Work Hard" secondary drive, and a notable deficit in "Be Strong." Characteristic scenario patterns ("Almost" vs. "While") and preferred communication doors ("Feel" vs. "Think") further differentiated the cohorts. Qualitative interpretation suggested that external validation, perfectionism, and under-developed time-management or resilience skills are salient developmental challenges. The findings underscore the need for classroom strategies that bolster intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and adaptive coping.

Keywords: Working Styles, Julie Hay's Questionnaire, Drivers Theory, Adolescent Behavior, Educational Psychology

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Introduction

The theory of Working Styles was introduced almost half a century ago and has since evolved into a relatively simple set of five characteristic styles (Kozhevnikov, 2007). Kahler initially defined the concept in the 1970s. He describes how he developed it by watching recordings over several weeks and named the drives after the Freudian drives, i.e., the basic instincts for repetitive behavior (Kahler, 2008). Kahler described the drives as “behaviors that last from a fraction of a second to a maximum of 7 seconds”. They are defined as restrictive messages we unconsciously adopt from people we look up to, which manifest as a particular set of compulsive behaviors in a given person (Kahler, 1975).

The term compulsivity actually derives from its negative connotation, which is equated with the movement that comes to the fore in stressful situations. In other words, it is an unconscious, programmed reaction to messages from people who are important to us. We are, in fact, reacting to messages that tell us how we should behave in order to be tolerated and accepted, i.e., to fulfill the expectations of the people we look up to. For example, the message is that a child should be obedient and do everything an adult tells them to do. This effort to be as close as possible to what we think we should be borders on utopia and leads to even more stress. Working Styles are unconscious patterns of behavior that affect every area of our lives, whether we are alone, with our families, friends, at work, or at home (Dimitrov & Andonovic, 2019).

Hay introduces the term 'Working Style'. She explains that Working Styles are the positive manifestation of unconscious behavioral patterns that we acquired in early childhood. She also developed the Working Styles Questionnaire, which reflects the concept of Working Styles as the way in which drives are perceived as forces in the organizational environment, particularly when they are part of the individual's consciousness rather than as unconscious attempts to gain recognition from others (Hay, 1992).

Kahler has identified five drives: being perfect, being strong, hurrying, pleasing others, and working hard. He describes drives as “behavior that lasts from a fraction of a second to seven seconds at most” and that “the same sentence structure with a fixed pattern can be repeated hundreds of times a day unconsciously.” They are defined as limiting messages we unconsciously adopt from people we look up to, which manifest as a particular set of compulsive behaviors in a given person (Kahler, 1975).

In real life, there is usually the influence of two drives rather than one. The combination of two urges seems to agree with experience, as people most often combine two urges rather than just one. Although it would be difficult to combine being perfect and hurrying (the former is more detail-oriented, the latter more speed-oriented), it does happen, albeit rarely. The combination of being perfect and pleasing others seems to be particularly vulnerable, especially when combined with being strong. However, this combination also exists. People should develop combinations that allow them to use their strengths and minimize their weaknesses (Dimitrov & Andonovic, 2019).

Kahler explains how drives begin to function when an external factor influences the reinforcement of the position “I am fine when...” Their influence begins in a person's early childhood, shaped by parents. Working Styles are positive manifestations of the unconscious set of behaviors learned/acquired in early childhood (Kahler, 1975).

Hazell also commented on the positive aspect of drives, describing them as “habits we all use to cope with challenges... useful when they are well moderated...” and “positive when used for performance”. The values of fast, energetic, pleasant, strong,

and excellent – as valued qualities of the autonomous individual – escape the influence of the antisciplinary drivers, i.e., the influence of the scripts (Hazell, 1989).

We may never meet a person who fits 100% within the framework of a style, but indeed, a particular blend or combination of styles can be identified in each of us. Styles can be identified by seven factors, of which physical sensing and internal ignoring are internal and cannot be recognized or identified by anyone but the individual themselves. Characteristic behaviors such as tone and dynamics of voice, specific words, gestures, demeanor, and facial expressions are the other five factors that can be observed and monitored (Bary & Hufford, 1990; Kahler, 1975, 1992, 1999, 2008; Spasovska, 2011; Woollams & Brown, 1979).

Methodology

For this research, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques was used (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The use of multiple data collection techniques (triangulation) increases the validity of the results (Jick, 1979). Julie Hay's questionnaire was used to determine students' Working Styles. The questionnaire consists of two parts: a section with questions and a table with an evaluation method. The section with questions to determine the characteristic working style contains twenty-five assertions or statements that students were asked to rate on a scale from zero to eight, depending on how closely they correspond to the style. The highest score (8) therefore indicates that the respondent entirely agrees with the statement being assessed. Conversely, the lowest score (zero) means that the respondent does not recognize themselves at all in the statement. The mean score (four) means that the respondent is indifferent and ambivalent and neither agrees nor disagrees. Working Styles can be rated on a scale from 0 to 40, so the degree of prediction varies depending on the result (Hay, 1995, 2009; Spasovska, 2011). The scoring results are presented in Table 1 as shown, with the questions grouped by the corresponding Working Style.

The survey was conducted in April 2025 in the elementary school Goce Delchev-Vasilevo. 20 students in 8th grade and 20 students in 9th grade, taught in Macedonian, participated. To ensure data confidentiality, the students' names were replaced with codes (Seitz, 2019). The right to privacy of all persons involved in the research is fully protected. No personal data of the respondents will be used, and the survey is entirely anonymous. Their parents or guardians gave formal consent for students to participate in the study. The students were also informed about the research project so that they could understand it themselves and participate voluntarily.

Table 1
Scoring method

MY WORKING STYLE(S)									
Statement	Points	Statement	Points	Statement	Points	Statement	Points	Statement	Points
1		2		3		4		5	
6		7		8		9		10	
11		12		13		14		15	
16		17		18		19		20	
21		22		23		24		25	
total		total		total		total		total	
Hurry up		Be perfect		Please Others		Work hard		Be strong	

Source: Authors' work

Results and Discussion

The survey was conducted with a sample of 40 students from the elementary school "Goce Delchev" in Vasilevo. The sample was composed of students in grades 8 and 9. By applying the Working Styles questionnaire by Julie Hay, the Working Styles can be determined. The questionnaire responses were statistically processed (Table 2) for each student; the points were entered into tables accordingly, and histograms were created for each student. The Working Styles can appear with an intensity on a scale from 0 to 40, so that the degree of prediction varies depending on the result. In addition, the individual values for the Working Styles were used to statistically calculate the average values of the Working Styles for the student groups by grade level, and histograms were created for each grade level (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4; Figure 5; Figure 6; Figure 7; Figure 8; Figure 9; Figure 10). Finally, a summarising statistical calculation was carried out for the Working Styles for the entire group of respondents, and a summarising histogram was created (Figures 5, 6, 11, and 12).

Table 2

Percentage of responses for each statement from the Julie Hay Working Style questionnaire

Statement	What do I usually do?	0 - does not recognize the statement at all 4 - neither agrees nor disagrees with it 8 - I completely agree with the statement								
		Point								
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
1	I tend to wait until the deadline is approaching before I start working on a task	17,5	10	5	2,5	10	10	5	17,5	22,5
2	I like to organize my work environment efficiently	2,5	/	2,5	5	15	5	7,5	12,5	50
3	It is important to maintain harmony in working relationships	2,5	/	/	2,5	15	10	10	15	45
4	I like to start new projects	10	5	7,5	5	12,5	10	10	10	30
5	I am very good at keeping calm in times of crisis	7,5	5	10	7,5	12,5	7,5	10	10	30
6	I work consistently and conscientiously when something is asked of me	2,5	/	/	2,5	12,5	10	10	17,5	45
7	I am good at seeing the full scope of a task and showing initiative	5	7,5	2,5	10	17,5	12,5	15	12,5	17,5
8	I enjoy encouraging people and doing things that help them	/	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	12,5	7,5	20	50
9	I make a detailed plan in advance to prepare for any problems that might arise	7,5	/	5	12,5	12,5	5	12,5	17,5	27,5
10	I enjoy having a lot to do (even if I sometimes complain about it)	27,5	10	/	7,5	15	12,5	5	7,5	15

11	It's important to watch out for mistakes	2,5	/	2,5	/	7,5	7,5	20	25	35
12	I am usually more enthusiastic than other people	2,5	2,5	2,5	7,5	15	15	5	22,5	27,5
13	I am usually more balanced and less hot-tempered than other people	15	10	5	/	27,5	10	10	12,5	10
14	I am usually intuitive and sensitive to other people's feelings	7,5	12,5	2,5	2,5	5	10	7,5	12,5	40
15	I can usually complete tasks faster than other people	2,5	/	/	10	20	10	17,5	12,5	27,5
16	Sometimes people seem to think I'm overly critical of my work standards	20	12,5	10	2,5	12,5	12,5	15	7,5	7,5
17	Sometimes I make mistakes because I work too fast	/	15	5	/	10	5	10	20	35
18	Sometimes people act like they're disgusted, even though I'm just trying to help them	5	/	7,5	10	20	10	10	12,5	25
19	Sometimes I miss deadlines because I have a hard time asking for help, even when I have too much to do	7,5	5	2,5	10	17,5	10	17,5	5	25
20	I tend to start several projects but have trouble finishing any of them	22,5	5	5	15	12,5	17,5	5	5	12,5
21	People sometimes complain that I make tasks too big because I take on so many possible aspects	20	7,5	20	12,5	12,5	12,5	5	5	5
22	People sometimes seem to think I'm reserved and unfriendly	32,5	10	2,5	12,5	12,5	2,5	5	10	12,5
23	I find it hard to say no, even when I already have too much to do	17,5	5	5	7,5	10	15	5	5	30
24	I get impatient when people spend too much time discussing what needs to be done	17,5	5	5	5	5	7,5	10	22,5	22,5
25	Sometimes I miss deadlines because I need more time to review my work	17,5	12,5	17,5	15	12,5	2,5	7,5	2,5	12,5

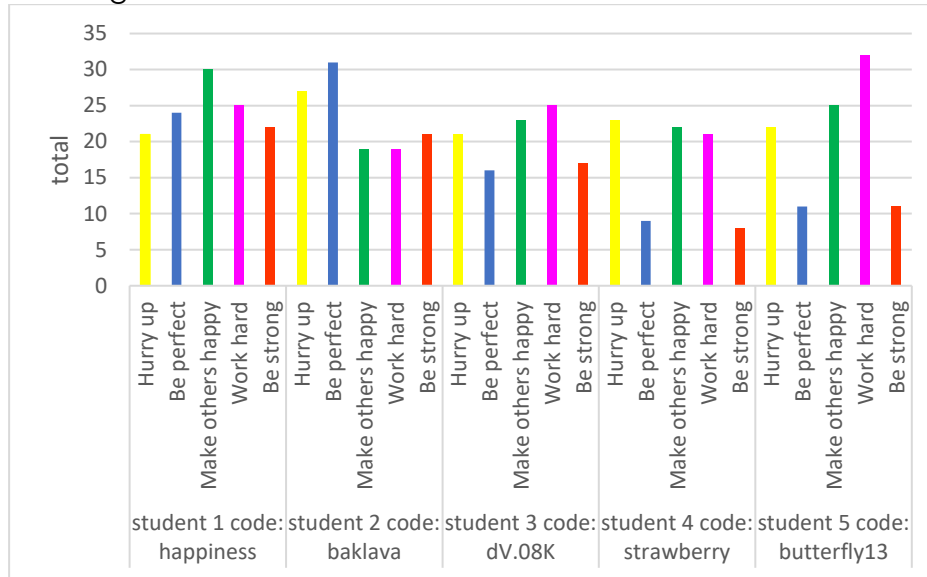
Source: Authors' work

This is followed by the analysis of individual results for each student to gain better insight and the possibility of making appropriate recommendations for curricula, individual students, and further strategies at "Goce Delchev" Primary School. The analysis and interpretation of the conducted histograms includes: 40 for each interviewed student were identified: one characteristic scenario pattern, one main communication door, and one characteristic sentence pattern (Table 3; Table 4; Table 5; Table 6; Table 8; Table 9; Table 10; Table 11). For each generation of eighth- and 9th-grade students, a characteristic scenario pattern, a central communication

door, a characteristic sentence pattern, as well as a dominant Working Style and a weakest Working Style were separately identified, interpreted, and recommendations made (Table 7; Table 12). For the entire sample of respondents, a characteristic scenario pattern, a central communication door, a characteristic sentence pattern, as well as a dominant Working Style and a weakest Working Style, were identified, interpreted, and recommendations made. The results and interpretations of the profiles for each student and the whole group of respondents are presented below.

Figure 1

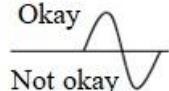
A histogram showing the summarized results of Julie Hay's Working Style Questionnaire for 8th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 3

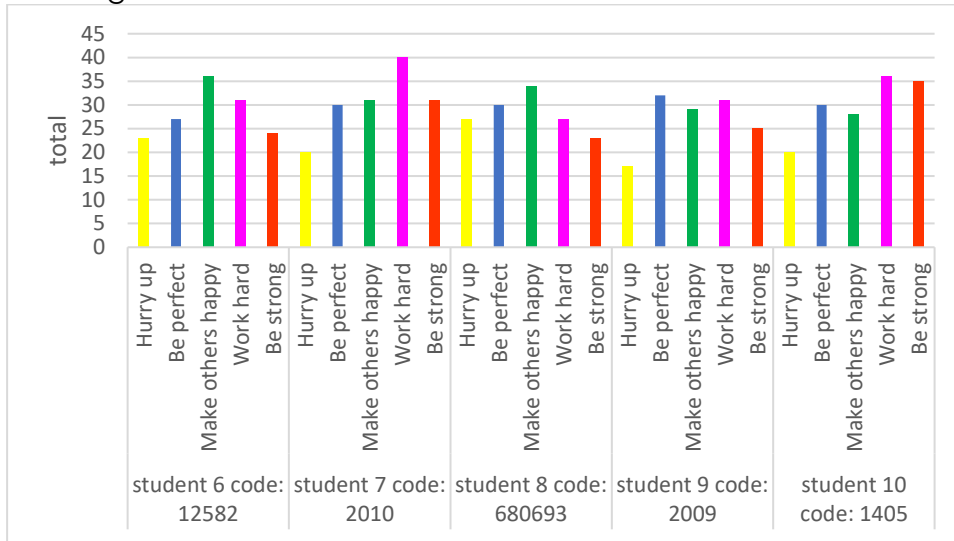
Data for each 8th-grade student interviewed, a characteristic scenario pattern, a main communication door, and a characteristic sentence pattern.

	student 1 code: happiness	student 2 code: baklava	student 3 code: dV.08K	student 4 code: strawberry	student 5 code: butterfly13
Characteristic scenario pattern	Almost (work hard, please others)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	Almost (work hard, please others)	Then (Please others, hurry up)	Almost (work hard, please others)
Main communication door	Feel	Think	Feel	Feel	Feel
Characteristic sentence pattern	+++++ type I →→→ type II → type III	→ inserted text →	+++++ type I →→→ type II → type III	+ feelings, but - feelings Okay  Not okay	+++++ type I →→→ type II → type III

Source: Authors' work

Figure 2

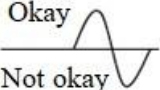
A histogram showing the summarized results of Julie Hay's Working Style Questionnaire for 8th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 4

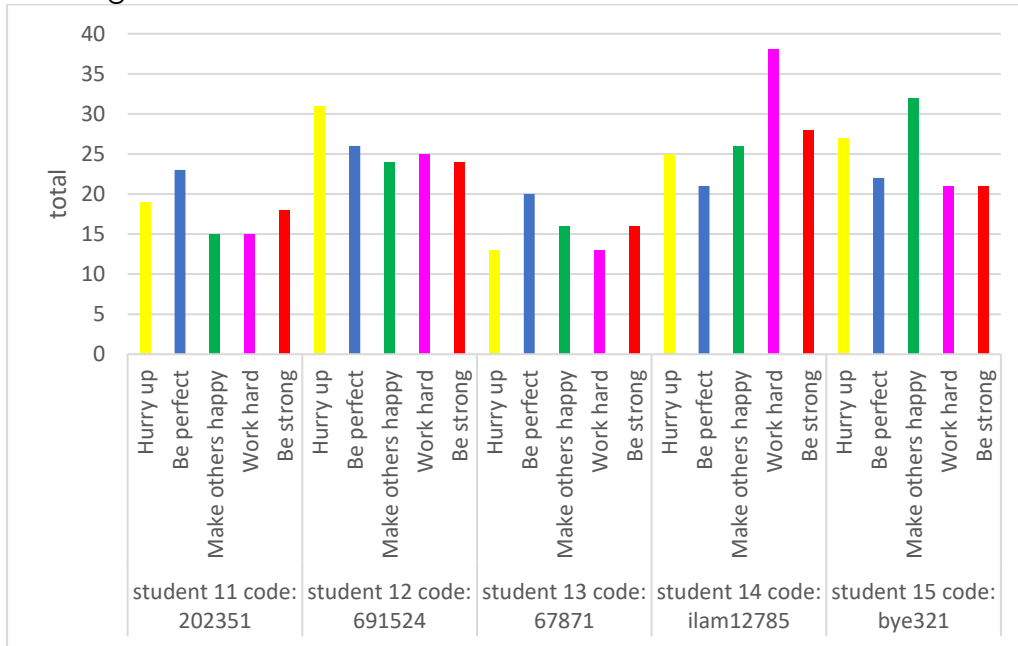
Data for each 8th-grade student interviewed, a characteristic scenario pattern, a main communication door, and a characteristic sentence pattern

	student 6 code: 12582	student 7 code: 2010	student 8 code: 680693	student 9 code: 2009	student 10 code: 1405
Characteristic scenario pattern	Almost (work hard, please others)	Almost (work hard, please others)	Then (Please others, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	Almost (work hard, please others)
Main communication door	Feel	Think	Feel	Think	Think
Characteristic sentence pattern	+++++ type I →→→ type II → type III	+++++ type I →→→ type II → type III	+ feelings, but - feelings Okay  Not okay	→ inserted text →	+++++ type I →→→ type II → type III

Source: Authors' work

Figure 3

A histogram showing the summarized results of Julie Hay's Working Style Questionnaire for 8th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 5

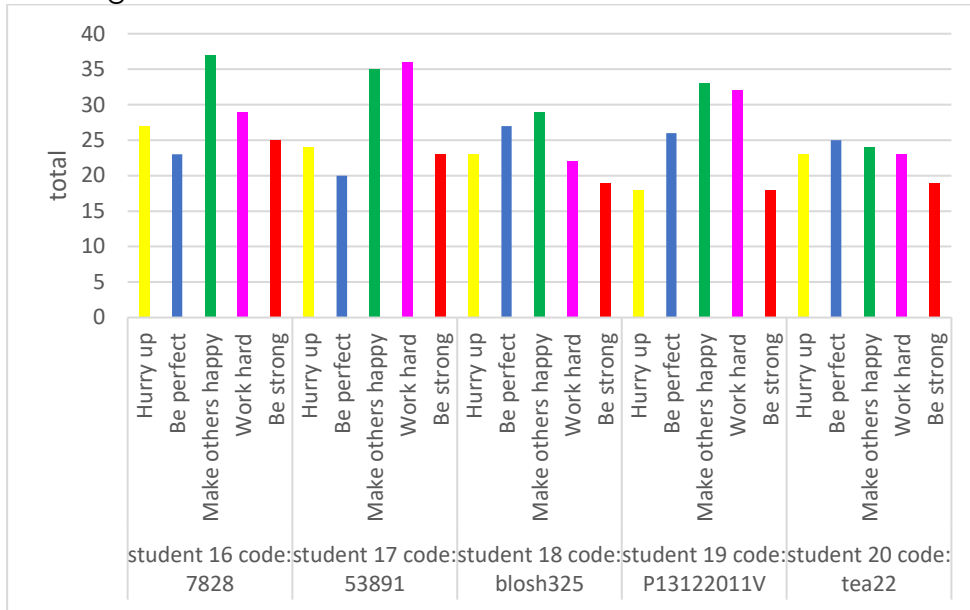
Data for each 8th-grade student interviewed included a characteristic scenario pattern, a central communication door, and a characteristic sentence pattern

	student 11 code: 202351	student 12 code: 691524	student 13 code: 67871	student 14 code: ilam12785	student 15 code: bye321:
Characteristic scenario pattern	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	Almost (work hard, please others)	Then (Please others, hurry up)
Main communication door	Feel	Think	Feel	Think	Feel
Characteristic sentence pattern	→ inserted text →	→ inserted text →	→ inserted text →		+ feelings, but - feelings

Source: Authors' work

Figure 4

A histogram showing the summarized results of Julie Hay's Working Style Questionnaire for 8th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 6

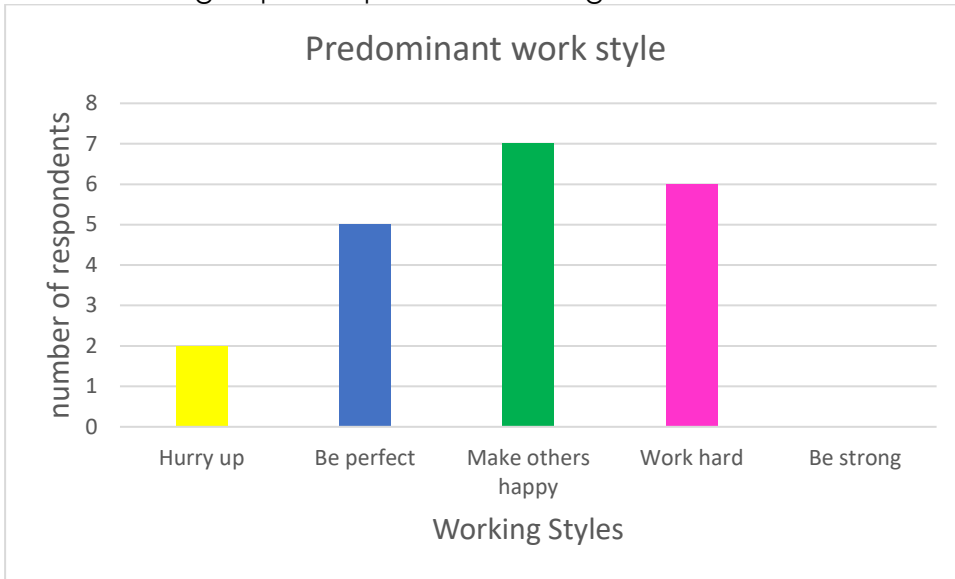
Data for each 8th-grade student interviewed included a characteristic scenario pattern, a central communication door, and a characteristic sentence pattern.

	student 16 code: 7828	student 17 code: 53891	student 18 code: blosh325	student 19 code: P13122011V	student 20 code: tea22
Characteristic scenario pattern	Then (Please others, hurry up)	Almost (work hard, please others)	Then (Please others, hurry up)	Almost (work hard, please others)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)
Main communication door	Feel	Feel	Feel	Think	Behavior
Characteristic sentence pattern	+ feelings, but - feelings Okay Not okay	++++- type I type II type III	+ feelings, but - feelings Okay Not okay	++++- type I type II type III	→ inserted text →

Source: Authors' work

Figure 5

Histogram showing a summary statistical calculation of the predominant Working Style for the entire group of respondents – 8th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

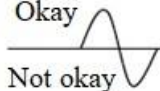
Figure 6

Histogram showing a summary statistical calculation for the weakest Working Style for the entire group of respondents – 8th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 7
Summarised results for 8th-grade students

Characteristic scenario pattern	Almost (work hard, please others)
Main communication door	Feel + feelings, but – feelings
Characteristic sentence pattern	
Dominant Working Style	Please Others
Second dominant Working Style	Work hard
The weakest Working Style	Hurry up
Number of respondents - 20	

Source: Authors' work

Analysis

The results suggest that external expectations drive the majority of students in this respondent's group and aim to please others, often going to great lengths to meet these criteria. Although this can promote collaboration and social cohesion, it can also lead to a reliance on validation from teachers, peers, or parents, which could compromise self-esteem and autonomous thinking. In addition, the observation that "Hurry Up" is the least effective Working Style suggests that students may struggle with time management, decision-making, or working efficiently in fast-paced scenarios. This could affect their ability to meet deadlines, adapt quickly to changing situations, or manage stress effectively.

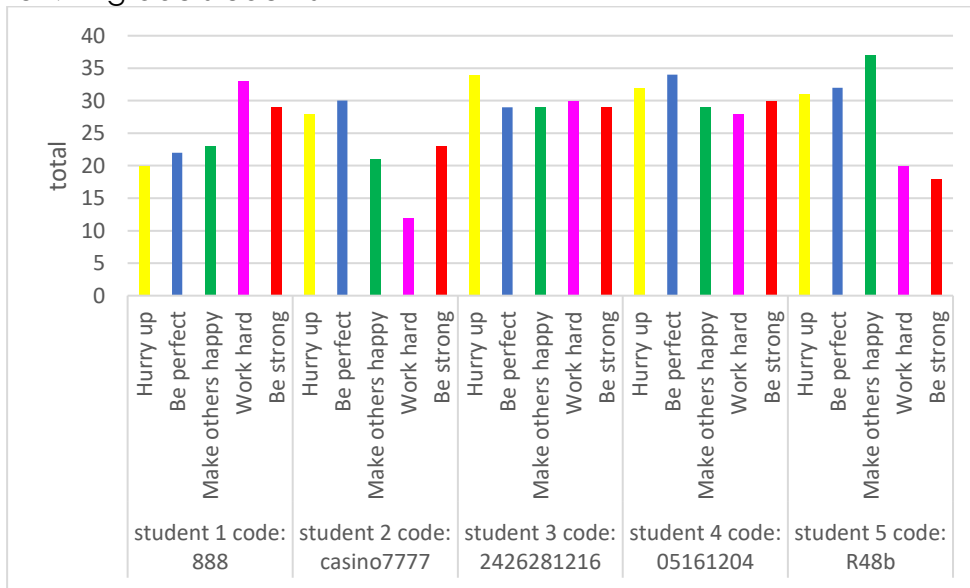
Recommendation for improvement

To improve and round off the approach to work and learning, the following strategies can be used:

- Provide opportunities for students to set personal goals, make independent decisions, and take responsibility for their learning.
- It is necessary to introduce techniques such as prioritizing, task planning, and time-limited activities to help students develop efficiency and confidence in dealing with deadlines.
- Assist students in understanding the importance of intrinsic motivation by promoting self-reflection, recognizing personal achievement, and participating in self-directed learning experiences.
- Encourage students to take responsibility, make autonomous decisions without frequently seeking validation, and see challenges as opportunities for personal growth.
- Inform students that mistakes are a normal aspect of development so that they can escape the pressure of constantly having to meet high expectations.

Figure 7

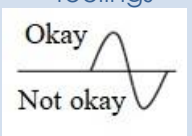
A histogram showing the summarized results of Julie Hay's Working Style Questionnaire for 9th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 8

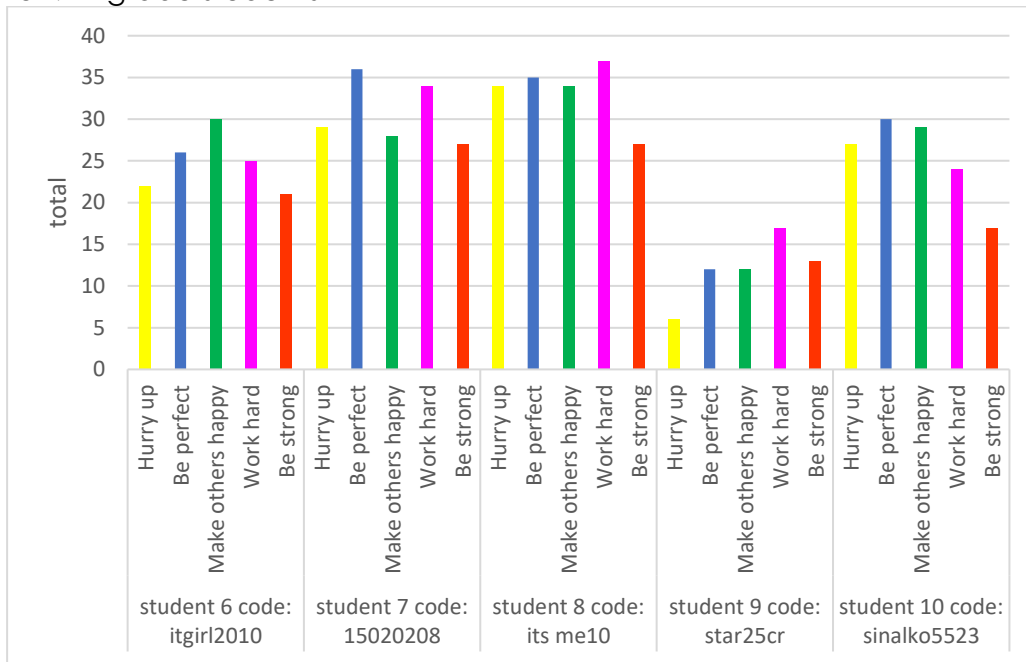
Data for each 9th-grade student interviewed, a characteristic scenario pattern, a central communication door, and a characteristic sentence pattern

	student 1 code: 888	student 2 code: casino7777	student 3 code: 2426281216	student 4 code: 05161204	student 5 code: R48b
Characteristic scenario pattern	Almost (work hard, please others)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	Then (Please others, hurry up)
Main communication door	Think	Think	Think	Think	Feel
Characteristic sentence pattern	++++- type I → ↘ ↙ ↘ type II → ↘ ↙ type III	→ inserted text →	→ inserted text →	→ inserted text →	+ feelings, but - feelings 

Source: Authors' work

Figure 8

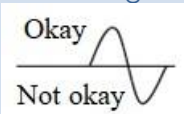
A histogram showing the summarized results of Julie Hay's Working Style Questionnaire for 9th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 9

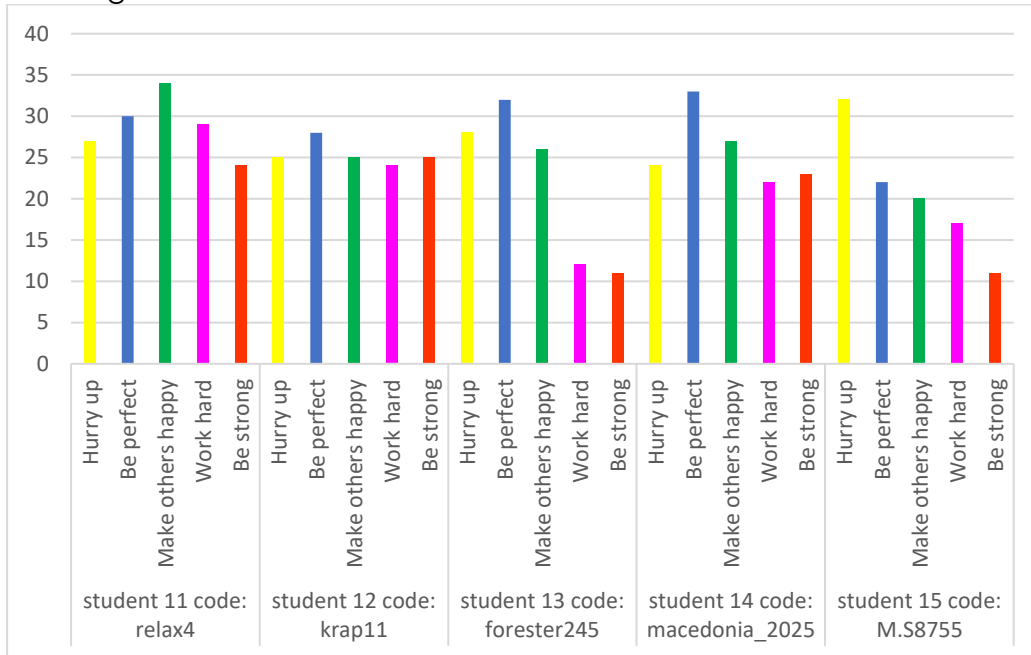
Data for each 9th-grade student interviewed, a characteristic scenario pattern, a main communication door, and a characteristic sentence pattern

	student 6 code: itgirl2010	student 7 code: 15020208	student 8 code: its me10	student 9 code: star25cr	student 10 code: sinalko5523
Characteristic scenario pattern	Then (Please others, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	Almost (work hard, please others)	Almost (work hard, please others)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)
Main communication door	Feel	Think	Behavior	Think	Think
Characteristic sentence pattern	+ feelings, but - feelings 	→ inserted text →	++++- type I → type II → type III	++++- type I → type II → type III	→ inserted text →

Source: Authors' work

Figure 9

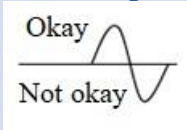
A histogram showing the summarized results of Julie Hay's Working Style Questionnaire for 9th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 10

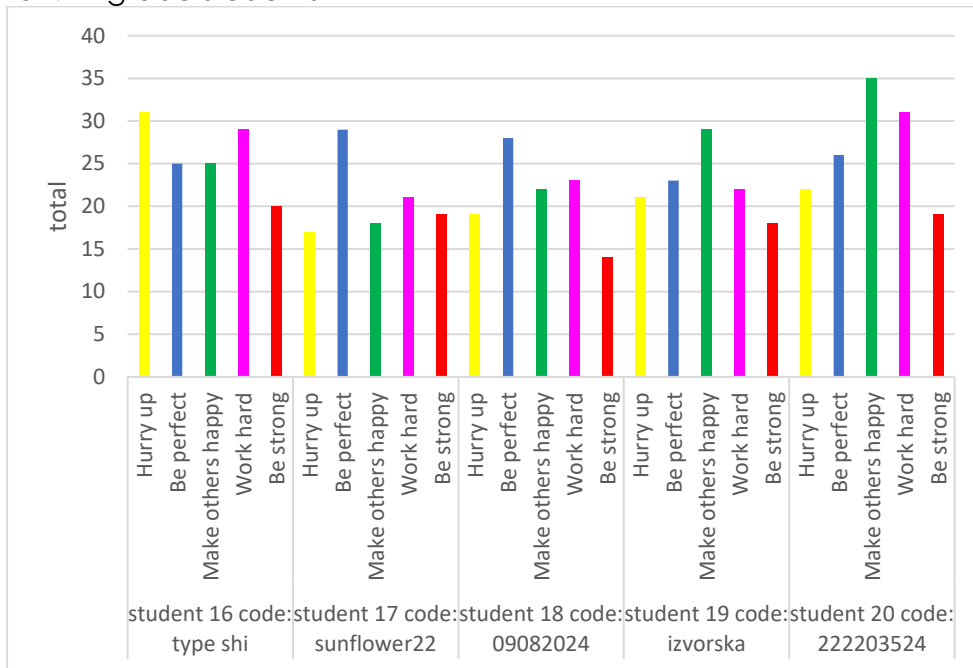
Data for each 9th-grade student interviewed, a characteristic scenario pattern, a central communication door, and a characteristic sentence pattern

	student 11 code: relax4	student 12 code: krap11	student 13 code: forester245	student 14 code: macedonia_2025	student 15 code: M.S8755
Characteristic scenario pattern	Then (Please others, hurry up)	Autonomous person	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	Always (be strong, hurry up)
Main communication door	Feel	All depending on the situation	Think	Think	Everything depends on the situation
Characteristic sentence pattern	+ feelings, but - feelings 	There is none	→ inserted text →	→ inserted text →	There are no consistent phrases

Source: Authors' work

Figure 10

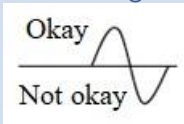
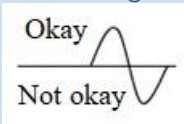
A histogram showing the summarized results of Julie Hay's Working Style Questionnaire for 9th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 11

Data for each 9th-grade student interviewed, a characteristic scenario pattern, a central communication door, and a characteristic sentence pattern

	student 16 code: type shi	student 17 code: sunflower22	student 18 code: 09082024	student 19 code: izvorska	student 20 code: 222203524
Characteristic scenario pattern	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	While (Be perfect, hurry up)	Then (Please others, hurry up)	Then (Please others, hurry up)
Main communication door	Behavior	Think	Think	Feel	Feel
Characteristic sentence pattern	→ inserted text →	→ inserted text →	→ inserted text →	+ feelings, but - feelings 	+ feelings, but - feelings 

Source: Authors' work

Figure 11

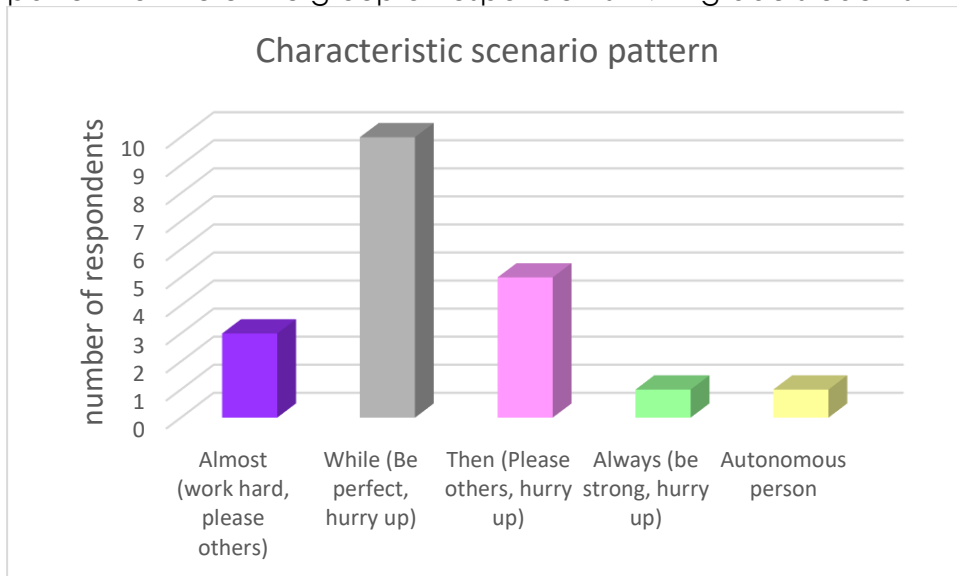
Histogram showing a summary statistical calculation for the weakest Working Style for the entire group of respondents – 9th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Figure 12

Histogram showing a summary statistical calculation for the characteristic scenario pattern for the entire group of respondents – 9th-grade students



Source: Authors' work

Table 12
Summarised results for 9th-grade students

Characteristic scenario pattern	While (Be perfect, hurry up)
Main communication door	Think
Characteristic sentence pattern	→ inserted text →
Dominant Working Style	Be perfect
Second dominant Working Style	Work hard
The weakest Working Style	Be strong
Number of respondents - 20	

Source: Authors' work

Analysis

9th-grade students are focused on completing tasks efficiently. The data obtained indicate that these students tend to be perfectionists and detail-oriented, and often feel pressured to achieve a high standard of work. They are also motivated by external expectations that can lead them directly to success, but these students are also at high risk for stress and anxiety. These are students who naturally adopt the "Be Strong" style of working, suggesting that traits such as resilience, risk-taking, and self-confidence are not as prevalent in this group. It can therefore be assumed that their ability to deal with failure, adapt to challenges, or take initiative will be impaired in the long term.

Furthermore, the presence of only one fully autonomous student suggests that self-motivation and independent thinking could be further encouraged. For the respondent with "My Working Style number 12, code krap11", all five Working Styles have almost equal values. As a person, he is not under the dominant influence of any driving force and has no characteristic scenario pattern. Encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and decision-making can increase their confidence and adaptability in real-life situations.

Recommendation for improvement

Some 9th-grade students should try to prioritise and identify precisely where detailed information is required. At the same time, they should accept that it is human to make mistakes and that making mistakes is a way of learning, and that complete perfection is impossible. If necessary, they should seek the opinion of others, not look at things too critically, and focus on properly planning the actual time needed to complete the work within the given deadline.

Conclusion

This investigation expands empirical knowledge of adolescent working-style formation by documenting grade-specific profiles in a Macedonian educational context. Eighth-graders' orientation toward pleasing others, coupled with weak urgency patterns, implies benefits from goal-setting and time-boxing activities that build self-regulated efficiency. Ninth-graders' perfectionistic stance, alongside low "Be Strong" scores, signals the importance of normalising errors, fostering resilience, and encouraging calculated risk-taking. The comparative analysis of 8th and 9th-grade students reveals distinct working style profiles shaped by developmental and psychological factors. Eighth graders predominantly exhibit a "Please Others" working style, supported by a secondary "Work Hard" drive. This suggests a strong orientation

toward external validation and social harmony, often at the expense of time efficiency and autonomous decision-making. Their weakest style, "Hurry Up," indicates challenges with urgency, time management, and adaptability in fast-paced scenarios.

In contrast, ninth graders are primarily driven by the "Be Perfect" style, with "Work Hard" as a secondary trait. This cohort demonstrates a heightened focus on precision, structure, and achievement, often accompanied by internal pressure and a fear of failure. Their weakest style, "Be Strong," points to underdeveloped resilience and assertiveness, which may hinder their ability to cope with setbacks or take initiative. Furthermore, the communication and scenario patterns differ notably between the groups. Eighth graders tend to communicate through emotional channels ("Feel") and operate within the "Almost" scenario pattern, reflecting striving behaviour that may fall short due to external dependencies. Ninth graders, on the other hand, favour cognitive communication ("Think") and follow the "While" scenario pattern, indicating a simultaneous pursuit of perfection and urgency.

These findings underscore the importance of tailoring educational strategies to each group's psychological and behavioural tendencies. For 8th graders, fostering autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and time management skills is essential. For 9th graders, promoting resilience, normalizing mistakes, and encouraging balanced perfectionism can support healthier academic and personal development.

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About the authors

Tome Kitanovski, MSc, is a biology graduate and biology teacher at the "Goce Delcev" elementary school in Vasilevo, with 14 years of professional experience. He holds a Master of Technical Sciences degree and is currently pursuing a PhD in Technology at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy in Skopje. He is a Scientix Ambassador until December 31, 2025, and is an advanced eTwinner, GLOBE professor, and teacher mentor. He has also published academic papers in international and national journals and publications, and actively participated in various international conferences, forums, and training programs. The author can be contacted at: tome_kit22@yahoo.com

Prof. Aleksandar Dimitrov, PhD, is a Full Professor at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, Skopje, North Macedonia, and Head of the Department of Extractive Metallurgy. He completed postdoctoral studies at the Department of Materials Science and Metallurgy at the University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK. Prof. Dimitrov is the author of more than 100 international scientific articles and has presented at numerous international conferences as an invited lecturer. Prof. Dimitrov is a current MC member of the EU COST Actions CA17139 and CA17140, and has been a leader of many international projects. The author can be contacted at: aco2501@gmail.com

Prof. Bosko Boskovski, PhD, is a Full Professor at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, North Macedonia, since 2024. He currently teaches courses in the Inorganic Engineering and Environmental Protection study program. His scientific research focuses on mineral raw materials and ecology. He has published more than 20 research papers in reputable scientific journals, has conducted several studies, and has participated in scientific research projects. He is also the author of several internal textbooks. The author can be contacted at: bboskovski@tmf.ukim.edu.mk

Prof. Ana Tomova, PhD, is a Full Professor at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, North Macedonia, since 2024. She has been working at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy in Skopje since 2008, first as a research associate and later as a lecturer in metallurgy. She is a member of the Association of Metallurgists of Macedonia and the association NanoMak. She is currently the Head of the Master's Study Program in Extractive Metallurgy and the Head of the Career Center at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. The author can be contacted at: anatomova@tmf.ukim.edu.mk

Prof. Beti Andonovic is a full professor at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Macedonia. She holds a PhD in Mathematical Sciences, with a focus on algebraic topology, from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Skopje. She has participated in numerous international and national research projects, serving as a contributor, member of management committees, and Scientific Communication Officer. Prof. Andonovic previously served as Head of the Institute of Chemical and Control Engineering and currently holds the positions of Head of the Second-Cycle Study Program in Quality Management and Vice Dean for Science and International Collaboration at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy. The author can be contacted at: beti@tmf.ukim.edu.mk