

## **Work, Stress, and Health (2019) – Conference Proposal**

### **Type of Proposal:**

Poster Only

### **Title of Proposal:**

Joint Effects of Sense of Control, Job Control, and Dispositional Mindfulness as Relating to Work Engagement

### **Abstract:**

Work engagement (WE) is a positive mental state consisting of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees with high levels of WE have better task performance, higher commitment to their companies, and find their work “fun” (Schaufeli, 2016). We draw upon Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to propose that sense of control, job control, and mindfulness positively predict WE. We further propose that mindfulness and job control have joint moderating effects on the relationship between sense of control and WE, such that mindfulness buffers a negative relationship between sense of control and WE when job control is low.

According to SDT, satisfaction of psychological needs through autonomy, competence, and relatedness produces intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2008). Extrinsic, or controlled, behaviors and emotional states deplete energy, while intrinsically motivated activities and autonomous self-regulation do not use internal resources and increase vitality (Ryan & Deci, 2008). WE is intrinsically motivated as it involves investment of internal resources; yet instead of depletion, it is characterized by vigor (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Stefano & Gaudiino, 2019).

Sense of control is, “the belief that one can determine one’s own internal states and behavior, influence one’s environment, and/or bring about desired outcomes” (Wallston et al.,

1987, p. 5). Sense of control positively correlates with well-being, and due to its link to autonomous functioning, we expect it to positively relate to WE (Hypothesis 1). However, high sense of control not always beneficial; in uncontrollable situations, high sense of control causes considerable stress (Heidemeier & Goritz, 2013).

Job control is the actual or perceived control, or authority, a person has concerning their work tasks and how they are completed (Llorens, Salanova, Torrente, & Acosta, 2013). In accordance with SDT, job control should positively relate to WE (Hypothesis 2). We also expect the relationship between sense of control and WE to be weaker for those with low job control (Hypothesis 3).

Mindfulness refers to being fully aware of the moment as it is happening, with non-judgmental selflessness and open-minded acceptance (Davis & Haynes, 2011). In addition to a cognitive state, mindfulness is a dispositional trait that varies between people and can be strengthened through meditation (Kiken, Garland, Bluth, Palsson, & Gaylord, 2015). One's level of dispositional mindfulness affects the frequency and length of their mindfulness experiences. Mindfulness is thought to relate to autonomous motivation (Schultz & Ryan, 2015); we therefore expect mindfulness to relate positively to WE (Hypothesis 4). We further expect mindfulness to buffer the aforementioned negative effect of low job control on the sense of control - WE relationship (Hypothesis 5).

Participants ( $N = 277$ ) were employees of a large U.S. university, age 18+, who worked 30+ hours per week and had job-related customer contact. An advertisement was posted on a university website; participants completed a 20-minute online survey and received a \$10 incentive.

A 15 item scale from Brown and Ryan (2003) was used to assess trait mindfulness. A five-item scale from Lachman and Weaver (1998) was used to assess sense of control. A three-item scale from Smith, Tisak, Hahn and Schmieder (1997) was used to measure job control. An 18-item scale from Rich, LePine, and Crawford (2010) was used to measure WE.

Scale descriptive statistics, correlations, and coefficient alphas are in Table 1. We tested main effects and interactions using hierarchical linear regression. As recommended by Dawson (2014), we standardized the predictor variables before creating interaction terms. We entered the three predictors (step 1), then the three two-way interaction terms (step 2), then the three-way interaction term (step 3). We interpreted results from step 3.

Sense of control ( $\beta = .17, p = .004$ ), job control ( $\beta = .38, p < .001$ ), and mindfulness ( $\beta = .17, p = .003$ ) all positively predicted WE, supporting H1, H2, and H4. The two-way interaction term for sense of control x job control was significant ( $\beta = .14, p = .019$ ), supporting H3. The three-way interaction term was also significant ( $\beta = -.16, p = .009$ ), supporting H5.

We plotted the three-way interaction using Excel and tested for slope differences using tools from Dawson (2014; see Figure 1). Overall, as sense of control increases, WE increases, especially at high job control. When job control is low, the relationship between sense of control and WE is weaker; yet, mindfulness buffers this effect. When job control is low and mindfulness is high, the relationship between sense of control and WE is significantly stronger than when it is low. This slope at low levels of job control and mindfulness was significantly different from the other three slopes, supporting our proposition that mindfulness is effective when job control is limited and sense of control is high. This finding is useful for organizations with positions that are inherently low on autonomy.

## References

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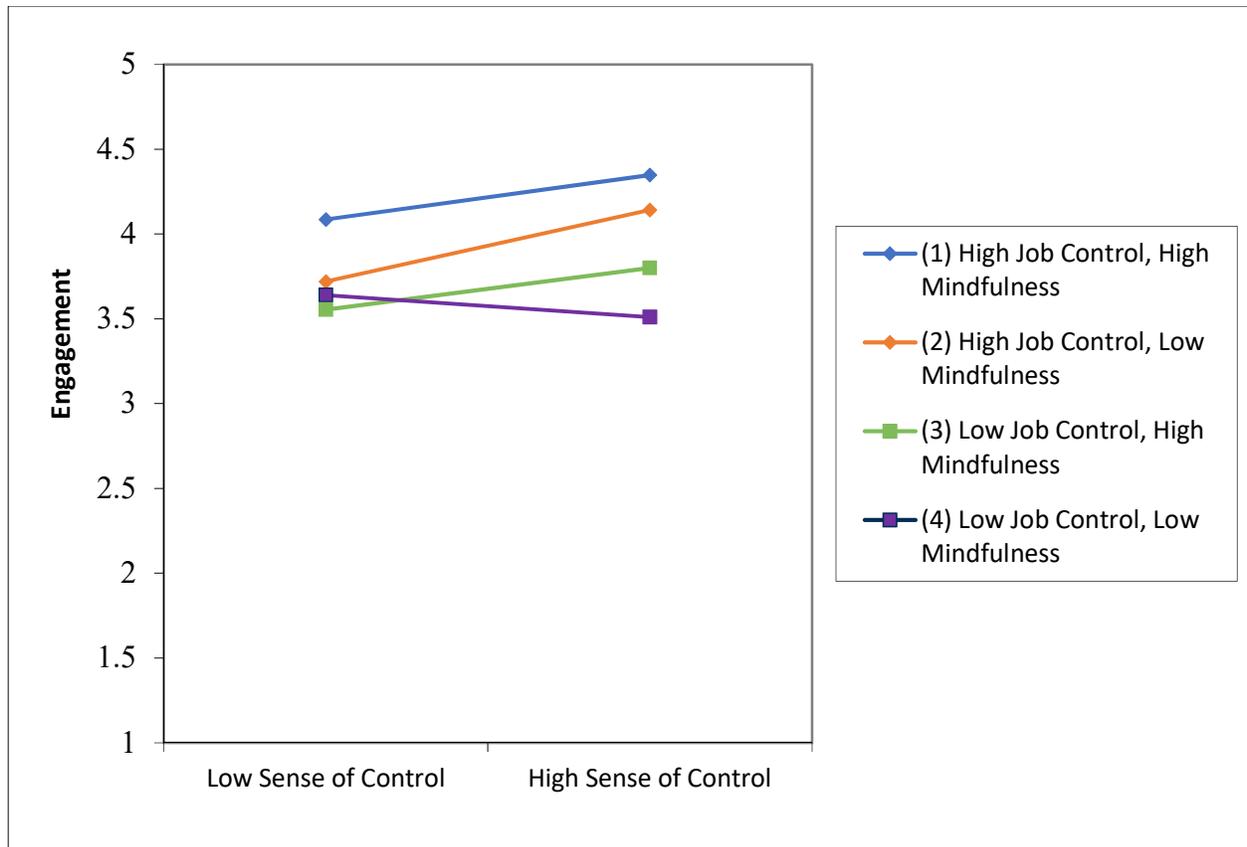
**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Coefficient Alphas*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Sense of Control	3.80	0.71	(.87)			
2. Job Control	3.45	1.01	.14*	(.86)		
3. Mindfulness	4.11	0.88	.21**	.07	(.92)	
4. Work Engagement	3.87	0.59	.18**	.35**	.19**	(.93)

*Note.*  $N = 277$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . Coefficient alphas in parentheses along diagonal.

**Figure 1**

*Three-way interaction of sense of control, job control, and mindfulness on work engagement.*



**Brief Summary:**

Work engagement is a mental state consisting of vigor, dedication, and absorption that positively relates to job performance, organizational commitment, and worker well-being. It is important to examine predictors of work engagement, especially for jobs in which workers inherently lack control over how their tasks are completed. In a sample of 277 university employees, we found that sense of control positively predicted work engagement, yet this effect was significantly weaker when job control was low. Further, mindfulness buffered this effect, such that for workers with higher levels of mindfulness, the negative effects of low job control on the positive relationship between sense of control and work engagement were lessened.

**Award Competitions:**

N/A

**Supporting Documentation:**

N/A

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**Scheduling Constraints:**

N/A

**Topics of Interest to the Conference:**

- 1) Workplace Stress and Related Outcomes
  - d. Job attitudes
- 2) Interventions in the Workplace
  - c. Positive Psychology and Engagement in the Workplace

**Conference Topic:**

Engagement in the Workplace

**Focus of Research:**

Work Engagement (WE)

**Occupation/Industry:**

N/A – General Employee, Low Job Control Employees

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**Continuing Education (CE) Information:**

N/A