



The relationship between job autonomy and well-being: the roles of boundary control and personality

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Abstract

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Due to ever-changing technologies, today's work design emphasizes the importance of having the freedom to choose where and when to perform work tasks. This freedom also puts the responsibility on the employee to manage the separation of their personal and professional lives. Therefore, it is important to give employees a high degree of autonomy so that they perceive a high degree of control over boundaries between work and personal life which in turn might contribute to their well-being. This thesis seeks to expand knowledge on the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement by proposing boundary control as a mediator. Furthermore, it sheds light on personality traits as potential moderators of this relationship.

One study examined whether the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement is mediated by boundary control and moderated by the big five personality traits ($N = 191$). As expected, job autonomy predicted work engagement, and this relationship was mediated by perceived boundary control. This means that when people have more autonomy to schedule the tasks of their job, they feel more engaged at work because they have a greater ability to control the boundaries between their work and life spheres. Unfortunately, a moderation analysis could not be conducted since the instrument used for measuring the different traits had very low reliability.

Keywords: Job autonomy, boundary control, work engagement, the big five personality traits.

Sumario

A relação entre autonomia no trabalho e o bem-estar: o papel do controlo de limites e da personalidade.

Lena Herentrey

Devido às tecnologias em constante mudança, o design do trabalho atual enfatiza a importância de ter a liberdade de escolher onde e quando realizar as tarefas de trabalho. Essa liberdade também coloca a responsabilidade sobre o trabalhador de gerir a separação entre suas vidas pessoal e profissional. Portanto, é importante dar autonomia aos trabalhadores para que tenham maior controlo sobre os limites entre o trabalho e a vida pessoal, o que pode levar a um maior bem-estar. Esta tese procura expandir o conhecimento sobre a relação entre a autonomia no trabalho e o engagement, propondo o controlo de limites entre vida pessoal e profissional como mediador. Além disso, esta tese investiga os traços de personalidade como um potencial moderador desta relação.

Um estudo examinou se a relação entre a autonomia no trabalho e o engagement é mediada pelo controlo de limites e moderada pelos traços de personalidade do modelo dos Cinco Grandes Fatores ($N = 191$). Como esperado, a autonomia no trabalho predisse o engagement e a relação foi mediada pelo controlo de limites percebido. Tal significa que quando as pessoas têm mais autonomia para agendar as tarefas do trabalho, sentem-se mais envolvidas no trabalho, porque têm uma maior capacidade de controlar os limites entre o trabalho e a vida pessoal. Infelizmente, não foi possível testar a moderação pois o instrumento usado para medir os traços de personalidade apresentou uma consistência interna demasiado baixa.

Palavras-chave: Autonomia no trabalho, controlo de limites, engagement, traços de personalidade dos cinco grandes fatores.

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This journey has been very adventurous and filled with many challenges. With the support of family and friends, I am proud to announce that I have successfully finished this journey. Also a huge thank you to anyone who has supported me during this time. Without their support, this whole process would not have been possible.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and problem statement

„Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity. “

—General George S. Patton

Job autonomy is one of the most important jobs characteristics a job can have to increase employees' well-being (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Humphrey et al, 2007). As in the opening sentence described, employees are more engaged and creative when they perceive more autonomy in their tasks which leads not only to better results in their work but also to increased job satisfaction and well-being in general (Baer et al., 2006). Job autonomy increases the innovative behavior of employees (Amabile, 1996) which in turn promotes their work results and increases work engagement (Judge et al, 2001; Tims et al., 2013; Wrzesniewski et al., 2001). On the other hand, employees who lack job autonomy are more likely to suffer from burnout and are more dissatisfied with their job (Demerouti et al., 2001; Tims et al., 2013) and their life in general (Halbesleben et al., 2004). The lack of freedom and control in one's work can result in decreased motivation, and engagement, which in turn can cause decreased productivity, high rates of employee turnover, and reduced overall job performance (Bakker et al., 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 2001). Lacking job autonomy can have therefore serious consequences for the entire company which will lose money as a result (Bakker et al., 2007; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Wrzesniewski et al., 2001).

Technology has changed the way we work a lot. New ways of working such as teleworking have given more autonomy to employees to decide where they want to work from. On the other hand, this makes the boundaries between the work sphere and personal life blur. The overlap between work and personal life has put the responsibility on employees to keep those two spheres separated or to integrate them into one another and find a balance. Job autonomy is here increasingly important for employees' perceived boundary control especially to give every employee the chance to individually separate those two spheres to one's favor and therefore to give them the best opportunity for finding a balance (Köffer et al., 2015).

Job autonomy plays a crucial role in helping workers to control boundaries between work and life spheres. The concept of boundary control refers to an individual perceived ability to manage the boundaries between work and non-work activities (Geurts et al., 2003). The concept of boundary control has gained significant attention in the field of work-life balance and employee well-being. The rapid advancement of technology and increasing work demands have made it challenging for employees to keep their personal and professional life separated. As a result, boundary control has become a necessary aspect of promoting a healthy work-life balance and avoiding burnout.

Research has demonstrated that individuals who perceive strong boundary control skills experience heightened levels of job satisfaction, a good work-life balance, and overall well-being (Geurts et al., 2003). On the other side, those with poor boundary control do have increased work-family conflicts, stress, and burnout (Geurts et al., 2003; Grandey et al., 2005). Job autonomy has a crucial effect on an employee's perceived boundary control. Research has shown that workers with higher job autonomy have a stronger sense of control over the boundaries between their work and personal life (Geurts et al., 2003). This leads to better work-life balance, reduced work-family conflict, and improved general well-being (Grandey et al., 2005). Conversely, employees with limited job autonomy may experience greater overlap between their work and personal life, resulting in feelings of stress and burnout (Humphrey et al., 2007). This highlights the significance of job autonomy in enabling workers to maintain a balance between their work and personal life.

In conclusion, job autonomy plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's perceived boundary control and has a direct impact on their well-being (Kossek et al., 2005). Employers need to provide sufficient autonomy to keep a healthy work-life balance and general job satisfaction.

Research has shown that individual differences such as personality can influence the relationships between autonomy and well-being. Mäkikangas et al. (2013) have already shown that more extroverted people use their social network outside of their workplace as a resource to minimize stress at work. The big five personality traits are commonly used to distinguish and identify different personality traits people own (McCrea & Costa, 1999). For example, it's easier for people who are more open, extroverted, and very self-consciousness to make friends and build a network within their private life and ask for certain things they need to feel better at work or to increase their work-life balance (Mäkikangas et al. 2013).

The purpose of the current thesis is to examine how job autonomy influences perceptions of boundary control and how this affects employees' well-being (measured as work engagement). Perceived boundary control plays here a mediating role between job autonomy and employees' work engagement. Furthermore, this thesis aims to find out how personality traits moderate the mediated relationship between job autonomy and well-being. Accordingly, this thesis will provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How does job autonomy influence perceptions of boundary control and consequently employees' well-being?
2. Is this relationship different depending on employees' personality traits?

The corresponding research model is pictured in Figure 1:

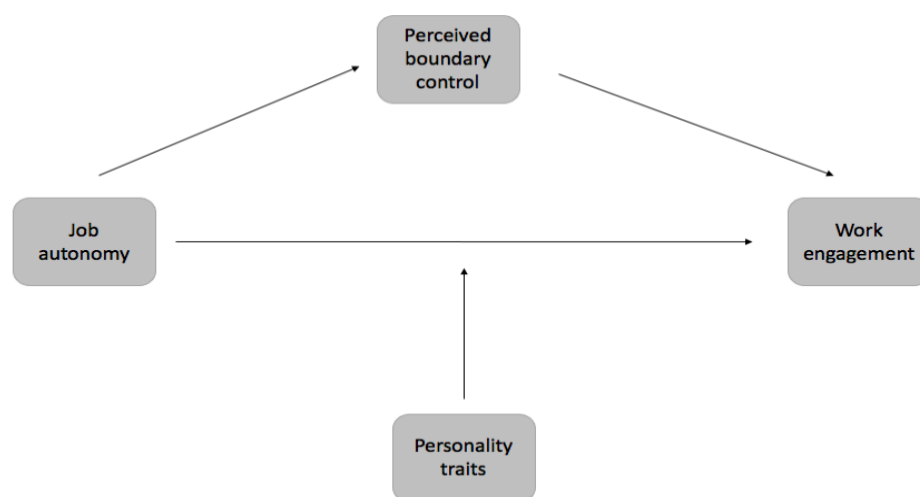


Figure 1: Research model

1.2. Relevance and contributions

This thesis aims to add existing research about the impact of job autonomy on boundary control and employees' well-being and the special role of personality traits. Existing literature broadly covers job autonomy's influence on employees' well-being and also perceived boundary control (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Humphrey et al, 2007). There is a gap in research when it especially comes to the role of personality traits and how it moderates the mediated relationship between job autonomy and perceived boundary control. An additional research gap consists of analyzing boundary control as a mediator for the relationship between job autonomy and work

engagement. Research has shown that autonomy leads to engagement and that autonomy leads to perceived boundary control and boundary control leads to engagement. Therefore, this thesis aims to shed new light on the role of boundary control as it will be analyzed as a mediator. This thesis aims to close this gap. Job autonomy and boundary control are crucial for employees' well-being and have also an important role when it comes to the well-being of organizations as a whole (Bakker et al., 2007; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Wrzesniewski et al., 2001). Lacking job autonomy leads to higher turnover intentions and decrease job performance (Bakker et al., 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 2001). Therefore, organizations should be aware of the role of personality traits and how it influences the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement. Organizations need to identify if there is a difference in personality traits in terms of the named relationship. They need to identify which resources are additionally needed or need to be more individualized to support employees in their daily challenges.

This thesis will also provide another perspective on perceived boundary control since we look at it as a mediator between job autonomy and work engagement. It is extremely important for companies to not only draw a relationship between job autonomy and well-being but also support employees perceiving boundary control and therefore, not only help employees' work-life balance but also the organizational health at a large. By utilizing the understanding that job autonomy can enhance individuals' perceived boundary control and well-being and that this correlation is impacted by the big five personality traits, companies can make better-informed decisions regarding job and team management. By doing so, they can create a more engaged and productive workforce.

In conclusion, by utilizing the knowledge of the importance of job autonomy and how it improves perceived boundary control and well-being, managers can make more informed decisions regarding job design, performance management, and employee well-being.

1.3. Outline

This thesis reviews the existing literature on job autonomy, perceived boundary control, work engagement, and the big five personality traits. On this basis, hypotheses will be developed. Then, a cross-sectional study will be presented ($N=191$), where employees were asked to answer a survey which was distributed by an App called „Appinio". In the end, the results will be presented and this thesis will discuss findings based on the current literature and the study and draws limitations.

2. Theorization

2.1. Literature review

The following chapter will summarize previous research regarding the main topic of the thesis. In the following, the variables of job autonomy, perceived boundary control, work engagement, and the big five personality traits will be explained.

2.1.1. Job autonomy

Job autonomy has been described by different researchers as a crucial part of job design to ensure employees' well-being and motivation. One of the first revolutionary approaches for job redesign to motivate employees came from Frederick Herzberg (1966). Herzberg was one of the first psychologists to argue that work must have different characteristics to enhance employee performance and increase internal motivation. He wanted workplaces to be enriched. The possibility of growth was crucial for Herzberg, which plays an important role not only for the individual employee but also in increasing the performance of the overall organization (Herzberg, 1966).

Hackman's and Oldham (1976) built a more detailed job-characteristic theory that has found great appeal in motivational research. Many recent theories have also drawn on Hackman and Oldham's model. They especially focus on identifying what job conditions motivate individual employees. Therefore, they assume, that the motivation of employees is based on how the job is structured for the individual employee. They settled for five crucial job characteristics: Skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and job-based feedback (Hackman & Oldham, 2010). Skill variety can be explained as the degree to which a job requires employees to use a range of different skills and abilities, while task identity is the degree to which a job involves completing a whole and identifiable piece of work, from beginning to end. Task significance refers to the degree to which a job has an impact on the lives or work of other people, either within or outside the organization. Autonomy is the degree to which a job provides employees with independence and discretion over how they perform their work. They defined job autonomy as to which extent employees are allowed to determine the scheduling and discretionary nature of the work they perform (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Job-based feedback can be described as the degree to which employees receive information about the effectiveness of their work (Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

Those characteristics lead to experiencing meaningfulness in the employees' jobs. Autonomy ensures that employees experience responsibility for their work outcome and feedback provides knowledge of their actual performance and the results of their work activities. If all the core characteristics are fulfilled and lead to the described psychological states, personal and work outcomes would be motivation, satisfaction with the work in general, low absenteeism, and low turnover intentions, and employees would perform high-quality work (Hackman & Oldham, 2010).

Hackman and Oldham furthermore stated that job autonomy is one of the most important factors in work design to increase motivation and job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) created an extension of Hackman and Oldham's job characteristic model, where autonomy is also part of the work design characteristics and is specifically playing a motivational role as well. The most important part of the extended version of the model for this thesis mainly consists in dividing job autonomy into work scheduling autonomy, work methods autonomy, and decision-making autonomy.

While job scheduling autonomy is mainly about time, if individuals can decide for themselves when the work is happening and in which order tasks are made, work method autonomy describes the extent to which individuals can decide which methods they can use to complete their tasks. Decision-making autonomy describes the autonomy of having the freedom to make decisions independently and if employees can use their judgment and initiative for doing their work. Consequently, they define job autonomy as having freedom, independence, and discretion to schedule work, make decisions and individually be able to choose the methods how they want to pursue their work (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

Research has found the important role of autonomy in the world of work and especially what autonomy can cause. Saragih (2011), for example, found that job autonomy correlates positively with job performance and satisfaction. This means that the more autonomy employees are granted, the better their job performance and the higher their job satisfaction (Saraghi, 2011). Park and Searcy (2011) imply with their study, that job autonomy improves employees' well-being and in addition their organizational commitment. Ahuja et al. (2007) have shown in their study among IT professionals that job autonomy plays an important role when it comes to turnover intentions and work-family balance. They found out, that autonomy is negatively related to work exhaustion as well as turnover intentions, meaning the more

autonomy an IT professional had the less work exhaustion they feel, and the fewer turnover intentions they have, meaning the less likely they are to change their job or company.

Humphrey et al. (2007) stated in their meta-analysis that job autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction, growth satisfaction internal work motivation. In terms of organizational family support, Thompson et al. (2005) found out that employees with a high level of job autonomy were more satisfied with their job, family, and their life overall. They had significantly fewer turnover intentions and were less likely to feel stressed. Furthermore, Humphrey et al. analyzed the relationship between all ten motivational characteristics and attitudinal outcomes. Autonomy had the strongest relationship with all attitudinal outcomes, which shows how autonomy is such a crucial aspect of job design (Humphrey et al, 2007).

2.1.2. Perceived boundary control

Every person owns different social roles in their life. An individual can be a mother, a daughter, a manager, and a friend at the same time. All those labels are different social roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). The classic concept of the social role comes from social sciences. Parsons, for example, describes a role as a construct of behavioral expectations that are placed on the respective counterpart by complementary interaction partners (Schreyögg, 1991).

Turner describes that roles are created by social groups assigning a set of tasks to individuals. Therefore, a role is like a construct of expectations, behaviors, and attitudes that belong together (Turner, 2002). Furthermore, Turner explains that most social roles only exist in sets (Turner, 2002). For example, could there be no mother role without her children. To cope with all those different roles in life, individuals create boundaries between those roles to organize and structure their social environment, organize their daily lives, and put everything in order (Ashforth et al., 2000; Zerubavel, 1991). Eviatar (1991) described boundaries already as a helpful frame to organize our environment and to hold our roles separate from one another (Zerubavel, 1991).

When individuals are overtaking roles, they also jump into different identities called *role identities*. Social roles do own a certain persona. They have their own goals, beliefs, and norms. Consequently, they have their character (Ashforth et al. 2000). Depending on the different features that a role owns, role transitions are more or less difficult. For example, the role of a

manager has different expectations, values, and norms than the role of a father. The greater the differences between two roles and therefore the greater the contrast is, the more difficult and extensive the transition from one role into the other (Ashforth et al., 2000). The greater the contrast in role identities the more segmented are roles. Consequently, boundaries between those highly different roles are very inflexible and impermeable while roles with low contrast and similar features in role identities have very flexible and permeable boundaries (Ashforth et al. 2000). In conclusion it can be said that highly segmented roles have less boundary blurring but make boundary-crossing activities way more difficult (Ashforth et al. 2000).

Controlling those boundary-crossing activities can be more or less difficult for the individual depending on the identity of the role, interruption behaviors, and work settings (Hall & Richter, 1988). Hall & Richter explained that in terms of work and home settings, boundaries are created by both, the individuals and the work settings. Boundaries refer here to different time and place settings. Therefore, boundaries can be created physically, where the roles are acting in different places and at different times. Psychological boundaries are represented more by permeability (Hall & Richter, 1988). This means individuals are located in one domain but with their minds (psychologically) in another domain (Hall & Richter, 1988).

Consequently, people have roles in their personal as well as in their professional lives and they build boundaries between those roles to organize and structure their environment. Due to technological changes and new working methods, those boundaries blurry, and boundary-crossing activities are increased, such as a parent might be responding to emails while waiting for a medical appointment for the child. The extent to which employees have control over their boundaries and those boundary-crossing activities vary (Mellner et al. 2014).

Mellner et al. (2014) found that a high level of perceived boundary control is associated with a better work-life balance. Their study found that men, in particular, experience this phenomenon. Employees need a high degree of self-regulation to better regulate their boundaries (especially within flexible work). Thus, it was shown that a better work-life balance can be achieved through successful boundary control. Furthermore, Mellner et al. identified that people desire a segmentation between work and personal life and that most people are experiencing low boundary control in general (Mellner et al. 2014). These results highlight the needs for managerial consequences and changes that must be taken into account to support employees to manage their boundaries between work and personal life. Piszczek found out in his study, which

was mainly about boundary control and controlled boundaries in terms of technology usage, that boundary control is negatively related to emotional exhaustion (Piszczek, 2017). Consequently, employees with a high degree of boundary control have less emotional exhaustion. When individuals can choose for themselves whether and to what extent they want to set boundaries between work and personal life, this is considered a predictor of well-being (Kossek et al., 2005). Kossek (2005) named having a certain boundary management style, which is separating work and personal life in someone's favor, as the strongest predictor for well-being in their study about telecommuting, control, and boundary management.

2.1.3. Work engagement

The job demands-resource model (JD-R) proposes that every job has demands and resources. Work demands are those that place a sustained physical and/or mental strain on employees and therefore come at a physical and/or mental cost. For example, too much workload and correspondingly high work pressure. However, work demands are by no means a bad thing per se (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). But if employees do not receive sufficient support (job resources) and experience too much stress, this can harm their health.

Work resources, on the other hand, are resources that can help employees achieve their goals and compensate or even reduce the demands of work. Moreover, work resources are necessary not only to compensate for work demands but also to motivate the individual to develop and learn (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). They can have psychological, physical, organizational, or social character. On the organizational level, work resources can be compensation, but also training opportunities. On the social level, supportive colleagues or a good team atmosphere can be work resources.

One of the most important premises of the JD-R model is that job resources have a motivating effect and can thus increase work engagement and also improve performance. When workers are exposed to high work demands over a long time, physical and mental problems can occur. It can lead to chronic exhaustion and a psychological detachment from their work. Or, in other words, burnout is the result.

Work engagement is seen as the opposite of burnout. Engaged employees feel challenged rather than stressed, as well as energized and connected to their work (Bakker et al., 2008). They can identify themselves with their work. The clear difference between engaged employees and employees suffering from burnout is that these employees are more likely to view their work as stressful, and demanding (Bakker et al., 2008) and exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2014). Work engagement encompasses a positive, motivating, and energetic state of mind, in which employees are deeply invested and committed to their work. It involves experiencing high levels of energy, dedication, and absorption in one's job. Work engagement is considered to be an important indicator of job performance, employee well-being, and overall job satisfaction (Schaufeli et al., 2004; Salanova et al., 2005).

Also, Karasek stated in his job strain model (1979), that a high level of job demands, and a low level of decision-making freedom (job decision latitude) can result in stress and therefore will lower the well-being of employees. Furthermore, it also predicts, that a high level of job demands and a high level of job decision latitude results in being productive (Karasek, 1979). The meta-analysis of Bakker et al. (2014) also found that burnout can be predicted by factors like role conflict, role stress, or a high workload.

In terms of employee engagement, therefore, the most important predictor is work resources, i.e., the opposite of burnout (Bakker et al. 2014). Here, again, the complementary character to burnout can be established. Work resources are among others task variety, task importance, autonomy, and social support from colleagues (Bakker et al., 2014). Meta-analytical evidence for a positive effect on work engagement was found for resources like autonomy and social support. Bakker et al. also found in a study of Finnish teachers that work resources contribute to an experienced engagement even in the face of high work demands (Bakker et al., 2014).

2.1.4. Personality traits

The Five-Factor Model (FFM) is a generalization about how personality traits covariate (McCrea & Costa, 1999). It postulates five broad personality dimensions: Neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, which can be traced back to behavioral orientations in interpersonal interactions and interindividual differences in the areas of attitude, experience, and motivation (Dehne & Schupp, 2007).

The FFM summarizes a major fraction of what psychologists define by the term personality and has proven extremely helpful to the discipline by unifying and systematizing many ideas and measures (McCrae & Costa, 1999). According to McCrae and John (1992), the FFM is not a theory of personality, but it implicitly accepts the fundamental ideas of trait theory, such as the ability to quantify traits and their ability to exhibit some degree of cross-situational consistency.

The first dimension extraversion/introversion finds wide agreement among theorists. People with a higher degree of extraversion are usually very sociable and outgoing people. People who like to be active and talkative. Hogan (1986) gave this dimension two components: Ambition and sociability (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Watson and Clark identified 7 characteristics of extraversion which are for example positivity, energy, advancement, and ambition. Individuals with a low degree of extraversion tend to be quiet, reserved, and shy (McCrae & John, 1992).

Theorists are also pretty aligned on the second dimension: neuroticism. Neuroticism has also been called emotional stability, stability, and emotionality (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Associated personality traits are depression, anger, embarrassment, and insecurity. Extraversion and neuroticism built the big two personality traits. McCrae & John (1992) associate a high level of neuroticism with personality traits like low-self esteem and recurrent nervous tension. Thus, individuals with a high neuroticism score are at high risk for a variety of psychiatric disorders. However, this does not mean that individuals with a low neuroticism score are mentally healthy. They are just calmer and more balanced (McCrae & John, 1992).

Agreeableness builds the third dimension and is also called likability, which already suggests the personality traits this dimension is associated with. People with a high degree of agreeableness are friendly, flexible, trusting, soft-hearted, and tolerant (Barrick & Mount, 1991). McCrae & John (1992) associated with a high degree of agreeableness personality traits like caring and emotional support. So people with a great sense of empathy. Graziano and Eisenberg preferred the description of agreeableness versus antagonism (McCrae & John, 1992). Since agreeableness should be orthogonal to extraversion, the interpretation of agreeableness always depends strongly on how extraversion is defined.

The fourth dimension is called conscientiousness and has also been called the will to achieve. Conscientiousness is related to a variety of educational achievement measures and can be described as being careful, responsible, and planful (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Researchers have

proposed that conscientiousness is also associated with personality traits like being hardworking (Barrick & Mount, 1991). People with a high degree of conscientiousness are hard workers, are well-organized, and like to follow rules (McCrae & John, 1992).

The fifth and last dimension is the most difficult one to identify. It is commonly called openness to experience but has also been called intellect or intelligence (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The controversy surrounding the openness personality trait is due to the difference between the results found by language studies and questionnaires (McCrae & John, 1992). While many studies attribute imagination, artistic, and creativity traits to openness, these characteristics capture more than intellectual ability (Dehne & Schupp, 2007). Openness includes facets such as receptiveness to fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and systems of norms and values. Openness is characterized by an individual's willingness to embrace new experiences and ideas, open-mindedness, acceptance of different perspectives and values, and creativity and imagination in problem-solving. Those who score low on openness tend to prefer familiarity and routine, have traditional and conservative attitudes and values, and are less interested in intellectual pursuits (Gosling et al., 2003).

2.2. Concluding remarks about the current literature

Job autonomy, boundary control, and work engagement are broadly covered by the current literature. Most theories and studies are based on Hackman and Oldham's job design theory and the JDR theory, saying that job autonomy as a job characteristic has an important influence on employees' well-being and therefore on their work engagement (Hackman & Oldham, 2010). Boundary control is mostly perceived by employees with a higher degree of job autonomy and therefore should mediate the relationship between job autonomy and employees' well-being. Meaning the more job autonomy someone has the higher the degree of perceived boundary control they should have and therefore, the higher the work engagement they should have.

A high degree of perceived boundary control is important for the employee's health as well as to have control over boundary-crossing activities that either interrupt their personal or their professional life. How personality traits moderate the relationship between job autonomy and well-being is not as broadly covered as the other relationships. Based on the literature it can be assumed that the big five personality traits do play a moderator role in the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement. As mentioned, people own different personality traits and therefore have different abilities to mobilize resources. As Mäkikangas et al. (2013) proposed in their study that the personality traits of extraversion and conscientiousness were constantly positively associated with work engagement since it is easier for extraverted people to proactively ask for feedback or build a social network as a resource and therefore can better compensate job demands (Mäkikangas et al. 2013). Therefore, the degree and type of personality traits someone owns strengthen the direction of the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement.

2.3. Hypotheses development

The following chapter provides theoretical and empirical arguments that will support the development of the hypotheses between the previously described theories and the literature review relevant to the existing variables of this thesis: Job autonomy, perceived boundary control, work engagement, and personality traits. Based on this, this chapter describes testable hypotheses that suggest a relationship between the variables.

2.3.1. Job autonomy and work engagement

The relationship between job autonomy and work engagement plays an important role in this thesis. There are different kinds of autonomy that employees can own in their job. This thesis mainly focuses on work scheduling autonomy, the autonomy employees have to schedule their work, and the autonomy they have to decide in which order they do their work.

Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) as well as Hackman and Oldham (2010) already proposed job autonomy as a motivator and job characteristic a job needs to contribute to employees' engagement and well-being. Karasek also proposed in his job demand-resource model that autonomy is needed to experience high job engagement (Karasek, 1979). The importance of job autonomy for job satisfaction was shown by Saraghi (2011), meaning the more job autonomy an employee perceives the more satisfied they were with their job. Autonomy has also an important influence on turnover intentions and work-family balance (Saraghi, 2011). Employees with more job autonomy do have it easier to balance work and family life (Saraghi, 2011) and are more satisfied with their life in general (Thompson et al., 2005). In Humphrey et al. meta-analysis they furthermore found out that autonomy is very strongly related to supervisor satisfaction, coworker satisfaction, compensation satisfaction, and promotion satisfaction which all lead to work engagement (Humphrey et al, 2007).

For this reason, it is argued, that job autonomy is positively related to work engagement.

H1: There is a positive relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, such as the higher the degree of job autonomy the higher the degree of work engagement.

2.3.2. Perceived boundary control as a mediator

As argued before job autonomy does have an important impact on well-being. But one of the reasons why job autonomy influence work engagement is that job autonomy can create a perception of boundary control and boundary control leads to well-being (Thompson & Prottas 2005). Employees do have different styles how to manage the boundaries between work and personal life. They integrate the different spheres into each other, but they also strictly distinguish between work and personal life (Kossek et al., 2011). The rapid development of technologies also led to significant changes in the world of work and to the fact that one's workplace was increasingly moved into one's own home (Kossek et al. 2011).

However, perceived boundary control is a psychological interpretation and self-assessment of how far one has control over the boundary between work and professional life. It is the control over how often one allows or does not allow interferences and reduces or extends a boundary (Kossek et al. 2011). Since people with a higher degree of job autonomy have more freedom in deciding how to do their tasks and where they want to work it is also assumed that those people do have a higher perception of boundary control which in conclusion should lead to higher perceived well-being. Empirical results can be seen in Kossek et al. (2006) study, where they found out that the extent to which employees can decide where, when, and how their work is done, is a strong predictor for family conflicts and therefore perceived boundary control (Kossek et al. 2006). Kossek et al. (2005) further found empirical evidence that perceived boundary control is a predictor of well-being. Among their study of telecommuting, control, and boundary management, perceived boundary control was the strongest predictor for well-being (Kossek et al. 2005).

H2: Perceived boundary control mediates the positive relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, such as the higher the degree of job autonomy, the higher the perceived boundary control, and consequently, the higher employees' work engagement.

2.3.3. Personality traits as a moderator

Individual factors play an important role in well-being, as people with certain personal dispositions can mobilize resources better than others. People do have different traits which are more or less helpful for mobilizing different resources they get through their work or using

social support they have in their private life as compensation to reduce demands and stress in their job. For example, extroverts find it easier to ask their supervisors for feedback and generally have no difficulty making social contacts, which in turn helps them to compensate for job demands (Mäkikangas et al. 2013). Taking Hackman & Oldhams' (2010) theory into account, receiving feedback plays an important factor when it comes to working engagement. This will contribute to better well-being measured as work engagement (Hackman & Oldham, 2010). Extraverts generally show more positive emotions and a higher level of interpersonal interaction, which helps them to mobilize resources in a way to reduce job demands and work engagement occurs (Mäkikangas et al. 2013). People with a high degree of extraversion are more likely to perceive job resources as high interpreting that extraverted people have a more positive view of the world and experience more work engagement (Baker et al., 2010; Fukuzaki & Iwata, 2022). Personality traits of extraversion are also constantly positively related to work engagement in Mäkikangas et al. (2013) qualitative study.

H3a: Personality traits moderate the positive mediated relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, such as the relationship between job autonomy and employees' work engagement is stronger for higher levels of extraversion.

In a qualitative study, Mäkikangas et al. 2013 examined the relationship between the five-factor model and work engagement. They found out that the personality traits of conscientiousness were constantly positively associated with high work engagement. A high degree of conscientiousness is associated with plan-oriented and hardworking personality traits and they are more likely to work efficiently (especially because of their plan-oriented attitude) which allows them to better use personal and job resources when they need it and are less likely to experience boredom (Zecca et al., 2015).

H3b: Personality traits moderate the positive mediated relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, such as the relationship between job autonomy and employees' work engagement is stronger for higher levels of conscientiousness.

In some of the studies reviewed by Mäkikangas et al. (2013), neuroticism was found to have a negative relationship with work engagement. Similarly, Baker et al. (2010) found that individuals with high levels of neuroticism were more likely to perceive job demands as being very high. This could be because neurotic individuals tend to view their work environment as

unpleasant, making it difficult for them to engage with their work. Additionally, since neuroticism is often associated with feelings of nervousness, frustration, guilt, and low self-esteem, and is generally linked to depression and other psychological disorders (McCrae & John, 1992), these individuals likely have difficulty being proactive and building social relationships within their organization or outside of work. Based on Hackman & Oldham's (2010) theory, this lack of proactivity and social relationships could contribute to their reduced work engagement. For this reason, it is argued that employees with a high degree of neuroticism have a lower level of well-being/work engagement.

H3c: Personality traits moderate the positive mediated relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, such as the relationship between job autonomy and employees' work engagement is weaker for higher levels of neuroticism.

A meta-analysis from Fukuzaki & Iwata (2022) further found a relationship between openness and work engagement. Furthermore, did Ongore (2013) find out in his study that the five-factor model is a good source for work engagement. Each personality trait was related to work engagement, but openness and agreeableness were found as significant predictors. Additionally, in Ongore's (2013) study, he discovered that the five-factor model is a reliable indicator of work engagement, with each personality trait having a correlation with work engagement. However, the personality traits of openness and agreeableness were found to be the most influential predictors. Ongore furthermore argues that people with a high level of openness can better adapt to the rapid changes of their current working life and therefore it is easier for them to adapt and can be then more engaged in their job.

H3d: Personality traits moderate the positive mediated relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, such as the relationship between job autonomy and employees' work engagement is stronger for higher levels of openness.

Chiotis and Michaelides (2022) found that agreeableness moderated the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement. Specifically, they found that job autonomy was more strongly related to work engagement for employees who were high in agreeableness compared to those who were low in agreeableness. As mentioned before Ongore (2013) found agreeableness to be a significant predictor of work engagement. He furthermore explained that

people with a high degree of agreeableness are more positive and motivated to solve problems and can be more engaged in their jobs.

H3e: Personality traits moderate the positive mediated relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, such as the relationship between job autonomy and employees' work engagement is stronger for higher levels of agreeableness.

The framework for this thesis based on the described hypotheses is pictured in figure 2:

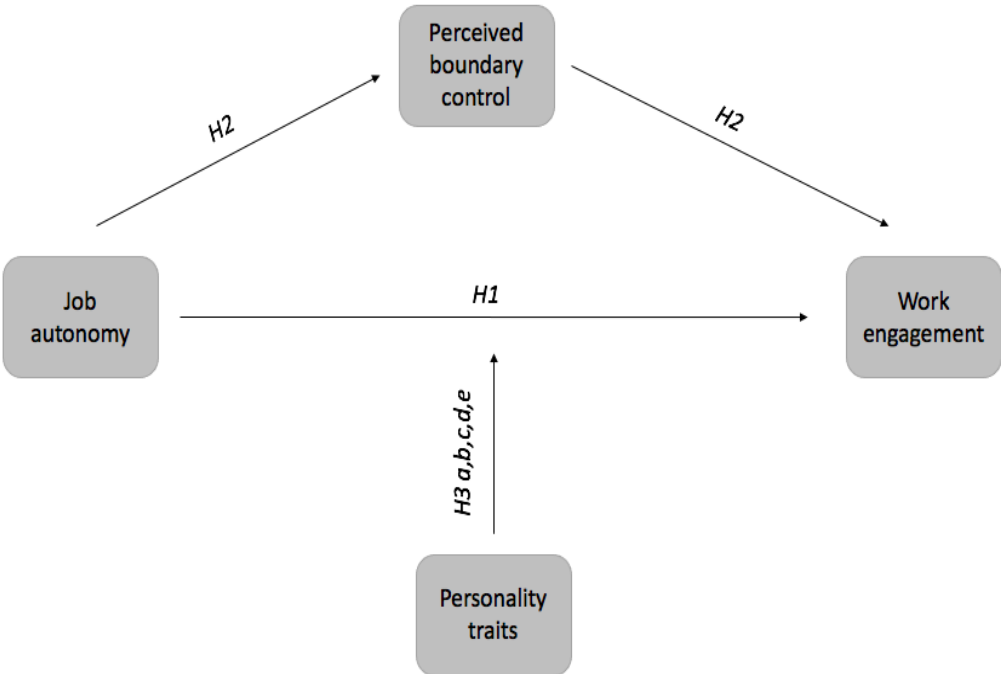


Figure 2: Conceptual framework and hypotheses

3. Method

The following study is a cross-sectional study. Cross-sectional studies measure data at one single point in time. A survey has been created to gain data from 300 participants. The survey was created with Appinio, a market research company.

3.1. Sample and procedure

The sample only includes individuals who are working full time (>35h/week). Considering the topic, this was the most reasonable since controlling boundaries is probably the most challenging for full-time employees. The survey was distributed via the Appinio app. Appinio is a business-to-business (B2B) market research company that offers real-time market research. Via their app, they have over 240.000 users with all different kinds of demographics. They have their tool to create the survey and send it into the app where people can be screened out who are not supposed to answer the survey. Appinio avoids giving people money as an incentive to answer the survey and therefore they have a gamification incentive. Within 10 minutes 300 participants answered the survey.

After giving consent for participation and confirming that they were working full-time, participants were asked questions to measure the variables of interest in this study. Started with the moderator variable of personality. Afterward, the following question block was about the predictor variable job autonomy. It was asked about the mediator variable in the further question block. The last block is about employees' work engagement. Finally, participants are asked to provide demographic data. While answering the survey, participants also go through one attention check question. All questions were required to answer to not miss any data.

Out of the 303 responses, 45 participants were disqualified because they worked less than 35 hours per week. Additionally, 16 respondents failed the attention question, and 51 participants reported having an English proficiency level of either A1 or A2, resulting in a final sample size of $N = 191$. Participants who possessed A1 and A2 levels of English proficiency got excluded from the sample, as it was anticipated that their language skills may not have been adequate to comprehend and respond to the study's requirements with the necessary precision, which could have potentially compromised the validity of the results. The sample consisted of 82 female participants (34.00%) and 109 male participants (45.20%). The majority of the respondents were from Germany (76.30%), followed by the "other" option (19.70%), and finally from Italy (4.00%). In terms of educational level, many of the respondents hold a high school diploma

(37.70%), followed by a Master's degree (25.65%), while other participants held a bachelor's degree (23.56%), completed elementary school (9.95%), or held a Ph.D. (3.14%). Many of the participants have no children (38.84%), followed by those with two children (36.65%), while others had one child (14.66%), three children (7.33%), or four or more children (2.62%). Regarding marital status, many of the participants are married (48.69%), while single and those in a relationship are equally distributed (25.65%). The average age of the participants is 37.6 years ($SD = 12.60$), with an average work experience of 22.6 years ($SD = 10.60$), and an average of 40.64 hours worked per week ($SD = 4.89$). On average, participants were able to work 20.10 hours per week from home ($SD = 10.89$).

3.2.Measures

For all variables have been used already pre-existing and proven validated scales and items. All items were answered by using seven-point scales.

Job autonomy. Autonomy was measured using Morgeson & Humphreys's (2006) scheduling autonomy items. The participants were asked to rate three questions on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1= Never; 7=Always). An example of the item is “*The job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work*”.

Perceived boundary control. Perceived boundary control was measured with the three-item scale developed by Kossek et al. (2011). Sample item included “*I control the weather I am able to keep my work and personal life separate.*” (Kossek et al., 2011: 126). Participants had to choose from a 7-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree; 7= Strongly agree)

Work engagement. Work engagement was measured by using the 17-item Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) developed work engagement scale. Sample items included “*My job inspires me. At my work, I feel bursting with energy*”(Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004: 48). Participants had to rate the 17 statements on a 7-point Likert-type scale (0=Never; 6= Every day).

Personality traits. The different personality traits were measured by using the 10-item big five inventory-10 (BFI-10) by Rammstedt and John (2007). Participants had to answer 10 statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree; 7= Strongly agree). Sample items include “*I see myself as someone who is reserved; I see myself as someone who does a thorough job*”

3.3. Analysis

The data analysis and hypotheses testing were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28 software. The analysis consisted of several steps, including (1) conducting reliability testing of all measurement scales using Cronbach's Alpha (2) and Spearman-brown (3) calculating descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables of interest, and (3) testing the moderated mediation models (one for each personality trait) using the PROCESS macro v4.1 running model 5.

4. Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and reliabilities for all variables of interest. The Cronbach's alpha analysis indicates high internal consistency of job autonomy, boundary control, and work engagement with coefficients above .71 (Hair et al., 2011). To test the reliability of the scales for the big five personality traits, Cronbach's alpha could not be used since the subscale for each personality trait only consists of two items. Thus, the Spearman-Brown coefficient has been used. As displayed in Table 1 the Spearman-Brown coefficients show a very low internal consistency. For this reason, moderation analyses to test the role of personality traits as moderators could not be tested.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities of the study's variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skew</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Cronbach's α / Spearman-Brown</i>
Job autonomy	4.62	1.38	0.23	-.76	1.00	7.00	0.79
Boundary control	4.66	1.18	0.29	-.31	1.75	7.00	0.82
Work engagement	4.67	1.05	0.45	-.71	1.71	6.76	0.89
Agreeableness	4.87	0.99	0.35	-.26	2.50	7.00	-.25
Extraversion	4.87	0.95	0.12	.09	1.50	7.00	-.09
Neuroticism	4.69	0.93	0.23	-.48	2.50	7.00	.32
Openness	5.13	0.95	0.45	.18	1.50	7.00	-.42
Conscientiousness	4.83	0.91	0.19	-.15	3.00	7.00	.16

Note: $N = 191$

Table 2 displays the correlations among the variables of interest utilized in the study. It is noteworthy that Pearson's r was used for all correlation analyses. Table 2 shows a strong correlation between boundary control and job autonomy ($r = 0.70, p < .001$). Work engagement is also strongly positively correlated with job autonomy ($r = 0.63, p < .001$) and moderately correlate with boundary control ($r = 0.58, p < .001$). Openness shows the strongest correlation out of the five personality traits with the three variables (job autonomy, work engagement, and boundary control). Openness is weakly correlated with job autonomy ($r = 0.23, p < .001$), very

weakly correlated with boundary control ($r = 0.18, p < .050$), and weakly correlated with work engagement ($r = 0.31, p < .001$). Extraversion and neuroticism have no significant correlation with the three variables. Conscientiousness only shows a very weak correlation with boundary control ($r = 0.16, p < .001$).

Despite this, the correlations provide initial indications for the indirect effect of job autonomy on boundary control and work engagement.

Table 2
Correlations of Variables

Variable	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>
1. Job autonomy								
2. Boundary control	.70**							
3. Work engagement	.63**	.58**						
4. Agreeableness	.08	.03	.15*					
5. Extraversion	.1	.06	.13	.54**				
6. Neuroticism	-.05	.00	-.10	.56**	.46**			
7. Openness	.23**	.18*	.31**	.44**	.42**	.25**		
8. Conscientiousness	.06	.16*	.00	.45**	.42**	.49**	.31**	

Note: $N = 191$

** . The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* . The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Hypothesis 1 proposed that job autonomy is positively associated with work engagement. To test hypothesis 1, a linear regression model with job autonomy as a predictor and work engagement as an outcome variable has been conducted. Table 3 shows that employees who have more autonomy towards their work, are more engaged in their work ($F = 179.62, p < .001$), which supports hypothesis 1.

Table 3

Regression results of the direct effect of job autonomy on work engagement

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<u>Outcome Variable:</u>			
Work engagement			
1. Job autonomy	.61	179.62	<.001

Note: $N = 191$

Hypothesis 2 states that perceived boundary control mediates the positive relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, such as the higher the degree of job autonomy, the higher the perceived boundary control, and the higher consequently employees' work engagement. The results of Table 4 show multiple results which support this hypothesis. First of all, it shows that autonomy is a positive and significant predictor of boundary control ($B = .61, p < .001$). Furthermore, job autonomy is also a positive and significant predictor of work engagement ($B = .47, p < .001$) and boundary control has a positive and significant relationship with work engagement ($B = 0.38, p < .001$). In conclusion, the results also show that the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement is mediated by boundary control since the confidence intervals for the indirect effect do not include 0.

Table 4

Results of boundary control mediating the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
<u>Outcome variable:</u>						
Boundary control						
constant	1.77**	.16	10.79	.000	1.45	2.09
Job autonomy	.61**	.04	16.91	.000	.54	.68
<u>Outcome variable:</u>						
Work engagement						
Constant	1.89**	.17	11.02	.000	1.55	2.23
Job autonomy	.24**	.04	5.26	.000	.15	.32
Boundary control	.38**	.05	7.38	.000	.28	.48
<u>Outcome variable:</u>						
Work engagement						
constant	2.56**	.16	16.18	.000	2.25	2.87
Job autonomy	.47**	.03	13.4	.000	.40	.54
<u>Indirect effect of X on Y</u>						
Boundary control	.23	.04			.15	.31

Note: $N = 191$. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000 *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit

** $p < .001$

* $p < .050$

$R^2 = .37$

5. Discussion

The objective of the study was to analyze how job autonomy predicts work engagement through the indirect effect of perceived boundary control and the moderate influence of the big five personality traits.

The results of the study supported the suggestion that job autonomy predicts work engagement, and that higher autonomy predicts higher perceived boundary control and increased work engagement. Unfortunately, it was not possible to test the moderation hypotheses due to very low internal consistency of the instrument used to measure the personality traits.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This thesis contributes to the current literature on work design in several ways. First, the results support Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT), suggesting that autonomy is a fundamental psychological need employees need in order to take initiative, make choices, and feel in control of their environment. The results are also aligned with Oldham & Hackman's (1976) job characteristic model that job autonomy has a huge influence on the motivation and well-being of employees (2006). Also, Karasek (1979) proposed in his job strain model that autonomy is needed to contribute to employees' well-being. Finally, this thesis provides additional support for JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). by showing the role of autonomy as a resource needed for work engagement.

Secondly, previous studies already found evidence for the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement (Moregson & Humphrey, 2006), as well as job autonomy and boundary control (Thompson & Protas, 2005) and boundary control and work engagement (Kossek et al., 2005). But no prior research has tested the mediation of job autonomy and work engagement via perceived boundary control. Thus, this thesis shows boundary control as an important psychological mechanism responsible for channeling the effect of autonomy into work engagement. As previous research has shown that most people experience low boundary control in general (Mellner et al. 2014), this thesis also contributes to shed light into an important predictor of boundary control, and one that companies and managers can influence: giving employees more autonomy to schedule their work.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing research on job resources and employee outcomes by showing the important role of job autonomy in shaping boundary control and work engagement.

5.2. Practical implications

This thesis also provides practical implications for organizations, such as that organizations should provide job autonomy to employees since it is a valuable job resource that can foster employees' positive psychological states and behaviors in the workplace. This can be done by giving employees more control over their work methods, meaning that employees can decide for themselves which methods they can use to complete their tasks (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), giving them more autonomy in terms of decision-making, meaning employees have the freedom to use their judgment and initiative for doing their work, and giving them more freedom towards their scheduling on how and when the work needs to be done (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Zhang et al., 2020). Managers should also ensure that employees have the necessary resources and support to carry out their tasks autonomously and support them on an individual basis based on their personality traits.

The results further contribute to performance management. Organizations that implement higher job autonomy will have more motivated and engaged employees, resulting in higher levels of performance (Zhang et al., 2020).

Finally, this study provides valuable knowledge for organizations and managers on the importance of job autonomy in shaping employees' work engagement. This also helps to better understand employees' responses to job demands and resources.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Beyond doubt, there are limitations that are noteworthy about the current thesis – especially in terms of the sample. 54% of the sample hold at least a Bachelor's degree, meaning that the majority of the sample is highly educated employees, who are mainly coming from Germany (76.3%). The majority of this study furthermore had children (61%). Furthermore, the study only include people who are working <35h per week and only include participants who had at least an English level of B1. Future research studies should recruit participants who are more

broadly distributed and are origin from different countries. Future studies should also consider participants who obtained a lower degree than Bachelor studies are working less than 35 hours per week and should translate the survey into different languages. By doing this, future studies would increase the generalizability of results.

Furthermore, the study only measured job autonomy as scheduling autonomy. Further studies should include all different types of autonomy in order to receive a broader perspective of job autonomy to investigate if the different types of autonomy influence work engagement similarly or differently. In regard to personality traits, the current thesis used a shortened version of the 44-item big five inventory (BFI-44; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; Rammstedt, 1997). This shortened version was used so that the survey would have a short answering time and thus would be more appealing for participants to answer. To have a broader impression of participants' personality traits and how this influences employees' work engagement, future research should take the BFI-44 into account.

More importantly, the scale turned out to show very poor reliability and the desired moderation statistical tests could not be run. One reason for the low reliability might be that, in this scale, every subscale (for each trait) had two items and in each pair of items, one was reversed scored. As Swain et al. (2008) have mentioned and tested, using reversed items can be a source of misresponse. Misresponse means that participants are answering against their beliefs which can lead to diminished scale reliability (Swain et al., 2008). Misresponse can happen due to several reasons in reversed items. One possibility is "polar opposite misresponse", i.e., inappropriate responding to antonyms which results in a response inconsistency for pairs of items in which the polarity of the core concept differs (Weijters & Baumgartner, 2012). Bentler, Jackson, and Messick (1971) refer to this as "acceptance acquiescence" or "endorsement bias". Future research should consider using a scale to measure personality traits that do not include reversed items.

In terms of boundary control, further studies could investigate boundary management styles deeper and in more detail. To give detailed managerial implications on how people keep their boundaries separated while receiving autonomy and investigate the different boundary management styles in correlation with different personality traits, managers could use this result to get a better understanding of how to support individuals in their boundary management style.

Further research should also divide participants into employees who are working from home and employees who have the possibility of going to an external workspace like an office in order to research if this has an impact on the perceived boundary control. Furthermore can be investigated differences between people with children and without. Because it can be assumed that employees with children might have it more difficult to separate the spheres of private and work life.

5.4. Conclusion

In times of ever-changing technologies that create new ways of working, spheres of private and professional lives are starting to blur intensively. Employees need to be provided with autonomy to support them in managing the overlap between their private and professional lives and to keep healthy boundaries. By doing so, organizations will see increased employees' well-being as a result. The results of this thesis underline the importance of providing job autonomy to employees. Further, this thesis shows that job autonomy does have an impact on boundary control and boundary control in turn positively influences the work engagement of employees. Meaning that organizations that provide a high degree of job autonomy are directly supporting their employees in keeping healthy boundaries between work and personal life which in turn provides employees with work engagement which is also beneficial for the organization as a whole.

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