

# Individual agency and work-related outcomes: Domain-specific engagement strongly mediates the influence of individuals' general goal-engagement tendency

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## Introduction

- Individuals can regulate their own development through their selective engagement of motivational resources toward specific goal pursuits (Heckhausen, Wrosch & Schulz, 2010).
- Motivational Theory of Life-span Development proposes that striving to control one's environment and own development (primary control striving), is a prominent motivational force throughout the life course.
- Among major life domains for goal engagement, the work-domain is a central developmental goal pursuit that has important consequences for other domains of life.
- Individuals' goal engagement entails both a domain-general trait-like tendency for goal engagement and a domain-specific goal engagement which is flexibly and selectively adjusted to situational affordances.
- The present study addresses individual agency and work-related outcomes by examining:**
  - how domain-general, domain-specific and work-specific outcomes change across adulthood
  - the mediating role of work-specific engagement on the relationship between individuals' domain-general goal engagement tendency and work-specific outcomes across adulthood.

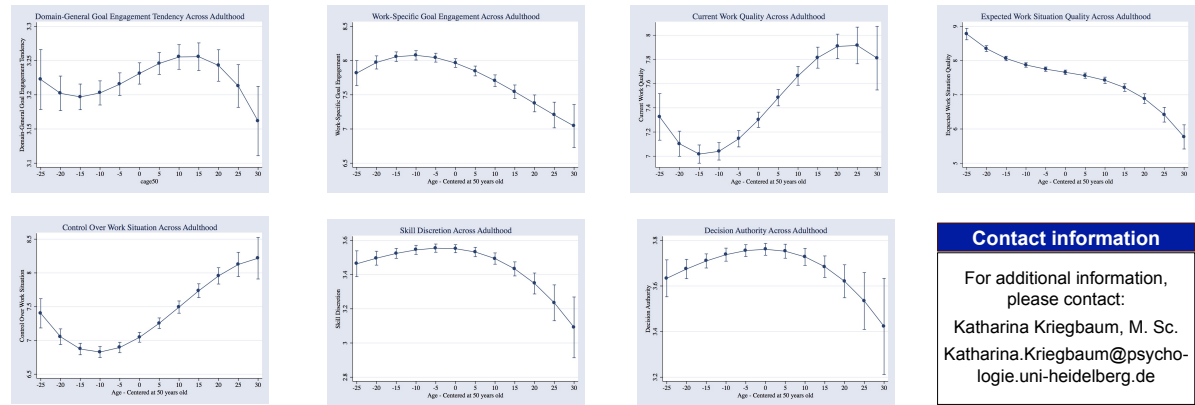
## Methods

- Dataset: Midlife in the United States National Longitudinal Study of Health and Well-Being I (1995) and II (2004/2005) (Ryff et al., 2004)
- Participants:  $n = 4808$  to  $6098$  (depending on the outcome examined). The full MIDUS I sample has a mean age of 46.38 years, is 51.1% female, 90.7% White, an average total household income of \$71,700.98, and education levels of less than high school (11.11%), high school graduate (27.45%), some college attended but no bachelor's degree (30.57%), and a bachelor's degree or higher (30.68%).
- Analyses – multilevel analyses focusing on trajectories across adulthood and the mediating role of work-specific engagement on the relationship between domain-general goal engagement tendency and work-specific outcomes.
- Variables overview:

Variable	Role of variable in the models	Example items
General Goal Engagement Tendency	Independent variable	"I rarely give up on something I am doing, even when things get tough."
Work-specific Goal Engagement	Mediator	"How much thought and effort do you put into your work these days?"
Perceived Work situation quality (current and expected)	Dependent variable	"How would you rate your work situation these days / looking ahead ten years into the future?"
Perceived control over work situation	Dependent variable	"How would you rate the amount of control you have over your work situation these days?"
Skill Discretion	Dependent variable	"How often does your work demand a high level of skill or expertise?"
Decision Authority	Dependent variable	"How often do you have a choice in deciding how you do your tasks at work?"
Gender, Age, Education Level, Job prestige and Household Income	Control variables	

## Results

Figure 1: Age-graded graphs for independent and dependent variables



## Contact information

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Figure 2: General mediation-model depicting individuals' work-specific goal engagement as a mediator of the relationship between their domain-general goal engagement tendency and work-related outcomes

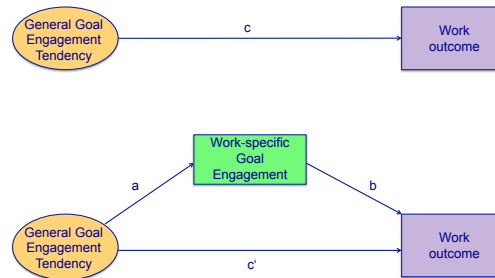


Table 1  
Results from Multi-Level Mediation Analyses

Outcome	n (obs.)	A path	B path	C path	C' path	% Mediation
Current Work Situation Quality	5430 (8142)	.89 (.04)*	.33 (.01)*	.67 (.04)*	.40 (.04)*	40%
Expected Work Situation Quality	5400 (8073)	.89 (.04)*	.27 (.01)*	.75 (.05)*	.55 (.05)*	27%
Control Over Work Situation	5462 (8209)	.89 (.04)*	.37 (.01)*	1.00 (.05)*	.71 (.05)*	29%
Skill Discretion at Work	4721 (6873)	.85 (.04)*	.13 (.00)*	.30 (.02)*	.22 (.02)*	27%
Decision Authority at Work	4722 (6886)	.85 (.04)*	.10 (.00)*	.32 (.02)*	.26 (.02)*	19%

## Discussion / Conclusions

- Age-graded trajectories show a peak in domain-general goal engagement tendency around 65 y.o. while work-specific goal engagement peaks around 40 y.o.. Current work quality increases with age, while expected work quality declines. Control over work generally increases with age while skill discretion and decision authority decline after 50 y.o.
- Mediation analyses indicate that individuals' work-specific goal engagement partially mediates the relationship between their domain-general goal engagement and different work outcomes.
- Individuals exert domain-specific control over their own development through selectively channeling their motivational resources toward different goal pursuits across the lifespan.
- Further research is needed to examine the extent that individuals' domain-specific goal engagement influence important outcomes in other domains of life, in other culture contexts, and the positive/negative effects of cross-domain motivational engagement.