



# Value congruence and teachers' work engagement: The mediating role of autonomous and controlled motivation



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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the importance of value congruence in work engagement and to extend the previous literature by investigating the potential mediating effects of autonomous and controlled motivation in this relationship. The Perceived Value Congruence, Autonomous and Controlled Motivation and Work Engagement scales were administered to 767 teachers in Mainland China. Correlation analysis revealed that value congruence, autonomous and controlled motivation and work engagement were significantly correlated with each other. Furthermore, structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis showed that value congruence exerted its indirect effect on teacher's work engagement through the mediating effect of autonomous and controlled motivation. These findings provide a new perspective to explain the complex association between value congruence and work engagement. The possible explanations and the research limitations are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Work engagement represents a positive and psychologically fulfilling state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This concept has evolved to become a core indicator that reflects the quality of teachers' occupational lives by accounting for significant variance in the prediction of teachers' occupational and organizational outcomes, including task performance, problem solving, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Demerouti & Bakker, 2012). Moreover, work engagement is negatively associated with turnover intention, deviant behavior, and other negative outcomes (Newman, Joseph, & Hulin, 2010; Syaebani & Sobri, 2011). Thus, upsurges of research investigating the factors that predict employee's engagement behavior have been seen in recent years.

Value congruence which refers to the consistency of individual and organizational values was considered to be one of the antecedent variables to employee's work engagement (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Erdogan & Bauer, 2005). In particular, the better fit between individual and organizational values, the greater likelihood of

engagement behavior will be. For instance, Dylag, Jaworek, Karwowski, Kozusznik, and Marek (2013) found that there would be a decrease in work engagement under the condition of perceived discrepancy between individual and organizational values at work. Meanwhile, Sortheix, Dietrich, Chow, and Salmela-Aro (2013) concluded that value congruence were positively associated with work engagement in young adults group. Although the link between value congruence and employee work engagement is evident, few studies have focused on the influence of value congruence on work engagement of teachers, who are engaged in special work that is directly correlated with the overall development of students. Even less attention has been directed toward the intervening mechanisms underlying this relationship.

As an energizing force that induces actions, work motivation may be a variable that mediates the relationship between value congruence and work engagement. Studies shown that individuals with a high level of value congruence were highly motivated and they also demonstrated stronger engagement behaviors in workplace (Martin, 2008; Ren, 2010). However, no existing study has investigated the role of work motivation in the value congruence–work engagement relationship. In consequence, the present study aimed to replicate the relationship between value congruence and work engagement and to extend previous literature by examining a potential mediator, work motivation, to explain the value congruence–work engagement relationship in the teaching profession.

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### 1.1. Work motivation and teachers' engagement

Numerous researches have highlighted the importance of work motivation in fostering employee's engagement. For example, Lamb (1984) and Thomas (2009) proposed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play different roles in work engagement. Intrinsic motivation could have a longer-term and more stable effect on work engagement compared with extrinsic motivation. However, most of the studies examining this relationship were based on a two-pronged theory of motivation: intrinsic–extrinsic work motivation.

In recent years, Deci and Ryan's (2000) developed self-determination theory (SDT) which provides a distinct perspective for understanding work motivation by classifying the reasons of motivating one's behaviors depending on the degree of enjoyment. These researchers distinguished five forms of motivation regulation according to the internalization of external motivators: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation and intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, based on the degree of self-determination, Vansteenkiste, Ryan, and Deci (2008) defined external regulation and introjected regulation as controlled forms of motivation in which a person commits to certain behavior under internal or external pressure. Additionally, the authors treated identified regulation, integrated regulation and intrinsic motivation as autonomous forms of motivation in which a person chooses certain behaviors based on his own willingness. SDT has deepened our understanding of the process through which environmental factors are internalized into intrinsic motivation and also has improved the predictive power of individual behaviors in the work domain (Deci & Ryan, 2004; Meyer & Gagné, 2008).

Within the SDT framework, numerous studies have examined the roles of autonomous motivation and controlled motivation in individuals' engagement across various occupations, such as athletes, police officers, volunteers and industrial employees. These studies showed that highly autonomously motivated employees exhibit more engagement behavior than their controlled motivated counterparts (Haivas, Hofmans, & Pepermans, 2013; Jowett, Hill, Hall, & Curran, 2013; Stoeber, Davis, & Townley, 2013). Teachers require a higher degree of self-determination motivation to cope with their challenging teaching and educational tasks. However, it remains unclear that whether autonomous motivation and controlled motivation have different effects on teachers' engagement.

### 1.2. Teachers' value congruence and work motivation

Extant work has less directly focused on the links among value congruence, autonomous motivation, and controlled motivation. However, an extensive body of literature has established a positive relationship between value congruence and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. For instance, one study of 409 nursing home administrators in Minnesota demonstrated that value congruence could serve as a source of intrinsic motivation for employee efforts in the workplace and that this motivation is likely to be strengthened through value congruence (Ren, 2010). Another study in a sample of 211 military personnel indicated that value congruence had the largest incremental effect in explaining leadership motivation (Clemmons & Fields, 2011). More importantly, Sheldon and Elliot's (1999) self-concordance model of motivation proposed that individuals are likely to persist in goals that are consistent with their values. Thus, one can reasonably assume that value congruence could incrementally contribute to explaining autonomous motivation and controlled motivation.

Additionally, value congruence could promote communication, predictability, attraction and trust according to the person–job fit theory (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Kristof, 1996). These positive characteristics are identified as the antecedents of psychological need

fulfillment (autonomy, competence and relatedness; Cable & Edwards, 2004). Furthermore, basic psychological needs theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996) proposed that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs is critical for generating autonomous motivation and positive work behavior, whereas the lack of basic psychological needs would lead to controlled motivation and negative work behavior. Therefore, it is rational to hypothesize that value congruence may promote the types of positive qualities (e.g., communication, predictability) that are the antecedent conditions for psychological need fulfillment. Subsequently, the promotion of these qualities could exert a significant indirect influence on teachers' work engagement through autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. However, to our knowledge, existing research has not focused on this potential relationship.

### 1.3. The present study

Given the preceding rationale and the available literature addressing the connections among value congruence, autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and work engagement, this study hypothesizes that the relationship between value congruence and teachers' engagement is mediated by autonomous and controlled motivation. Specifically, teachers with higher levels of value congruence have greater autonomous motivation, which in turn serves to enhance their levels of work engagement, whereas teachers with lower levels of value congruence have greater controlled motivation, which in turn leads to a reduction in work engagement. The detailed hypothesized model concerning the mediating roles of autonomous and controlled motivation in the relationship between value congruence and teachers' work engagement is presented in Fig. 1.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants and procedures

Invitations to participate in the study were sent to 826 teachers in the classroom environment by researchers in Mainland China, and 767 valid questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 92.9%. The 767 participants included 269 males (35.1%) and 498 females (64.9%). The age of the participants ranged from 21 years to 56 years, with an average age of 32.04 (SD = 8.63). The teachers' average length of service in school was 11.45 years (SD = 10.20).

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before completing the measures. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were encouraged to keep their

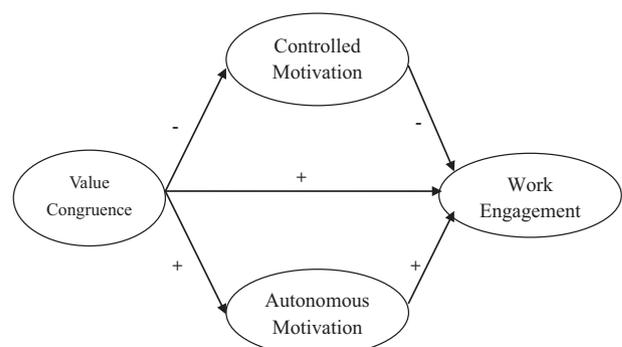


Fig. 1. The hypothesized model concerning about the mediating effects of autonomous and controlled motivation on the association between value congruence and work engagement.

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