

# Passion for Work, Job Satisfaction, and the Mediating Role of Belongingness

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## Abstract

The dualistic model of passion was investigated in a work context. This model states that individuals may develop either a harmonious or obsessive passion for a valued activity. We hypothesized that harmonious passion for work would be positively related to job satisfaction through higher perceptions of belongingness at work. Results from a survey conducted with 278 Norwegian employees showed that belongingness partly mediated the effect from harmonious passion to job satisfaction. Obsessive passion was unrelated to belongingness, and thus, no such mediation was evident for obsessive passion on job satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of harmonious passion for work and the role of belongingness for overall work satisfaction.

*Keywords:* Harmonious and obsessive passion, self-determination theory, psychological needs, job satisfaction, positive psychology.

## Passion, Job Satisfaction, and the Mediating Role of Belongingness

Positive psychology has reached a strong position in mainstream psychology during the last decade (Snyder & Lopez, 2011). Research within the field has focused on optimal psychological functioning and the sources for well-being. One theoretical model associated with positive psychology, which seeks to explain well-being outcomes from engagement in specific activities, is the dualistic

model of passion (Vallerand et al, 2003; Vallerand, 2010). The model suggests that there are two forms of passion for valued activities; harmonious passion and obsessive passion. A number of studies on passion and work-related outcomes have been conducted (e.g. Carbonneau et al., 2008), but little is still known with regard to how passion specifically influences job satisfaction. Advancing knowledge in this field could help explain why some individuals are more satisfied with work than others. Moreover, such research is needed to identify

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the psychological processes which mediate the effects of passion on job satisfaction. The scope of the present study was to investigate the role of belongingness (Baumesiter & Leary, 1995) at work in the relationship between passion and job satisfaction, which recently has been shown to impact on how passion generates positive emotions in sport activities (Stenseng, Forest, & Curran, 2015).

### The dualistic model of passion

Vallerand and colleagues (2003, 2006, 2007, 2008) have introduced a dualistic model of passion towards activities. Passion is defined as a strong inclination towards an activity that an individual likes, considers important, and invests considerable time and energy in. According to the model, passionate activities are internalized into the self, resulting in the activity becoming part of the individual's identity. Passion can take two different forms, depending on how the individual internalizes the activity. Harmonious passion originates from an autonomous internalization of the activity and involves the performance of an activity in a self-determined manner (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vallerand et al., 2003), in concordance with one's personal values and goals. The passionate activity does not take an overbearing place in the individual's identity and harmonizes with other aspects of life. In contrast, obsessive passion is believed to emerge from a controlled internalization of the activity, where the individual experiences external or internal pressure to perform the activity (Vallerand et al., 2003) and the passionate activity takes an overbearing place in the person's identity.

Research on the dualistic model of passion supports the conceptualizations of harmonious and obsessive passion. The Passion Scale developed by Vallerand and colleagues (2003) has been found to have high levels of internal consistency, in addition to high external, discriminant, construct and predictive validity. Both types of passion have also been found to correlate positively with time and energy investment in activities, inclusion of the activity in the self and activity valuation, including perceptions of the activity as a passion. (For a more extensive review, see Vallerand, 2015).

The Dualistic Model of Passion differs from other motivational concepts, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Vallerand and colleagues (2003),

intrinsically motivated activities are typically not seen as being internalized into the person's identity. In addition, harmonious passion has been found to predict changes in positive affect over and above intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vallerand et al., 2003).

### Passion and job satisfaction

The passion model has mostly been studied in relation to sports and leisure activities, but the model also lends itself well to a work context (Vallerand and Houliort, 2003). While the two passion constructs appear to share some similarities with other work-related concepts, such as workaholism (Spence & Robbins, 1992) and organizational commitment, a study by Houliort and colleagues (2011) found that harmonious passion predicted the same outcomes over and above the different dimensions of workaholism and organizational commitment. These findings indicate that the passion model is a valuable addition to the work engagement and organizational literature as it can be empirically differentiated from related constructs. In addition, the passion construct appears more parsimonious, as it simultaneously covers positive and negative aspects related to work.

Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet and Guay (2008) conducted a study of passion among teachers, where passion and different work outcomes were measured twice over a three-month period. The authors found that harmonious passion correlated positively with job satisfaction three months later, whereas obsessive passion was uncorrelated with job satisfaction. The authors also investigated the causal direction between passion and job satisfaction. Harmonious passion for work predicted job satisfaction, whereas job satisfaction did not predict either harmonious or obsessive passion. Relatedly, Lavigne, Forest and Crevier-Braud (2010) conducted a longitudinal and a cross-sectional study on the effects of passion in relation to burnout. The results from both studies showed that harmonious passion was related to higher levels of flow experiences, which appeared to protect against the experience of burnout symptoms. In a recent study by Houliort and colleagues (2014, study 2) obsessive passion was positively related to turnover intentions among teachers, while harmonious passion was negatively related to turnover intentions. These findings constitute a general pattern, in which harmonious and obsessive passion have been

linked to different outcomes. For example, studies have shown that harmonious passion is related to positive emotions during and after activity engagement (Mageau & Vallerand, 2007; Vallerand et al., 2007; Wang, Khoo, Liu, & Divakaran, 2008), while obsessive passion is related to negative affect (Rousseau & Vallerand, 2008; Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand et al., 2006) and negative subjective well-being (Vallerand et al., 2007). The latter form of passion has also been related to negative emotions when the individual is prevented from performing the passionate activity (Vallerand et al., 2003).

As apparent from the studies above, having a passionate interest for work does not in itself guarantee that the person will experience positive emotional outcomes at work. Carbonneau and colleagues (2008) have explicitly requested more research on the psychological processes through which passion is linked to job satisfaction. Increased knowledge about the factors through which passion increases or restricts satisfaction with work could aid employers in their efforts to increase employees' job motivation and performance. This knowledge could also benefit the employee directly.

Job satisfaction, which is often defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1300), is considered to be an important variable for both the individual employee and the organization. Faragher, Cass and Cooper (2005) performed a meta-analysis of 485 studies on job satisfaction, finding significant associations between job satisfaction and good mental and physical health, including high self-esteem, and lack of depression, anxiety and burnout. Other researchers have found that high and low job satisfaction can result in positive and negative mood outside the workplace, through a so-called spillover effect (Ilies, Wilson & Wagner, 2009). In addition to health related outcomes, job satisfaction has also been shown to be among the strongest correlates of job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001).

In light of the above, it seems relevant to investigate the relationship between passion and job satisfaction in more detail. Specifically, more knowledge is needed on why individuals who are harmoniously or obsessively passionate about their work differ in terms of experienced satisfaction with work. One explanation could be that the two forms of passion influence the quality of interpersonal relationships at work.

## The mediational role of belongingness

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a macro-theory concerning human motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT, humans are inherently directed towards activities that satisfy psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which in turn promotes optimal psychological growth and well-being in various aspects of life, including work. Baumeister and Leary (1995) studied the literature on attachment and social relations and concluded that positive, social relations appear to be an important factor for individuals' health and well-being; to the extent that humans appear to have an innate and universal need for belongingness. Sheldon, Elliot, Kim and Kasser (2001) have provided important support for the notion that relatedness is a universal human need. The authors studied psychological needs among both American and South Korean students, and found that relatedness was among the highest rated needs. Belongingness has empirically been shown to be conducive to optimal psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and a number of studies support the role of belongingness in facilitating positive emotions in a variety of work settings. For example, Lynch, Plant and Ryan (2005) found a significant positive effect of belongingness on job satisfaction among staff in a psychiatric hospital, while Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) obtained similar results among Norwegian teachers. These findings reflect a broader consensus that positive, secure and reciprocal social bonds are conducive to job satisfaction, while lack of social support is detrimental to job satisfaction.

The theoretical foundation behind the passion model suggests that harmonious and obsessive passion will have different effects on the quality of interpersonal relationships. Harmonious passion should promote closer and more meaningful relationships through a more positive and autonomous engagement in the activity. Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions promote a broadening of the mindset and the self, which increases the perceived similarities with others (Johnson & Fredrickson, 2005) and promotes new and stronger social bonds. While someone who is harmoniously passionate about an activity can choose to freely engage and disengage from the activity, someone who is obsessively passionate will feel compelled to engage in the activity, causing them to ruminate or think about

the activity when not engaging in it (Ratelle et al., 2004; Vallerand et al., 2003). The obsessive passion for work makes the activity hard to regulate and difficult to incorporate with other aspects of work, such as interpersonal relationships, as this interferes with the passionate activity. This is reflected in empirical findings in which obsessive passion has been related to interpersonal and life domain conflicts (Séguin-Levesque et al., 2003; Stenseng, 2008; Stenseng, Haugen, Torstveit & Høigaard, 2015; Vallerand et al., 2008).

## The present study

In the present study, we aimed at investigating whether harmonious passion and obsessive passion were differently associated with job satisfaction, and to what extent belongingness would mediate the relationship between the two forms of passion and job satisfaction. First, since previous studies on passion have shown that harmonious passion is linked to adaptive psychological functioning and positive psychological outcomes, we expected harmonious passion to be more strongly and positively related to job satisfaction compared to obsessive passion. Second, considering the broad consensus that social support is conducive to job satisfaction, we expected belongingness to affect job satisfaction positively. Third, harmonious passion should promote closer and more meaningful relationships through a more positive and autonomous engagement in the activity, and thereby be more positively related to belongingness compared to obsessive passion. Finally, we expected belongingness to mediate the effect from harmonious passion onto job satisfaction, through the positive effect that harmonious passion has on belongingness, and the latter's effect on job satisfaction.

## Methods

### Participants

A total of 278 employees participated in the study (51.7% men, 48.3% women). The sample was mainly concentrated around the age groups of 40 to 49 years (27.3 %) and 50 to 59 years (29.9 %). Only 8.9 % of the respondents were in the lowest age group, (20 to 29 years), while 14.4 % were in the highest age group (60 to 69 years). Average number of work hours was reported to be around 38 to 45 hours a week

(40.6 %). The majority reported having minimum 5 years of higher education from college or university (55.4 %). The work titles that were most frequently reported were consultant for the first company and researcher for the second company.

### Procedure

The present study was part of a larger study on passion. Letters with information about the study, including a link to our web-based questionnaire, were sent by e-mail to HR-executives in different Norwegian companies. Two companies - one in the field of insurance and the other in research and education - chose to participate in the study. The HR-executives sent an e-mail to their employees, requesting them to participate in the study. As they could not provide information about the total number of employees that received the e-mails, we are unable to determine an exact response rate. Based on the total number of employees in the two organizations, a total response rate of about 40% is a fair approximation. The employees were informed about their anonymity and voluntary participation.

### Measures

**The Passion Scale.** The Passion Scale is a 16-item questionnaire developed by Vallerand and colleagues (2003) to measure passionate interest towards an activity. It consists of two subscales measuring harmonious passion and obsessive passion. The harmonious passion subscale includes the statement: "My work is in harmony with the other activities in my life". The obsessive passion subscale includes the statement: "I have difficulties controlling my urge to do my work." Respondents were asked to give their responses on a seven point scale (1 = *completely disagree*; 7 = *completely agree*). Cronbach alphas for harmonious passion and obsessive passion were .86 and .81, respectively.

**Belongingness at Work.** The relatedness dimension of the Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004) was used to measure belongingness in the work setting. This dimension consists of eight items, such as "I get along with people at work". Responses were made on a seven point response scale ranging from *completely disagree* (1) to *completely agree* (7). Alpha for the construct was .79.

**Job Satisfaction Index.** Job satisfaction was measured by selecting six statements from Brayfield and Rothe’s (1951) 19-item Job Satisfaction Index, which was done to shorten the questionnaire. This scale has often been used in similar short versions (Bono & Judge, 2003; Judge, Bono & Locke, 2000; Ozer, 2008). One of the included statements were: "I am satisfied with my job for the time being". The respondents were instructed to give their answers on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale, and alpha was .89.

## Results

Preliminary analyses were conducted to investigate the frequency distributions of the scales. Normality was assessed by kurtosis and skewness tests. Both tests showed distributional normality for the variables used in the SEM analysis, within the range of -1.5 to +1.5. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables are reported in Table 1.

Path analyses were performed to assess the mediational effect hypothesized in the introduction. AMOS 16.0 was used to estimate path coefficients and model fit indices. Due to the large number of items in the model, we created parcels for the passion construct and the be-

longingness construct by aggregating the item with largest loading on a factor with the item with the smallest loading (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). The data fit the measurement model well: NFI > .90, CFI > .95, RMSEA > .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The main benefit of path analyses is that the relations between data become clearer than when applying regression analyses, since the former takes consideration of the residual variables and the interrelated correlations between endogenous and exogenous variables (Kline, 1998). Harmonious passion and obsessive passion were defined as exogenous variables, while belongingness and job satisfaction were defined as endogenous variables. The belongingness construct was placed as an intermediate variable between passion and work satisfaction. This made it possible to test for their mediational impact on the effect from passion toward satisfaction at work. Covariates were freed between the passion dimensions and the belongingness residuals. Initial t-tests showed some differences between the two companies with regard to the endogenous variables. However, when controlled for in our analyses, these differences did not significantly affect the path analyses. Figure 1 shows the model and the results from the path analysis, after non-significant path coefficients were removed. Fit indices showed that the mod-

Table 1. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations between the Study’s Variables

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Age	-	-	-							
2. Gender	-	-	.25**	-						
3. Work hours	-	-	-.04	-.27**	-					
4. Education	-	-	-.21**	.11	.24**	-				
5. Harmonious P.	4.28	1.09	-.02	-.11	.30**	.11	-			
6. Obsessive P.	2.52	1.07	.01	-.20**	.48**	.13*	.28**	-		
7. Belongingness	5.63	0.85	.04	-.01	.08	-.12	.33**	.02	-	
8. Job sat.	4.10	0.77	.16**	-.11	.17**	-.11	.61**	.18**	.36**	-

Note. Alpha coefficients on the diagonal. Demographic variables were coded in categories. Gender was dummy coded (0 = men, 1 = women). N= 257-278

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

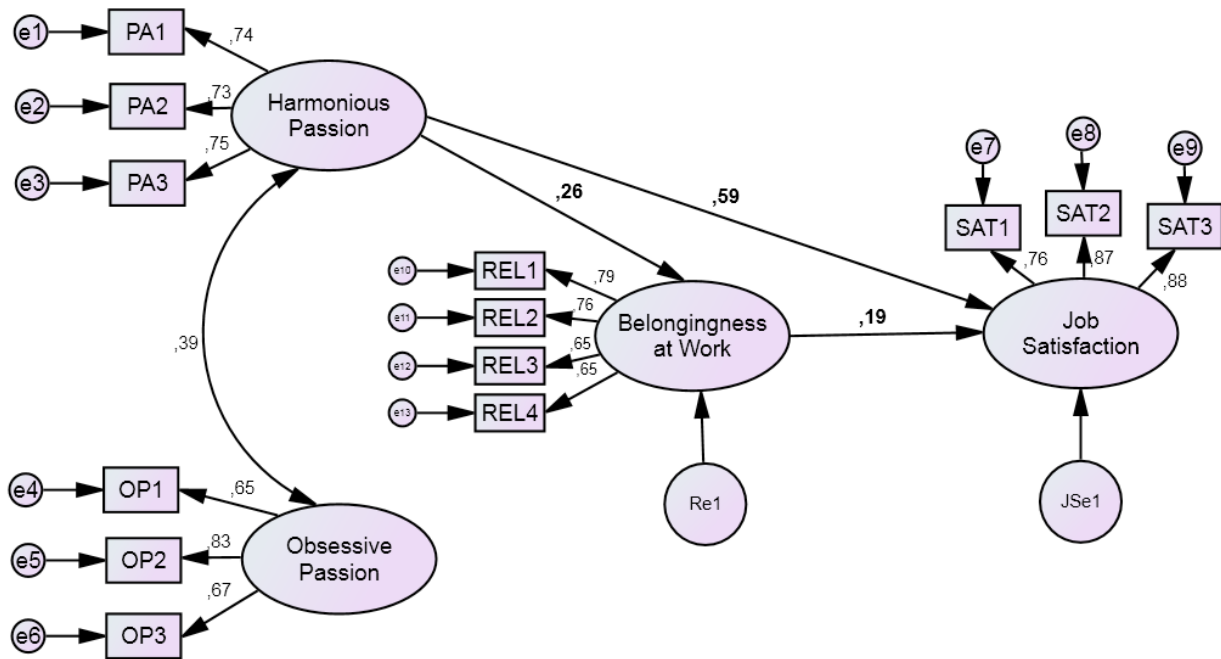


Figure 1. Structural equation model involving passion, belongingness at work, and job satisfaction. Path values are standardized regression coefficients. Items constituting the passion and the emotion constructs are parcels. All shown paths significant on the .01-level. Non-significant paths are omitted from the figure.

el had acceptable fit with the data,  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 61$ ) = 147.71, CFI = .94, NFI = .90, RMSEA = .072.

Inspections of the direct effects in the model showed that harmonious passion had a positive effect on belongingness ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Harmonious passion also had a direct positive effect on job satisfaction ( $\beta = .59$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Obsessive passion, on the other hand, had no significant effects on the endogenous variables. Belongingness had a significant direct effect on job satisfaction ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .002$ ).

The mediational impact of belongingness at work in the model was then tested (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). Since the path analysis showed that there was a direct effect of harmonious passion towards job satisfaction beyond the belongingness measure, only a partial mediational role of belongingness could be obtained. More specifically, when the belongingness construct was eliminated from the model, the direct effect from passion towards job satisfaction was .68 ( $p < .001$ ). When including belongingness in the model the direct effect was substantially reduced, thereby indicating partial mediation from the intermediate variables in the model. The indirect effect of belongingness at work on the effect from harmonious passion and towards job satisfaction was .17 ( $p < .05$ ) That is, due to

the indirect (mediated) effect of belongingness on job satisfaction, when belongingness goes up by 1 standard deviation, job satisfaction goes up by .17 standard deviations. This is in addition to any direct (unmediated) effect in the model.

To further validate the results of the present study, an alternative model was tested. In this model, harmonious passion and obsessive passion were specified as the mediating variables between belongingness and job satisfaction. Results of the path analysis revealed poor fit of the model to the data:  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 61$ ) = 177.41, CFI = .92, NFI = .88, RMSEA = .082, hence indicating a worse model fit than for the proposed model.

In sum, the path analyses showed that belongingness at work has explanatory relevance in the relationship between harmonious passion for work and job satisfaction.

## Discussion

Most findings in the present study were in line with the assumptions. First, and in accordance with previous studies (Lavigne et al., 2010), we found that harmonious passion was strongly related to job satisfaction. Second, experiencing belongingness at work was related to higher job

satisfaction. Third, while harmonious passion was positively related to belongingness, obsessive passion was unrelated to this construct. It seems to be a prerequisite to have a harmonious passion towards one's work in order to experience belongingness at work. Finally, experiencing belongingness at work partially mediated the effect from harmonious passion towards job satisfaction. This shows that harmonious passion towards work is likely to facilitate a sense of belongingness, thereby affecting job satisfaction in a positive direction.

### **The passion-job satisfaction relationship**

The present findings have several implications for the passion model when it is applied in a work context. Harmonious passion and obsessive passion for work were positively correlated in our study, as they also are in other studies on passion (e.g. Forest, Mageau, Sarrazin & Morin, 2011; Philippe et al., 2010). As noted in our introduction, passion is defined as a strong inclination towards an activity that the individual likes, spends considerable time doing and experiences as important. The positive correlation between harmonious and obsessive passion refers to the shared definition of passion. The difference in these two terms relates to whether an activity is internalized in an autonomous or controlled form into one's identity. This explains why the two types of passion can be correlated positively while also being related to different outcomes. What this study demonstrates, then, is that simply being passionate about one's work does not guarantee positive emotional outcomes at work. More specifically, the way in which the individual has internalized the activity influences activity engagement in such a way that it can be either beneficial or detrimental to the feeling of belongingness at work. And in line with other studies, respondents in our study who felt a stronger sense of belongingness were more satisfied with work.

### **The mediating role of belongingness**

In this study, belongingness was found to partially mediate the harmonious passion- job satisfaction relationship. Obsessive passion was unrelated to belongingness and job satisfaction. This is in line with the theoretical arguments presented earlier in the paper. Our findings suggest that passion could play a role in triggering the

broadening and narrowing processes related to Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory. Support for this notion can also be found in a series of studies by Philippe and colleagues' (2010), who looked at the connection between passion and interpersonal relationships, based on ratings by external observers. In one study, basketball players who had higher levels of harmonious passion scored higher on coaches' ratings of the players' interpersonal closeness with teammates. Another study showed similar results among students enrolled in a management program. This suggests that individuals who are harmoniously passionate about their work display overt positive behaviors towards their coworkers, such as smiling more or initiating social contact. When this behavior is reciprocated, it improves their feeling of belongingness. While the design of our study did not enable us to test this hypothesis, it does offer a possible explanation for why belongingness mediated part the effect of harmonious passion unto job satisfaction, while not being related to obsessive passion.

While our study findings confirmed our theoretical predictions, the generalizability of the findings could differ depending on context. It is possible that variables such as passion, belongingness and job satisfaction have different meanings and interactions in countries with a more collectivistic (e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991) or performance-oriented culture.

The results from our study suggest that the model represents a valuable contribution to the work and organizational literature. As we mentioned earlier, job satisfaction has important implications both on an individual level (e.g. increased mental and physical health) and on an organizational level (e.g. increased job performance). Understanding more about the relationship between passion and job satisfaction is therefore important, both for practical and theoretical purposes. Theoretically, our study contributes to the understanding of why passion for work can have different consequences for well-being at work (i.e. through facilitating or thwarting the sense of belongingness at work). This knowledge has previously been lacking from the organizational literature. Our study thus answers Carbonneau and colleagues' (2008) call for more research on the psychological processes through which passion is linked to job satisfaction. Our study also tested the passion model in a Norwegian work setting. Considering the possible wider implications of our finding, our study could inspire more research on the topic of passion and belongingness at work.

For example, as team work and cooperation becomes increasingly important in contemporary organizations, it would be interesting to explore whether high levels of obsessive passion could negatively influence team unity and productivity through a reduced sense of belongingness.

### Facilitating harmonious passion

Vallerand and Houliort (2003) have argued that work environments should be organized to facilitate harmonious passion. Work by Mageau et al. (2009) suggests that social environments that are autonomy-supportive can promote the emergence of harmonious passion. Examples include providing employees with opportunities to share their opinions and influence their own work tasks. On the other hand, reward systems that are based on performance could limit employees' experience of autonomy, and instead facilitate a controlled internalization of work (Gagné & Forest, 2008). Reward systems could also hinder the development of passion in general, by reducing intrinsic motivation for work. This argument is supported by Deci, Koestner and Ryan's (1999) meta-analysis of 128 studies, which found that external rewards meant to control behavior, undermined intrinsic motivation for the behavior.

Managers' leadership style could also affect the development of harmonious and obsessive passion. Bono and Judge (2003, study 2) found that transformational leadership, defined as a visionary, charismatic and inspirational leadership style, predicted controlled motivation negatively among students who watched a video with a leader displaying different leadership styles. Furthermore, organizations could map individuals' internalization style using scales such as Global Motivation Scale (Guay et al., 2003) or General Causality Orientations Scale (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The former measures different types of internal and external motivation while the latter measures the strength of different motivational orientations within an individual, including autonomous and controlled orientations. Organizations could use such scales to map whether the work environment is facilitating internal or external motivations among the employees, and, if necessary, implement relevant strategies or actions.

### Limitations and future research

There are several limitations to our study. Firstly, although we have outlined some causal relationships based on theoretical elaborations, the cross-sectional nature of our study restricts the conclusions regarding causes and outcomes. Additional longitudinal and experimental designs are necessary to draw any inferences regarding the causality suggested in our study model. Secondly, self-reported survey questionnaires, as employed in our study, make it difficult to rule out numerous alternative explanations for the results (i.e., priming, consistency, reverse causality). Future research would benefit from other methods of data collection (e.g., qualitative interviews) to confirm the pattern of relationships observed in the current study. Thirdly, mean scores on the passion subscales indicated that the respondents in our study were moderately passionate (harmoniously) about their work. It would perhaps be more theoretically interesting to apply the passion model to a work context where people have higher levels of harmonious or obsessive passion, such as leaders, artists, writers or entrepreneurs.

## Conclusion

The dualistic model of passion has mainly been studied in relation to sports and leisure activities. The results from our study suggest that the model represents a relevant and important contribution to the work and organizational literature, as it enhances the understanding of why passion for work can have different consequences for well-being at work.

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