

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Attention Regulation, Work-Related Flow, and Psychological Well-Being: A Comparative Study of Entrepreneurs and Salaried Employees

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Abstract: *Background:* Entrepreneurs and salaried employees differ in autonomy, job structures, and psychological demands, potentially shaping their cognitive functioning and well-being. *Aim:* To compare attention regulation, work-related flow, and psychological well-being between entrepreneurs and salaried employees. *Methods:* This comparative study was conducted on 200 participants (100 entrepreneurs, 100 salaried employees) using purposive sampling. Standardized tools assessed attention regulation (Stroop Test), work-related flow (WOLF), psychological well-being (Ryff's PWB). Independent t-tests and correlational analyses were performed. *Results:* Salaried employees reported significantly higher levels of attention regulation ($M = 594.8$) compared to entrepreneurs ($M = 581.0$; $t = 2.23$, $p = 0.028$). In contrast, entrepreneurs exhibited significantly greater work-related flow ($M = 72.7$ vs. 65.5 ; $t = 5.70$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological well-being ($M = 194.9$ vs. 180.5 ; $t = 5.45$, $p < 0.001$). Correlation analyses revealed no significant associations among attention regulation, work-related flow, and psychological well-being in either group. Among entrepreneurs, meaning in life was also included and showed no significant correlations with other variables. *Conclusion:* The findings suggest that salaried employees may possess stronger attentional regulation skills, whereas entrepreneurs experience higher levels of work engagement and psychological well-being. These differences highlight the role of occupational context in shaping cognitive-emotional resources and overall well-being.

Keywords: Entrepreneurs, salaried employees, attention regulation, work-related flow, psychological well-being

INTRODUCTION

People who aspire to self-employment must face the fact that the path is frequently a roller coaster because entrepreneurship is a very dynamic and unpredictable endeavour [1,2]. Although the ride's dips are marked by expected hardship, unanticipated difficulties, and even failure [3,4], the peaks provide alluring benefits like financial success, personal freedom, and fulfilling employment [5,6]. According to scholars, the result of navigating these highs and lows is increasingly combined into the comprehensive idea of entrepreneurs' subjective well-being, which includes the presence of positive affect, the absence of negative affect, and the feeling of happiness or contentment. This idea reflects living life in a positive manner [7]. Numerous facets of subjective well-being have already been shown to be important motivators for evaluating opportunities, being creative, taking risks, and exerting effort on future-focused entrepreneurial tasks [8,9]. Higher levels of job and life satisfaction, which are essential for wellbeing, can also result from entrepreneurship [10,11].

Bakker [12] introduced the notion of flow to the workplace, based on the theory of Csikszentmihalyi et al. [13]. They described work-related flow experiences as workers' brief peak experiences at work that are marked by intrinsic drive, work enjoyment, and

absorption. Activating the flow state is crucial for both organisational and individual development because workers in this condition frequently report higher levels of job satisfaction, performance, and well-being. Sheldon [14] The person-artifact-task model and the flow state model both claim that internal drive, a balance between skill and difficulty, and unambiguous feedback regarding goal progress are the core ideas of flow antecedents.[15,16]

All of these theories contend that only difficult jobs may induce flow, therefore before workers can completely commit to meeting these demands, they must first regain their psychological reserves. People must psychologically disengage from their work during nonworking hours in order to regain their psychological energies.[17]

In today's fast-paced and demanding professional landscape, understanding the psychological factors that contribute to optimal functioning and well-being in the workplace has become increasingly important. As the nature of work continues to evolve, distinct differences have emerged between salaried employees and entrepreneurs, not only in their roles and responsibilities but also in how they experience and manage psychological processes.

This comparative study seeks to explore the complex interplay among attention regulation, work-related flow, and meaningfulness in life, and how these factors collectively influence psychological well-being.

Methods

This Comparative study was done including 200 participants (100 entrepreneurs, 100 salaried

employees) aged ≥ 18 years, through purposive sampling. Instruments tools used were: Stroop Color and Word Test, Work-Related Flow, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales. Ethical clearance obtained. Structured questionnaires were distributed to eligible participants who provided consent. Data analyzed using t-tests and correlations.

RESULT:

The descriptive analysis indicated notable differences between salaried employees and entrepreneurs across the study variables. Salaried employees demonstrated higher levels of attention regulation ($M = 594.8$) compared to entrepreneurs ($M = 581.0$). In contrast, entrepreneurs reported higher scores in both work-related flow ($M = 72.7$) and psychological well-being ($M = 194.9$), relative to their salaried counterparts ($M = 65.5$ and $M = 180.5$, respectively). (Table 1 & 2)

Correlation analysis within the salaried group revealed no significant associations among the study variables. Attention regulation showed only a marginal positive relationship with work-related flow ($r = 0.191$, $p = 0.057$), while its associations with psychological well-being were negligible ($r = 0.039$, $p = 0.692$). Similarly, work-related flow did not demonstrate a significant relationship with psychological well-being ($r = -0.113$, $p = 0.262$). (Table 3)

Among entrepreneurs, the pattern was similar, with no significant correlations observed among attention regulation, work-related flow, meaning in life, and psychological well-being. Attention regulation was not significantly related to work-related flow ($r = -0.018$, $p = 0.862$), meaning in life ($r = -0.130$, $p = 0.198$), or psychological well-being ($r = 0.096$, $p = 0.338$). Furthermore, work-related flow showed weak, non-significant associations with meaning in life ($r = 0.073$, $p = 0.473$) and psychological well-being ($r = -0.085$, $p = 0.400$). A similarly weak association was found between meaning in life and psychological well-being ($r = 0.095$, $p = 0.342$). (Table 4)

Group comparisons using independent-samples t-tests revealed statistically significant differences between salaried employees and entrepreneurs. Salaried employees reported significantly higher attention regulation than entrepreneurs ($t = 2.23$, $p = 0.028$). In contrast, entrepreneurs exhibited significantly higher levels of work-related flow ($t = 5.70$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological well-being ($t = 5.45$, $p < 0.001$). (Table 5)

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables among salaried employees (n = 100)

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Attention Regulation	594.8	593.7	44.61	469.0	692.6
Work-Related Flow	65.5	65.8	8.34	39.1	95.8
Psychological Well-Being	180.5	179.1	20.78	126.1	231.5

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of study variables among entrepreneurs (n = 100)

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Attention Regulation	581.0	583.8	42.92	493.7	702.4
Work-Related Flow	72.7	72.4	6.19	57.1	87.3
Psychological Well-Being	194.9	196.3	17.55	157.5	242.4

Table 3. Correlation matrix among study variables in salaried employees (n = 100)

Q	Attention Regulation	Work-Related Flow	Psychological Well-Being
Attention Regulation	—	0.191 ($p = 0.057$)	0.039 ($p = 0.692$)
Work-Related Flow	0.191 ($p = 0.057$)	—	-0.113 ($p = 0.262$)
Psychological Well-Being	0.039 ($p = 0.692$)	-0.113 ($p = 0.262$)	—

Table 4. Correlation matrix among study variables in entrepreneurs (n = 100)

Variables	Attention Regulation	Work-Related Flow	Meaning in Life	Psychological Well-Being
Attention Regulation	—	-0.018 (p = 0.862)	-0.130 (p = 0.198)	0.096 (p = 0.338)
Work-Related Flow	-0.018 (p = 0.862)	—	0.073 (p = 0.473)	-0.085 (p = 0.400)
Psychological Well-Being	0.096 (p = 0.338)	-0.085 (p = 0.400)	0.095 (p = 0.342)	—

Table 5. Independent samples t-test comparing salaried employees and entrepreneurs

Variable	Salaried (M ± SD)	Entrepreneurs (M ± SD)	t-value	p-value
Attention Regulation	594.8 ± 40.5	581.0 ± 42.9	2.23	0.028
Work-Related Flow	65.5 ± 5.8	72.7 ± 6.2	5.70	<0.001
Psychological Well-Being	180.5 ± 16.5	194.9 ± 17.6	5.45	<0.001

DISCUSSION

Salaried employees demonstrated significantly better attention regulation than entrepreneurs ($p = 0.028$). Although paid individuals' organised work environments offer stability, their limited autonomy and strict timetables may limit their cognitive flexibility. Employees on salaries might be more dependent on externally enforced routines, which could account for their comparatively poorer performance on activities requiring attention regulation.

Self-regulation encompasses not only the willpower to work hard towards one's goals but also the flexibility to work intelligently by tackling them in a practical manner. In order to clarify these seemingly incompatible facets of self-regulation, Diefendorff and Lord [18] stated that while self-regulation sometimes entails people focussing on a task until it is finished, other times it necessitates disengaging from a task when even the best efforts result in failure.

Entrepreneurs may exercise self-regulation by taking initiative to seize environmental opportunities, but they may also exercise caution and postpone commitments until more crucial objectives have been met or circumstances are more favourable. Lastly, self-regulation can include people's ability to focus on one objective and disregard all others, or it can feature their flexibility in dividing their attention between two or more goals.[18] The ability to respond to internal situations in a flexible and context-sensitive way while acting in numerous goal settings is the key to effective self-regulation.[19]

Self-efficacious workers show reduced learnt helplessness, according to Masoom et al. In a similar vein, workers with strong self-efficacy say they feel less helpless. Employee views of felt powerlessness and learnt helplessness are positively correlated. Self-

efficacy reduces the relationship between perceived powerlessness and learnt helplessness. Therefore, it is discovered that the two activation and exertion clusters causing the experience of control failure are learnt helplessness and perceived powerlessness. Improving employees' self-efficacy can reduce the impact of these clusters in the workplace. [20]

Psychological well-being was also significantly greater among entrepreneurs ($p < 0.001$). Payroll positions provide stability and financial security, but they can also come with pressures like little autonomy, repetitive work, or pressure from superiors. The greater autonomy, personal fulfillment, and direct impact from entrepreneurial work likely contribute to this higher level of psychological well-being. No significant determinants of well-being among paid workers were found by regression analysis, underscoring the possible impact of workplace support, leadership style, and organisational atmosphere on mental health. According to a study by Jung et al., [21] businesses should have a vision that allows people to grow and evolve while also providing for their physical and spiritual well-being. Employees and businesses alike can consider self-acceptance as a way to reduce work and family stress. Second, life satisfaction is negatively impacted by work and family obligations. Employees must think and act positively and not negatively when taking on work and family responsibilities. To reduce role conflicts, employees must communicate positively both at work and at home.

Third, job load and life satisfaction operate as mediators between employment instability and these factors. The worker who recognised job insecurity was content with life despite having a heavy workload: Employees that are overworked may be less likely to keep their jobs. Low job instability may result in a lower level of life satisfaction for the employee. Life satisfaction is

negatively impacted by both job burden and employment instability, which reduces uncertainty about job instability. The job burden of a group experiencing job instability might resolve the issue. Nowadays, businesses don't provide crucial tasks to temporary or part-time employees: Employees who are able to shift their social standing can be more productive by taking on more work. The affirmative effect will be examined in future research.

Fourth, family load mediated life satisfaction and meaning in life, while job burden mediated environmental mastery and life satisfaction. The most significant positive aspect of life is self-acceptance, and load issues can reduce life happiness by affecting not only environmental mastery but also life purpose. To have a positive attitude towards them, the employees will look back on their own. Businesses will assist workers in adopting a positive outlook in order to reduce the workload. [21]

The degree of work-related flow was higher among entrepreneurs ($p < 0.001$). The independence and internal drive that come with self-directed labour are probably the causes of this. On the other hand, despite the advantages of job security and well defined responsibilities, salaried employees could have a harder time experiencing flow because of disruptions, hierarchical restrictions, and a lack of discretion over task selection. Interestingly, extraversion and flow were shown to be negatively correlated among salaried professionals ($r = -0.248$, $p = 0.013$), suggesting that more introverted people may be better able to focus and immerse themselves in controlled environments.

According to Mateja et al., feeling in flow at work strengthens the link between subjective well-being and work-life balance satisfaction. We provide practical entrepreneurs with insights into how to attain greater levels of well-being and improved growth based on our findings. In particular, we stress the benefits of attaining work-life balance since it affects an entrepreneur's subjective well-being and indirectly influences business growth. In addition to conventional economic metrics, stakeholders in entrepreneurial ecosystems should accept subjective well-being as a significant predictor of results. [22]

Zubair et al. demonstrated that psychological capital and work-related flow were important indicators of employee creativity. Previous research bakker et al. 2008[12]; Gardner et al. 2005[23]; Lyubomirsky et al. 2006[24]; Rego et al. 2012[25]; Tierney and Farmer 2004[26]; Walumbwa et al. 2010[27]; Yammarino et al. 2008[28]) has provided substantial and extensive support for this trend, highlighting the critical role that positive psychological states and internal drive play in initiating and maintaining innovative and resourceful work behaviour. Previous studies have demonstrated that cognitive and emotive involvement in terms of flow

is a strong predictor of creative and productive performance in organisational settings [29,30]

In a similar vein, Aier,[31] Hong, and Nam et al. [32] discovered that Flow influences Entrepreneurial Satisfaction (ES) and Life Satisfaction (LS) directly, as well as indirectly through ES. The results indicated that the relationship between Flow and LS may be influenced by ES, an attitudinal trait that is strongly associated with a person's work profile. This demonstrates that people who have a high sense of self-worth are more likely to be content in both their personal and professional lives. (Hong & Nam et al., 2021; Aier et al., 2024)

It is important to note that while group differences were found, correlation analyses revealed no significant direct relationships between attention regulation, work-related flow, and psychological well-being within either group. This indicates that these constructs may operate independently in these contexts or that their relationships are influenced by other mediating factors. Practical ramifications for workforce management result from these findings. Initiatives like job rotation, flexible scheduling, and autonomy-boosting tactics may improve flow and well-being for paid workers. Training in financial planning and stress management can support entrepreneurs' mental well-being in the face of uncertainty.

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurs consistently exhibited higher cognitive flexibility, engagement, and psychological well-being compared to salaried employees. Tailored workplace strategies are essential to enhance well-being across occupational groups.

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