



Money for Nothing? The Impact of Anti-Work Orientation on Work Motivation and Engagement

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Anti-work orientation is a concept that critiques the value placed on paid employment. Despite its recent surge in popularity, which industry workforce analysts have predicted could lead to negative consequences for organizations and the global economy, research exploring its impact on work motivation and engagement is lacking. This study aimed to examine these issues with a stratified representative sample of the Swedish working population ($N = 2595$), using the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale based on Self-determination theory. The results revealed that anti-work orientation was most strongly correlated with amotivation and low levels of work engagement, suggesting that anti-work supporters may be experiencing low levels of energy, commitment, and enthusiasm for their job, and that they may even feel indifferent about their work. The connection to intrinsic motivation further suggests that they experience lower levels of enjoyment and personal value in the job. Interestingly, a positive association with external regulation suggests that anti-workers may still be motivated by external rewards, particularly material, even if they lack a genuine interest in their work. Finally, the association between anti-work orientation and introjected regulation was weak, indicating that individuals with strong anti-work sentiments are not primarily motivated by external pressures such as fear of failing in the eyes of others, or a sense of obligation. Implications for management are discussed.

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For countless individuals, work serves as a source of purpose and meaning, and sometimes even a way to make an impact on the surrounding community or society (King & Napa, 1998; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Yet, in recent years, the relevance of work in contemporary society has been increasingly questioned (Alliger & McEachern, 2023). Indeed, the growing popularity of platforms like the online Reddit community “r/antiwork” and the rise of phenomena such as “quiet quitting” (ceasing to be fully committed to one’s job and doing just enough to meet the job description’s requirements; Mahand & Caldwell, 2023) suggest an increasing trend toward viewing work negatively. Discontent with the nature of work has given rise to movements and perspectives labeled as “anti-work” (Alliger & McEachern, 2023; Scruggs, 2024; Sinclair et al., 2025). Anti-work orientation can be defined as a ‘generalized, contentious rejection of work as determinant of one’s self-worth or worth to society’ (Scruggs, 2024, p. 14). In essence, the anti-work movement views paid employment as a mechanism that perpetuates an unfair social power structure, benefiting a small group of powerful individuals while undermining the dignity, well-being, and autonomy of the majority (Alliger & McEachern, 2023). According to this perspective, every worker is subject to authority figures (like supervisors) or pressures (such as profit motives). The core idea is that because work requires individuals to surrender their freedom for the sake of the organization, work is inherently coercive, which negatively influences workers’ well-being. As such, anti-work ideology challenges the conventional narratives of productivity and job satisfaction. As work often requires individuals to compromise their autonomy and to be productive, the anti-work movement’s critique of work as inherently coercive and questioning of the value of productivity as a measure of human worth has significant implications for Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, particularly in how organizations manage employee well-being, motivation, and autonomy. Considering that support for anti-work ideas is common among working adults in both the US (Scruggs, 2024) and Western European countries such as Sweden (Sinclair et al., 2025), it is important to learn more about its implications for organizational outcomes. The present study is (to the best of our knowledge) the first to examine the impact of anti-work orientation on work motivation and work engagement.

Anti-work supporters seem, by definition, to be unmotivated to go to work. In a sense, then, the relation between anti-work attitudes and work motivation as well as engagement may appear self-evident. However, anti-work orientation distinguishes itself from related beliefs and attitudes such as job satisfaction, engagement, and motivation through its focus and degree of opposition. Instead of targeting a specific job or organization, anti-work challenges the very concept of work and the systems

that uphold it; it encompasses a broader discontent going beyond individual employment. Furthermore, anti-work is defined by its skepticism toward widely accepted pro-work beliefs, ethics, and societal norms that equate “work with worth”. Those holding anti-work attitudes would dismiss ingrained beliefs such as the protestant work ethic (Mirels & Garrett, 1971) or the notion of work as a calling (Schabram et al., 2022) and may argue that these beliefs stem from manipulation or “brainwashing” (Scruggs, 2024). Anti-work thus differs from concepts such as work centrality (Paullay et al., 1994), which reflects how essential work is perceived, but does not capture the broader opposition to societal systems that may overvalue work. Importantly, although repeated experiences of not having meaningful work may contribute to adopting an anti-work belief system, individuals can still encounter moments of meaningful work alongside this belief and may thus experience some level of work engagement (a state characterized by high levels of mental and physical energy, enthusiasm about and dedication to work, and complete absorption in work activities; Bakker, 2022). It is also possible that only more external forms of work motivation will persist. For instance, workers with high anti-work orientation might regard their job as “just a job” and experience low levels of interest or enjoyment (intrinsic motivation), while still feeling motivated to do the job for the sake of obtaining the salary, thus being extrinsically motivated by material incentives (Amabile et al., 1994). Alternatively, they may lack work motivation entirely, a state often referred to as “amotivation”. This highlights the need to examine not only the *amount* of motivation but also to distinguish between different *types* of motivation.

WORK MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

One of the most prominent motivation theories, Self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017), posits that motivation is multidimensional, including intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation. These motivations vary in the degree of self-determination they reflect, ranging from intrinsic to different degrees of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual and occurs when a person engages in an activity for its own sake, driven by personal interest, enjoyment, or a sense of challenge, for example, someone who plays an instrument because they love the music. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is characterized by engaging in an activity for the sake of obtaining external rewards or avoiding negative outcomes. SDT proposes that external motivation should be further divided into four types based on the degree of autonomy. External regulation is the least autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, where actions are driven by external

rewards (like money or praise) or to avoid punishment. With introjected regulation, a person feels pressured to engage in an activity to avoid feelings of guilt or gain contingent self-esteem. This motivation is somewhat internalized; however, it still relies on external validation. Both external and introjected regulation are recognized as controlled motivations and are often grouped together (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). In contrast, in the case of identified regulation, individuals recognize the value of an activity and find it personally important. They engage in the behavior because they believe it is beneficial, indicating a higher degree of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Finally, integrated regulation¹ is the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, where the individual fully integrates the behavior into their sense of self and values. For example, someone might exercise not primarily because they enjoy it, but because they believe in maintaining good health and see it as part of their identity. While both identified and integrated regulations are classified as extrinsic motivation because of their role in achieving outcomes outside the activity itself, they are often seen as more autonomous and akin to intrinsic motivation due to their volitional nature. Apart from these types of motivation, SDT also recognizes the state of amotivation, which refers to a lack of motivation or desire to act. Individuals in this state may feel overwhelmed, incapable, or indifferent about engaging in the activity, leading to disengagement.

In support of SDT, meta-analytic evidence (Van den Broeck et al., 2021) suggests that there are clear benefits to analyzing the different motivational regulations separately rather than as a composite (such as using a relative autonomy index), as it offers a detailed perspective on how motivation influences employee functioning, such as well-being, attitudes, and behavior. The results of Van den Broeck et al. (2021) highlight the important role of intrinsic motivation in the workplace, indicating that it accounts for the greatest variance across nearly all outcomes. However, identified regulation may be even more impactful in some instances. Engaging in a behavior because it holds personal value or meaning (e.g., aligning with one's goals, values, or motives; Sheldon, 2011; Sheldon & Schöler, 2011) may be even more important than intrinsic motivation (i.e., participating because the activity is enjoyable) for sustained effort, goal-directed behavior, or a willingness to go the extra mile, especially when faced with monotonous or stressful tasks. Moreover, certain types of extrinsic motivation, such as identified regulation, can sometimes lead to higher performance levels, extra-role behaviors, or helping behaviors compared to intrinsic motivation. In contrast, introjected regulation represents a mixed form of motivation: those motivated by introjected regulation might perform well due to self-imposed pressure or a desire to feel better about themselves; however, this often comes with a cost to their well-

being. Finally, expecting rewards (like praise or bonuses) or striving to avoid punishments (such as job loss or criticism) is not the most effective form of motivation, as it can lead to stress. Although external regulation shows minor positive correlations with performance, it correlates negatively with well-being. Although there has been limited research on amotivation, and some researchers have argued that individuals must possess at least some sort of motivation for their jobs, rendering the exploration of amotivation unnecessary (Gagné et al., 2015), studies suggest that as many as 10 to 25% of employees primarily experience this motivational state (Howard et al., 2016). The available literature suggests that amotivation is particularly tied to burnout and has a strong negative correlation with performance (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). Having no motivation (low quantity of motivation) may thus be more harmful than external regulation (low quality of motivation).

While work motivation refers to the psychological forces that drive individuals to pursue goals and perform tasks, work engagement reflects the level of energy, commitment, and enthusiasm an employee has toward their job (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Work engagement is linked to work motivation, especially intrinsic motivation: when employees find their tasks meaningful and aligned with their values, they are more likely to exhibit greater engagement in their work (Li et al., 2015). Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, has a more complex relationship with work engagement: while extrinsic motivators can boost initial engagement, these effects may diminish over time if they are not accompanied by intrinsic satisfaction (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This indicates that a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is essential for sustained engagement.

Although work engagement and autonomous motivation are closely related, they are conceptually distinct. Motivation refers to the psychological forces that initiate and regulate work behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2017), whereas engagement reflects a positive, energetic state during work, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Research shows that motivation and engagement predict different outcomes: motivation primarily drives effort and persistence, while engagement is more strongly linked to well-being and performance (Li et al., 2015; Van den Broeck et al., 2021). Given that anti-work orientation is an emerging construct, examining its associations with both motivation and engagement provides a more nuanced understanding of its implications for organizational outcomes.

AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

The present study aims to advance the understanding of anti-work attitudes by examining their associations with

distinct forms of work motivation and work engagement. While prior research has focused on motivation as a predictor of engagement and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Van den Broeck et al., 2021), no studies have investigated how the ideological stance of a generalized rejection of work relates to these constructs. This is theoretically important because anti-work ideology challenges foundational assumptions in Organizational Psychology about the value of work as a source of meaning and identity (Alliger & McEachern, 2023). By linking anti-work attitudes to both the *quality* of motivation, and the experiential state of engagement, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how ideological beliefs shape employee functioning. Practically, these insights could inform interventions by clarifying whether a rejection of the worth of work is accompanied by a lack of motivation, lack of engagement, or both, or whether certain motivational profiles (e.g., external regulation) persist despite anti-work beliefs.

The qualitative nature of each regulatory style offers insight into its potential relationship with anti-work orientation. For instance, external regulation, which is driven by tangible rewards or avoidance of punishment, may persist among individuals high in anti-work orientation because it requires minimal ideological endorsement of work; the job may be performed “for the paycheck,” which would be consistent with anti-work beliefs. Introjected regulation, by contrast, relies on internalized pressures such as guilt or contingent self-worth. Anti-work ideology argues that society imposes a pervasive expectation that personal worth is tied to productivity. Because this pressure is deeply embedded in cultural norms and particularly salient for anti-workers, individuals with anti-work attitudes may feel its influence and, over time, partially internalize it. Identified regulation, which involves valuing work as personally meaningful, may be particularly incompatible with anti-work attitudes, as it presupposes endorsement of work’s inherent worth, and intrinsic motivation, rooted in enjoyment and interest, may also be attenuated. Similarly, work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker, 2022), and typically supported by perceptions of meaning and value in work. As anti-work orientation involves skepticism toward these very beliefs, it may erode the motivational foundation for sustained engagement. More specifically, individuals high in anti-work orientation should be less likely to experience dedication or absorption because they reject the societal and personal significance of work (even if engagement may occur in specific tasks that align with personal interests or provide immediate satisfaction). Taken together, these distinctions suggest that anti-work orientation may not merely be associated with lower motivation overall, but also with a specific motivational profile.

We hypothesized that:

H1. Higher anti-work orientation will be *negatively* associated with:

- (a) intrinsic motivation,
- (b) identified regulation, and
- (c) work engagement.

H2. Higher anti-work orientation will be *positively* associated with:

- (a) introjected regulation,
- (b) external regulation, and
- (c) amotivation.

METHOD

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study. The present study was pre-registered prior to data collection. The pre-registration is available in the Open Science Framework repository: https://osf.io/yxp2e/?view_only=1f670ae010764ad89e38b644980abe56.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

We collected the data through PFM Research, a polling organization that provides access to a panel of survey respondents residing in Sweden. The initial sample was stratified by gender, age, and geographical location. Our goal was to recruit a sample of a minimum of 2500² employed individuals, excluding those who failed two attention checks. Ultimately, we excluded 328 participants (11%), resulting in a final sample size of 2595. This group comprised 47.2% men, 52.4% women, 0.2% who identified with another gender, and 0.2% who did not disclose their gender identity. The age of participants ranged from 16 to 74 years, with a mean age of 44.18 ($SD = 11.89$). Regarding educational attainment, 0.2% had not completed elementary school, 3.1% had completed elementary school, 45.3% had attained tertiary education, and 51% held a university degree. Participants reported their occupations in a free response format, and we coded these as high- or low-skilled based on the requirement for higher education. There was a diverse array of jobs, with 52.9% of the sample working in high-skilled positions and 47.1% in low-skilled positions. Work experience also varied, and 49% of participants had more than 20 years of experience.

MEASURES

We measured anti-work orientation with a 10-item measure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.92$) developed and validated by Scruggs (2024). The scale was translated to Swedish by the researchers. The translation was subsequently

reviewed by a subject-matter expert to ensure linguistic clarity and conceptual equivalence. Sample items include 'We are wrongly taught that the best way to contribute to society is through working' and 'We are manipulated into believing that work is foundational to our worth in life'. The participants responded on a seven-point scale (1 = 'Do not agree at all' to 7 = 'Completely agree').

We captured work motivation with the 19-item Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale, which includes measures of intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation, as well as amotivation (MWMS; [Gagné et al., 2015](#)). The participants responded to the question, 'To what extent are the following propositions reasons for you to make efforts/to get involved in your job?'. Sample items include, 'Because the work I do is interesting' (intrinsic motivation, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$), 'Because putting efforts in this job aligns with my personal values' (identified regulation, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$), 'Because otherwise I will feel bad about myself' (introjected regulation, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$), 'Because others will reward me financially only if I put enough effort in my job (e.g., employer, supervisor ...)' (extrinsic regulation, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$), and 'I don't, because I really feel that I'm wasting my time at work' (amotivation, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$).

We measured work engagement with a three-item measure (COPSOQ; [Burr et al., 2019](#)), on a five-point scale from 'never' to 'always' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$). This measure consists of three items ('At my work, I feel bursting with energy'; 'I am enthusiastic about my job'; and 'I am immersed in my work'). These items tap into the aspects of vigor, dedication, and absorption, respectively, and constitute an abbreviated version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; [Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010](#)).

The data collection was part of a larger research project, and additional measures that fall outside the scope of the present paper were thus also collected.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS v. 28, whereas model estimation was conducted using the lavaan package ([Rosseel, 2012](#)) in R v. 4.1.0. All statistical analyses were conducted using two-tailed tests. We tested the hypothesized relationships through structural equation modeling, with an analytical strategy that consisted of three steps.

In the first step, descriptive statistics such as intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations of study variables were calculated. The distribution of the variables was also evaluated. In line with our pre-registration, we opted to use the maximum likelihood (ML) estimator in case the variables did not deviate substantially from normality.

In the second step, the measurement model was estimated. Items from the scales measuring anti-work

orientation, extrinsic regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, intrinsic motivation, amotivation, and work engagement were used as indicators for each latent variable, respectively. The latent variables were free to correlate in the model ([Cole & Maxwell, 2003](#)). Conventional fit indices were used to evaluate model fit (i.e., confirmatory fit index [CFI] and Tucker-Lewis Index [TLI] > 0.95, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] < 0.06, standard root mean square residual [SRMR] < 0.08) and the χ^2 -test of the model-implied covariance matrix ([Hu & Bentler, 1999](#)).

In the third step, predictive paths were added to the latent variables in the structural equation model, where anti-work orientation was set to predict all other latent variables, according to our hypothesized model.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlation coefficients of the study variables are depicted in [Table 1](#). None of the variables indicated any substantial skewness in either direction (they ranged from -0.785 to 1.589, well within ± 2 points; [West et al., 1995](#)), and only the amotivation variable demonstrated a kurtosis value of 2.002, with all other variables ranging from -0.647 to 0.335. Consequently, since the variables did not deviate substantially from normality, we used the maximum likelihood estimator in all subsequent models, in line with the pre-registration.

ASSESSING THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the measurement model for a seven-factor model was estimated. The model fit indices for a seven-factor model were slightly worse than Hu and Bentler's (1999) threshold recommendations: $\chi^2(443) = 8037.44$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.85, TLI = 0.83, RMSEA = 0.081 [0.080–0.083], SRMR = 0.081. However, all factor loadings were significant at the $p < 0.001$ level for each factor and ranged from 0.33 to 0.92. Closer inspection of the model revealed that the primary reason for the misfit was the anti-work orientation scale, which had a better fit to the data when specified as consisting of two subfactors, $\chi^2(436) = 6187.03$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.89, TLI = 0.87, RMSEA = 0.071 [0.070–0.073], SRMR = 0.069. Specifically, there is a slight shift in nuance between the first six and the final four items of the anti-work scale (see [Scruggs, 2024](#), for the full scale). The first six items concern how we are taught/manipulated by society into believing that work equals worth (e.g., 'We are manipulated into believing that work is foundational to our worth in life'). The final four items are closer to the referent itself, (e.g., 'I dislike the idea of working to make a living'). The two factors mirror what [Scruggs \(2024\)](#) referred to as general perspectives (concerning society), and first-person perspectives (concerning the self). To further explore the

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. AWO	–						
2. EXT	0.19***	–					
3. INJ	0.04*	0.44***	–				
4. IDE	–0.13***	0.23***	0.60***	–			
5. INT	–0.20***	0.13***	0.37***	0.58***	–		
6. AMOT	0.33***	0.22***	–0.07***	–0.31***	–0.21***	–	
7. WE	–0.28***	0.05**	0.30***	0.52***	0.75***	–0.29***	–
<i>M (SD)</i>	3.74 (1.42)	3.79 (1.29)	4.54 (1.32)	5.20 (1.41)	4.69 (1.52)	1.94 (1.33)	3.55 (.86)

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study variables.

Note: * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$. AWO = anti-work orientation; EXT = extrinsic regulation; INJ = introjected regulation; IDE = identified regulation; INT = intrinsic motivation; AMOT = amotivation; WE = work engagement.

relevance of the two emergent factors, we calculated scale scores for the two factors separately and explored their intercorrelations with the other variables (see Table A1 in the supplemental material for a full diagnostic of the scale). While the strength of the associations differed somewhat, the two anti-work variables generally followed the same pattern of correlations with the other constructs, with one exception. The general perspectives factor correlated positively with introjected motivation ($r = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the first-person perspective factor was slightly negatively related to introjected motivation ($r = -0.04$, $p < 0.05$). However, these effects were very weak.

While it is possible that the anti-work orientation construct is better represented as two factors, the two anti-work factors were highly correlated in the model $r = 0.714$, $p < 0.001$, suggesting that they share a great deal of variance. It is therefore problematic to treat them as two separate variables in the same model (see supplemental material for details). To account for this, we estimated a bifactor model that models both a shared anti-work factor, and the two different subfactors simultaneously.³ In a bifactor model, all 10 items from the scale are loaded on one shared factor, and in parallel, two subfactors consisting of the six and four items each are included in the same model. The anti-work factors in this model are specified to be orthogonal (i.e., uncorrelated). In such models, the shared factor accounts for the shared variance in the construct, while the remaining factor-specific variance is captured by the two subfactors (Reise, 2012). Hereafter, we refer to the factor which all items were loaded onto in the bifactor model as the “shared factor”, and the two subfactors as the “general perspectives” factor and the “first-person perspectives” factor, respectively, to be consistent with Scruggs’ (2024) terminology.

Fitting a bifactor model where all anti-work orientation items were loaded on one shared anti-work factor, and where the six general items, as well as the four first-person items respectively, were loaded onto

two separate factors in parallel, resulted in a better fit: $\chi^2(421) = 5362.37$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.067 [0.066–0.069], SRMR = 0.066, which was more closely aligned with conventional criteria for model fit. Although the structural model demonstrated CFI = 0.91 and TLI = 0.89, slightly below conventional thresholds for good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), the RMSEA and SRMR were within ranges considered reasonable or acceptable (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). It should be noted that complex models with many latent variables and indicators, such as the current one, are particularly prone to resulting in lower CFI and TFI values, which does not necessarily equate to misspecification (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Although these results were still not ideal, we did not consider the deviations from typical fit metrics to be substantial enough to preclude further hypothesis tests.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

Next, to test the study hypotheses, predictive paths were added from the shared variance anti-work latent variable as well as from the emergent second first-person factor to see if it had an incremental contribution to the shared factor, predicting all of the motivation forms (external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, intrinsic motivation, and amotivation) as well as work engagement. The model, depicted in Figure 1, revealed significant paths between both forms of anti-work orientation and all of the outcomes ($p < 0.001$), except for introjected motivation and extrinsic motivation. Introjected motivation was not predicted by the shared anti-work factor ($p = 0.305$), but was, however, significantly negatively predicted by the first-person anti-work factor ($p < 0.001$). Conversely, extrinsic motivation was predicted by the shared factor ($p < 0.001$), but not the first-person factor ($p = 0.062$). In line with Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c, anti-work orientation was significantly negatively associated with intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, and work engagement. As for the second hypothesis, anti-work orientation

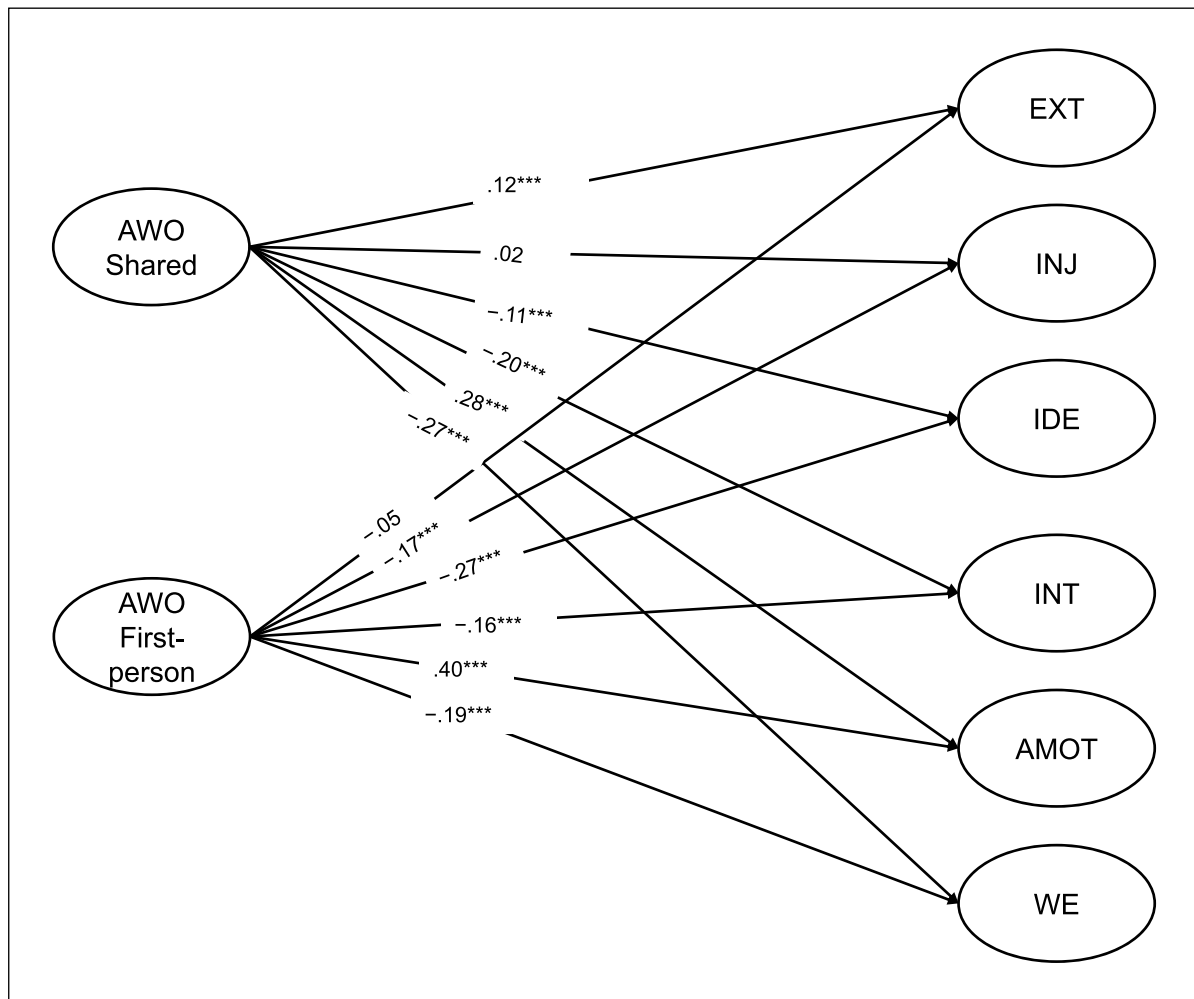


Figure 1 Structural model depicting standardized estimates of the relationships between the latent variables.

Note: Indicators of latent variables and intercorrelations are omitted in the figure. *** Correlations significant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

AWO = anti-work orientation; EXT = extrinsic regulation; INJ = introjected regulation; IDE = identified regulation; INT = intrinsic motivation; AMOT = amotivation; WE = work engagement.

showed significant positive relationships with external regulation and amotivation, but only the first-person factor was significantly related to introjected regulation in the opposite of the predicted direction, providing support for Hypotheses 2b and 2c, but not for 2a. The unstandardized estimates and 95% confidence intervals are provided in Table A3 (see supplemental material).

EXPLORATORY ANALYSES

Based on scholarship suggesting that there may be differences in associations when extrinsic regulation is divided into two facets, extrinsic-social (e.g., getting the approval of others) and extrinsic-material (e.g., material gains such as financial rewards; [Van den Broeck et al., 2021](#)), we conducted additional exploratory analysis with extrinsic regulation split into two factors.⁴ This resulted in an even better fitting measurement model, $\chi^2(419) = 4378.08$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.060 [0.059–0.062], SRMR = 0.060. When adding predictive paths from the AWO factors to the other latent variables, AWO-shared predicted the social dimension ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$), in line with the original model, but the first-

person factor revealed a small negative path to extrinsic-social ($\beta = -0.06$, $p = 0.015$). For AWO-shared, the path to the material dimension was slightly stronger ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), but the path from first-person AWO did not predict this dimension significantly ($p = 0.055$). The other parameter estimates were identical to the original model, where extrinsic regulation was modelled as one factor. Taken together, these exploratory analyses showed that the association between anti-work and the material dimension of extrinsic regulation was stronger than the association with the social dimension, but this did not primarily apply to the first-person anti-work dimension.

DISCUSSION

Anti-work attitudes are characterized by a critical stance toward the demands and expectations of work, often manifesting as skepticism regarding the value and purpose of work itself ([Alliger & McEachern, 2023](#); [Scruggs, 2024](#)). The present study is the first to examine how anti-work orientation relates to different kinds of work

motivation and work engagement. Our findings revealed that anti-work orientation was most strongly correlated with amotivation and work engagement, suggesting the possibility that, by the time that anti-work attitudes have been endorsed, the toll on motivation has been so great that there is none left, and feelings of engagement (characterized by energy, commitment, and enthusiasm for one's job) may be down to a minimum. These individuals may not just experience low levels of motivation, but they may even feel helpless or indifferent toward work (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It is also possible, of course, that the relationship is at least to some extent reciprocal, such that the less motivated and engaged a person feels, the more convinced they become of the veracity of anti-work ideas. We recommend that future research with longitudinal designs investigate this possibility.

Interestingly, our results suggest that anti-work orientation was best modelled with a bifactor model, with one shared factor and two subfactors: one consisting of general perspectives, and the other consisting of first-person views of anti-work. While the associations from these factors were in similar directions to the other variables, the strength of the relationships differed. Importantly, amotivation was more strongly related to first-person anti-work orientation, and this form was also more strongly negatively related to identified and introjected regulations. It is possible that this subfactor reflects a more internalized form of anti-work orientation (the referent's personal views, as compared to societal pressures). Accordingly, having internalized anti-work attitudes might to an even larger extent reduce the sense of finding work personally meaningful, as with identified regulation, compared to more general anti-work attitudes. Moreover, concerning introjected regulation, it is possible that individuals with strong anti-work sentiments are not primarily motivated by external pressures, such as fear of failure or obligation, which is consistent with rejection of internalized societal norms about work (Alliger & McEachern, 2023; Scruggs, 2024; Sinclair et al., 2025). Therefore, this implies that organizational interventions relying on guilt, shame, or social comparison may be ineffective or even counterproductive. In contrast, the positive association between shared anti-work orientation and external regulation seems to suggest that some anti-workers are still motivated by external rewards such as pay, even if they have lost (or perhaps never had) genuine interest or a sense of value in their work. Indeed, the exploratory analyses showed that the association between the shared anti-work factor and the material dimension of extrinsic regulation was stronger than the association with the social dimension, suggesting that financial rewards might be the strongest form of motivation for individuals high in anti-work orientation. However, even though this form of external regulation is more

promising than amotivation, it tends to be less effective in sustaining high performance over the long term and thus represents a more fragile and unsustainable form of motivation, compared to the other motivation types. This also appears to apply primarily to shared anti-work attitudes, as the first-person factor was more consistently negatively related to all regulation forms, and had a stronger link to amotivation. Consequently, if anti-work orientation has been internalized, not even an external incentive such as a pay raise would be an effective way to increase motivation, indicating that differences in motivation are not only dependent on levels of anti-work sentiments, but also the extent of their internalization.

Overall, it is important to keep in mind that when trying to develop effective organizational strategies aimed at fostering more motivated employees, organizations seeking to address disengagement may struggle, as employees with anti-work sentiments are likely to view attempts to change attitudes or behaviors as manipulative, exploitative, or authoritarian (Olson et al., 2024). Trying to change tasks to motivate the employee might not prove effective either, as work motivation and engagement may have diminished to the point where they are no longer easily influenced. The possibility of a reciprocal relationship—where anti-work attitudes and beliefs both stem from and reinforce low motivation and engagement—might eventually lead to a motivational “dead zone” where traditional engagement strategies are ineffective. Recognizing the anti-work attitudes behind low motivation or engagement is thus critical in order to address the root of the problem. To discover whether employees with low motivation levels have endorsed this generalized work critique, perhaps it would be helpful to offer coaching or counseling to explore sources of disengagement, as well as creating safe spaces for employees to express dissatisfaction without fear of reprisal. However, it is important to acknowledge that anti-work attitudes may also reflect broader societal and economic conditions. Structural factors, such as unequal access to secure or meaningful work, labor market segmentation, or disparities in education and social status, may shape the extent to which individuals perceive work as coercive or lacking in value. Therefore, it is possible that anti-work attitudes must also be addressed at a societal level, where a larger discussion can be raised on how to make working life attractive and inclusive. As amotivation is particularly tied to both distress and low performance (Van den Broeck et al., 2021), it is crucial to intervene before motivation deteriorates to this state.

Considering that employees with strong anti-work attitudes may be resistant to surface-level engagement tactics or external pressures such as the imposition of guilt or shame, interventions may instead focus on restoring basic needs. SDT posits that motivation quality is shaped by the satisfaction of three basic psychological

needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Gagné & Deci, 2005). These needs have been suggested to be universal, yet not uniform (Soenens et al., 2015). An endeavor for future research could be to examine whether anti-work attitudes may be symptomatic of deeper psychological need frustration. For example, in the case of a low degree of satisfaction of the need for autonomy, individuals with anti-work sentiments may feel that their work lacks volition or personal endorsement, leading to amotivation. If anti-workers feel that their work environment fails to provide opportunities for mastery or meaningful challenge, the need for competence is not satisfied, and they may disengage. And finally, if relatedness is the issue, the root of the problem might be a lack of meaningful social connection at work, which could serve to alienate individuals and reinforce anti-work beliefs. Recent developments in SDT further distinguish between need satisfaction, need unfulfillment, and need frustration (Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al., 2021). Need satisfaction fosters optimal functioning, while need frustration reflects active thwarting of needs and is linked to maladaptive outcomes (Bartholomew et al., 2011). Need unfulfillment, by contrast, captures situations where needs are unmet but not actively obstructed, which can still undermine motivation and engagement. Although speculative at this point, anti-work attitudes may be symptomatic of either need frustration or unfulfillment: for example, frustration when autonomy is actively constrained, or unfulfillment when work fails to provide opportunities for competence or meaningful social connection.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Even though this study was based on a large and stratified sample of employees in Sweden, it is nevertheless limited by its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data. The nature of self-reported data means that we have captured employees' subjective experiences of motivation and engagement, and that these ratings may differ from actual workplace behaviors that they engage in. However, research has demonstrated clear links between self-rated motivation and performance over numerous studies (e.g., Cerasoli et al., 2014), which underscores the importance of understanding the correlates of different forms of motivation for organizational outcomes.

Furthermore, as discussed above, the model fit indices were slightly below the threshold recommendations due to the anti-work orientation scale showing a better fit to the data when specified as consisting of two subfactors rather than one. In the present study, we approached this with a bifactor modeling approach, which captures both common variance and also the specific nuances of subscales. In the initial validation

of the anti-work orientation scale, Scruggs (2024) found both general and first-person perspectives to load on a unidimensional factor, although the factor loadings for the first-person perspectives in his model were weaker. Even if a bifactor approach may yield a more comprehensive perspective, it nevertheless raises questions regarding the composition of the anti-work orientation scale's underlying factor structure. For example, it may be important for future studies to further explore what the first-person anti-work factor represents (e.g., whether it reflects a more internalized form of anti-work attitudes), considering that most of the common variance in a bifactor model is captured by the shared factor. Future studies might be able to refine the measures even further.

A final limitation worth mentioning is that the findings presented here might not generalize equally well to all cultural contexts: even if basic motivational processes are universal (Soenens et al., 2015), cultural differences in, for example, work ethic (Miller et al., 2002) might influence how strongly they relate to negative attitudes toward work.

In summary, future studies should explore whether anti-work attitudes are reciprocally related to low motivation and engagement using longitudinal designs, examine their potential roots in psychological need frustration or unfulfillment within the SDT framework, refine measurement approaches, and investigate cultural differences. Last but not least, future research could focus on developing and evaluating interventions that support psychological need satisfaction and re-engagement for employees with strong anti-work orientation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides new insights into the motivational consequences of anti-work attitudes by linking them to distinct forms of work motivation and engagement. The findings imply that addressing such attitudes requires more than surface-level engagement strategies, and that interventions rooted in guilt, shame, or social comparison are unlikely to be effective. While some individuals with anti-work sentiments may still respond to external rewards, a more sustainable approach would involve restoring a sense of meaning and purpose in the workplace to foster intrinsic motivation.

DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this article are available in the OSF repository: https://osf.io/jy82k/overview?view_only=4ef04fd7f7914d09b12de42b98c2bef5.

NOTES

1. Despite its theoretical relevance, numerous studies have found that items intended to measure integrated regulation exhibit high cross-loadings and poor discriminant validity, making reliable operationalization difficult (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The scale that we used to measure work motivation (the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale; Gagné et al., 2015) does not include integrated regulation. Therefore, it is not included in our empirical model.
2. There was an error in the pre-registration, stating a planned sample of 25000 instead of 2500.
3. It should be noted that the results of testing the hypotheses using a bifactor model were largely the same as if the scale had been used in a unidimensional way, but the bifactor results provide slightly more nuance. See the supplemental material for a comparison.
4. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

ADDITIONAL FILE

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Supplemental Material.** Supplemental analyses.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjwop.461.s1>

ETHICS AND CONSENT

This study was performed in line with the local guidelines laid out by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, and all participants provided informed consent before participating in this study. The research does not fall under the categories requiring ethical approval, according to the Swedish Ethical Review Act (SFS 2003:460). This was confirmed by the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Linnaeus University.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Samantha Sinclair: Conceptualization (equal); methodology (equal); project administration (lead); funding acquisition (lead); investigation (lead); writing—original draft preparation (lead); writing—review & editing (lead).

Kristoffer Holm: Conceptualization (equal); methodology (equal); investigation (supporting); formal analysis (lead); writing—original draft preparation (supporting); writing—review & editing (supporting).

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