

# The Antinomies of Autonomy: The Social Structures of Stressors in Ireland and Denmark

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New Deals in the New Economy

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# Autonomy is Good. Autonomy is Important.

- **Life Conditions**

- Freedom & Choice, Life Goals, Aging, Health Outcomes, Psychological functioning, Aging...

- **Working Conditions**

- Job Quality [*job control, freedom*]
- Job Strain (Karasek 1979), Lower Stress Levels, Job Satisfaction [*decision latitude, skill discretion*]
- Learning opportunities & Organisational Innovation [*influence*] (Arundel et al. 2007, Holm et al. 2010)
- Meaning & Dignity [*agency*] (Sherman 2007, Hodson 2001)

- Kohn (1976) 'self-direction' key aspects shaping impact of working conditions on workers.

- 'Autonomy could be the key to workplace happiness' (World Economic Forum, 2016).

# Important ✓ Always Good?

- Psychosocial risk profile (Eurofound 2015, WHO 2010)
- Autonomy Paradox (van Echtelt et al. 2006)
- Project Time (Shih 2004)
- Time Work (Moen et al. 2013)
- Unpredictability of knowledge work (O'Carroll 2015)
- Reinforcing Gender Roles (Lott and Chung 2016)
- Stress of higher status (Schieman et al. 2006)
- Overload of requirements (Warr 2007 Vitamin Model)
- Boundarylessness (Allvin 2008)
- De-synchronised rhythms (Lund et al. 2011) and low associational control (Hvid et al. 2010)

# Research Objective

- Explore stressors of autonomous working life across different national settings , analysing the role of context in the social structuring of psychosocial risks?
  - Unpacking and locating work autonomy
  - How are the dynamics of autonomy shaped by the organisational and institutional context in which it is embedded?
  - How are these dynamics translated into stressors?

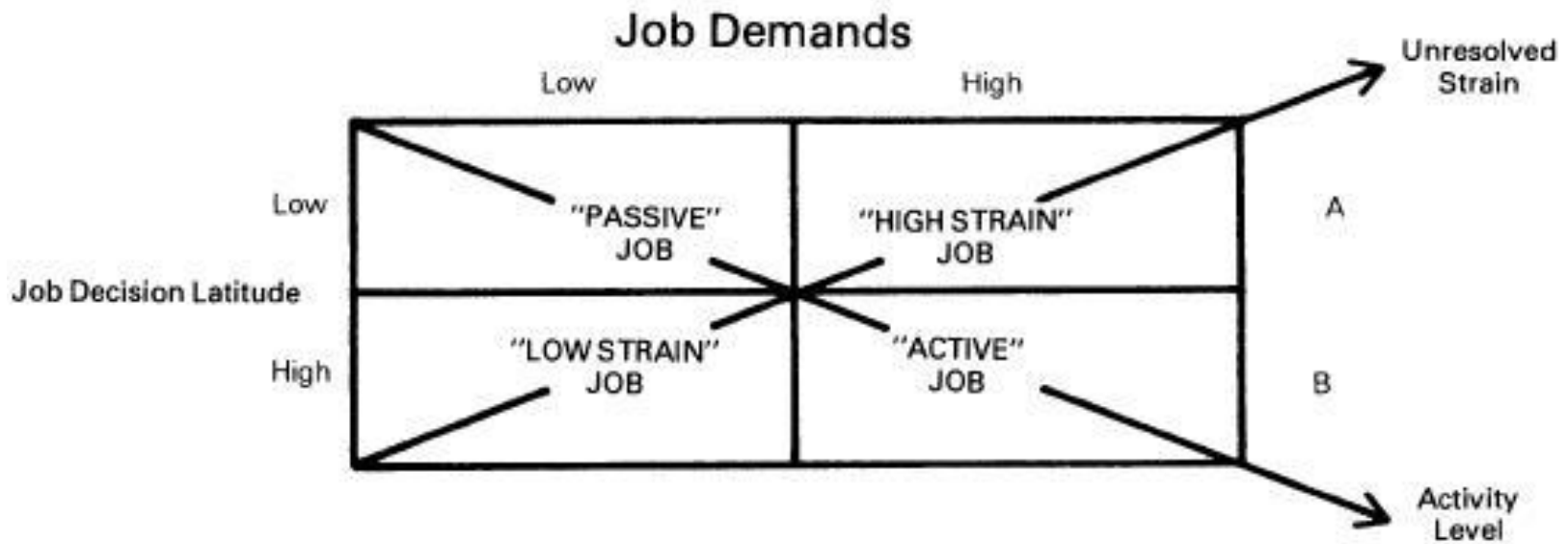
# Methodology

- Comparative Case Study (instrumental)
  - Similar building blocks of IT work & Autonomy
- Theoretical framework linking ‘capabilities’ (Hobson 2014) & stressors (Wheaton 1999)
- Semi-structured interviews with IT workers in Ireland (N=17) and Denmark (N=14)
- 4 key instruments:
  1. Career & Employment History Grid
  2. PWE Survey
  3. Job-related feelings Survey
  4. Discussion of working life framed by key bargains of post-industrial work: effort (work-pay), boundaries (work-time), employment/career (pay-time) (Ó Riain et al. 2016).

# Participant Positions

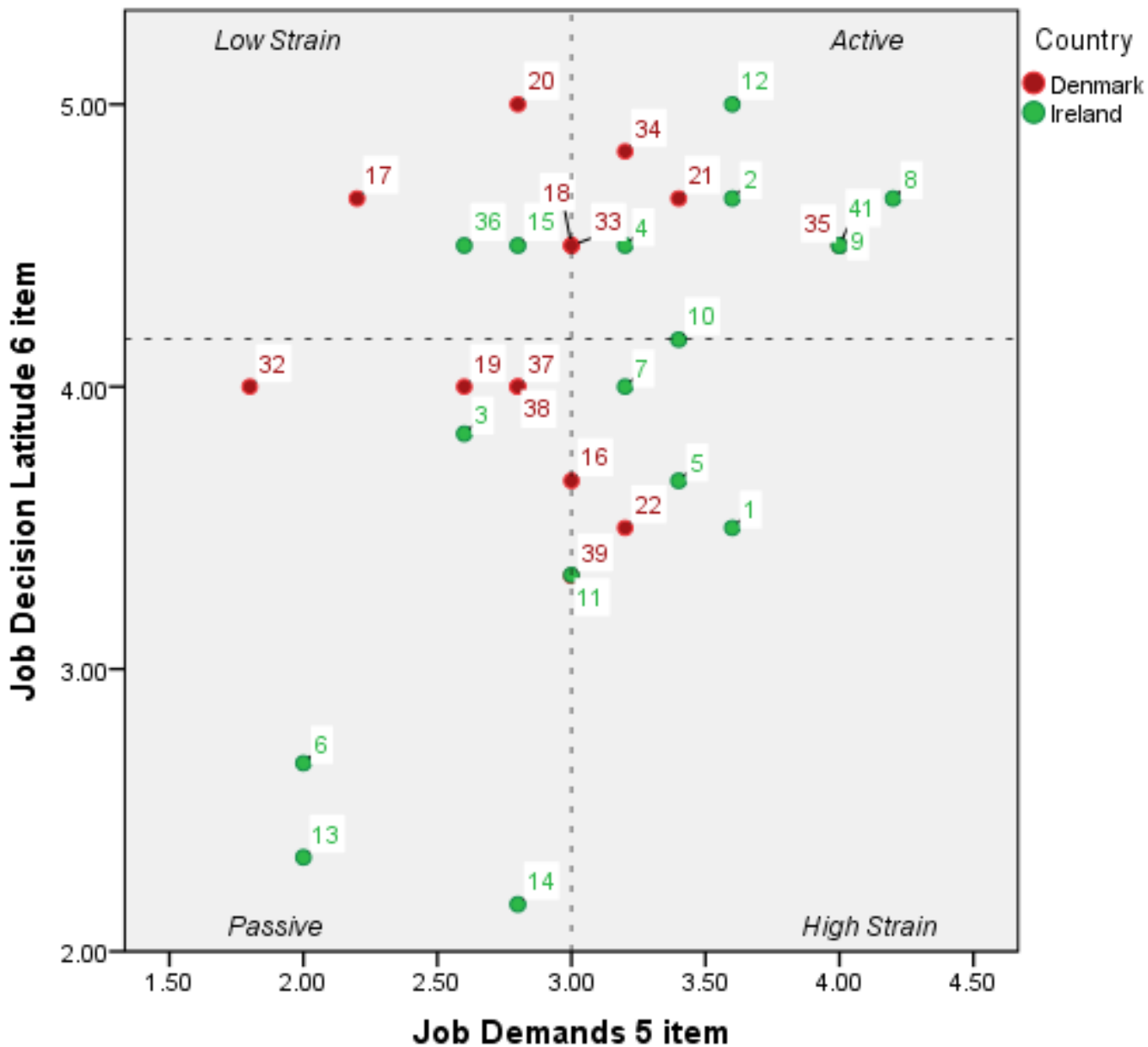
Denmark	Ireland
Tech Lead	Senior Compliance Office
Chief Tech Officer/Architect (2)	Head of IT
Enterprise Modernisation Specialist	Consultant (4)
Software Developer (3)	Chief Information Officer
Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	Technical Trainer
IT/System Consultant (3)	Senior Tech Writer (2)
IT Project Manager	Software Developer
Senior Developer/Advisor (2)	Project Manager (2)
	Editor
	CEO/VP (2)
	Head of Professional Services

# Karasek (1979) D-C Model



**Figure 1. Job strain model.**

Figure??: Participant D-C Model 6\*5





## Job Decision Lat & Job Demands Correlation

<b>Ireland</b>		
	Job Decision Latitude	Job Demands
Job Decision Latitude	1	.66**
Job Demands	.66**	1
Pearson Correlation, *p<.05, **p<.01, two-tailed, n=17		
<b>Denmark</b>		
	Job Decision Latitude	Job Demands
Job Decision Latitude	1	.08
Job Demands	.08	1
Spearman's rho, *p<.05, **p<.01, two-tailed, n=14		

# Qualitative Findings

- Autonomy is relational and context dependent
  - “contested terrain” - actively negotiated, managed, and effected by other structures.
- 3 Key Negotiations for IT workers:
  1. Between Freedom and Responsibility (working conditions)
  2. Between Autonomy and Anarchy (labour process)
  3. Between Employability and the Self (career)

# 1. Between Freedom & Responsibility

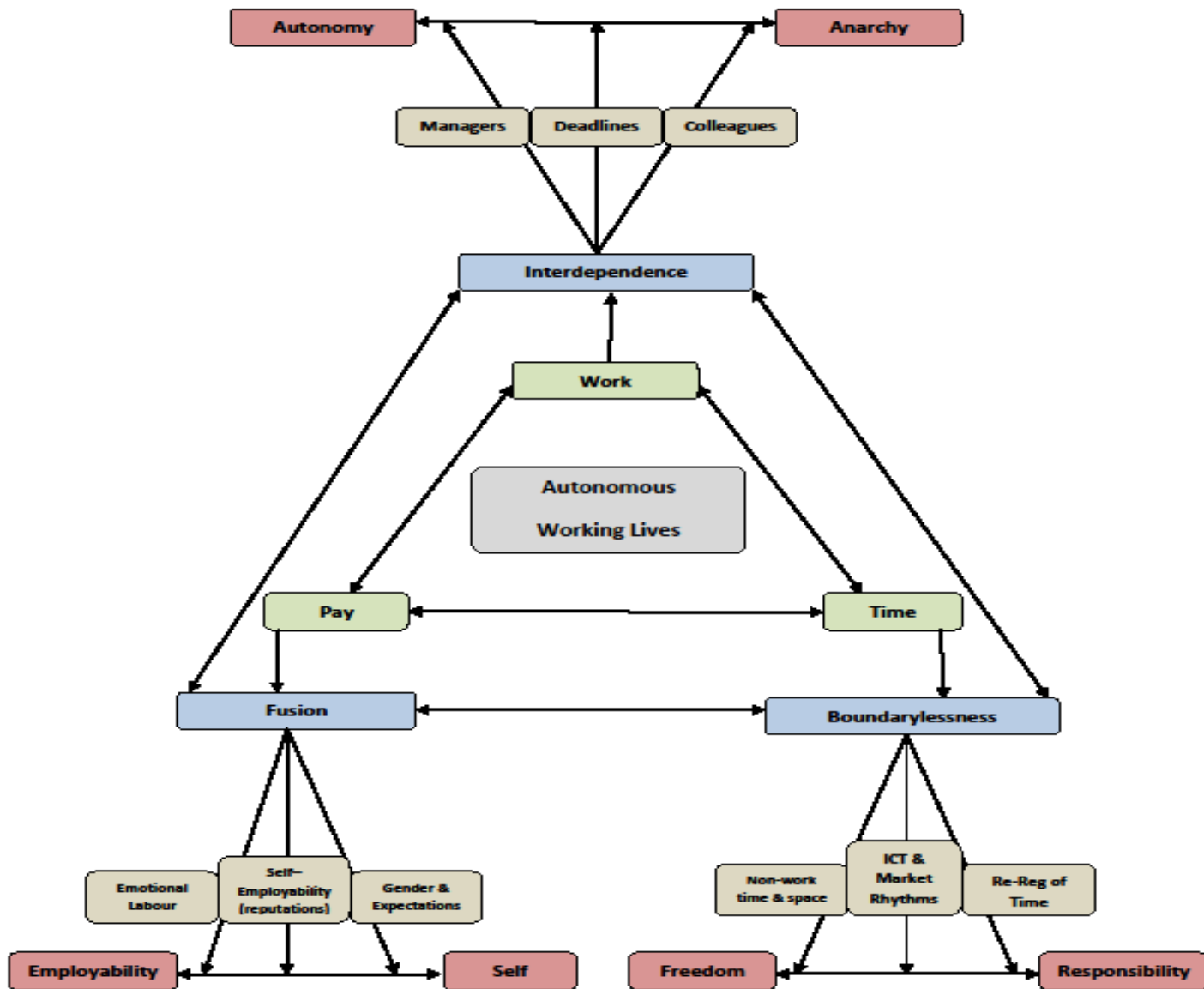
- Negotiating engagement & disengagement with work (Intensification and extensification of working time)
- Mechanisms affecting balance:
  - Re-Regulation of Work Time
    - individual v organisational 'time-work'
  - ICT & Market Rhythms
    - Internalised responsibility
    - The Smartphone Analogy
    - Expectations – accessible = available
  - Non-work Time & Space (Constructing 'clear demarcations')
    - Children – avoid being 'consumed' by job, 'going nuts'...
    - Clothes
    - Commute – Boundary, Transition, Office
    - De-Syncing Phones, Laptop out of view
- Institutional Differences: Individual ('force balance') v Collective Nature of Strategies
- Antinomy - Boundarylessness

# 2. Between Autonomy & Anarchy

- Negotiating the interactive and interdependent relations of the IT labour process
- Mechanisms affecting balance:
  - Deadlines: fact and fiction ('make numbers work')
  - Colleagues: unpredictability (in the way of 'real work')
  - Managers: setting the tone ('managing the ocean')
- Institutional Differences: Contesting deadlines, managers more autonomy in IE
  - IE: negative (erratic individuals or bureaucratic constraining)
  - DK: a necessary resource (ensure efficiency, control demands)
- Antinomy – Interdependence (linked to boundarylessness)

# 3. Between Employability & The Self

- Negotiating employment security in an individualised and insecure industry.
- Mechanisms affecting balance:
  - Networks & Reputation: ‘lack of future’ & self-employability
  - Emotional Labour: ‘It’s important what people think of you’ & ‘...smile, keep working, send your invoice in...’
  - Gendered Roles & Expectations (meeting irregular and market led demands)
- Institutional Differences: security linked to broader welfare state, childcare as stressor in IE
- Antinomy : Fusion (linked to boundarylessness & interdependence)



# Conclusions

- The dynamics, rhythms, and complexities (antinomies) of autonomous working life are socially structured.
- The balances between manageable and unmanageable working patterns are based on individual, organisational, and institutional contexts
- Boundaryless working time and interdependent labour prices present unique demands and pressures – often impinging on a sense of self-regulation (e.g. ‘making hours’ and making numbers ‘work’)
- Employment Bargain – the emotional labour of employment security in IT (risk of fusion)

# Institutional Differences

- Collectively sourced strategies to manage the mechanisms linking the antinomies.
  - Norms around time (bounded, tax & balance)
  - A ‘good’ manager
    - Private lives of workers
    - More bounded time means organisational ‘time work’
    - Acknowledging and acting on unrealistic deadlines
  - Limits imposition of interdependence & role expectations
- Gender paradox in DK? More capabilities, similar barriers



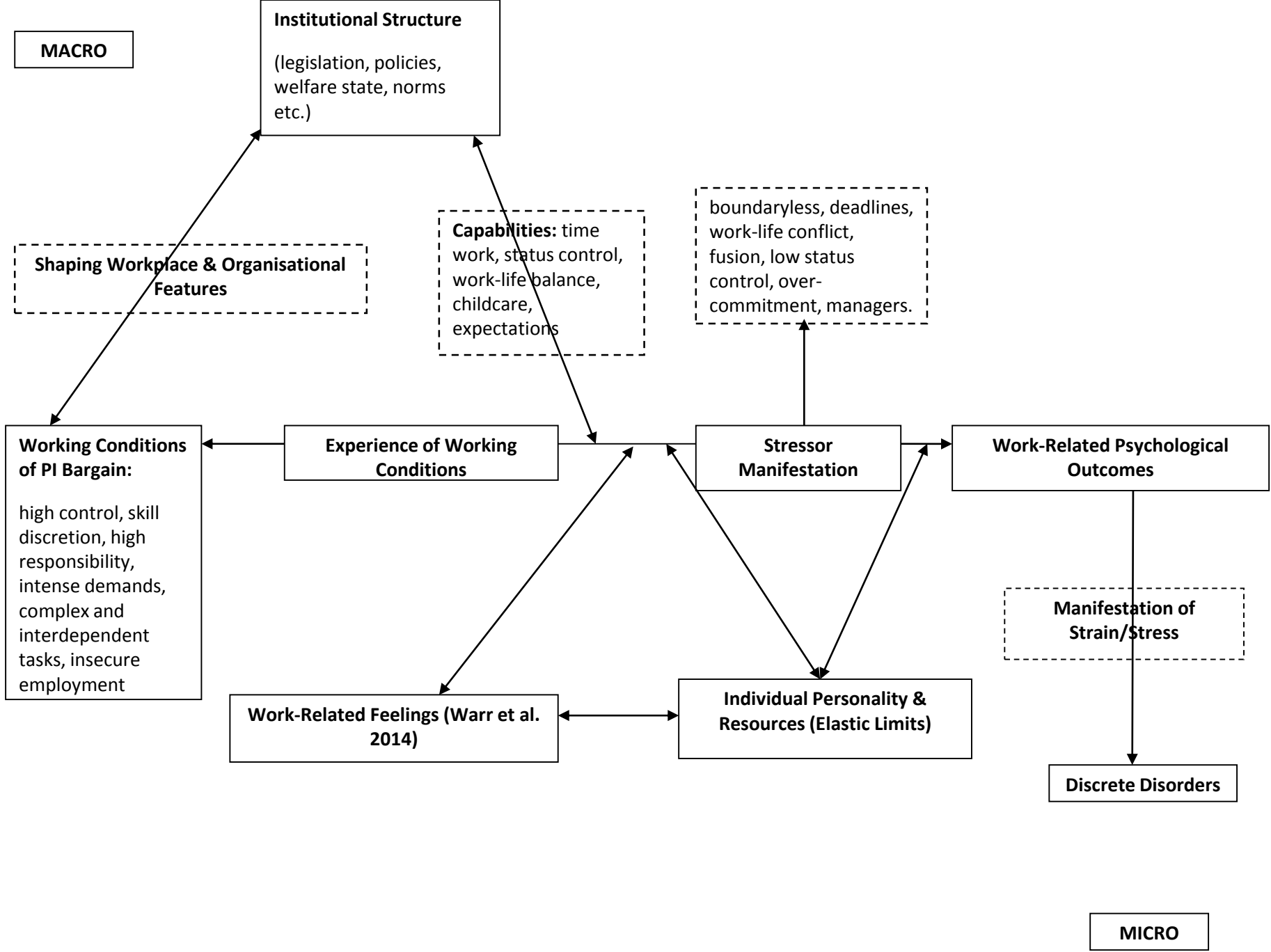
# Thank You!

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# PWE Questions – Decision Lat/Autonomy

- Are you able to choose or change your order of tasks? [job control]
- Are you able to choose or change your methods of work? [job control]
- Can you decide where you worked? [freedom]
- Can you decide when you worked? [freedom]
- Are you able to apply your own ideas in your work? [discretion]
- Can you influence decisions that were important for your work? [influence]

# PWE Questions – Demands

- Does your job involve working at very high speed? [quant]
- How often do you not have time to complete all your work tasks? [quant]
- Does your job involve complex tasks? [cognitive]
- Is your work emotionally demanding? [emotional]
- Does your work require that you hide your feelings? [emotional]

# JOB RELATED FEELINGS SECTION

# Warr et al. (2014) Operationalised

- For the past month, how often you have felt the following while working in your job. Focus is on how work makes you feel not an assessment of general mental health.

**HAPA** [excited, enthusiastic, inspired, joyful]

**HAUA** [anxious, tense, worried, nervous]

**LAPA** [relaxed, calm, at ease, laid back]

**LAUA** [depressed, dejected, despondent, hopeless]

Pleasant Scoring (1: Never...7: Always)

Unpleasant Scoring (7:Never...1: Always)

# Job-Related Affect Quadrant Means

JOB-RELATED FEELINGS (N=31)								
	HAPA		HAUA		LAPA		LAUA	
Mean	4.35		5.82		3.97		6.65	
Minimum	2.25		3.75		3		5.25	
Maximum	6.75		7		6		7	
	DK	IE	DK	IE	DK	IE	DK	IE
Mean	4.55	4.18	6.07	5.62	4.34	3.67	6.55	6.73
Minimum	2.25	2.25	5	3.75	2	2.25	5.5	5.25
Maximum	6.25	6.75	7	6.5	5.75	6	7	7

**HAPA** [excited, enthusiastic, inspired, joyful]

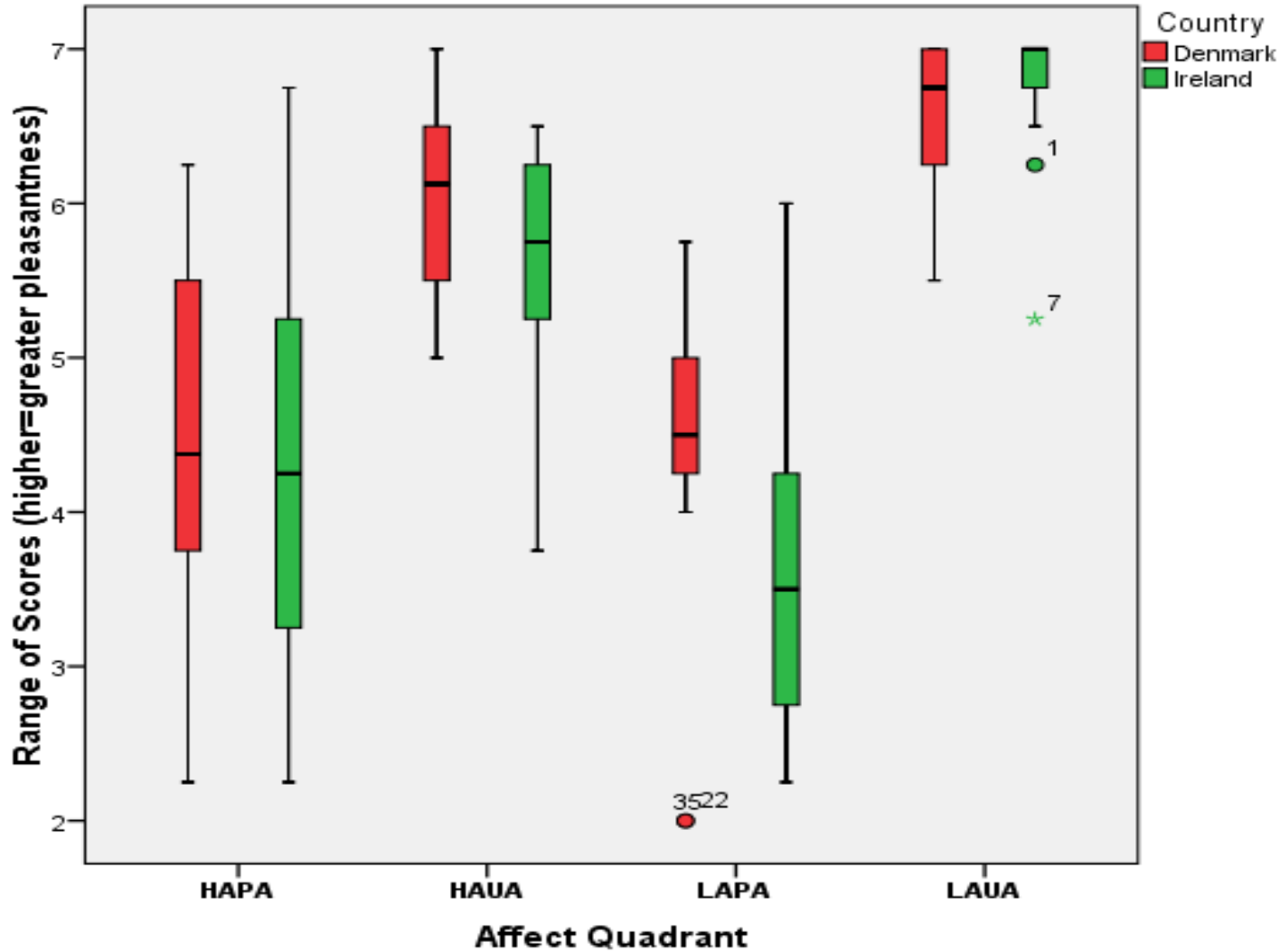
**HAUA** [anxious, tense, worried, nervous]

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Pleasant Scoring (1: Never...7: Always), Unpleasant Scoring (7:Never...1: Always)

# Affect Quadrants Boxplot





## D-C Quads 6\*5 Version by Job-Related Affect Quadrants

	HAPA	HAUA	LAPA	LAUA
<b>PASSIVE (n=8)</b>				
Mean	<b>3.84</b>	6.06	4.65	6.7
Minimum	2.25	5.5	3.25	5.5
Maximum	5.25	6.5	6	7
<b>LOW STRAIN (n=4)</b>				
Mean	5.12	6.19	4.31	6.9
Minimum	4	5.75	3.75	6.75
Maximum	6.75	6.5	5.25	7
<b>ACTIVE (n=11)</b>				
Mean	4.77	5.81	<b>3.69</b>	6.69
Minimum	3.25	3.75	2	6
Maximum	6.25	6.75	5.75	7
<b>HIGH STRAIN (n=8)</b>				
Mean	<b>3.88</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>6.47</b>
Minimum	2.25	4.25	2	5.25
Maximum	6.25	7	5.5	7

## D-C Quads & Affect Quadrants by Country Mean

	HAPA		HAUA		LAPA		LAUA	
	DK	IE	DK	IE	DK	IE	DK	IE
<b>PASSIVE</b>								
Mean	<b>3.81</b>	<b>3.87</b>	5.94	6.19	4.62	4.69	6.37	6.94
<b>LOW STRAIN</b>								
Mean	<b>4.87</b>	<b>5.37</b>	6.25	6.12	4.62	4	7	6.87
<b>ACTIVE</b>								
Mean	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.67</b>	6.25	5.46	4.2	<b>3.25</b>	6.5	6.83
<b>HIGH STRAIN</b>								
Mean	<b>4.75</b>	<b>3.35</b>	5.83	5.15	4	<b>3.2</b>	6.58	6.4

# Participant Profile

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	Total (n=31)	Denmark (n=14)	Ireland (n=17)
<b>Age (mean)</b>	48	49	48
<b>Women (%)</b>	23%	14%	29%
<b>Children (% Yes)</b>	81%	79%	82%
<b>Third Level Qual. (%)</b>	74%	50%	94%
<b>Post Grad Qual (%)</b>	35%	7%	59%