# Librarian Perceptions of Job Control
## Considerations for Leaders and Managers

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## Introduction

Control and agency are central issues in anecdotes about burnout related to micro-managing bosses, demanding service models, or opaque decision-making processes.

In a 1986 meta-analysis of perceived control by employees, Paul Spector observes that "although enhanced control is often strongly advocated, many have questioned if it is a universal panacea to employee ills," and continues to note that "with increased control comes increased responsibility and often increased workload."

What are the limits of job control? How do we talk to librarians about control and create autonomy-supportive workplaces?

## Dimensions of Job Control

- **Work tasks**: control over what you do, how you perform job tasks
- **Work scheduling**: ability to determine work hours and schedule; flexible work arrangements; telecommuting
- **Work pacing**: control over the speed at which you do your work; rest breaks
- **Physical environment**: control over workspace, including lighting, comfort, equipment, decorations
- **Decision-making**: ability to participate in decision-making; shared or participative decision-making; transparent decision-making
- **Interaction**: control over social interactions at work, including interactions with students, faculty, staff, colleagues, bosses; interruptions; intersects with design of office spaces (i.e., physical environment)
- **Mobility**: ability to move within the organization; take on different roles; career advancement

| Question | N | NA | Mean ↑ |
|---|---|---|---|
| JC20. How much control do you have over the amount you earn at your job? | 306 | 1 | 1.55 |
| JC21. How much control do you have over how your work is evaluated? | 302 | 5 | 2.16 |
| JC19. How much can you control the number of times you are interrupted while you work? | 306 | 1 | 2.33 |
| JC12. How much can you control the physical conditions of your work station (lighting, temperature)? | 307 | 0 | 2.53 |
| JC18. How much control do you have over the amount of resources (tools, materials) you get? | 305 | 2 | 2.85 |
| JC15. How much influence do you have over the policies and procedures in your work unit? | 305 | 2 | 2.88 |
| JC10. How much are you able to predict what results of decisions you make on the job will be? | 303 | 4 | 3.21 |
| JC17. How much are things that affect you at work predictable, even if you can't directly control them? | 306 | 1 | 3.29 |
| JC16. How much control do you have over the sources of information you need to do your job? | 305 | 2 | 3.30 |
| JC14. How much can you control when and how much you interact with others at work? | 305 | 2 | 3.31 |
| JC22. In general, how much overall control do you have over work and work-related matters? | 307 | 0 | 3.36 |
| JC4. How much can you generally predict the amount of work you will have to do on any given day? | 305 | 2 | 3.43 |
| JC8. How much control do you have over when you come to work and leave? | 307 | 0 | 3.47 |
| JC6. How much control do you have over how quickly or slowly you have to work? | 307 | 0 | 3.60 |
| JC2. How much can you choose among a variety of tasks or projects to do? | 307 | 0 | 3.61 |
| JC5. How much control do you have personally over how much work you get done? | 306 | 1 | 3.74 |
| JC9. How much control do you have over when you take vacations or days off? | 306 | 1 | 3.87 |
| JC7. How much control do you have over scheduling and duration of your rest breaks? | 305 | 2 | 3.95 |
| JC13. How much control do you have over how you do your work? | 307 | 0 | 3.95 |
| JC1. How much control do you have over the variety of methods you use in completing your work? | 307 | 0 | 4.05 |
| JC11. How much are you able to decorate, rearrange, or personalize your work area? | 306 | 1 | 4.28 |
| JC3. How much control do you have personally over the quality of your work? | 302 | 5 | 4.30 |

## Methods

- A web survey was administered to academic librarians with instruction responsibilities. The survey included a previously developed scale for measuring job control.
- A recruitment email was sent three times (in fall 2022) via ALA Connect to ACRL Members, ACRL Instruction Section, and Information Literacy Instruction in Academic Libraries.
- 307 academic instruction librarians responded to the job control inventory
- The job control inventory (Dwyer & Ganster 1991) includes 22 questions. The first 21 questions were used to assess job control, and the last item was used as a control for perception.
- Scoring for the job control inventory uses a Likert scale with values one through five (Very little = 1; Little = 2; A moderate amount = 3; Much = 4, and Very much = 5).
- The alpha coefficient for the scale demonstrated good reliability (α = 0.89).

| Min. | Q1 | Median | Mean | Q3 | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.886 | 3.00 | 3.33 | 3.33 | 3.67 | 5.00 |
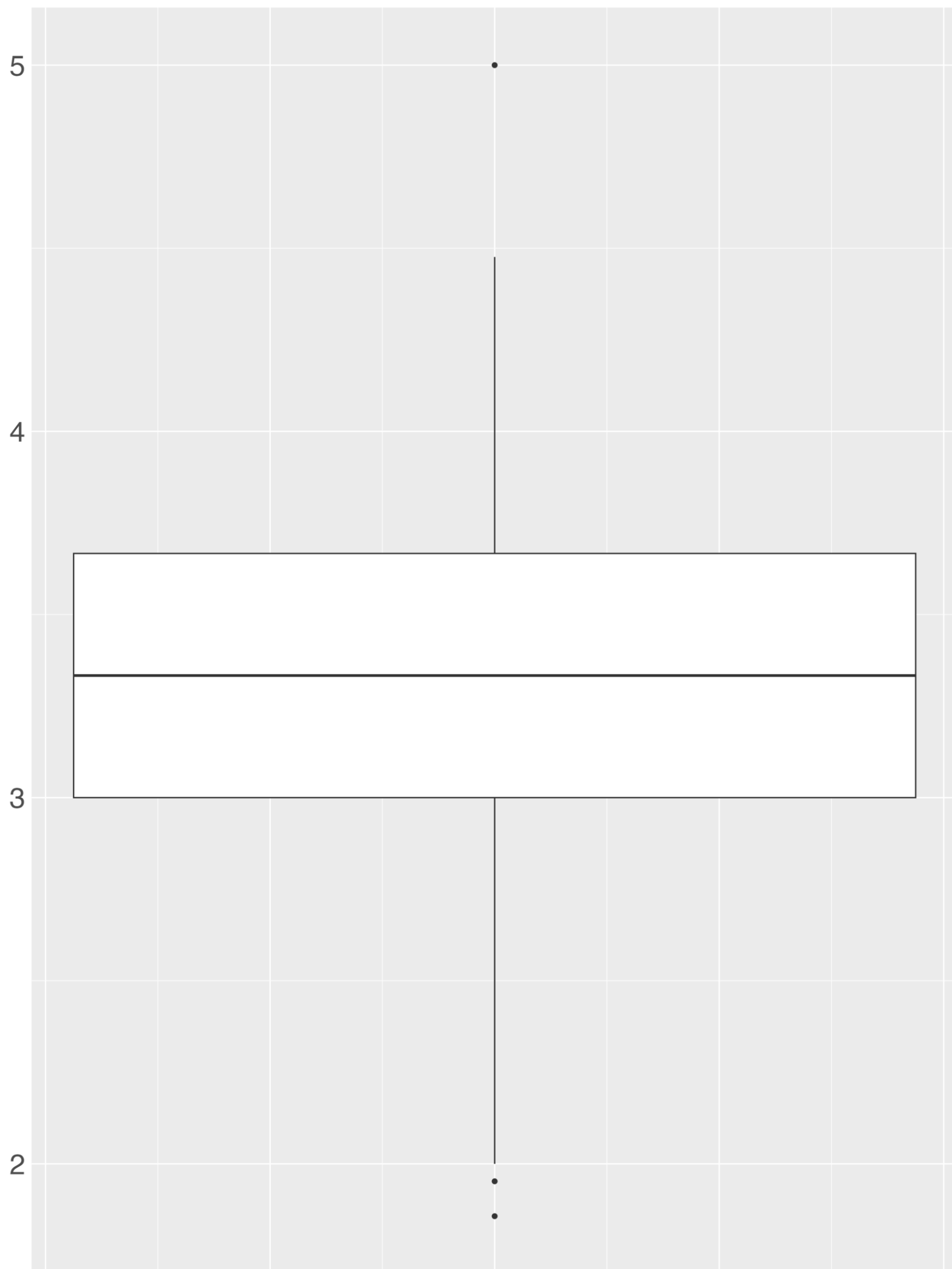


## Key Concerns

- Income
- Evaluation
- Interruptions
- Physical conditions
- Resources
- Policies & Procedures
- Decision-making

The majority of these are concerned with decision-making, suggesting that there is greater need to engage library workers in decision-making processes. However, concerns about income and resources are also related to larger issues with libraries being low-resourced.

On the other hand, academic instruction librarians expressed generally high control over their work, including work tasks, scheduling, and pacing.

## References

Dwyer, D. J., & Ganster, D. C. (1991). The effects of job demands and control on employee attendance and satisfaction. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *12*(7), 595–608. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030120704

## My Related Work

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