

JOB AUTONOMY AS A DRIVER OF JOB SATISFACTION

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Abstract

As one of the essential human needs, autonomy affects internal motivation and drives job satisfaction. The aim of the article is based on long-term quantitative research ($n = 631$) to examine gender, age, education and job position differences in job autonomy and to evaluate the extent to which job satisfaction and job autonomy are related. The research shows that 72.6% of the respondents have a high degree of work scheduling autonomy, 68.1% have a high degree of decision-making autonomy and 53.9% have a high degree of work methods autonomy. An important finding is that most respondents (84.8%) are satisfied with their job. There are differences between generations and non/managerial job positions regarding work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. Additionally, there is a difference between education levels regarding work scheduling autonomy. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficients show positive mutual correlations between job autonomy categories, as well as between job autonomy categories and job satisfaction. The results also confirm the relationships between job autonomy categories and job satisfaction. Employees with a high degree of job autonomy feel more satisfied in their jobs than others. On the contrary, there are no differences between genders regarding work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. Furthermore, there are no differences between education levels regarding decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. Understanding the relationship between job autonomy and satisfaction is vital for employers and policymakers to enhance job satisfaction, retain employees and improve organisational performance.

Implications for Central European audience: The research reveals that employees with a high degree of job autonomy, encompassing work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy, experience greater job satisfaction. No gender or education-based differences in terms of job autonomy were found, but differences exist between generations and non/managerial job positions and job autonomy. The results confirm that job autonomy drives job satisfaction. Employees with a high degree of job autonomy feel more satisfied in their jobs than others. Employers and policymakers should

therefore prioritise increasing job autonomy to improve job satisfaction, retention and organisational performance.

Keywords: Employee; correlation; difference; job autonomy; job satisfaction; relationship; research

JEL Classification: M12, M54

Introduction

The modern era brought more demanding obligations for work and family and employees currently experience conflict between these two areas, leading to increased stress and decreased job satisfaction (Wang et al., 2022). Accenture's Future of Work Study from November 2022 (Smith et al., 2022) pointed out that productive mindsets are affected by job autonomy more than work flexibility. The future of work should enable employees to be productive, healthy and satisfied regardless of where they work (Smith et al., 2022). The contemporary nature of work necessitates people who are committed, engaged, flexible and proactive (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Organisations worldwide are finding that fostering autonomy rather than imposing constraints benefits not just their employees but also their profitability and performance (Deci et al., 2017). Thus, greater relative autonomy and the factors that promote it within organisations create excellent workplaces (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Since today's employees not only demand adequate pay for their work but also care about other factors that affect their job satisfaction (Wan & Duffy, 2022), we focus on the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction in the Czech Republic.

1 Literature Review

1.1 Job autonomy

Autonomy is one of the essential human needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and has been regarded as an important component of professional growth (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016). In the modern work context, autonomy plays an important role because it allows employees to execute work tasks and work in a way that reflects their judgment and preferences (Wan & Duffy, 2022). Thus, according to Wang et al. (2022), job autonomy promotes employees' feelings of freedom and comfort, so they work with greater passion. Moreover, Gagné and Deci (2005) confirmed that workplaces that support autonomy foster needs satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, thus resulting in greater work engagement and better goal attainment. Additionally, job autonomy facilitates employees' identification with their work by reinforcing its intrinsic value, which is crucial because it leads to greater employee job satisfaction and employees' protection from the vulnerability associated with excessive attention to extrinsic motivation (Kwok, 2020).

Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory defines job autonomy as an employee-motivating factor (Herzberg et al., 1993). Furthermore, job autonomy represents one of the fundamental characteristics in the job characteristics model of work motivation. Hackman and Oldham (1976) stated that job autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance and feedback are core elements that positively affect employees' psychological states. It is an effective

employee resource that helps them cope with job demands (Van Yperen et al., 2016). It allows employees to use their tacit knowledge to organise their work activities in the best manner, thus enabling more specialisation and higher productivity (van Hoorn, 2018). Initially, job autonomy was used to describe the degree of a person's freedom and independence when carrying out their work tasks (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). However, over time, this original concept has been expanded. According to Morgeson and Humphrey (2006), job autonomy based on freedom includes work scheduling, decision-making and work methods as three linked task aspects. Although these job autonomy aspects were previously mainly connected to the task level, recent changes, such as the growth in flexible work arrangements, have transferred job autonomy to the level of the work itself (Kubicek et al., 2017). Thus, employees can decide how and in what order they complete their tasks, choose the pace of their work, when they begin and end working (Carr & Mellizo, 2013), or even where they perform their work (Nijp et al., 2012). In summary, job autonomy is employees' freedom to decide when, where, in what order and by what means they will work and perform their tasks (Kubicek et al., 2017). It leads to employees' greater decision-making authority regarding their work execution (Leach et al., 2003). Moreover, Galletta et al. (2011) claimed that high job autonomy increases employees' sense of responsibility for their work results.

A large body of research has addressed the impact of job autonomy on various aspects of employees' working lives. Since the end of the 20th century, researchers have confirmed a positive effect of job autonomy on the acquisition of skills and knowledge and employees' learning motivation (Wielenga-Meijer et al., 2010), employees' psychological and physical health (Park & Jang, 2017; van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020) and well-being (Knudsen et al., 2011), work engagement and career commitment (Littman-Ovadia et al., 2013), job motivation (Ng & Feldman, 2015), thus improving employees' productivity (Bakker et al., 2007) and proactive behaviour (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Job autonomy reduces adverse effects of job demands (Bakker et al., 2007; Brauchli et al., 2014; Spoor et al., 2010), tensions caused by contradictory work and personal role pressures (Michel et al., 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2015; Wong et al., 2014), employees' mental burnout and emotional exhaustion (Zhou, 2020), and is therefore related to lower turnover (Lin et al., 2013; Parsons et al., 2003). It increases employee role diversity (Morgeson et al., 2005) and intrinsic motivation, which in turn enhances employees' engagement, work performance (Nahrgang et al., 2011) and work effort and quality (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2011). Furthermore, job autonomy contributes to vigorous, passionate and devoted work (Malinowska et al., 2018), developing new and valuable ideas (Volmer et al., 2012) and thus to workplace creativity (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Sia & Appu, 2015), which encourages employees' inventiveness (Garg & Dhar, 2017; Giebels et al., 2016).

Concerning the points mentioned above, and since job autonomy encourages employees to believe in their competence and capabilities to accomplish their work, other work-related aspects are also addressed. Since the effect of job autonomy on factors related to employees' happiness has been demonstrated, it has been expected to affect job satisfaction directly. Many researchers have focused on this issue (Humphrey et al., 2007; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Lin et al., 2013; Gözükarar & Çolakoğlu, 2016; Kubicek et al., 2017). Therefore, as stated by Zhao et al. (2022), job autonomy is considered one of the powerful management tools to increase job satisfaction.

1.2 Job satisfaction

In organisational culture, job satisfaction is a crucial concept that has been discussed for a long time, especially in the context of organisational success (Balzer et al., 1997). It is a broad concept linked to overall job attitude (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016) and there are numerous definitions in the literature. For example, Weiss (2002) defined job satisfaction as a positive state of emotions and expressions that results from how an employee evaluates and relates to the job. Oshagbemi (2000) stated that job satisfaction is a self-reported comparison of desired and actual job outcomes. A more recent definition of job satisfaction emphasised that it is the employee's subjective feeling towards the work, i.e., how people feel about their work and whether they like it (Lopes et al., 2014). According to Ybema et al. (2010), it may be linked to various work-related factors, such as pay, working conditions or hours.

Similarly to job autonomy, the job characteristics theory by Hackman and Oldham (1976) is commonly used to explain job satisfaction. They proposed five core elements to increase employee job satisfaction (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2011). Following this theory, intrinsic task motivation increases job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). However, as Rose (2001) concluded, having both internal and external sources is important for a sense of satisfaction. An example of internal sources may be an interesting job, social contribution or skill development opportunities. On the other hand, job security, income level and working hours represent external sources (Clark, 2005). Furthermore, Lin et al. (2013) revealed a relationship between employees' age, education, profession, employment status and job satisfaction. Carr and Mellizo (2013) stated that job satisfaction is one of the most crucial aspects of a person's overall well-being, especially in those who work for a living. Nevertheless, job satisfaction is not only important for personal reasons and employee well-being (Kwok, 2020) but also relates to the health of those in the employee's immediate environment. Higher satisfaction levels are generally linked to flexible or shorter work hours (Clark, 1997; Scandura & Lankau, 1997) and skill utilisation opportunities (Morrison et al., 2005).

According to Gözükara and Çolakoğlu (2016), research into the direct relationship between job autonomy and satisfaction is limited. Nonetheless, earlier research (e.g., Hackman, 1980; Fried & Ferris, 1987; Pousette & Hanse, 2002) reported a positive correlation between job satisfaction and autonomy. This aligns with recent findings that employees report greater job satisfaction when experiencing more autonomy (Benz & Frey, 2004; Thompson & Prottas, 2006; Carr & Mellizo, 2013). Furthermore, Lange (2012) revealed the effect of the preference for autonomy and independence of the self-employed, which causes a higher level of job satisfaction.

Since job satisfaction can be related to factors such as working conditions (Ybema et al., 2010) or employee types (Dong et al., 2021), we build on the assumption of Gözükara and Çolakoğlu (2016) that job autonomy, which provides employees with freedom and own decision-making, leads to their greater satisfaction. Our research builds on the existing gaps to examine the influence of job autonomy on job satisfaction.

The objective of the article is to examine gender, age (from the generation point of view), education and job position differences in job autonomy and to evaluate the extent to which

job satisfaction and job autonomy are related. The rest of the article is structured as follows. The following section describes the methodology. Section 3 is dedicated to an evaluation of the outcomes of the survey. Subsequently, the differences and relationships between selected variables are examined. Section 4 discusses the results and proposes practical implications, while the last section focuses on the conclusion.

2 Methodology

2.1 Questionnaire

Primary data were obtained through a quantitative survey using an online questionnaire. This quantitative survey was carried out in the period from 2017 to 2022. This period was chosen to increase the sample size and overcome the data collection slowdown related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was distributed based on a random selection of respondents and it was ensured that this selection was not biased or predictable.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part focused on identification questions from which information regarding identification variables was obtained. Therefore, the questions ascertained the gender, age, level of education, job position, average working hours per week and time worked in the position, as well as in the organisation. The next part of the questionnaire focused on job autonomy, which we further divided according to Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) into three linked categories related to job autonomy: work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. The categories were supplemented with work elements related to pace, place, time, goals or sense. The last part of the questionnaire focused on job satisfaction according to Morgeson and Humphrey (2006). In the second and third parts of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with each statement. The respondents indicated their responses using a linear numeric scale from 1 (lowest agreement) to 15 (highest agreement) by choosing a concrete number.

2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 631 respondents. The respondent structure is shown in Table 1 and additional information about the respondents is provided below.

Table 1 | Respondent structure

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Gender | Male | | Female | |
| | 199 31.5% | | 432 68.5% | |
| Generation | Boomers | Generation X | Generation Y | Generation Z |
| | 18 2.9% | 177 28.1% | 235 37.2% | 201 31.9% |
| Higher education | Yes | | No | |
| | 453 71.8% | | 178 28.2% | |
| Job position | Managers | Rank-and-file employees | Missing | |
| | 126 20% | 484 76.7% | 21 3.3% | |

Source: Own research (2017-2022)

The respondents' average weekly working time is 35.7 hours. They have been working an average of 4.9 years in their current job position and 6.3 years in the same organisation. The respondents' year of birth ranged from 1952 to 2003. Based on McCrindle (2011), age categories are divided by generations into Boomers (between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (between 1965 and 1979), Generation Y (between 1980 and 1994) and Generation Z (between 1995 and 2009). "Missing" means missing values that are absent from the data.

2.3 Research questions, hypotheses and statistical analysis

As part of our research, we wanted to determine the impact of identification variables on work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. Based on the theoretical background, we formulated the first research question: Are the medians of two (or more) groups different? Following this research question, we formulated 12 null hypotheses that assume that the medians of each group are equal. The alternative hypotheses state that medians are not equal. We examined whether there is a significant difference between groups (and if so, which groups differ).

H₀1: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of work scheduling autonomy is not gender-dependent).

H₀2: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of decision-making autonomy is not gender-dependent).

H₀3: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of work methods autonomy is not gender-dependent).

H₀4: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of work scheduling autonomy is not generation-dependent).

H₀5: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of decision-making autonomy is not generation-dependent).

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H₀₆: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of work methods autonomy is not generation-dependent).

H₀₇: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of work scheduling autonomy is not education-dependent).

H₀₈: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of decision-making autonomy is not education-dependent).

H₀₉: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of work methods autonomy is not education-dependent).

H₀₁₀: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of work scheduling autonomy is not job position-dependent).

H₀₁₁: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of decision-making autonomy is not job position-dependent).

H₀₁₂: There is no significant difference between groups (the degree of work methods autonomy is not job position-dependent).

Furthermore, we wanted to determine the extent to which work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy and job satisfaction are related. Based on the theoretical background, we formulated another research question: Is there a significant correlation between job autonomy and job satisfaction? Following this research question, we formulated six null hypotheses that assume no significant correlation between two selected variables in the population. The alternative hypotheses state that there is a significant correlation between two selected variables in the population.

H₀₁₃: There is no significant correlation between work scheduling autonomy and decision-making autonomy.

H₀₁₄: There is no significant correlation between work scheduling autonomy and work methods autonomy.

H₀₁₅: There is no significant correlation between decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy.

H₀₁₆: There is no significant correlation between work scheduling autonomy and job satisfaction.

H₀₁₇: There is no significant correlation between decision-making autonomy and job satisfaction.

H₀₁₈: There is no significant correlation between work methods autonomy and job satisfaction.

The data were processed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 28 software. The data analysis was performed using one-dimensional and multivariate statistical methods. The descriptive analysis was based on exploratory data analysis. The normality of the distribution of the cardinal variables was tested using the Shapiro–Wilk test. The exploratory data analysis showed that the normality of the distribution was not met. Therefore, the hypotheses were

tested using the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H tests. The significance level was set at 0.05. The strength of the correlation between the two variables was examined using the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient using the scale given by de Vaus (2014) as follows: 0.01-0.09 (trivial to low), 0.10-0.29 (low to moderate), 0.30-0.49 (moderate to substantial), 0.50-0.69 (substantial to very strong), 0.70-0.89 (very strong to near perfect) and 0.90+ (perfect). The total numbers for each analysis vary according to the frequency of respondents' answers (some respondents did not answer all the questions).

3 Results

Job autonomy was divided into three linked categories in line with the questionnaire structure: work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. The respondents indicated their agreement with individual statements using the 15-point linear numeric scale. This scale was divided into three categories: 1-5 for a low degree of autonomy, 6-10 for a medium degree of autonomy and 11-15 for a high degree of autonomy. The results show that respondents rated the degree of autonomy on average from 10.53 to 11.73, indicating a medium to high degree of autonomy. Respondents perceived the highest degree of autonomy in work scheduling autonomy (mean = 11.72; 72.6% of the respondents rated their degree of work scheduling autonomy as high), followed by decision-making autonomy (mean = 11.29; 68.1% of the respondents rated their degree of decision-making autonomy as high) and respondents reported the lowest mean value in the category of work methods autonomy (mean = 10.53; 53.9% of the respondents rated their degree of work methods autonomy as high). Although this value is lower than the previous ones, a positive finding is that two of the three values are in the range 11-15, indicating a high degree of autonomy, and one value is close to this range. The results also show that most respondents (84.8%) are satisfied with their job. The average value obtained in this category is 12.38. First, we examined gender, age (from the generation point of view), education and job position differences in job autonomy; then, we paid attention to the extent to which job satisfaction and work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy are related.

3.1 Differences between basic identification variables and job autonomy

The differences between gender, age (from the generation point of view), education, job position and job autonomy categories are examined below. As the assumption of normality of the distribution was not met, hypotheses were tested using the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H tests.

Gender

In all the examined categories, the degree of autonomy reported by men and women did not differ significantly. A high degree of work scheduling autonomy was stated by 73.4% of men and 72.2% of women, while for decision-making autonomy, it was stated by 72.4% of men and 66.2% of women and for work methods autonomy by 59.8% of men and 51.2% of women.

The results of the Mann–Whitney U test for H_01 - H_03 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 | Results of Mann–Whitney U test for H_01-H_03

| No. | There is no difference between gender and: | p-value | Decision |
|--------|--|---------|----------------------------|
| H_01 | work scheduling autonomy | 0.893 | Retain the null hypothesis |
| H_02 | decision-making autonomy | 0.102 | Retain the null hypothesis |
| H_03 | work methods autonomy | 0.067 | Retain the null hypothesis |

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$

Source: Own research (2017-2022)

There is no significant difference between groups. This means that work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy are not gender-dependent. Hypotheses H_01-H_03 were not rejected.

Generation

As concerns the distribution of respondents by generation, the differences were more evident. In all the examined categories, respondents from Generation X stated a higher degree of autonomy than respondents from other generations. For the sake of clarity, the partial results (for the category “high degree of autonomy”) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 | High degree of autonomy by generations

| Distribution by generations | High degree of work scheduling autonomy | High degree of decision-making autonomy | High degree of work methods autonomy |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| Boomers ($n_1 = 18$) | 12 66.7% | 13 72.2% | 10 55.6% |
| Generation X ($n_2 = 177$) | 144 81.4% | 132 74.6% | 107 60.5% |
| Generation Y ($n_3 = 235$) | 172 73.2% | 158 67.2% | 126 53.6% |
| Generation Z ($n_4 = 201$) | 130 64.7% | 127 63.2% | 97 48.3% |
| Total ($n = 631$) | 458 72.6% | 430 68.1% | 340 53.9% |

Source: Own research (2017-2022)

Employees' age may be an important factor influencing the relationship between job autonomy and job-related and family-related outcomes. Regarding our sample of respondents, Generation X and Generation Y reported the highest degree of work scheduling autonomy. Generation X has the second highest number of managers in our sample (Generation X 32.8%, Boomers 44.4%), suggesting that managers generally have higher job autonomy. Generation Y represents a younger generation of employees who are unwilling to follow orders and directions and thus it is evident that they prefer to work freely and independently. When evaluating a job, this generation not only pays attention to the salary but also considers whether they can influence the course of the work. In the case of decision-making autonomy, Generation X again dominates, followed by Boomers, which is in line with the generation representatives' job positions as mentioned above. The same applies to work

methods autonomy, but this category is generally associated with the lowest autonomy values. What is certainly interesting is that although Generation X is predominant in all three categories, the differences from the younger generations (Generation Y and Generation Z) are minor. This is also consistent with our assumption that work pattern requirements are diversifying. Young people increasingly try to organise their working patterns according to autonomy in place and time, valuing their free time. Job autonomy allows them to acquire knowledge and information, develop work skills and demonstrate competencies.

The results of the Kruskal–Wallis H test for H_{04} – H_{06} are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 | Results of Kruskal–Wallis H test for H_{04} – H_{06}

| No. | There is no difference between generations and: | p-value | Decision |
|----------|---|---------|----------------------------|
| H_{04} | work scheduling autonomy | < 0.001 | Reject the null hypothesis |
| H_{05} | decision-making autonomy | 0.007 | Reject the null hypothesis |
| H_{06} | work methods autonomy | 0.001 | Reject the null hypothesis |

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$

Source: Own research (2017–2022)

The results of the test for H_{04} – H_{06} show that differences between groups can be determined with these data. Hypotheses H_{04} – H_{06} were rejected and the alternative hypotheses were accepted. This means that work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy are generation-dependent.

Education

The higher education level did not play a role in respondents' answers. Higher education graduates surprisingly stated similar degrees of job autonomy as other respondents. A high degree of work scheduling autonomy was stated by 75.3% of the respondents with a higher education degree and 65.7% of the respondents without a degree, in the case of decision-making autonomy by 68.9% of the respondents with a higher education degree and 66.3% of the respondents without a degree and in the case of work methods autonomy by 54.5% of the respondents with a higher education degree and 52.2% of the respondents without a degree.

The results of the Mann–Whitney U test for H_{07} – H_{09} are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 | Results of Mann–Whitney U test for H_{07} – H_{09}

| No. | There is no difference between education levels and: | p-value | Decision |
|----------|--|---------|----------------------------|
| H_{07} | work scheduling autonomy | 0.012 | Reject the null hypothesis |
| H_{08} | decision-making autonomy | 0.078 | Retain the null hypothesis |
| H_{09} | work methods autonomy | 0.340 | Retain the null hypothesis |

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$

Source: Own research (2017–2022)

The results of the test for H_{07} show a difference between groups (the degree of work scheduling autonomy is education-dependent). Hypothesis H_{07} was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Hypotheses H_{08} and H_{09} were not rejected as there is

no significant difference between groups. This means that work decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy are not education-dependent.

Job position

In all the examined categories, managers had higher degrees of autonomy than rank-and-file employees (high degree of work scheduling autonomy: 86.5% vs 69%; high degree of decision-making autonomy: 77.8% vs 65.7%; high degree of work methods autonomy: 67.5% vs 50.6%). The findings are consistent with the assumption that managers have more job autonomy than rank-and-file employees.

The results of the Mann–Whitney *U* test for H_010-H_012 are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 | Results of Mann–Whitney *U* test for H_010-H_012

| No. | There is no difference between job positions and: | p-value | Decision |
|---------|---|---------|----------------------------|
| H_010 | work scheduling autonomy | < 0.001 | Reject the null hypothesis |
| H_011 | decision-making autonomy | < 0.001 | Reject the null hypothesis |
| H_012 | work methods autonomy | < 0.001 | Reject the null hypothesis |

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$

Source: Own research (2017-2022)

The results of the test for H_010-H_012 show that differences between groups can be determined with these data and hypotheses H_010-H_012 were rejected. The alternative hypotheses were accepted. This means that work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy are job position-dependent.

The research results show that in the examined sample, there are no differences in gender regarding work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. Furthermore, there are no differences between education levels regarding decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. On the contrary, there are differences between generations and non/managerial job positions regarding work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. Additionally, there is a difference between education levels regarding work scheduling autonomy.

3.2 Correlation between job autonomy and job satisfaction

Furthermore, we found out the extent to which job satisfaction and work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy are related. The exploratory data analysis, based on the Shapiro–Wilk test, showed that the normality of the distribution was not met. Therefore, the assumption of a linear correlation between job satisfaction and work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy was made based on the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient.

The results of the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and its significance value (*p*-value) for job autonomy categories and job satisfaction are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 | Results of Spearman's rho and p-value

| No. | Spearman's rho | Work scheduling autonomy | Decision-making autonomy | Work methods autonomy |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| H_013 | Decision-making autonomy | 0.558** | | |
| H_014, H_015 | Work methods autonomy | 0.528** | 0.594** | |
| H_016, H_017, H_018 | Job satisfaction | 0.327** | 0.374** | 0.307** |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Own research (2017-2022)

The results of the test for H_013 - H_018 show that correlations between variables are significant. Therefore, hypotheses H_013 - H_018 were rejected and the alternative hypotheses were accepted. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficients show mutual correlations between individual job autonomy categories and job autonomy categories and job satisfaction with the positive direction (these variables tend to increase together). Job autonomy categories correlate substantially. The highest value is between decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy (Spearman's $\rho = 0.594$), which aligns with the fact that decision-making must also be made in setting work goals and choosing workflows, techniques and methods.

There are several reasons why job autonomy categories are substantially correlated. Decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy relate to the workplace's level of control and independence. Decision-making autonomy refers to the extent of an employee's control over important work decisions, such as task prioritisation or solving problems. On the other hand, work methods autonomy refers to an employee's degrees of freedom in choosing how to complete work, such as which tools, techniques or methods to use. Since both types of autonomy involve a degree of control and independence, they are related in practice. Employees who are given more decision-making autonomy often take more responsibility for their work.

Work methods autonomy is primarily focused on the methods and techniques used by employees to complete their work, while work scheduling autonomy relates to working time allocation. The correlation between work methods autonomy and work scheduling autonomy is lower (but still high, Spearman's $\rho = 0.528$) because, in some cases, work planning is not as closely linked to work methods as, e.g., decision-making and it is possible to organise without depending on the choice of work methods.

Job satisfaction correlates the most with decision-making autonomy (Spearman's $\rho = 0.374$), then with work scheduling autonomy (Spearman's $\rho = 0.327$) and least with work methods autonomy (Spearman's $\rho = 0.307$). Work scheduling and decision-making autonomy play a vital role in job satisfaction. Both linked categories concerning job autonomy can improve employees' overall job satisfaction. Decision-making autonomy affects employees who feel more involved and engaged. Conversely, the reason for the lowest correlation between job satisfaction and work methods autonomy may be caused by the level of fixed workflows, techniques and methods in specific organisations. This set of fixed workflows, techniques and methods that employees must use to ensure efficiency may limit

work methods autonomy benefits. Therefore, the benefits of work methods autonomy may be limited in some industries. Empowering employees and promoting organisational job autonomy is vital to increasing job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction is a complex construct that can be influenced by various factors such as job design, organisational culture, social relationships at work and individual characteristics of employees (Yasin et al., 2020). However, our research has shown that decision-making autonomy is among the most important factors influencing job satisfaction. Here are some reasons why:

- Sense of control: When employees have the competence to make decisions that influence their work, they feel a sense of control over their work, which can lead to a greater sense of satisfaction. Making decisions and influencing outcomes gives employees a sense of ownership over their work.
- Use of skills and knowledge: Decision-making autonomy requires employees to use their skills and knowledge to analyse problems and propose solutions. This can be intellectually challenging and stimulating, contributing to job satisfaction.
- Responsibility and accountability: Decision-making autonomy is also connected with responsibility and accountability for outcomes. Employees with this type of autonomy are likely to take pride in their work and be more invested in their work outcomes.

In contrast, work methods autonomy has been found to be the least important job satisfaction factor. This may be because employees generally prefer clear guidelines and procedures for completing their work rather than figuring things out independently. Additionally, work methods may be less important because they are often determined by the nature of the job or the industry in which the employee works.

Work scheduling autonomy is also important but may be less important than decision-making autonomy because it directly affects work-life balance rather than job satisfaction. Employees with more control over their work schedules may better balance personal and professional activities, which can contribute to overall life satisfaction. However, it may not affect job satisfaction as directly as decision-making autonomy because it does not necessarily contribute to the sense of control and ownership over one's work.

All the abovementioned correlations between job autonomy categories and job satisfaction are moderate and statistically significant. It means that the relationships between job autonomy categories and job satisfaction exist and that employees with a high degree of autonomy feel more satisfied in their jobs than others. However, other factors that were not the subject of our research might also be important.

4 Discussion

According to Yarmolyuk-Kröck (2022), Central and Eastern Europe are characterised by poor professional development opportunities, lack of job autonomy and low levels of job satisfaction. Therefore, job satisfaction in these parts of Europe appears to be lower than in Western Europe (Yarmolyuk-Kröck, 2022). In the Czech Republic, the latest wave of the LMC

JobsIndex survey showed a year-on-year increase in dissatisfaction in practically all employee groups (LMC, 2022). However, the LMC JobsIndex survey does not include the issue of job autonomy. In contrast, the results of our research show that employees with a higher degree of job autonomy are more satisfied at work. Therefore, it is important to focus more on the current issues of job autonomy that affect job satisfaction in European research.

It is important to realise that job autonomy is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Its implementation in organisations must be carefully planned and executed. In some cases, organisations may not fully understand what job autonomy entails and how it can be supported in the workplace, leading to employee misunderstandings and dissatisfaction. The study by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) found that many organisations define job autonomy narrowly, focusing only on task autonomy. For instance, blue-collar workers might value job autonomy differently than white-collar workers, emphasising control over their physical work environment, tools and a greater variety of learning opportunities (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2012). Thus, the organisations' lack of understanding or narrow definition of job autonomy could contribute to job dissatisfaction among employees. Future research should therefore strive to develop a comprehensive understanding of job autonomy and how to support it in various ways, including task and work autonomy, flexibility and decision-making. Furthermore, paying attention to the different viewpoints on job autonomy as a basic psychological need and a job characteristic is vital. Understanding these differences is essential for creating a work environment that fosters employee well-being, motivation and productivity.

Jin et al. (2022) stated that job autonomy might indicate a more general organisational culture that values independence, self-determination and innovation. In such a culture, employees are encouraged to take ownership of their work and to find new and better ways of accomplishing their tasks. This could lead to higher degrees of both decision-making and work methods autonomy. Consistently with Muecke et al. (2020), who focused on job autonomy concerning work engagement, our research revealed the importance of decision-making and work methods autonomy. Nevertheless, regarding job satisfaction, also work scheduling autonomy is significant. It is in line with Parker et al. (2006), who found that work scheduling autonomy, work decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy were all positively related to proactive work behaviour and thus supporting job satisfaction. Furthermore, the correlations between job autonomy categories indicate that employees who have more autonomy in one area are also likely to have more autonomy in other areas. For instance, a study conducted in the United States by Hackman and Oldham (1976) found that job satisfaction and motivation were positively associated with work scheduling autonomy, work decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy. These findings suggest that job autonomy categories are closely linked. The reason for the strong correlation between work decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy may be that employees who have greater input in decision-making processes are also more likely to have control over how they perform their work (Parker, 2003). Similarly, the correlation between work decision-making autonomy and work scheduling autonomy might be caused by close relation because employees who have more control over their work decisions are also better able to manage their work schedules and boundaries between work and non-work roles (Halbesleben, 2010; Jiang et al., 2012). Whereas our results show the lowest correlation between work methods autonomy and work scheduling autonomy, this correlation is still significant. It suggests that both are closely related because it involves giving employees more control over their work, thus promoting innovative work behaviour (De Spiegelaere et al., 2014), proactivity (Parker

et al., 2006) and job crafting (Tims et al., 2013). Of course, other factors may explain the correlation between job autonomy categories in specific studies or contexts. Future research should closely address them, for example, helping and voice behaviours (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), job stress (Spector & Jex, 1998), employee well-being, transformational leadership (Nielsen et al., 2008) or the broader organisational culture and values around independence and creativity.

Our results align with the study of Dong et al. (2021), who found positive correlations among work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy, work method autonomy and job satisfaction. However, our research emphasized the gap that should be addressed to test the influence of autonomy on job satisfaction, specifically in the context of job classifications, job tenure and types of employees (Dong et al., 2021). It corresponds with the assumption of Kubicek et al. (2017) that employee age could be a crucial element that affects the connections between job autonomy and outcomes related to job satisfaction.

According to our results, the respondents from Generation X stated a higher degree of autonomy than respondents from all other generations. This is consistent with Jurkiewicz's (2000) cross-sectional study in which Generation X valued job autonomy significantly more. A more recent meta-analysis found that younger generations place a higher value on work-life balance and flexibility, which could lead to a greater preference for work scheduling autonomy (Costanza et al., 2012). This is consistent with our findings that work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy are generation-dependent.

Concerning education, the higher education level did not play a role in respondents' answers. In contrast to earlier findings, where job autonomy was related to employees' higher education levels (Lin et al., 2013), our findings are diverse. However, we found that work scheduling autonomy is education-dependent. This suggests that the relationship between job autonomy and education level may depend on the specific dimensions of autonomy. Nevertheless, our finding is contrary to that of Parker et al. (2010), who found that Australian employees with higher levels of education had a positive correlation with work decision-making autonomy. However, there was no significant relationship between work scheduling autonomy or work methods autonomy and education level (Parker et al., 2010). The relationship between job autonomy and education level may depend on the specific dimensions of autonomy being considered, as well as individual preferences and cultural factors. Thus, future research should address this.

The relationship between job autonomy and job position can vary depending on the level of responsibility and decision-making power associated with the position. Our research revealed that managers had higher degrees of autonomy than rank-and-file employees. This is consistent with the findings of Morgeson et al. (2005), who found that job autonomy is positively related to employees' role breadth or range of tasks and responsibilities. Whereas Schulz and Schulz (1988) found that gender influences employee autonomy, we did not reveal significant differences between men and women in our sample. Our findings are consistent with Smith et al. (2013), showing minimal variation among men and women working in teams in the European Union. The results may be affected by differences in cultural and occupational norms, social development and the importance of gender equality

or sample bias because a larger proportion of women (68.5%) were represented in our research.

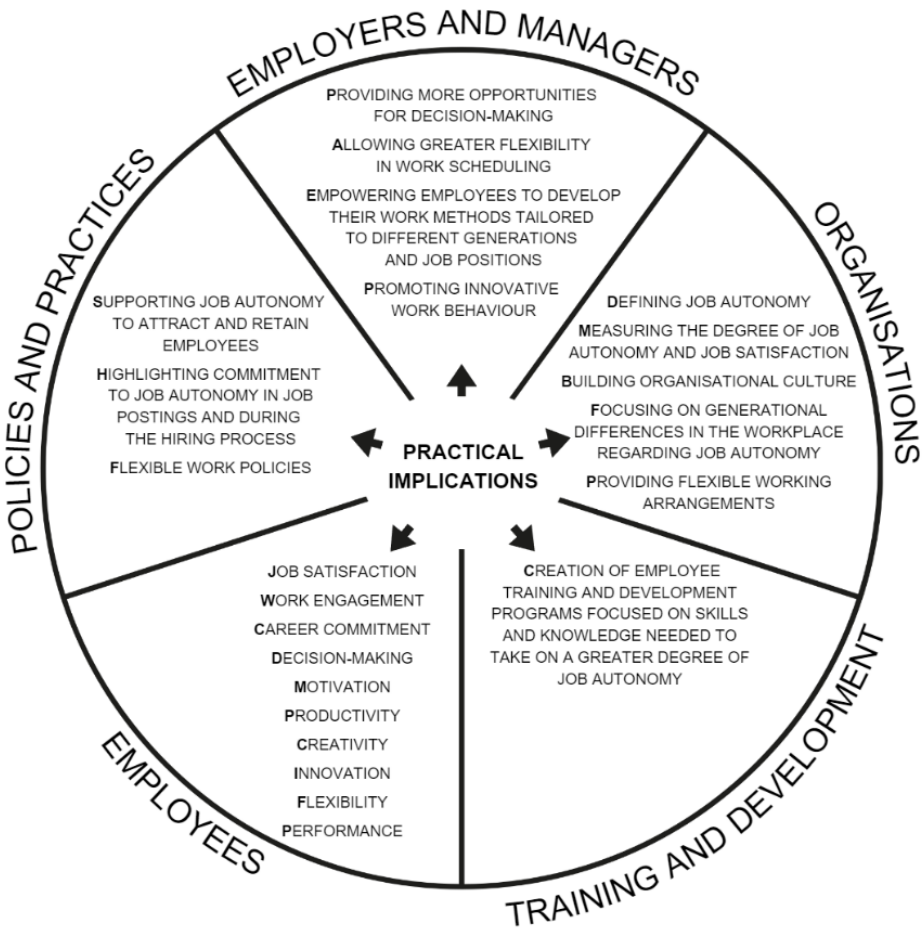
Our research also revealed that it is better, in our context, to utilise a linear numeric scale rather than a verbal one because a verbal scale can lead to an undesirable loss of detail.

According to de Vaus (2014), researchers may not always prioritise having a representative sample when they are, for example, interested in understanding the range of responses or ideas among people. In such cases, generalising from the sample to the entire population becomes less important. Similarly, in our research, the selection of the sample limited the results of our research. While the sample is suitable for data mining and allows obtaining significant results about the relationships between job autonomy categories and job satisfaction, the conclusions cannot be generalised to all employees in the population. Another limitation may be the interpretation of the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. In order not to make subjective conclusions, an established scale (de Vaus, 2014) was used for interpretation, as has been the case in several similar studies. As de Vaus (2014) confirmed, descriptive statistics are vital in social research because they allow us to make sense of our data. Although knowing that our sample results would hold in the population is useful additional information, it is sterile unless we have first carefully and resourcefully used descriptive statistics to analyse our sample data.

According to our findings, job autonomy drives job satisfaction for several reasons. Job autonomy and its categories give employees greater control over their work, which can increase their sense of competence and mastery. Thus, it leads to a better ability to shape the work environment to employees' preferences and strengths. Increased flexibility in terms of working hours, work location and work methods allows employees to control their work schedule and methods to manage potential work-family conflicts better. A greater variety of tasks and responsibilities give employees more control over performed work and allows them to engage in task and job crafting. Lastly, job autonomy is often associated with higher levels of innovation, as employees who have more control over their work are more likely to experiment with new ideas and approaches. Thus, it leads to a sense of ownership and meaningful contribution to the organisation. Overall, job autonomy is an important driver of job satisfaction and employers who want to improve employee satisfaction and engagement should consider offering employees more autonomy at work.

We further propose practical implications for promoting employee satisfaction and organisational performance, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 | Practical implications



Source: Own research (2017-2022)

Overall, this research underscores the importance of considering job autonomy as a driver of job satisfaction in the workplace. Follow-up research should focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on job autonomy and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

This research suggests that employers and policymakers should consider the importance of job autonomy in promoting job satisfaction, employee retention and overall organisational performance. The findings that many respondents have a high degree of job autonomy and job satisfaction, as well as that there are no gender differences, are promising. Still, the differences between generations and job positions regarding work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy and work methods autonomy highlight the need for targeted interventions to improve autonomy for these employees. The positive correlations between

job autonomy categories and job satisfaction also suggest that increasing job autonomy can lead to greater employee satisfaction. However, it is important to note that other factors not examined in this research may also affect job satisfaction and organisational performance.

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