



# JOB AUTONOMY AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF THE OIL AND GAS COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper aims at examining the role of job autonomy in organizations and its relation to employee performance. This will be achieved by providing a critical review of the subject matter in existing management literature. In recent years, the concept of job autonomy has gained increasing importance in the practice of Human Resource Management. Even some studies claimed that job autonomy directly affects job performance and some of its indicators including job satisfaction, motivation, job engagement, and job commitment. As a result, the current paper aims at studying the effect of job autonomy on employee performance by critically reviewing the existing work of human resource scholars. The study concluded that job autonomy influences employee performance and recommends that Human resource managers in the public sector ought to enhance job autonomy by increasing the control employees have over what they are supposed to accomplish.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Job Autonomy, Employee Performance, Contextual Performance, Adaptive performance, Task performance*

## INTRODUCTION

Due to rapid and multidimensional changes in the business environment, companies and organizations are faced with difficulty to recruit, keeping, and developing skilled human resources. Effective human resources management is gaining further importance as a competitive advantage contributing to a firm's survival and success regardless of organizational size and structure or even the industry in which the business is conducted (Armstrong, 2006). Among others, more and more scholars emphasize job autonomy as a factor contributing to enhancing employee performance. Saragih (2011) argues for its positive effect on employees and eventually the firm's performance due to increasing satisfaction, self-efficacy, and mitigating job stress. Others argue that job autonomy contributes to increasing commitment (Sisodia, & Das, 2013), motivation (Hackman, & Oldham, 1976), employee engagement, and more trust-building toward top management (Lu et al., 2017). According to Hackman & Oldham (1976) job autonomy is exercising authority, power, and decision-making by employees within the control of his/her own.

Telecommuting (Onyemaechi et al, 2018), flexible working hours (Beckmann, 2016), and job sharing (Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2013) are among sub-divisional areas of job autonomy that are practiced in numerous organizations. Job autonomy is considered within the process of job design in human resource management. The concept of job autonomy is a controversial matter in profit and non-profit organizations as it works best in some cultures while it receives criticism in others. Job autonomy can be characterized as a "practice or collection of practices involving hierarchical delegation of responsibility, to provide employees with enhanced decision-making powers to carry out primary tasks" (Shobe, 2018).

Employee performance is critical to the overall success of the organization as it helps in determining the strengths, weaknesses, and potential managerial gaps in the business organization (Kuranchie-Mensah & Amponsah-Tauriah, 2016; Leonard, 2019). Leonard (2019) pointed out that an important factor in the domain of employee performance is the attainment of stated goals. This implies that such employees are expected to meet deadlines, make sales, and build a brand image through positive interactions with customers. When employees perform below expectation, customers may feel the organization shows less concern or lack interest in their needs and may most likely seek help elsewhere. Leonard (2019) further explained that when employees are effectively performing their duties, morale across the organization gets a boost. This boost tends to rub off on other employees who were not originally motivated to perform.



Employee performance as articulated by Kuranchie-Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah (2016) is the “work-related actions anticipated of a worker and how soundly those activities are executed.” It entails what is to be achieved at the organizational level by workers as it involves agreed measures, skills, competency requirements, development plans, and the delivery of results (Abiante, 2018). The performance of employees is higher when they are physically and emotionally stable to work and cultivate a desire to work especially in a safe and secure environment (Onuegbu, 2020). This study, therefore, sought to examine the influence of job autonomy on employee performance

## 1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Ascertain the relationship between job autonomy and task performance
- ii. Ascertain the relationship between job autonomy and adaptive performance
- iii. Investigate the relationship between job autonomy and contextual performance

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

#### Flexibility Firm Theory – Rodgers (1992)

This is the core idea behind the flexibility firm theory (Rodgers, 1992). This theory asserts that workplace flexibility improves worker productivity by allowing them to work from home and conduct personal tasks, while also allowing enterprises to get the most out of their employees' efforts. Employees are happier as well (Dickens, 2005). The idea of flexibility has been extended to encompass the remote work scenario in the flexibility firm theory. Workplace flexibility, work time flexibility, and organizational infrastructure flexibility are all expected to influence remote work flexibility. These factors have an influence on productivity and employee happiness, which in turn has an impact on organizational performance (Whyman & Petrescu, 2014; Chatterjee, Chaudhuri, & Vrontis, 2021). According to the flexibility firm theory, any unforeseen event, such as COVID-19, necessitates more elasticity in organizational structures. Employees will be able to be flexible in a company that has flexibility in its policies. It is the leadership's job to provide proper assistance to their staff so that they can work from home or any location during such a disaster.

#### Perceived Organizational Support Theory - Eisenberger et al. (1986)

Top management may extract the most advantages from remote-work flexibility if they actively support the system by defining suitable and adaptive organizational policy. This is consistent with the POS hypothesis (perceived organizational support) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to the POS theory, every organization's leadership has a significant impact on its workers, motivating them to be more involved in their employment and committed to attaining the organization's goals (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Bond, Galinsky, Kim, and Brownfield have all endorsed this theory (2005). Thus, both of these theories (flexibility firm theory and perceived organizational support theory) supplement the effectiveness of leadership support, which is calculated to motivate employees to be more flexible in their working style, to work uninterruptedly from any convenient location to keep the organization operationally active during and after a crisis.

### 2.2 Conceptual Review

#### 2.2.1 Job Autonomy

Job autonomy is defined as a "method or set of practices including hierarchical delegation of responsibility to give individuals increased decision-making capabilities to carry out key responsibilities" (Shobe, 2018). The previous study has shown that workers may be very independent at work, as well as passionate and free to participate in such activities, enhancing their capacity and drive to grow and prepare for the future (Zhou, Li & Gong, 2019). Saragih (2015) claimed that workers with more job autonomy produce more competent and inventive work. According to Lehmann (2016), when an employee has a certain level of work autonomy, he or she would choose a work-life balance that will lead to increased job satisfaction and efficiency. Job autonomy, according to Hackman & Oldham (1976), is defined as an employee exerting authority, power, and decision-making within his or her control. The word autonomy is derived from the Greek words "autonomous" and "autonomous," with "auto" meaning self and "nomos" meaning rule, referring to self-rule when combined. Self-rule is when someone or something relies on their own rules and processes to carry out their actions and responsibilities. Historically, Greek city governments had autonomy in making decisions and administering their affairs (Agich, 1994).

Heckman and Oldham (1976) describe work autonomy in the business environment as a significant amount of flexibility, independence, and discretion. However, in terms of vocabulary, freedom, discretion, and independence are distinct from one another (Breugh, 1999). Work technique, work schedule, the pace of work,



work processes, workspace, work assessment, working hours, kind of work and quantity of work, objectives, priorities, and work criteria are all examples of job autonomy that may be found in businesses (De Jonge, 1995). Many firms utilize telecommuting (Onyemaechi et al., 2018), flexible working hours (Kattenbach, Demerouti & Nachreiner, 2010; Beckmann, 2016), and job sharing (Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2013). The notion of job autonomy is well agreed upon among scholars. Job autonomy is described as allowing employees to choose their schedules and methods for completing their responsibilities, according to academics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Adler, 1993; Langfred & Moye, 2004; Saragih, 2011; Ho, & Nesbit, 2014; Ozkoc, 2016; Burcharth et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2017). Others define job autonomy as an employee's ability to make decisions about their work (Kim et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2011; Sisodia & Das, 2013).

### 2.1.2 Employee Performance

Employee performance, according to Hellriegel, Jackson, and Slocum (1999), is the level of an individual's work achievement after exerting effort. Employee performance may be defined as an action in which an individual effectively completes the work allocated to him/her, within the customary restrictions of appropriate resource use (Dar, Akmal, Akram & Khan, 2011). Motowidlo, Borman, and Schmidt (1997) defined work performance as the total expected value derived from employees' actions over some time.

Employees are the most important resources of each organization. How they feel about the work and the results from it, have a direct impact on the organization's performance and ultimately its stability (Milliman, 2008). For example, if the employees are happy and satisfied with their work, they will be highly motivated to perform to the best of their ability to achieve the goals of the organization. Therefore, to compete in the global market and achieve organizational goals, the organization should do more for an employee than the job requires which could lead to higher job performance. Employees who are highly engaged in their organization produce high levels of customer care, retention, and productivity and generate higher profits (Luthans & Peterson, 2002).

Employee performance refers to how effectively and efficiently employees of a company accomplish their daily tasks to fulfill management and consumer expectations (Pierce et al, 2004). It is also the extent to which people put their talents, expertise, and attitudes to work to achieve the intended outcomes and satisfy the set goals (Rehman, 2009). Employee performance is typically judged indirectly by utilizing features of employee behavior at work such as speed, civility, etiquette, accuracy, time management, consistency, and effect on other workers, (Bohnstedt, & Larsen, 2008). Employee performance, according to Armstrong (2006), is about fostering productive discretionary behavior to generate human capital advantage. Armstrong (2006) believes that people are the most important source of competitive advantage, and that, unlike other forms of the competitive advantage derived from improving factors such as design or process, the people factor is extremely difficult to reproduce or replicate, which is why it is so valuable to businesses.

### 2.1.3 Task Performance

Employee work performance, according to Goodman and Svyantek (1999), comprises task or in-role behavior as well as contextual or extra-role behavior. The concept of task performance highlights the importance of achieving organizational objectives. It refers to the needed outputs and behaviors that directly support the organization's objectives (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). Meeting business objectives, making excellent sales presentations, and varying across tasks within the same corporation are all part of it. Individual and organizational performance is also influenced by role performance behaviors, either directly or indirectly. Task performance refers to the acts that contribute to the transformation of raw resources into commodities and services, as described in job descriptions. Selling clothing, drilling holes, and teaching a lesson are just a few examples. Task performance refers to the outcomes and behaviors that help the company achieve its goals. Within the same organization, task performance may differ (Bhardwaj, & Kalia, 2021). Employees' behavior, rather than the monetary rewards they receive, is what matters. Important attributes for completing task behaviors are knowledge, skills, and capacities that change with task competency.

Task performance is an employee's behavior related to the achievement of projected, specified, or formal role commitments as part of the organization. Employee task performance is the observable things employees do that are relevant to the goals of the organization (Campbell, McHenry, & Wise, 1990). Task-based performance is made up of work-specific behaviors, such as those given as part of a job description and which include basic job duties. More cognitive capacity is needed to complete tasks, and this is mainly enabled by task knowledge or the technical know-how required to guarantee work performance and the strength required for many tasks to be completed simultaneously. To execute a task effectively, the employee must have task competence, which is having the technical knowledge to do so without a lot of supervision, and task habits, which is having an inherent capacity to react to tasks that either help or hinder your performance (Conway, 1999). As a result, the need for task performance is the competence to execute the work based on previous experience. Prior experience job performance is a contractual agreement between a manager and a subordinate in an organization to complete



a certain task (Teo et al., 2011). Technical-administrative task performance and leadership task performance make up the two categories of entrusted task performance (Teo et al., 2011).

Human resource development is very concerned with productivity as shown by work performance (Ahmad, 2011; Anyadike, 2013; Baard et al., 2014). An important component of successful human resource management is the evaluation and management of job performance, and this is a highly sought-after developmental intervention in the human resource portfolio (Dessler, 2013; Teo et al., 2011; Stringer et al., 2011; Sopiah, 2016). The word "employee performance" refers to an individual's work accomplishment after putting in the necessary effort on a certain task to get a worthwhile outcome (Armstrong, 2009; Ayomikun, 2017; Bonner et al., 2001). To maximize the use of human resources and increase organizational success, a firm must have an efficient system for tracking employee performance. The performance-based goal is anticipated to be in line with the organization's policies so that the whole process shifts from being event-driven to one that is more strategic and centered on people (Gungor, 2011; Grund & Przemek, 2012; Ichniowski et al., 1999).

#### 2.1.4 Adaptive Performance

Adaptability is highly valued by employers since it demonstrates that a person has a positive attitude toward their profession and the ability to cope successfully with difficult circumstances that may arise in the future. A firm's employees with a high degree of adaptation will have more advantages than their less adaptable counterparts in terms of future employment opportunities (Biswas & Gautam, 2017; Boachie-Mensah, 2011; Booner et al., 2001; Brun, & Dugas, 2008;). Individuals with adaptive performance are those who can adjust to changing work conditions and offer the assistance that is required by the job profile. The results of previous research show that after workers achieve a certain level of excellence in their given duties, they attempt to modify their attitudes and behaviors to suit their job's various needs (Dessler, 2013; Teo et al., 2011; Stringer et al., 2011; Sopiah, 2016).

Team adaptive performance is a phenomenon that develops over time from the unfolding of a recursive cycle in which one or more team members utilize their resources to functionally alter current cognitive or behavioral goal-directed action or structures to meet anticipated or unexpected demands (Park, Lim, Kim & Kang, 2020). The capacity of workers to effectively cope with variable working conditions is required for successful adaptive performance (Griffin, et al., 2010; Grund & Przemek, 2012; Kiker & Motowidlo, 1999). Changes in the fundamental work assignment, reorganization, and so forth are examples of technological transitions. The emergence of new professions due to technological advancement necessitates the involvement of workers in ongoing learning and preparation for change (Chadwick et al., 2013; Griffin, et al., 2010; Grund & Przemek, 2012; Kiker & Motowidlo, 1999). As a result of these new conditions, workers must adapt their interpersonal conduct to operate effectively with a diverse group of peers and superiors.

#### 2.1.5 Contextual Performance

Contextual performance has grown so common that some studies have discovered that supervisors utilize extra-role behaviors to make formal assessment choices (Rosopa et al., 2013). While much psychology research has focused on contextual performance as an outcome, some research has also looked at the consequences of contextual performance, such as changes in performance evaluations (Conway, 1999; Viswesvaran et al., 2005), organizational performance (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997), and reward recommendations (Rosopa et al., 2013). Contextual performance refers to frequent small responsibilities that help support the context in which task execution occurs. Employee predispositions and volition play a role in contextual performance. Volunteering, assisting, and persevering are all behaviors that predict volitionally and predisposition, including person-organization fit (Kalia, & Bhardwaj, 2019). Marcus and Gopinath (2017) found that work performance improved with both effort and ability.

Contextual performance refers to the behaviors that contribute to overall effectiveness by enhancing the workplace's social and psychological milieu. Cooperating with coworkers, resolving problems, and cleaning up the conference room are just a few examples (Kónya et al., 2016). Contextual performance is a critical component that has been recognized as an extra-role behavior or organizational citizenship behavior. Employees' voluntary, good job behavior that goes beyond a mandated job or task behavior is referred to as contextual performance (Spector & Fox, 2002). According to Avery (1998), contextual performance is a supplemental work competency that creates the organizational, social, and psychological environment for attaining organizational goals. Employees engage in contextual performance when they obey the organization's norms and procedures, go above and beyond, assist and collaborate with others, and share knowledge with coworkers to solve work-related difficulties (Bilal, Bahadar, Yasir & Mateen, 2015). Personal initiative, defined as self-starting, a smart attitude to work, and going the additional mile for executing a certain task are examples of a more proactive approach to contextual performance (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010).



### 2.3 Relationship between Job Autonomy and Employee Performance

Muecke and Iseke (2019) meta-logically analyzed an integrative structure that joins job autonomy to work execution. Results from a rundown of 319 investigations and 151,134 members demonstrate that, by and large, job autonomy prompted better occupation execution, for the most part by improving work inspiration yet additionally by diminishing mental strain. The creators separated three elements of job autonomy (dynamic, technique, and booking autonomy) and indicated that hypothetical components change contingent upon the kind of autonomy. Work inspiration was most firmly upgraded by dynamic autonomy, yet it was reduced by planning autonomy. The strain-lessening impacts were more grounded for dynamic autonomy and technique autonomy than for booking autonomy. Besides, primer proof shows that center self-assessments intervened in the impacts of job autonomy measurements on work inspiration and mental strain.

Saragih (2015) inspected the connection between job autonomy and work results (work execution, work fulfillment, and occupation stress), and self-viability as an interceding variable. The auxiliary relationship demonstrated that job autonomy is essentially identified with work fulfillment and execution, however not huge with work pressure. It additionally indicated that self-adequacy somewhat intervened in the connection between job autonomy and work fulfillment, and employment execution. Likewise, this exploration found that self-adequacy did not intervene in the connection between job autonomy and work pressure. There was no noteworthy connection between job autonomy and work execution however this examination indicated that activity fulfillment fundamentally identified with work execution

Suteerawut, Vanno, and Khaikleng (2016) investigated how job autonomy and positive mental capital assist associations with advancing representatives' exhibition through inborn work inspiration. The auxiliary relationship demonstrated that job autonomy, positive mental capital, and inborn work inspiration altogether identified with work execution. What's more, results from the present investigation indicated that inherent work inspiration completely intercedes the connection between job autonomy and work execution, and in part intervenes connection between positive mental capital and employment execution.

Zhou, Li, and Gong (2019) look at how and when job autonomy advances a representative's self-improvement. The outcomes demonstrated that job autonomy anticipated the representative's self-advancement, and the worker's inborn inspiration completely interceded in this relationship. Group availability emphatically directed the connection between job autonomy and characteristic inspiration, and further directed the intervention impact of inherent inspiration. Sisodia and Das (2013) appeared there is a huge contrast secured between position responsibilities of workers with high and low job autonomy. There is a critical contrast secured between the position responsibility of representatives of high various leveled gatherings and those of low progressive group and noteworthy communication impact found among job autonomy and progressive level upon the authoritative duty of workers.

Naqvi, Ishtiaq, Kanwal, and Ali (2013) study assessed the impact of job autonomy on work fulfillment and authoritative duty with a directing job of hierarchical culture in the inexpensive food area of Pakistan. Results indicated that an expansion in job autonomy brings about an expanded degree of employment fulfillment and hierarchical responsibility and authoritative culture direct this relationship. Gözükaraa and Çolakoğlu's (2016) study results showed that job autonomy positively affected occupation fulfillment, while work-family strife had a negative interceding impact on this connection between job autonomy and work fulfillment

### 3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings reveal a significant relationship between job autonomy and the measures of employee performance (task performance and adaptive performance). Thus, we conclude that the adoption of job autonomy will induce employee performance in respect of their capacity to carry out their tasks and adapt to changes in the workplace and external environment. Specifically, increased job autonomy enhances employee performance. When employees are free to choose the methods to use in carrying out their work, they feel encouraged and this ensures better employee performance. The implication of this study is showing that job autonomy is vital for employee performance. This study further recommends that: The management of organizations can enhance job autonomy by increasing the control among employees over what they are supposed to accomplish. This can be achieved by a more elaborate performance management system whereby realistic targets are set; Organizations should endeavor to use work autonomy as an important factor to enhance the overall performance of employees.



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