The Good, the Bad,

and the Unknown

about Job Autonomy

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The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown about Job Autonomy

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"Not that the story need be long, but it will take a long while to make it short."

— Henry David Thoreau

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Simeon Muecke

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1 Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a notable shift in the regulation of work, with an increasing degree of autonomy being afforded to individual employees (Kubicek et al., 2017; Langfred & Rockmann, 2016; Wegman et al., 2018). A substantial body of theoretical and empirical evidence indicates that giving employees the right to control their task-related actions (i.e. job autonomy) has the potential to ensure motivation and performance, as well as health and well-being (e.g., Demerouti et al., 2001; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Humphrey et al., 2007; Karasek, 1979). However, a small but growing body of research indicates that granting employees job autonomy is not always beneficial (e.g., Cheong et al., 2016; Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022; Kubicek et al., 2017; Langfred, 2004; Langfred & Moye, 2004; Lu et al., 2017; Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018). Yet, it remains unknown why and when job autonomy is good or bad for employees.

In work design research, the distinction is typically made between beneficial (resources) and detrimental (demands) aspects of the work environment (e.g., Demerouti et al., 2001; Karasek, 1979). However, scholars have recently challenged this distinction and demonstrated that demands may also have beneficial effects (e.g., Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Crawford et al., 2010; J. A. LePine et al., 2004), while resources may have detrimental effects as well (e.g., M. D. Baer et al., 2015; Chan & Lam, 2011; Cheong et al., 2016; Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022; Lu et al., 2017; Schieman & Young, 2010). Although research has begun to systematically differentiate between potentially beneficial and entirely detrimental demands (challenge vs. hindrance demands; Cavanaugh et al., 2000), the proposition of adverse effects of job resources remains an underresearched topic (Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018). Therefore, the current dissertation focuses on job autonomy, which represents one of the most prominent job resources studied in work design research (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

Initially, job autonomy was viewed as the degree of freedom and independence individual employees have in carrying out their work assignment (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Recent research has

broadened the scope of this conceptualization, suggesting that autonomy reflects the extent to which a job provides discretion in making decisions, choosing the methods used to perform tasks, and scheduling work (e.g., Breaugh, 1985; De Spiegelaere et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 1993). Thus, job autonomy can be defined as employee discretion over daily work decisions, work methods, and work scheduling (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

The objective of this dissertation is to develop and test an extended theoretical model that can be utilized by practitioners and researchers to identify and comprehend the positive and negative consequences of job autonomy (Langfred & Moye, 2004). This dissertation is comprised of three manuscripts that are dedicated to examining different aspects of the theoretical model. The methods applied range from a meta-analytic approach to achieve the greatest possible external validity, and a multi-wave field study to explore psychological processes, to an experimental design to account for internal validity.

The synopsis of this dissertation is organized as follows. The first chapter reflects on a) why job autonomy represents a relevant topic for the future of work, b) what we already know about job autonomy from the work design and leadership literature, and c) what we do not know about job autonomy (research gaps and derived research questions of this dissertation). The second chapter introduces the theoretical model of this dissertation, by describing a) the variables that were selected for analyses, b) the relevant theories that explain the relationships between those variables, and c) the methods that were used to empirically test the proposed model. The third chapter provides a brief overview of the key findings and contributions of each manuscript. Finally, the fourth chapter presents a synthesis of the findings of this dissertation by delineating what is good, what is bad, and what is still unknown about job autonomy.

1.1 Looking Forward: The Meaning of Job Autonomy for the Future of Work

"The key underlying driver of the future of work is a high degree of work autonomy."

— Malhotra (2021)

The Meaning of Autonomy for Knowledge Work

The world of work has changed a lot in the last 50 years. In the context of the global shift from manufacturing economies to knowledge and service economies, the design of work and the manner in which leadership is exercised within organizations have undergone a profound transformation (S. K. Parker et al., 2001). The traditional top-down leadership approach has become less prevalent, while the emphasis on employee personal autonomy has increased. The concept of job autonomy represents a fundamental tenet of a number of organizational practices, such as high performance work systems, empowerment, or autonomous work teams, to name a few (Gagné & Bhave, 2011). Rarely used systematically before 1980, the number of organizations implementing autonomy-supportive work practices and related forms of employee participation has increased considerably over the past few decades (Langfred & Moye, 2004). This trend has been documented in a meta-analysis by Wegman et al. (2018), which indicates that, on average, employees today perceive greater levels of autonomy in their job than they did in 1975. A number of factors have contributed to the observed increase in employee autonomy, as outlined by Langfred & Rockmann (2016).

First, in the context of rising environmental complexity and uncertainty in many industries and markets, knowledge work is becoming more difficult to manage (Alvesson, 2001; S. K. Parker, 2014). Work has become inherently more ambiguous and challenging due to the growing variability and complexity of many work processes (S. K. Parker et al., 2001). One consequence of this trend has been a gradual shift in control from organizations to employees. This is evidenced by the flattening of

hierarchies and the granting of greater decision-making authority and responsibility to employees (Langfred & Rockmann, 2016). Second, the advent of information and communication technologies has facilitated connections across geographic and temporal boundaries, which results in more autonomy over how, where, and when employees work (Gajendran et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). The prevalence of virtual work in the field of knowledge work is on the rise, a trend that was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bell et al., 2023). The traditional assumptions regarding the nature of work, which posit that it occurs in a specific location under the direct supervision of a manager, are no longer applicable to a significant proportion of the workforce, who are currently working hybrid or full-time remotely (Leonardi et al., 2024; Wigert et al., 2023). Third, in addition to changes in the nature of work itself, organizations have been confronted with shifts in the attitudes and expectations of knowledge workers. As the number of dual-earner families continues to grow, the need for autonomy in the form of flexible work schedules has become increasingly apparent, as it enables employees to effectively manage the demands of their multiple roles (T. D. Allen et al., 2013). In particular, employees who have experienced a relatively high degree of autonomy during the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to desire even more job autonomy in a post-pandemic world (Malhotra, 2021).

The world of work has evolved over the past five decades in ways that were not anticipated by work design researchers (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). As technology advances at an accelerated pace, a multitude of novel industries and forms of employment are emerging, such as work in the gig economy (Vallas & Schor, 2020). It is likely that the nature of work will continue to change as we move further into the 21st century (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). However, the discourse on the future of work has yielded disparate perspectives regarding the trajectory of autonomy in the workplace. Some argue that the level of autonomy will continue to increase, while others contend that it will decrease once more. The following paragraphs describe two exemplary cases where new forms of work have paradoxical effects on employees' perceptions of job autonomy: virtual work and algorithmic management.

The Meaning of Autonomy for Virtual Work

Virtual work has brought about a number of advantages for companies across the globe. For example, technology has enabled employees to readily connect with colleagues, clients, and patients remotely. On the one hand, virtual work may increase employee perception of autonomy by enabling employees to work anywhere and anytime (B. Wang et al., 2021). Previous research indicates that telework employees perceive greater levels of autonomy in their job than regular employees, resulting in desirable outcomes such as job performance and job satisfaction (Gajendran et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Research also posits that gig work, such as online piecework, grants workers the autonomy to determine when and where they work, and the opportunity to achieve a more balanced relationship between work and other commitments (Vallas & Schor, 2020). On the other hand, these new forms of work can also diminish employee autonomy, when employees end up working everywhere and all the time (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2019). Empirical evidence indicates that when employees engage in flexible work arrangements, their colleagues in the office often expect them to be available for communication and collaboration at all times. The experienced demand for constant connectivity and responsiveness may result in diminished flexibility (Leonardi et al., 2010). A growing body of evidence indicates that the increased use of digital technologies in the workplace may be a contributing factor to an increased level of burnout among employees (S. H. Parker et al., 2023). Virtual work settings also have important implications for the manner in which supervisors may lead their employees (Bell et al., 2023). Managers are advised to lead telework employees in an autonomy-supportive way in order to encourage greater employee self-direction (Gagné et al., 2022). Yet many managers stick to regulating and closely monitoring employees' work (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003), partly because they remain skeptical in employees' abilities or intentions to work effectively remotely (S. K. Parker et al., 2020). This lack of trust leads to decreased feelings of autonomy (Seppälä et al., 2011), which can disrupt employee work-home balance and cause job stress (S. K. Parker et al., 2020).

The Meaning of Autonomy for Algorithmic Management

Algorithmic management is the utilization of software algorithms to execute workforce management functions, such as hiring and firing, coordinating work, and monitoring performance (Gagné et al., 2022). This phenomenon, which initially emerged on gig economy platforms, where all managerial functions were automated (Vallas & Schor, 2020), is now rapidly spreading to traditional work settings (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022). In recent times, an increasing number of organizations have been delegating tasks such as selection, task allocation, scheduling, and performance ratings to algorithms (S. K. Parker & Grote, 2022). A considerable number of scholars have proposed that technology has the potential to facilitate decentralized decision-making, thereby conferring greater job autonomy. This is largely due to the more extensive dissemination of information and the potential this offers for localized decision-making (S. K. Parker & Grote, 2022). The advent of algorithmic management has given rise to a novel form of human-machine interaction, in which artificial intelligence (AI) and employees will collaborate (Duan et al., 2019). In light of this, Duan et al. (2019) posit that AI will be largely accepted by employees as a decision support and augmentation tool.

Conversely, algorithmic management has the potential to encourage the phenomenon of "working for data," whereby employees prioritize aspects of their work that are subject to monitoring and quantification, thereby reducing their decision-making autonomy (Gagné et al., 2022; Schafheitle et al., 2020). In addition, algorithmic work instructions about how to carry out work may be associated with a decrease in method autonomy (e.g., Kellogg et al., 2020). The argument is made that centralized algorithmic decision-making is more efficient and more objective because it removes bias and includes many more data points (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). However, research argued that over-controlling decision-making systems may only yield short-term productivity gains, but in the long term, they may impede autonomy, motivation, and innovation (Wilson & Daugherty, 2018).

The Meaning of Job Autonomy for the Future of Work

The profound transformation of the world of work over the past few decades has prompted a re-evaluation of the underlying assumptions about the design of work. Researchers have questioned whether these assumptions, which were accurate in the 1970s and 1980s, remain relevant in the contemporary context (Langfred & Rockmann, 2016). However, Malhotra (2021) proposes that the primary factor influencing the future of work is the extent of autonomy in the workplace. While in the past, the focus has been on the extent of autonomy granted to employees by their supervisors, the focus may shift towards the autonomy granted to employees when cooperating with certain technologies. Thus, despite the changing work context, job autonomy will continue to represent a pivotal work design variable for the future of work.

Consequently, whether it is in discussions of work design or leadership, autonomy is often a central topic in debates about the current changes in the nature and organization of work (Gagné & Bhave, 2011). For example, job autonomy is discussed as a virtual work characteristic that may facilitate more effective remote and hybrid working in a post-pandemic world (B. Wang et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2019). In addition, scholars have proposed job autonomy as central work design variable for elucidating the potential for people to collaborate with AI and automation (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022; S. K. Parker & Grote, 2022). It is anticipated that the significance of job autonomy will intensify in the near future, as the roles of humans and autonomous, self-learning technology will have to be re-negotiated (S. K. Parker & Grote, 2022). Moreover, in light of the rising prevalence of burnout among knowledge workers, the design of quality work represents a crucial strategy for the prevention of poor mental health (S. K. Parker, 2014) and digital exhaustion (S. H. Parker et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the topic of job autonomy is of paramount importance in addressing the contemporary challenges posed by the changing nature of work. Thus, the time is right to reinvigorate and develop theory on this topic.

1.2 Looking Back: The Role of Job Autonomy in Work Design and Leadership Research

"Perhaps the most widely studied work characteristic is that of autonomy."

— Morgeson & Humphrey (2006)

In this chapter, I review work design and leadership concepts that include job autonomy as a key construct. This provides the necessary background on the history and theoretical underpinnings of job autonomy research. The review will focus on research published in the management and work psychology literature, given the constraints of space. Readers should be aware that a number of other disciplines have also investigated issues related to job autonomy (e.g., sociology, economics, industrial engineering, operations management).

Brief History: From Job Simplification to Job Enrichment

As outlined by S. K. Parker et al. (2001), there has been a long-standing interest among managers and researchers in identifying the optimal type of work for organizations and those who work in them. The theoretical foundations of contemporary approaches to work design can be traced back to the era of the Industrial Revolution. In 1776, Adam Smith proposed the division of labor as a means of enhancing worker productivity. This concept entails the breakdown of complex jobs into simpler tasks. Charles Babbage (1835) further developed this idea, emphasizing the cost-effective benefits of job simplification through the use of less skilled labor. The first systematic treatment of the concept of job simplification was conducted in the early years of the 20th century by Gilbreth (1911) and Taylor (1911). They proposed that increasing worker efficiency and productivity could be achieved by transferring responsibility for task execution from employees to engineers and managers. One of the most notable instances of the simplification of employees' work was the implementation of a moving assembly line in 1914 by Henry Ford at his automobile factory in Michigan. The concept of job simplification has become

firmly established within the industrial sector, extending from manufacturing to other domains. Yet, a key challenge in designing work to maximize efficiency was that the simplification of work often led to decreased employee satisfaction, as well as to increased employee turnover and absenteeism (Hackman & Lawler, 1971). In response to this, novel approaches to work design were developed. At the group level, autonomous work groups have emerged as a prominent phenomenon (also known as self-managing or self-directing teams). At the individual level, job rotation, job enlargement, and job enrichment were identified as potential motivational antidotes to simplified jobs. Among these approaches, job enrichment is of particular significance due to its emphasis on increasing employees' autonomy. The subsequent section presents the theoretical foundations of these and related work redesigns, as well as the empirical evidence regarding their effects. The review is primarily concerned with the perception of job autonomy at the individual level, rather than at the team or organizational level.

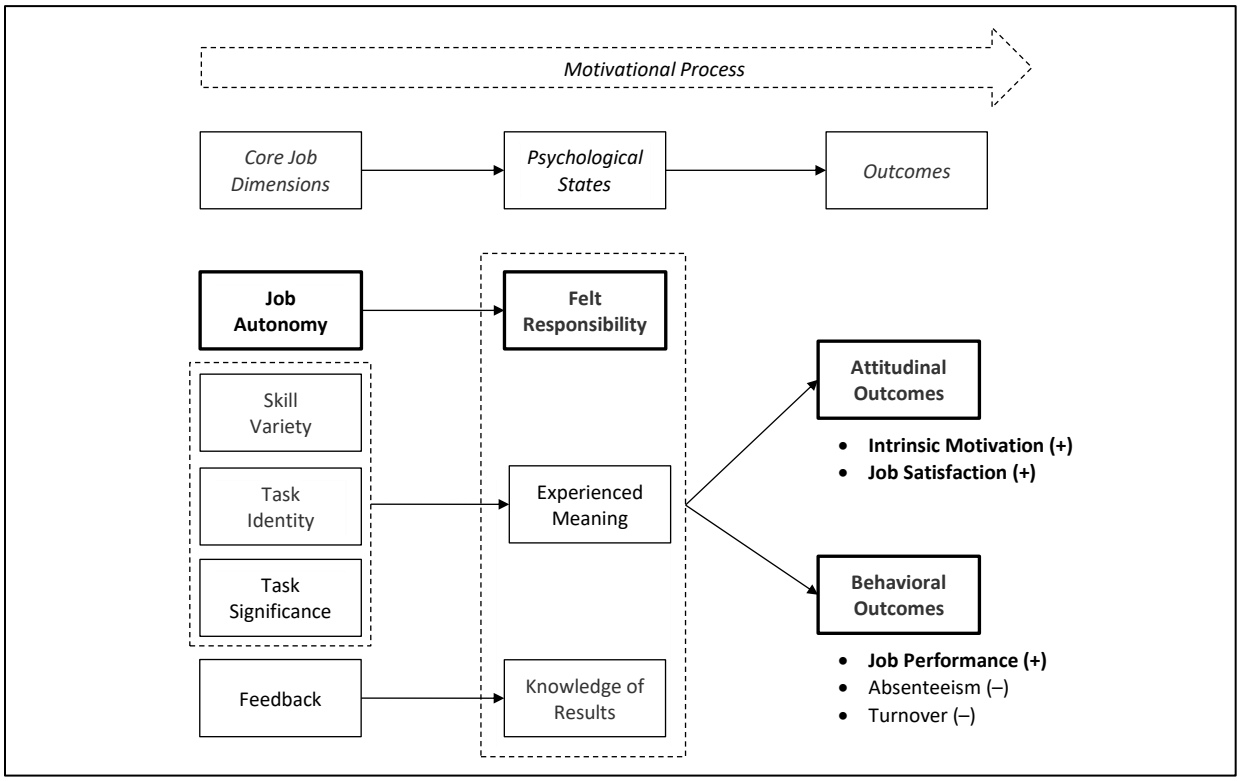
The Job Characteristics Model

The most influential work design model is the Job Characteristics Model (JCM). Hackman & Oldham (1976) proposed that work should be designed to have five core job characteristics, namely skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. As illustrated in Synopsis Figure 1, the fundamental premise of the JCM is that these job characteristics lead to three critical psychological states, which then result in a specific set of attitudinal (e.g., increased intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction) and behavioral outcomes (e.g., increased job performance; decreased absenteeism and turnover). The model suggests that skill variety, task identity and task significance together influence work outcomes by increasing the experienced meaningfulness of work; while feedback influences work outcomes by increasing knowledge of the actual results of the work activities.

With regard to job autonomy, the model proposes that job autonomy influences attitudinal and behavioral work outcomes through its impact on felt responsibility. Job autonomy is defined as "the

degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out" (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, p. 258). Hackman & Oldham (1976) argue that when employees are granted a high degree of autonomy, the outcomes are increasingly contingent upon their own efforts, initiatives and decisions, rather than on the adequacy of instructions from the superior or on the existence of a manual of job procedures. In such circumstances, employees should feel personally accountable and responsible for the results of the work they do (Holdorf & Greenwald, 2018).

Synopsis Figure 1 Key Proposed Relationships of the Job Characteristics Model



Notes: Variables relevant for this dissertation are **bolded**.

A synthesis of nearly five decades of empirical research inspired by the JCM has yielded two main conclusions. First, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that organizations can enhance employee motivation through the design of work (for meta-analysis, see Fried & Ferris, 1987; Humphrey

et al., 2007). However, the results for employee behavior (i.e. job performance, turnover and absence) have been less consistent (S. K. Parker et al., 2001). Meta-analytic findings of Humphrey et al. (2007) indicated that the core job characteristics exhibit only weak relationships with absence and almost no relationship with turnover intentions. The results further indicated a modest correlation between work characteristics and subjective job performance. Moreover, when objective job performance was taken into account, only job autonomy emerged as a significant factor (Humphrey et al., 2007). Thus, the relationship between job enrichment and job performance appears to be ambiguous.

Second, the proposed pathways between job characteristics and work outcomes via critical psychological states have not been fully confirmed in previous research (e.g., Johns et al., 1992). Humphrey et al. (2007) meta-analytically examined the mediating role of the critical psychological states. The results provided strong support for the mediating role of experienced meaningfulness of the work. Additionally, the study revealed a mediating effect of felt responsibility between job autonomy and internal work motivation, but only a partial mediating effect of felt responsibility between job autonomy and job satisfaction and performance. Lastly, the results provided only little support for the mediating role of knowledge of the actual results of the work activities.

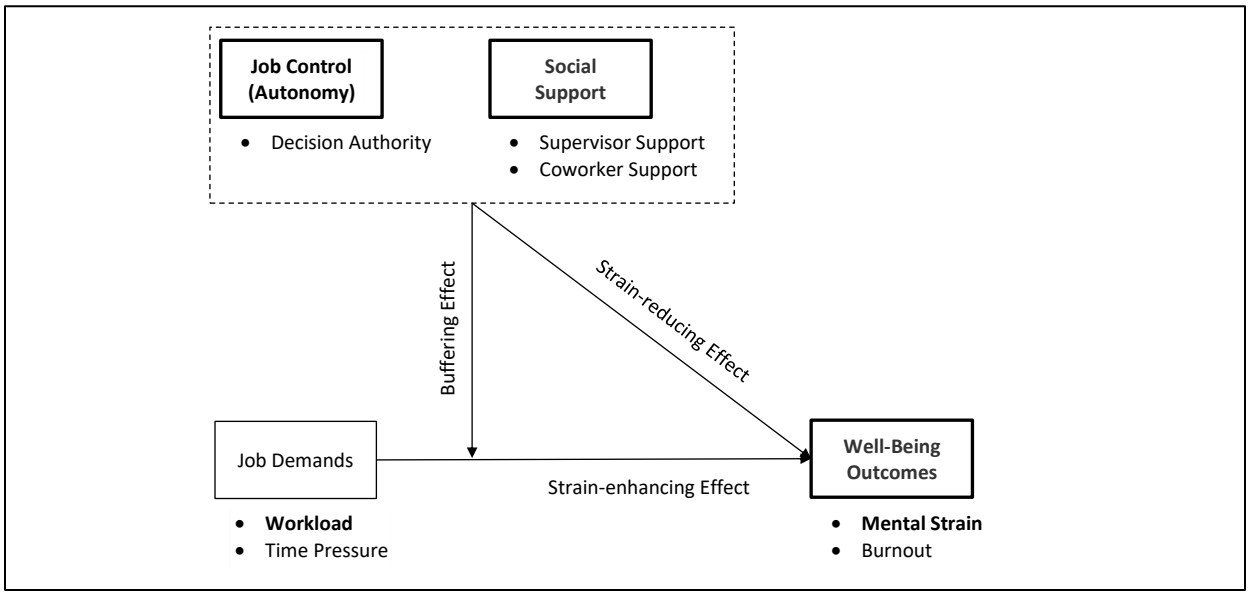
In conclusion, the JCM was the dominant work design model for many years, resulting in a great deal of research on the motivational potential of work design. Although some specific proposals of the JCM have not been consistently supported, the JCM continues to occupy a central place in work design theory (S. K. Parker et al., 2017).

The Job Demands–Control Model

In parallel with the JCM (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), Karasek's (1979) job demands-control (JD-C) model emerged. This work design model aims to explain the occurrence of mental strain in a workplace context. Karasek (1979) identified job demands and job control as essential job characteristics influencing employee well-being. Job demands are defined as "aspects of jobs that require sustained

and/or high levels of physical, mental, or emotional effort" (S. K. Parker, 2014, p. 664), such as high levels of workload and time pressure (Karasek et al., 1998). Job control is most commonly operationalized as decision latitude (decision-making autonomy), which refers to the extent to which employees are capable of controlling their tasks and general work activity (Häusser et al., 2010).

Synopsis Figure 2 Key Proposed Relationships of the Job Demands–Control Model



Notes: Variables relevant for this dissertation are **bolded**.

As illustrated in Synopsis Figure 2, the model suggests a strain-enhancing effect of job demands and a strain-reducing effect of job control. According to the JD-C model (Karasek, 1979), the degree of job control serves to distinguish between an active job, which is characterized by a high level of control, and a high-strain job, which is typified by a low level of control. The model suggests an interactive effect of job demands and job control, in which job control is predicted to buffer the negative impact of job demands on employee mental strain (Häusser et al., 2010). Subsequently, Karasek & Theorell (1990) identified social support as an additional job characteristic that has the potential to mitigate the negative effect of job demands on mental strain. It is proposed that the level of mental strain

experienced by employees is greatest when job demands are high and job control and social support are low (i.e., high-strain job).

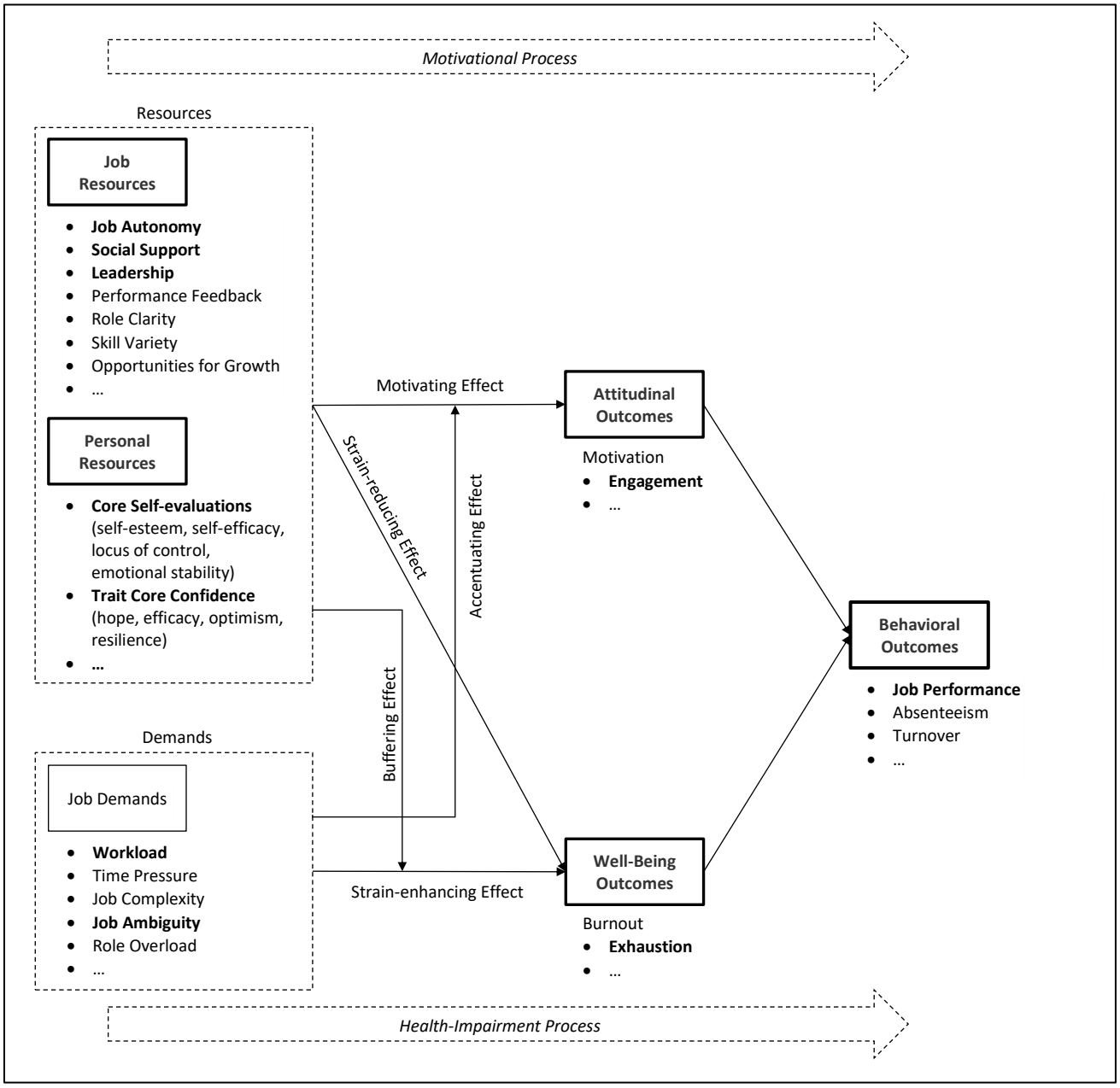
Similar the JCM, the JD-C model has spurred much research. A substantial body of research indicates that job demands have a detrimental effect on employee well-being, whereas job control and social support have a beneficial effect (for meta-analysis, see Alarcon, 2011; Crawford et al., 2010; Humphrey et al., 2007; R. T. Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Nahrgang et al., 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2015; Park et al., 2014; Spector, 1986). However, the results of several reviews indicate that the evidence supporting the interaction effect is not compelling (see, e.g., de Lange et al., 2003; van der Doef & Maes, 1999). Thus, further extensions of the JD-C model have emerged over the past year.

The Job Demands–Resources Model

Demerouti et al. (2001) developed the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which proposes that all types of job characteristics can be classified into two categories: job demands and job resources. Synopsis Figure 3 presents a model illustrating the key proposed relationships of the JD-R model.

The JD-R model represents a significant advancement over Karasek's (1979) initial effort in various ways (S. K. Parker et al., 2017). First, it identifies a broader set of job resources beyond job autonomy and social support. "Job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274). Examples of job resources are job autonomy, social support, leadership, performance feedback, role clarity, skill variety, and opportunities for growth (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Synopsis Figure 3 Key Proposed Relationships of the Job Demands–Resources Model



Notes: Variables relevant for this dissertation are **bolded**.

Second, an important expansion of the original JD–R model was the incorporation of personal resources into the model, which are proposed to perform a comparable function to job resources. "Personal resources are positive self- evaluations that are linked to resiliency and refer to individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact their environments successfully" (Bakker et al., 2014, p. 401).

Examples of personal resources are core self-evaluations (self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability; Judge & Bono, 2001) or trait core confidence (hope, efficacy, optimism, resilience; Stajkovic, 2006).

Third, the model incorporates two distinct processes that impact employee behavior, namely a health-impairment process and a motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Similar to the JD-C model (Karasek, 1979), the model suggests a strain-enhancing effect of job demands and a strain-reducing effect of resources. In addition, the model suggests a motivating effect of resources. The model posits that high levels of resources lead to positive behavior via increased motivation (the motivational process), while low levels of job resources and high levels of job demands lead to negative behavior via strain and health impairment (the health impairment process; Bakker et al., 2004; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Fourth, the JD-R model extends the interaction proposition of the JD-C model (Karasek, 1979) by proposing that job demands and job resources interact in predicting employee motivation and well-being. Two potential scenarios exist in which the interplay between demands and resources may influence employee outcomes. On the one side, similar to the JD-C model (Karasek, 1979), it is proposed that resources can act as a buffer against the impact of job demands on mental strain. Employees who possess many resources (both job resources and personal resources), are more likely to be able to effectively cope with the demands of their daily work (buffering effect). On the other side, job demands are proposed to amplify the impact of job resources on employee motivation. It is anticipated that job resources will be particularly motivating when they are required (accentuating effect).

Research has provided support for a number of the fundamental tenets of the JD-R model (for meta-analyses, see Crawford et al., 2010; Lesener et al., 2019; Nahrgang et al., 2011). Over the past several years, the JD-R model has emerged as a highly influential framework among researchers (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). One significant factor contributing to the prevalence of the JD–R model is its

adaptability, enabling its application across diverse work environments and the ability to align with the specific occupational context under consideration (Bakker et al., 2014). The JD-R model does not limit its scope to specific job demands or job resources. Instead, it assumes that any demand and any resource may affect employee motivation and well-being. The heuristic nature of the model, however, has also received considerable criticism (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The fact that job demands, job resources, personal resources, and outcomes have been represented by quite different concepts (see Synopsis Figure 3) limits the generalizability of many findings from primary studies (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). For example, although some studies have identified an interaction effect between specific job demands and job resources on specific work outcomes, this does not necessarily imply that analogous interactions exist between all job demands and all job resources for all outcome variables. Accordingly, S. K. Parker et al. (2017) have concluded that the predicted interactions between job demands and resources remain elusive.

Furthermore, questions arise regarding the distinction between job resources and job demands. Some researchers in the field of work design have posited that the lack of adequate resources may be considered a demand (S. K. Parker et al., 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). For example, job clarity is typically considered a job resource (Bakker et al., 2007). Job ambiguity, defined as the level of uncertainty or lack of clarity regarding various aspects of the job (Breaugh & Colihan, 1994), is typically recognized as a critical job demand (Crawford et al., 2010). It is therefore unclear whether demands and resources are conceptually distinct.

A notable advancement in this field has been the realization that not all demands are created equal. This notion will be introduced in greater detail in the subsequent section.

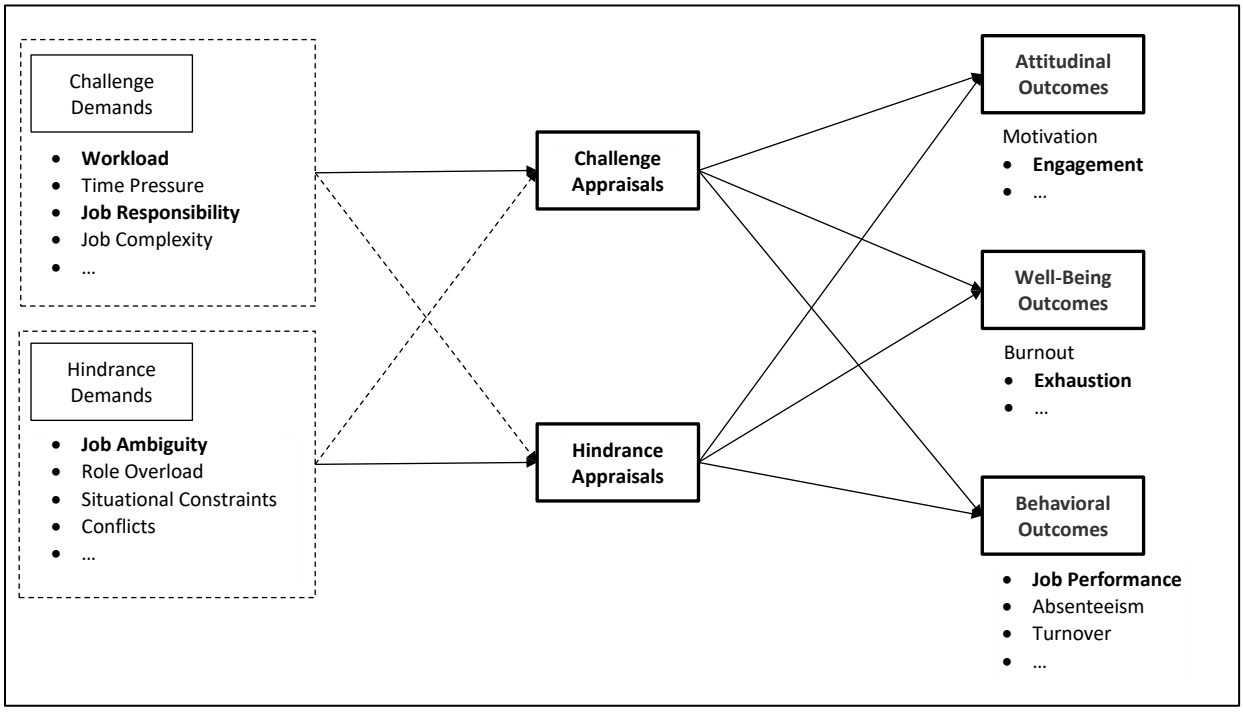
The Challenge–Hindrance Stressor Framework

In a further extension of the JD-C model (Karasek, 1979), the challenge-hindrance stressor framework (CHSF) proposed a distinction between challenge stressors and hindrance stressors (M. A.

LePine, 2022; N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2023). Challenge stressors are defined as "workplace demands that promote the accomplishment of job tasks and the personal development of the individual" (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2023, p. 169). Hindrance stressors are defined as "workplace demands that are perceived as barriers or obstacles that thwart the accomplishment of job tasks and the personal development of the individual" (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2023, p. 169). Challenge stressors typically include job responsibility, complexity, time pressure, and workload, whereas hindrance stressors include job stressors such as job ambiguity, role overload, situational constraints, conflicts, and resource inadequacies. The results of recent meta-analyses (Crawford et al., 2010; Downes et al., 2021; J. A. LePine et al., 2005; N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2007) indicate that both challenge and hindrance demands increase job strains, while the effects of hindrance demands appear to be more pronounced. Additionally, challenge demands have been found to be positively related to job attitudes and performance and negatively related to turnover, whereas hindrance demands have been found to be negatively related to job attitudes and performance and positively related to turnover (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2007).

Crawford et al. (2010) applied the CHSF to the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001). They argued that the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) may be overly parsimonious, as it fails to differentiate between challenge and hindrance demands (Crawford et al., 2010). The results of their meta-analytic path analyses indicated that both job demands were positively associated with employee burnout, whereas job resources were negatively associated with employee burnout. In contrast, challenge and hindrance demands were differentially associated with employee engagement. Whereas hindrance demands were negatively associated with employee engagement, challenge demands and job resources were positively associated with employee engagement.

Synopsis Figure 4 Key Proposed Relationships of the Challenge–Hindrance Stressor Framework



Notes: Variables relevant for this dissertation are **bolded**.

Given that one individual's challenge may be perceived as another's hindrance, one important elaboration to the early CHSF research were studies that considered employee appraisals of demands (e.g., Kim & Beehr, 2019; Kraimer et al., 2022; M. A. LePine et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2011). Employee cognitive appraisals are an essential element of the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The majority of research on challenge and hindrance stressors has classified stressors a priori into challenges or hindrances (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2023). However, the appraisals approach suggests that the work condition by itself does not determine whether a stressor is perceived as a challenge or a hindrance. Rather, it is the individual's anticipation of potential gains and losses that plays a role in this determination. “Challenge appraisals refer to an individual’s subjective interpretation that the demands have a potential for personal gain, growth, development, and well-being” (M. A. LePine et al., 2016, p. 1039). “Hindrance appraisals refer to an individual’s subjective interpretation that the demands have a potential to result in personal loss, constraints, or harm” (M. A. LePine et al., 2016, p. 1039). The two

cognitive appraisal processes are proposed as psychological mechanisms that may explain how employee perception of their job impacts work outcomes. Synopsis Figure 4 presents a model summarizing the key proposed relationships of the CHSF.

Since its introduction two decades ago (Cavanaugh et al., 2000), the CHSF has generated a substantial body of research (for meta-anlyses, see Crawford et al., 2010; Downes et al., 2021; J. A. LePine et al., 2005; N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2007). Consequently, the CHSF has emerged as the dominant perspective in the occupational stress literature today (Mazzola & Disselhorst, 2019).

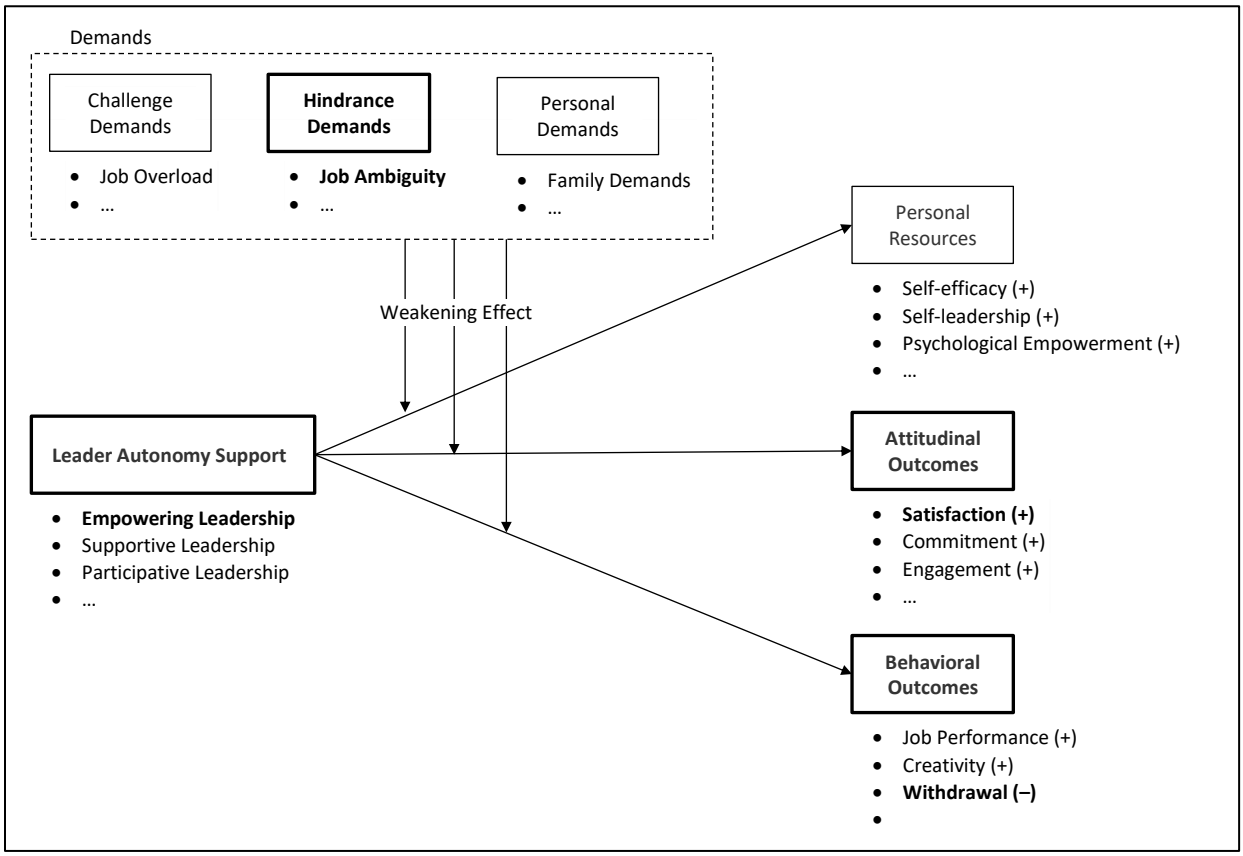
Leader Autonomy Support

In addition to the design of work, the perception of job autonomy can be influenced by the leadership style of the supervisor, which can range from highly supportive to highly controlling (Slemp et al., 2018). In contrast to a directive leadership style, which posits that employee performance is contingent upon close supervision and controlling practices, an autonomy-supportive leadership style is believed to enhance employee performance by fostering the perception that their behavior is more self-determined than externally controlled (Deci et al., 2017). The most prominent autonomy-supportive leadership style is empowering leadership.

The concept of empowering leadership has been developed in conjunction with a number of related concepts, including supportive leadership (Bowers & Seashore, 1966), participative leadership (Locke & Schweiger, 1979), and super leadership (Manz & Sims, 1987). Empowering leadership is defined as “a process of sharing power, and allocating autonomy and responsibilities to followers, teams, or collectives through a specific set of leader behaviors for employees to enhance internal motivation and achieve work success” (Cheong et al., 2019). Empowering leadership behaviors include enhancing the meaningfulness of work, expressing confidence in high performance, promoting participation in decision making, and providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints (Ahearne et al., 2005; X. Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Research on empowering leadership has grown substantially, with

empowering leader behaviors shown to increase employee self-efficacy, self-leadership, job satisfaction, engagement, creativity, and performance, and decrease withdrawal behavior (for meta-analyses, see Kim et al., 2018; A. Lee et al., 2018). Synopsis Figure 5 illustrates the key proposed relationships of empowering leadership on these outcomes.

Synopsis Figure 5 Key Proposed Relationships of Leader Autonomy Support



Notes: Variables relevant for this dissertation are **bolded**.

However, there is growing evidence that the concept of empowering leadership is not universally applicable in all contexts (Cheong et al., 2019). Previous research has considered various boundary conditions that could potentially alter the relationships between empowering leadership and outcomes, including empowerment related HRM system (Chuang et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2016), organizational support climate (Harris et al., 2014; Li et al., 2017), team geographic dispersion (Hill &

Bartol, 2016), and virtual team work (Hill & Bartol, 2016). Previous research has not yet fully explored the boundary conditions that influence the effectiveness of empowering leadership. Sharma & Kirkman (2015) posed the question of whether empowering practices are an appropriate leadership style for employees facing high levels of demands. They proposed that the combination of empowering leadership with high levels of job demands (challenge and hindrance demands) may overwhelm employees, such that the typically positive effects of empowering leadership on employee outcomes will be weakened (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). Furthermore, the authors posit that individuals who are subjected to high levels of demands in their personal lives may be less responsive to the motivational influence of empowering leadership (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). In support of these propositions, recent research findings indicate that empowering leadership can also be inappropriate and increase employees' unethical pro-organizational behavior (e.g., concealing the truth or withholding negative information about one's organization) when employees are facing significant hindering demands in their job (Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022). However, the potential negative consequences of empowering leadership remain a subject of limited investigation. A recent literature review of Han et al. (2022) revealed that of the approximately 160 published empirical papers on empowering leadership, only six have considered the possibility that it may result in undesirable outcomes.

Conclusion

Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, there has been a pervasive interest in how organizations can facilitate and sustain motivation and optimal functioning in employees. In the early years of the 20th century, the concept of job simplification has emerged as a strategy for optimizing employee efficiency and performance. One of the most significant challenges was the inverse relationship between job simplification and employee satisfaction, well-being, and absenteeism. In response to this challenge, job enrichment (i.e., increasing employees' autonomy) and leader autonomy support emerged as antidotes to simplified jobs (S. K. Parker, 2014; Slemp et al., 2018).

The review of established theories in management and work psychology reveals that job autonomy is a crucial element in work design and leadership research. Job autonomy has been considered a core factor in work design theories on motivation (most notably, Hackman & Oldham, 1976) as well as in work design theories on well-being (in particular, Karasek, 1979). While all theories on work design agree that job autonomy is beneficial, they differ on the reasons why. Whereas the JCM (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) views job autonomy as an aspect of the working environment that motivates employees, the JD-C model (Karasek, 1979) views job autonomy as an aspect of the working environment that allows employees to effectively manage the demands of the workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) conceptualizes job autonomy as a job resource and incorporates both the motivational and health-impairment processes into a theoretical framework (Bakker et al., 2014). Furthermore, empowering leadership is recognized in management literature as a popular autonomy-supportive leadership style (Slemp et al., 2018). This leadership style is typically regarded as advantageous, although it may also lead to undesirable outcomes.

Job autonomy has been considered a core factor in work design and leadership research since the 1970s (Hackman & Lawler, 1971), leading to a rich and diverse body of literature. Despite the extensive theoretical and empirical research conducted on job autonomy, there are still unresolved questions and areas for further investigation.

1.3 Looking for Answers: The Unknown about Job Autonomy

"Given the potentially bright and dark sides of autonomy, the question arises as to when job autonomy has beneficial or detrimental effects."

— Kubicek et al. (2017)

Previous research has primarily focused on the beneficial impact of job autonomy on employee work attitudes (e.g., increased motivation and job satisfaction), well-being (e.g., decreased exhaustion), and work behavior (e.g., increased job performance). However, a small but growing body of research indicates that granting employees job autonomy is not always beneficial (e.g., Cheong et al., 2016; Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022; Kubicek et al., 2017; Langfred, 2004; Langfred & Moye, 2004; Lu et al., 2017; Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018). Yet, it remains unknown why and when job autonomy is good or bad for employees.

Understanding the Multidimensional Nature of Job Autonomy

Job autonomy was originally conceptualized as a one-dimensional construct (e.g., the Job Diagnostic Survey; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). However, previous studies have employed a variety of measures to assess job autonomy, with each approach focusing on different aspects of autonomy. For example, the Job Content Questionnaire (Karasek et al., 1998) assesses decision authority, which refers to the extent to which employees are allowed to make decisions on their own and have a say over what happens in their work. Jackson et al. (1993) conceptualize autonomy in two additional ways: method autonomy, which refers to the freedom to choose the procedures and methods used to perform a task, and scheduling autonomy, which refers to the freedom to control the scheduling and timing of work. Therefore, Morgeson & Humphrey (2006) propose a differentiation between decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy.

Findings of previous research indicate that while all dimensions of autonomy are bivariately related to work outcomes, when they are analyzed simultaneously in one model, some of the effects become insignificant (De Spiegelaere et al., 2016; Humphrey et al., 2007). This raises the question whether different forms of job autonomy represent different job resources, given that not all forms of autonomy may contribute to the same work outcomes. To date, only Humphrey et al. (2007) have provided meta-analytic evidence for the differential impact of job autonomy dimensions on job satisfaction. However, scholars have not yet fully delineated the relationship between different dimensions of job autonomy and other work outcomes. Falsely assuming that all kinds of autonomy are the same may lead to an inaccurate understanding of job autonomy.

Research Question 1: Are there differences in the effects of decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy on work outcomes?

Furthermore, it remains unclear why different forms of autonomy may differ in their impact on various work outcomes. This question bears some resemblance to the discussion on the differentiation between challenge and hindrance demands and the incorporation of employee cognitive appraisals of demands (Kim & Beehr, 2019; Kraimer et al., 2022; Webster et al., 2011). The appraisals approach implies that it is not the work condition by itself that determines employee responses but rather the individual anticipation of personal gain and loss. Although this approach was initially developed to address stressors, previous research has applied its principles more broadly to various aspects of the job (Ohly & Fritz, 2010; S. K. Parker & Knight, 2024; Z. Wang et al., 2022). Thus, applying a cognitive appraisals approach might be a promising way to gain a better understanding of how employees appraise different forms of job autonomy.

Research Question 2: Do employees appraise their job differently depending on the form of job autonomy (decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy)?

Understanding the Impact of Job Autonomy on Positive and Negative Work Behavior

Meta-analytic findings of Humphrey et al. (2007) indicate that job autonomy was the only work characteristic that could be identified as a predictor of objective job performance. However, the relationship between job autonomy and job performance appears to be ambiguous (Andrei & Parker, 2018), as researchers find both positive and negative effects of job autonomy on employee performance (e.g., M. D. Baer et al., 2015; Chan & Lam, 2011; Cheong et al., 2016). These inconsistent results suggest a need to better understand whether, why, and when employees with job autonomy perform better or worse in their job.

Research Question 3a: Do employees with job autonomy perform better or worse in their job?

Research Question 3b: Why do employees with job autonomy perform better or worse in their job?

Research Question 3c: Under which conditions are the performance consequences of job autonomy stronger or weaker?

While previous research has focused almost exclusively on the impact of job autonomy on favorable work behaviors, little is known whether employees might also abuse their autonomy by engaging in negative work behaviors (Kubicek et al., 2017). Employees with high levels of autonomy may have increased opportunities to engage in negative work behavior due to less direct supervision (D. G. Allen et al., 2003). For example, employees who work from home may spend at least a portion of their work hours for non-work-related activities, such as taking longer breaks than allowed, surfing the Internet for personal reasons, or just daydreaming (Chong et al., 2020). In support of this notion, a limited number of studies have indicated that job autonomy can lead to unethical work behavior (Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022; Lu et al., 2017). Given that there is a potential dark side to job autonomy (Cheong et al., 2016; Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022; Langfred & Moye, 2004; Lu et al., 2017), it is crucial to

understand whether, why, and when employees with job autonomy engage in more or less negative work behavior.

Research Question 4a: Do employees with job autonomy engage in more or less negative behavior in their job?

Research Question 4b: Why do employees with job autonomy engage in more (or less) negative behavior in their job?

Research Question 4c: Under which conditions do employees with job autonomy engage in more (or less) negative behavior in their job?

Understanding the Impact of Job Autonomy on Employee Motivation and Well-being

In the work design literature, the motivating and strain-reducing potential of job autonomy is well established (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Karasek, 1979). Prior meta-analyses provide strong evidence for a positive relationship between job autonomy and work motivation (Christian et al., 2011; Fried & Ferris, 1987; Humphrey et al., 2007; Marinova et al., 2015; Nahrgang et al., 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2015; Spector, 1986) and a negative relationship between job autonomy and mental strain (Alarcon, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2007; R. T. Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Nahrgang et al., 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2015; Park et al., 2014; Spector, 1986). It matters greatly for employees whether job autonomy boosts work motivation or mitigates mental strain, even though both effects enable them to improve job performance. The first mechanism implies that job autonomy works as a motivator, inducing employees to dedicate more energy to their work and experience a positive state of mind. The second mechanism entails that job autonomy serves as a hygiene factor that prevents employees from losing energy through work and experiencing a negative state of mind (Gorgievski & Hobfoll, 2008). Although the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) incorporates theoretically motivating and strain-reducing effects as two distinct processes that both impact job performance, studies that compare and contrast work

motivation and mental strain as alternative mediators of the job autonomy – job performance relationship are lacking (S. K. Parker et al., 2017).

Research Question 5: Does job autonomy exert a more pronounced effect on job performance through increasing work motivation or through reducing mental strain?

Another criticism has been that most work design models fail to elucidate the underlying mechanisms through which job autonomy is associated with employee motivation and well-being (Morgeson & Campion, 2003; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Work design models, such as the JD-C model or the JD-R model, are descriptive in nature and do not provide any particular psychological explanations. The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) specifies the types of resources and demands that lead to specific work outcomes. However, it does not explain why this is the case. The fact that the existing work design models provide only limited insight into the psychological mechanisms involved is an important limitation (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Thus, researchers have argued for the need to further explore the psychological processes caused by job autonomy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Crawford et al., 2010; Humphrey et al., 2007; Morgeson & Campion, 2003; Oldham & Fried, 2016; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Research Question 6: How do the motivation and well-being consequences of job autonomy come about?

The most widely used framework to explain why job autonomy impacts employee's functioning in the workplace is Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model (Pearce & Gregersen, 1991). According to Hackman & Oldham (1976), job autonomy motivates employees because it stimulates employees' feelings of personal responsibility for their job. Yet, it remains unclear whether felt responsibility also explains the relationship between job autonomy and employee well-being. Job

responsibility is typically classified as a challenge demand which is proposed to potentially increase employee strain. Thus, questions remain whether feelings of personal responsibility, induced by job autonomy, are leading to more or less strain, given that responsibility can be both a benefit and a burden to employees (Holdorf & Greenwald, 2018; Schmitt et al., 2015).

Research Question 7: Do employees' feelings of personal responsibility, induced by job autonomy, reduce or enhance mental strain in their job?

Understanding the Effectiveness of Job Autonomy Above and Beyond Other Resources

The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) has been subjected to criticism for lacking sufficient specification, given that previous research has employed quite different concepts to represent demands, resources, and outcomes (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The differentiation between challenge and hindrance demands and the differentiation between job resources and personal resources have been significant contributions to work design literature, providing a more nuanced understanding of the unique predictive qualities of different resources and demands. The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) categorizes job autonomy as a job resource. However, the work design literature has been criticized that nearly anything could be considered a resource (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Thus, to assess the relevance of job autonomy as a job resource more accurately, it is important to identify and isolate its net effects, over and above other potential resources.

Research Question 8: Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes hold above and beyond the impact of other resources?

Understanding the Interplay Between Job Autonomy and Job Demands

The extant literature on work design and leadership proposes a number of interaction effects between job resources and job demands, which are, however, not entirely consistent with one another.

The JD-C model (Karasek, 1979) and the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) suggest an interactive effect of job demands and job resources (e.g., job autonomy), in which job resources are predicted to buffer the negative impact of job demands on employee mental strain (Häusser et al., 2010). The results of several reviews indicate that the evidence supporting the interaction effect is not compelling (see, e.g., de Lange et al., 2003; van der Doef & Maes, 1999).

Furthermore, the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) proposes job demands to amplify the impact of job resources on employee motivation. It is anticipated that job resources will be particularly motivating when they are required (accentuating effect). In contrast, Sharma & Kirkman (2015) are proposing that the typically positive effects of empowering leadership on employee outcomes will be weakened when job demands are high. They suggest that the combination of empowering leadership with high levels of job demands may overwhelm employees (weakening effect). S. K. Parker et al. (2017) have concluded that the predicted interactions between job demands and resources remain elusive.

Research Question 9: Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes differ depending on the level job demands?

Understanding the Impact of Culture on the Effectiveness of Job Autonomy

Researchers have called for studies that investigate whether the effects of job autonomy vary by culture (Oldham & Fried, 2016; S. K. Parker et al., 2017). In a recent meta-analysis, Carter et al. (2023) have found that national culture influences the strength of the job autonomy – job performance relationship and they suggest that future studies should also examine how culture moderates the relationship between job autonomy and employee attitudes and well-being. Another important aspect of the context is leadership culture. The GLOBE study extended implicit leadership theory to the aggregate cultural-level, highlighting that societal expectations and beliefs regarding good leadership

are culturally shared (House et al., 2014). However, the impact of leadership culture on the effectiveness of work design has received only limited research attention to date.

Research Question 10: Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes differ depending on the cultural context?

Conclusion

The work design and leadership literature have focused on the notion that job autonomy and autonomy-supportive leadership behaviors are perceived by employees as positive in nature (Kim et al., 2018; Ng & Feldman, 2015). However, previous research has not adequately addressed several key issues. These include a) the need to differentiate between different forms of autonomy, b) the need to explore the underlying psychological processes, c) the need to integrate the motivating and strain-reducing perspective of job autonomy, d) the need to consider employee negative behavior as an outcome variable, and e) the need to explore the impact of several contextual conditions. An examination of the research questions presented in this dissertation assists in the development of a more nuanced understanding of why and when job autonomy is good or bad for employees.

2 Theoretical Framework and Methods

"Unfortunately, there is no theoretical model to which practitioners or researchers can turn to identify and understand the effects (both positive and negative) of granting task autonomy to individuals in organizations."

— Langfred & Moye (2004)

Despite the growing importance of job autonomy for the future of work and its prevalence in the work design and leadership literature, there are important questions that remain unknown. In answering these questions, I develop and test an integrative theoretical framework that sheds light on the potential benefits and downsides of job autonomy. Therefore, a key contribution of this dissertation is not only to test existing theory, but also to propose new building blocks and a general framework for future theory development, following Langfred & Moye (2004).

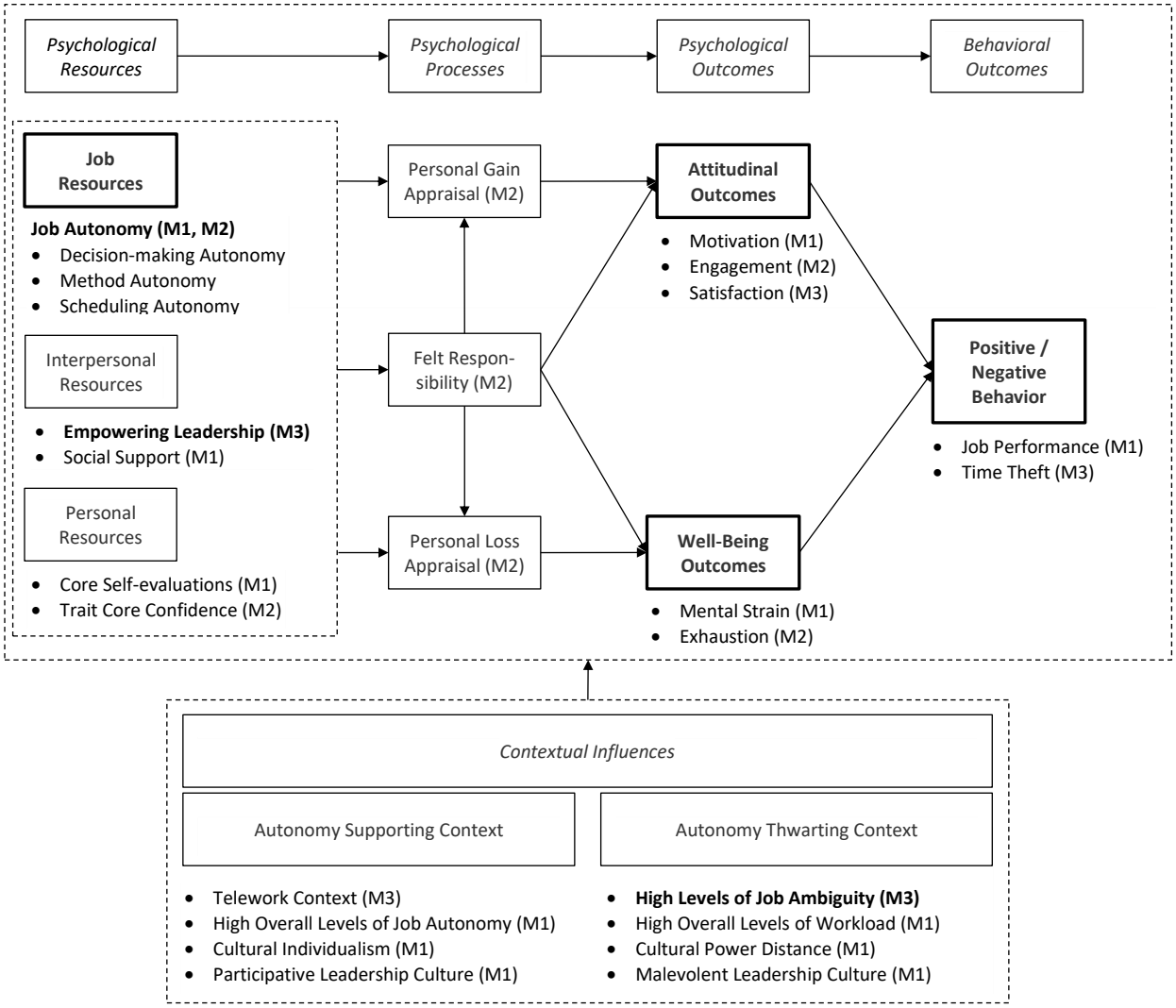
The theoretical framework of this dissertation is illustrated in Synopsis Figure 6. This chapter is organized around this model and is divided into three primary sections. First, I describe the variables that were selected for analysis. Second, I introduce relevant theories that explain the relationships between those variables. Third, I discuss the methods used to empirically test the proposed model.

2.1 Building the Model: Choice of Variables

In order to develop a theoretical framework, I employed an input–process–output model, including five building blocks: psychological resources, psychological processes, psychological outcomes, behavioral outcomes, and contextual influences. I categorized work and leadership characteristics as psychological resources (input) that influence employee psychological outcomes via various psychological processes. In turn, employee psychological outcomes are expected to influence employee

behavioral outcomes. In addition, various contextual influences are proposed to alter the effects between psychological resources and outcomes. The following sections describe the variables of interest for each building block of the theoretical framework.

Synopsis Figure 6 Theoretical Framework of this Dissertation



Notes: M1 = Manuscript 1 (Iseke & Muecke, 2024); M2 = Manuscript 2 (Muecke & Greenwald, 2024); M3 = Manuscript 3 (Muecke, 2024).

Key variables of the manuscripts are **bolded**.

Psychological Resources

The model distinguishes between three different forms of psychological resources: job resources, interpersonal resources, and personal resources.

Job resources refer to employees' positive evaluations of their job. Job resources are defined as those aspects of the job that "are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274). Following the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), I categorize job autonomy as a job resource. In addition, drawing on previous work on the multidimensional nature of autonomy (Breaugh, 1985; De Spiegelaere et al., 2016; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), I view decision-making autonomy, method autonomy, and scheduling autonomy as qualitatively distinct autonomy resources that may differ in their potential to reduce job demands, and to stimulate personal growth and development.

Interpersonal resources refer to employees' positive evaluations of their relationships with others. Prior research has demonstrated the importance of relational work design (Grant, 2007; Humphrey et al., 2007; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). In accordance with the JD-C model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), social support is regarded as a significant interpersonal resource within the model. In addition, I view supervisor empowering behaviors (i.e., enhancing the meaningfulness of work, expressing confidence in high performance, promoting participation in decision making, and providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints; Ahearne et al., 2005; X. Zhang & Bartol, 2010) as important interpersonal resources for employees.

Personal resources refer to employees' positive evaluations of their own ability to control their work situation (Bakker et al., 2014). I included core self-evaluations (i.e., high self-esteem, high self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and low neuroticism; Judge & Bono, 2001) and trait core confidence

(i.e., hope, efficacy, optimism, resilience; Stajkovic, 2006) in the model, which both contain a set of key personal resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

In this dissertation, I focus on employees' subjective evaluation of their job, of their relationships with others, and of themselves for the reasons stated by Hackman & Lawler, p. (1971, p. 264): "It should be emphasized that it is not their objective state which affects employee attitude and behavior, but rather how they are experienced by the employees. Regardless of the amount of feedback (or variety, autonomy, or task identity) a worker really has in his work, it is how much he perceives that he has which affects his reactions to the job."

Critics have contended that the same objective situation can be perceived in disparate ways, contingent upon the motivational structures of different individuals (Morgeson & Campion, 2003). Therefore, I control for the effects of personal characteristics, such as core self-evaluations (Manuscript 1) and trait core confidence (Manuscript 2). However, although personal characteristics may influence employee perceptions of their job and the relationships with others, there is a substantial body of evidence indicating that the use of perceptions is a valid approach in assessing job and social characteristics (Daniels, 2006; Morgeson & Campion, 2003; S. K. Parker, 2014).

Psychological Processes

The model incorporates three different psychological processes: employee feelings of personal responsibility, employee cognitive appraisal of personal gain, and employee cognitive appraisal of personal loss.

Work design theories include felt responsibility as a central variable (Holdorf & Greenwald, 2018). Felt responsibility represents a critical psychological state reflecting the extent to which an employee feels liable and accountable for job results (Humphrey et al., 2007). According to the JCM (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), job autonomy influences work outcomes through its impact on felt responsibility. Thus, I consider feelings of personal responsibility as a psychological process in the model.

Work design research on the CHSF considers employee cognitive appraisals as mechanisms that transmit the effects of work characteristics to outcomes (M. A. LePine, 2022). The appraisals approach implies that it is not the work condition by itself that determines employee responses but rather the individual anticipation of personal gain and loss (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Personal gain appraisal refers to an individual's subjective interpretation that the job has the potential for personal gain, growth, and development (M. A. LePine et al., 2016). Personal loss appraisal refers to an individual's subjective interpretation that the job has the potential to result in personal loss, constraints, or harm (M. A. LePine et al., 2016). I incorporate employee cognitive appraisals of personal gain and loss as two separate psychological processes to explain how employee perception of their job impacts psychological work outcomes, following previous research on challenge and hindrance appraisal (e.g., Kim & Beehr, 2019; Kraimer et al., 2022; M. A. LePine et al., 2016; Ohly & Fritz, 2010; Webster et al., 2011).

Psychological Outcomes

The model incorporates two different forms of psychological outcomes: employee attitudinal outcomes and employee well-being outcomes.

The JCM (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), as well as the literature on leader autonomy support (Slemp et al., 2018) indicate that job autonomy is associated with positive attitudinal outcomes, such as work motivation, work engagement, and job satisfaction.

The JD-C model (Karasek, 1979), the JD-R model (Bakker et al., 2004; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014), as well as the literature on leader autonomy support (Slemp et al., 2018) indicate that job autonomy is associated with well-being outcomes, such as less mental strain and less emotional exhaustion.

Accordingly, the model incorporates motivation, engagement, job satisfaction, mental strain, and exhaustion as psychological outcomes, which are postulated to impact employee behavior.

Behavioral Outcomes

The model includes positive and negative behavioral outcomes. Managers are interested in strategies that can enhance employees' functional behavior in the workplace. I therefore include employee job performance as a significant positive behavioral outcome in the model.

In addition, managers are interested in strategies that prevent employees from engaging in undesirable behavior in the workplace. In light of the current trend of an increasing number of employees working from home on a part-time or full-time basis, a common concern among managers is that employees may abuse their autonomy and engage in time theft while working from home (Blackman, 2020; Harold et al., 2022; Holland et al., 2016; Murty & Karanth, 2022). Time theft is considered a negative and unethical work behavior, because employees are intentionally accepting compensation from their organizations for time that they did not work or did not otherwise spend focused on their work (Liu & Berry, 2013). I therefore include employee time theft as a significant negative behavioral outcome in the model.

Contextual Influences

The model distinguishes between two different contextual influences that are proposed to alter the effects of job autonomy: an autonomy supporting context and an autonomy thwarting context.

An autonomy supporting context is characterized by high levels of resources. I included four examples for an autonomy supporting context in the model that are postulated to strengthen the effects of job autonomy. First, a telework context represents an autonomy supporting context because it offers employees greater freedom and flexibility in choosing where, when, and how to perform their job-related activities (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Second, an overall high level of job autonomy is a clear indicator of an autonomy-supporting context because it demonstrates that employees have been granted a significant degree of freedom and independence. Third, cultural individualism indicates an autonomy supporting context because individualistic cultures value the independent self, focus on

individual contributions and achievements, and allow for individual needs and preferences (e.g., Erez, 2010; Hirst et al., 2008; Hofstede, 2001). Fourth, a participative leadership culture indicates an autonomy supporting context because it reflects the degree to which good managers are supposed to delegate control, involve others in decision-making, and be egalitarian and team-oriented (Hanges & Dickson, 2004).

In contrast, an autonomy thwarting context is characterized by high levels of demands. I included four examples for an autonomy thwarting context in the model that are postulated to weaken the beneficial effects of job autonomy. First, a context that thwarts autonomy is one in which hindering demands are high (Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022). It is argued that high levels of hindering demands, such as job ambiguity (J. A. LePine et al., 2005), have the potential to hinder the effectiveness of empowerment and autonomy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Second, an overall high level of workload, which is considered a challenge demand, is indicative of a demanding and autonomy-thwarting context. Third, high cultural power distance indicates an autonomy thwarting context because employees in high power distance cultures accept unequal power and do not expect supervisors to share control (Hofstede, 2001), but instead rely on their supervisors to decide (Erez, 2010; Eylon & Au, 1999). Fourth, a malevolent leadership culture indicates an autonomy thwarting context because it reflects a high demanding and straining context in which managers are less likely to support and appreciate autonomous work behavior (Hanges & Dickson, 2004).

Conclusion

In the field of work design, researchers have already proposed a number of theoretical frameworks (e.g., Langfred & Moye, 2004; Morgeson & Campion, 2003; S. K. Parker et al., 2001). However, many of the propositions put forth by these theoretical models have not been empirically tested. Moreover, the theoretical framework of this dissertation extents previous work design frameworks, by a) differentiating between different forms of autonomy (representing different

psychological resources), b) incorporating employee cognitive appraisals as psychological processes for psychological resources, c) integrating both employee positive attitudes and employee well-being as psychological outcomes, d) considering both positive and negative behavioral outcomes, and e) proposing a variety of contextual influences that may either strengthen or weaken the effects of job autonomy. Thus, the objective of this dissertation is to develop and test an extended theoretical model that can be utilized by practitioners and researchers to identify and comprehend the positive and negative consequences of job autonomy (Langfred & Moye, 2004).

2.2 Explaining the Model: Choice of Theories

"Where other theories can inform us regarding those processes, we should build on them, because it is in this way that we can create new knowledge."

— Bakker & Demerouti (2017)

Previous work design models have been criticized for failing to adequately explain the influence of job characteristics on employee outcomes. Thus, researchers have argued for the need to build on other theories that can inform us regarding those processes (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Crawford et al., 2010; Humphrey et al., 2007; Morgeson & Campion, 2003; Oldham & Fried, 2016; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

In this dissertation, I draw on conservation of resources theory (COR, Hobfoll, 1989), on the transactional theory of stress (TTS, Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and on social exchange theory (SET, Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The following sections will provide a brief overview of each theory, focusing on the theoretical explanations for the beneficial and detrimental effects of job autonomy.

Conservation of Resources Theory

The primary idea of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) is that individuals strive to acquire new resources (i.e., resource gain) and protect current resources from depletion (i.e., resource conservation), where resources refer to anything individuals perceive as beneficial to achieving their goals (Halbesleben et al., 2014). COR theory helps to parsimoniously explain that psychological resources (i.e., job, interpersonal, personal) have the potential to generate resource gains, resulting in beneficial outcomes, while simultaneously preventing resource losses and detrimental outcomes (Debus et al., 2019). However, people must invest resources to acquire new resources and to protect existing resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

From a COR theory perspective, job autonomy can be viewed as a job resource that employees can use in three ways. First, job autonomy enriches a job in the sense that employees can acquire more or different resources through work behavior, such as a sense of agency or psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2001), thereby enhancing work motivation. Second, employees can use job autonomy to conserve existing cognitive and emotional resources by adjusting their work to individual interests and needs (Demerouti et al., 2001; S. K. Parker, 2014), thus reducing mental strain. Third, using job autonomy also requires employees to invest other resources, such as time and effort (Cheong et al., 2016; Langfred & Moye, 2004). When employees are required to perform a task and engage in making decisions and evaluating previous decisions simultaneously (Langfred & Moye, 2004), high levels of autonomy can also deplete resources and increase mental strain. Thus, job autonomy may simultaneously evoke three different processes: resource gain, resource conservation, and resource loss. Moreover, job autonomy, consisting of decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy, can be viewed as a bundle of qualitatively distinct job resources that may differ in their potential for resource gain, resource conservation, and resource loss.

COR theory further implies that employees' current resource status influences how they use their resources (Lim et al., 2020). According to the resource gain paradox, people with excess resources are more capable of arranging resource gains even though resource gains are less important to them (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Employees whose resources are exhausted or constrained tend to engage in defensive behavior directed toward conserving resources (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). Furthermore, COR theory suggests that the value of a specific resource depends on the context, such that a resource may be salient and beneficial in one context, but less so in another (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2002).

In conclusion, COR theory bases on fundamental evolutionary principles that have been identified to define humans as a species: humans must build, protect, and invest resources in order to survive and propagate (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Moreover, in contrast to evolutionary psychology, which is based on post-

hoc evaluations, COR theory makes both intuitive and counterintuitive testable predictions (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Given the broad applicability of the principles of this theory, COR theory has become a frequently cited theory in management and applied psychology research (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Transactional Theory of Stress

The transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) posits that individuals evaluate the demands placed upon them as challenging and/or hindering. Whereas challenge stressors are motivating because they facilitate personal growth and achievement, hindrance stressors are debilitating because they impede personal development and work-related accomplishment (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Kraimer et al., 2022). The TTS recognizes that employees respond to job characteristics based on how they appraise their job (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is proposed that individuals' appraisal of the environment (i.e., the assessment of the meaning and significance of a situation) is the primary psychological process that connects job demands to outcomes (M. A. LePine, 2022). Whereas challenge appraisals focus on the potential for growth or gains and elicit positive emotions, leading to beneficial outcomes, hindrance appraisals focus on the potential for harm or loss and elicit negative emotional responses, leading to detrimental outcomes (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2023). However, TTS posits that a single job characteristic may be simultaneously appraised as both a challenge and a hindrance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In contrast to COR theory, which emphasizes the objectively stressful nature of a job, the SST asserts that a job is stressful when it is perceived as stressful (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Thus, researchers have called for an integration of COR theory with appraisal approaches "by considering how various resources […] affect stressor appraisals" (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2023, p. 185). Given that employee cognitive appraisals are of the whole job rather than of specific job characteristics (e.g., Kim & Beehr, 2019; M. A. LePine et al., 2016; Ohly & Fritz, 2010), previous research has begun to apply its principles to various aspects of the job (Ohly & Fritz, 2010; S. K. Parker & Knight, 2024; Z. Wang et al., 2022).

According to the SST, it is not the work condition by itself that determines employee responses but rather the individual anticipation of personal gain and loss (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, the appraisals approach has the potential to reveal whether employees perceive their job as challenging (personal gain), or hindering (personal loss), or both (personal gain and loss), indicating the positive or negative or mixed nature of certain job characteristics (Kim & Beehr, 2019; Kraimer et al., 2022; Webster et al., 2011).

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is one of the most widely used conceptual framework for understanding workplace behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2014; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). According to social exchange theory, organizations are social marketplaces wherein individuals exchange economic and socioemotional resources (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Rosen et al., 2014). This theory is particularly useful in elucidating the exchange relationship between supervisors and employees.

The social exchange process between supervisors and employees typically begins with an initiating action of the supervisor towards an employee (e.g., supervisors' leadership behavior). In response to the initiating action of the supervisor, the employee may then choose to reciprocate this treatment with positive or negative attitudes and behaviors towards the leader and/ or the broader organization (Eisenberger et al., 1987). This process is often referred to as reciprocating responses (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Given that individuals seek balance in their exchange relationships (Gouldner, 1960), reciprocating responses depend on individual's perception of whether the exchange partner is providing expected resources or not. Employees who experience positive initiating actions by their supervisor will tend to reply in kind by engaging in more positive reciprocating responses and/ or fewer negative reciprocating responses (Cropanzano et al., 2017). This describes the positive reciprocation process. In contrast, employees who experience negative initiating actions (or inactions) by their

supervisor will tend to engage in fewer positive reciprocating responses and/ or more negative reciprocating responses (Cropanzano et al., 2017). This describes the negative reciprocation process.

The principles of reciprocal exchange (Gouldner, 1960; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003) may have the potential to explain whether employees respond positively or negatively to autonomy-supportive behaviors from their supervisor. When employees perceive autonomy-supportive behaviors from their supervisor as beneficial, they will tend to reply in kind by engaging in more positive behavior and/ or fewer negative behavior. In contrast, when employees perceive autonomy-supportive behaviors from their supervisor as passive or unhelpful (Norris et al., 2021; Wong & Giessner, 2018), they will tend to engage in fewer positive behavior and/ or more negative behavior.

Conclusion

Combining the rationales described above, I argue that when managers are granting their employees autonomy over decision-making, work methods, and work scheduling, they are providing employees different forms of job resources. Employee subjective perceptions of these job resources (employee cognitive appraisals) elucidate how employees respond to the level of autonomy that have been granted to them. When employees appraise their job as having the potential to stimulate personal growth and development due to the level of job autonomy (e.g., through increased leeway), they anticipate resource gain and respond with positive behavior. In contrast, when employees appraise their job as having the potential to increase job demands and their associated psychological costs due to the level of job autonomy (e.g., through increased role stress), employees anticipate resource loss and respond with negative behavior. Moreover, when employees anticipate both resource gain and loss due to the level of job autonomy, job autonomy may be perceived as a double-edged sword, conferring both benefits and burdens. Finally, employee subjective evaluations of job resources can be influenced by several contextual factors (e.g., leadership culture or level of job demands).

2.3 Testing the Model: Choice of Methods

> *"Researchers seem to face a seemingly inescapable dilemma: (a) implement experimental designs that yield high levels of confidence regarding internal validity but are challenged by difficulties regarding external validity (i.e., uncertainty regarding generalizability of results) or (b) implement nonexperimental designs that often maximize external validity because they are conducted in natural settings but whose conclusions are ambiguous in terms of the direction and nature of causal relationships."*
>
> *— Aguinis & Bradley (2014)*

In testing the research questions of this dissertation, I employed various methods: a meta-analysis, a multi-wave field study, and a scenario experiment.

Meta-Analysis (M1)

As demonstrated by Humphrey et al. (2007), work design research published in top management and applied psychology journals began to decline in the late 1980s and has remained at a low level ever since. One method for reinvigorating a field of study is to employ meta-analytic techniques to elucidate and integrate existing empirical findings, to evaluate hypotheses at a qualitatively distinct level, and to identify the most promising avenues for new theoretical advancements (Humphrey et al., 2007; Schmidt & Hunter, 2015).

Moreover, as illustrated by Humphrey et al. (2007) work design research is still thriving outside of the top journals in the fields of management and applied psychology. Given the rich and diverse body of research on job autonomy that has been conducted since the 1970s, meta-analytic techniques can be useful to enhance the understanding of this topic.

A traditional meta-analysis is a method of synthesizing and cumulating research findings into a single effect size (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015). The effect size is a quantitative measure of the magnitude and directionality of the association between two variables. Over the last years, various traditional meta-analysis have been conducted on job autonomy (Alarcon, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2007; Ng & Feldman, 2015; Park et al., 2014; Spector, 1986).

In this dissertation, a meta-analytic structural equation modeling (MASEM) approach is employed (Viswesvaran & Ones, 1995). The MASEM approach offers a number of advantages over traditional meta-analysis and traditional SEM, as outlined by Bergh et al. (2016). First, the MASEM methodology extends beyond the scope of traditional meta-analysis by offering effect sizes that account for other variables within the model, as well as providing insights into the overall fit of the model (Bergh et al., 2016). Second, MASEM can be used to compare and contrast alternative mediators in one model that cannot be done by meta-analysis alone (Bergh et al., 2016). Third, the inclusion of all available data for a specific relationship allows MASEM to achieve the greatest possible external validity (Shadish et al., 2002). Fourth, given that the input for SEM models is derived from meta-analysis, which frequently incorporates data from thousands of firms, the sample size in MASEM is considerably larger than that of a typical SEM study (Bergh et al., 2016). This represents a unique statistical power advantage (Cheung & Chan, 2005). In conclusion, MASEM offers a significantly more robust and comprehensive framework for quantitative synthesis of research findings than that provided by traditional meta-analysis or traditional SEM (Bergh et al., 2016; Viswesvaran & Ones, 1995).

The meta-analysis of this dissertation encompasses 406 independent samples, with a total of 195,890 individuals from 36 different countries.

Multi-wave Field Study (M2 + M3)

Some research questions can't be subjected to meta-analysis due to the limited number of studies available that a) differentiate between different forms of autonomy, b) incorporate

psychological processes (e.g., felt responsibility, employee cognitive appraisal), and c) examine employee negative behavior (e.g., time theft) as outcome.

Therefore, I conducted a primary study. I recruited participants through the online platform Prolific Academic (Peer et al., 2017). To account for external validity, I focused on participants that were full-time employees of a for-profit company or business and had no student status.

I collected data in three waves with a 4-week time lag between measurement points in order to minimize method biases (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 2012). Temporal separation between measurement points allows the previous responses to leave short-term memory of participants (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 2012). The effectiveness of temporal separation between predictor and criterion variable measurements was demonstrated by Ostroff et al. (2002). The authors conducted a comparative analysis of the correlations between predictor and criterion variables for concurrent ratings of both variables with a one-hour and a one-month time lag. Although no significant differences were found in the average correlations between the concurrent and one-hour delay conditions, the researchers reported that the average correlations were 32% lower after a one-month delay than they were in the concurrent condition (Ostroff et al., 2002). Therefore, the temporal separation allows for a more conservative assessment of the relationships between predictor and criterion variable.

The sample for the second manuscript (M2) consists of 255 full-time employees working in various organizations of several industries, including professional, scientific & technical (n = 45), finance & insurance (n = 32), retail (n = 30), manufacturing (n = 28), health (n = 25), information & communication (n = 18), business administration and support services (n = 12), construction (n = 11), transport & storage (n = 11), accommodation & food services (n = 9), education (n = 8), wholesale (n = 7), and other industries (n = 19). Within those industries, a wide range of positions are represented, including support staff (n = 26), administrative staff (n = 28), skilled laborer (n = 25), trained professional (n = 56), junior management (n = 48), middle management (n = 62), upper management (n = 10). The

participants' average age is 40 years (SD = 10.90), and the average tenure at the organizations is 7.9 years (SD = 6.24). Females represent forty-eight percent of the sample. Most of the participants are located in the United Kingdom (70%) and the United States (25%).

Between the second and third measurement point, the lockdown due to the COVID-19 crisis began in most countries of the world. As a consequence, employees began to work at home whenever possible. Thus, at the third measurement point, 133 (out of 255) participants were working from home due to the COVID-19 crisis. This unexpected external shock provides some unique data on employee information both before and during the period in which they were required to work from home due to the global pandemic.

To ensure data quality, I followed the recommendations of Aguinis et al. (2021) by including five attention checks and monitoring the time spent on each survey. Participants received compensation of $3.0 for completing all three surveys. The compensation was divided into three parts: $1.1 after the first survey, $0.7 after the second survey, and $0.7 after the third survey. Additionally, participants received a $0.5 bonus for completing all three surveys.

Although I employed temporal separation between the variables, all variables came from the same source, thereby leaving the possibility of common-method bias (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 2012). Moreover, the correlational nature of the study precludes causal claims. To address these limitations, I designed a scenario experiment for a second primary study.

Scenario Experiment (M3)

The comprehension of causal relationships necessitates the utilization of experimental designs (Grant & Wall, 2009). One of the limitations of experimental designs is that they often prioritize internal validity over external validity and generalizability (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). For instance, experimental designs frequently utilize participants such as students or individuals that are removed from their natural environments.

Scenario experiments, also known as experimental vignette methodology, represent a common experimental approach to strengthen causal inference (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Scenario experiments entail the presentation of carefully constructed and realistic scenarios to assess dependent variables, such as employee attitudes or behaviors (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Consequently, scenario experiments simultaneously enhance both internal and external validity by enhancing experimental realism and also by allowing researchers to manipulate and control independent variables (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

I recruited an independent sample of 227 full-time employees on Prolific Academic (Peer et al., 2017). To enhance external validity, I focused on participants that were full-time employees of a for-profit company or business that were currently work from home due to the COVID-19 crisis and had no student status. Moreover, to address concerns about the scenario's relevance to real-life situations, I only considered the results of participants who could relate to it. The final sample consisted of 136 participants. The sample was 50% female and the average age was 36 years (SD = 9.02). Most of the participants were located in the United Kingdom (63%) and the United States (33%). Participants received compensation of $1.0.

The scenario for the online experiment was adapted from previous studies (M. Baer et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2011). Participants first read a role-playing scenario designed to place them in the context of an employee who is currently working from home due to the COVID-19 crisis. As part of the scenario, participants were then asked to reflect on their work condition and their supervisor's leadership style, which were manipulated to create four conditions. These manipulations directly reflected the measures utilized in the multi-wave field study of this dissertation. Afterwards, participants had to complete an employee survey in the scenario, rating the dependent variables as if they were that employee in the scenario.

A recent review of (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014) revealed that although scenario studies appear to be underutilized in the management and applied psychology literature, every major journal in the field has published at least some articles that relied on a scenario experiment.

Conclusion

To test the theoretical model, I conducted a meta-analysis and two studies on Prolific, including a multi-wave field study and an experimental study. I used a meta-analytic approach to achieve the greatest possible external validity (Shadish et al., 2002) in order to a) compare and contrast alternative mediators of the theoretical model, b) offer effect sizes that account for other variables within the model, and c) uncover the influence of various contextual factors. In addition, I conducted a primary study using a three-wave design to test a) the differential effects of different forms of job autonomy, b) the psychological processes of the model, and c) the impact of empowering leadership on employee negative behavior. Lastly, I experimentally examined the causal relationship between empowering leadership and employee negative behavior. The multimethod designs of the three studies (i.e., meta-analysis, field study and experimental study) sought to account for internal and external validity of my findings.

3 Overview of the Contributions

In this section, the three manuscripts of this dissertation are briefly presented. Synopsis Table 1 provides an overview of the content, applied theories, and used methods of the three manuscripts.

Synopsis Table 1 Overview of the Manuscripts

	Manuscript	Content	Theory	Method
1	Job Autonomy and Job Performance: An Integrative Framework and Meta-Analysis. *Anja Iseke & Simeon Muecke*	Mediators, moderators, and covariates of the relationship between job autonomy – job performance	COR	Meta-analysis
2	Linking Job Autonomy to Employee Engagement and Exhaustion: The Role of Employee Cognitive Appraisal. *Simeon Muecke & Jessica Greenwald*	Mediators of the relationship between job autonomy and employee engagement and exhaustion	COR + TTS	Multi-wave field study
3	The Double-Edged Sword of Empowering Leadership: Investigating Why and When Empowering Leadership Prevents Versus Promotes Employee Time Theft while Working from Home. *Simeon Muecke*	Mediator and moderator of the relationship between empowering leadership and employee time theft	SET	Multi-wave field study + scenario experiment

Notes: COR = conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989); TTS = transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); SET = social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005)

The primary objective of the following sections is to elucidate the manner in which the manuscripts address the research questions posed in this dissertation (see chapter 1.3). Synopsis Table 2 provides an overview of the research questions and the manuscripts in which they are addressed.

Synopsis Table 2 Overview of the Research Questions

	Research Question (Q)	M1	M2	M3
1	Q1: Are there differences in the effects of decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy on work outcomes?	M1	M2	
2	Q2: Do employees appraise their job differently depending on the form of job autonomy (decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy)?		M2	
3	Q3a: Do employees with job autonomy perform better or worse in their job?	M1		
	Q3b: Why do employees with job autonomy perform better or worse in their job?	M1		
	Q3c: Under which conditions are the performance consequences of job autonomy stronger or weaker?	M1		
4	Q4a: Do employees with job autonomy engage in more or less negative behavior in their job?			M3
	Q4b: Why do employees with job autonomy engage in more (or less) negative behavior in their job?			M3
	Q4c: Under which conditions do employees with job autonomy engage in more (or less) negative behavior in their job?			M3
5	Q5: Does job autonomy exert a more pronounced effect on job performance through increasing work motivation or through reducing mental strain?	M1		
6	Q6: How do the motivation and well-being consequences of job autonomy come about?		M2	
7	Q7: Do employees' feelings of personal responsibility, induced by job autonomy, reduce or enhance mental strain in their job?		M2	
8	Q8: Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes hold above and beyond the impact of other resources?	M1	M2	
9	Q9: Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes differ depending on the level job demands?	M1		M3
10	Q10: Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes differ depending on the cultural context?	M1		

Notes: M1 = Manuscript 1 (Iseke & Muecke, 2024); M2 = Manuscript 2 (Muecke & Greenwald, 2024); M3 = Manuscript 3 (Muecke, 2024).

3.1 Manuscript 1: Iseke & Muecke (2024)

The purpose of Manuscript 1 is to better understand why and when job autonomy influences job performance. COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) is used for developing an integrative model that considers job autonomy as a resource that enhances job performance through motivational and strain-related mechanisms, over and above core self-evaluations and social support as alternative means of job control. Furthermore, it is postulated that decision-making autonomy, method autonomy, and scheduling autonomy influence job performance to varying degrees via different mechanisms. Finally, a number of contextual factors are proposed to alter the motivation-enhancing and strain-reducing effects of job autonomy.

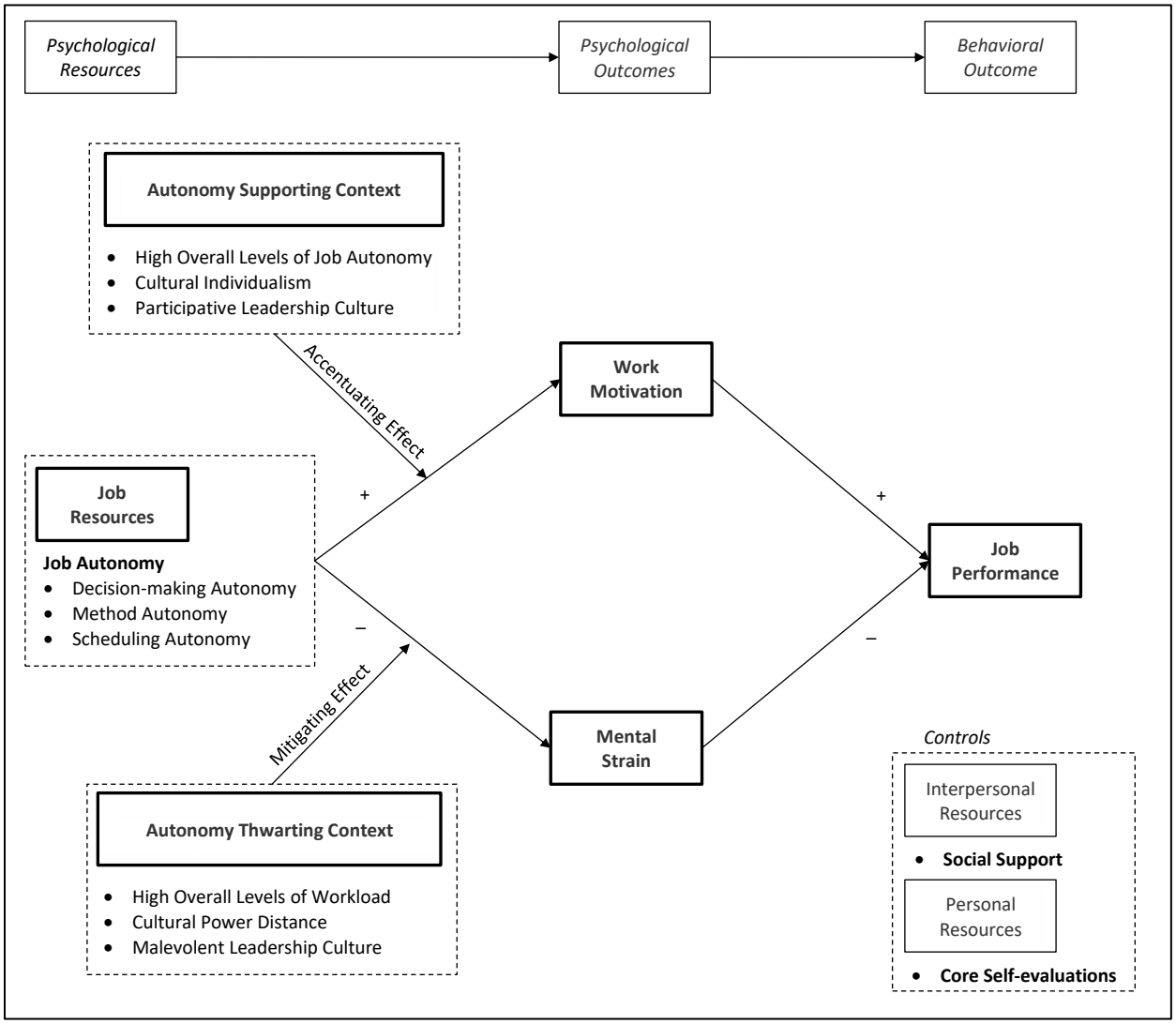
Variables of Manuscript 1

The model includes a) overall autonomy, including decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy (job resources), as independent variables, b) social support (interpersonal resource) and core self-evaluations (personal resources) as covariates, c) work motivation (attitudinal outcome) and mental strain (well-being outcome) as mediators, d) job performance (positive behavior) as dependent variable, and e) several autonomy supporting context variables (i.e., overall high autonomy, individualism and participative leadership cultures) and several autonomy thwarting context variables (i.e., high workload, power distance and malevolent leadership culture) as moderators. Synopsis Figure 7 illustrates the key variables and proposed relationships of this manuscript.

Results of Manuscript 1

The proposed model was meta-analytically tested based on effect sizes from 370 studies (N = 195,890 participants). The estimated true-score of the job autonomy – job performance relationship was significantly positive, and moderate in magnitude. Thus, with regard to research question 3a (Do employees with job autonomy perform better or worse in their job?), the results indicate that employees with job autonomy perform better in their job.

Synopsis Figure 7 Key Variables and Proposed Relationships of Manuscript 1



Notes: Key variables of the manuscript are **bolded**.

The results of meta-analytic structural equation modeling (MASEM) further indicate that job autonomy influences job performance primarily via work motivation but also via mental strain, even after controlling for the effects of social support and core self-evaluations as covariates. This finding contributes to various research questions. With regard to research question 3b (Why do employees with job autonomy perform better or worse in their job?), the results indicate that employees with job autonomy perform better because they are more motivated and experience less mental strain in their

job. With regard to research question 5 (Does job autonomy exert a more pronounced effect on job performance through increasing work motivation or through reducing mental strain?), the results indicate that the indirect effect between job autonomy and job performance via work motivation was stronger than via mental strain. With regard to research question 8 (Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes hold above and beyond the impact of other resources?), the results indicate that the effects of job autonomy (job resource) on work motivation, mental strain, and ultimately job performance hold above and beyond the impact of social support (interpersonal resource) and core self-evaluations (personal resources).

With regard to research question 1 (Are there differences in the effects of decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy on work outcomes?), the results indicate that decision-making, method, and scheduling autonomy influence job performance in distinct ways. For example, while decision-making autonomy leads to better job performance by enhancing work motivation, scheduling autonomy improves job performance by reducing mental strain.

Lastly, the results show that the motivation-enhancing effects of job autonomy were accentuated in autonomy supporting contexts (i.e., overall high autonomy), while autonomy thwarting contexts (i.e., power distance and malevolent leadership culture) tend to diminish the strain-reducing effects of job autonomy. The results further indicate that the strain-reducing effects of job autonomy were accentuated in autonomy supporting contexts (i.e., individualism and participative leadership cultures). These results inform us regarding research question 3c (Under which conditions are the performance consequences of job autonomy stronger or weaker?) and research question 10 (Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes differ depending on the cultural context?). With regard to research question 9 (Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes differ depending on the level job demands?), the meta-analytic results indicate that when the level of workload (challenge demand) is

higher, the negative relationship between job autonomy and mental strain is weaker, but this effect is non-significant.

Contributions of Manuscript 1

Manuscript 1 offers a number of important theoretical contributions to the literature on work design. First, Manuscript 1 extends prior research by integrating two major streams of literature on job autonomy based on COR theory, namely job design research on motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and job design research on stress (Karasek, 1979). The meta-analytic results indicate that job autonomy influences job performance primarily via work motivation but also via mental strain, even after controlling for the effects of core self-evaluations and social support as additional means of control. Given that work motivation and mental strain each have unique relationships with job autonomy, future research should consider both as mediators to gain a better understanding of how job autonomy affects job performance.

Second, the majority of prior studies considered job autonomy a unidimensional construct, but the meta-analytic results of Manuscript 1 indicate that decision-making, method, and scheduling autonomy are qualitatively distinct dimensions of job autonomy that are differently related to work motivation, mental strain, and job performance. Given that all three job autonomy dimensions have unique effects on job performance, failure to consider any dimension may skew the overall impact of job autonomy on job performance or at least lead to inaccurate results. Furthermore, considering different types of job autonomy as indicators of a uniform concept of overall job autonomy may mask substantial differences between decision-making, method, and scheduling autonomy. I therefore recommend that researchers include all three dimensions of job autonomy in their measures of job autonomy, as proposed by Morgeson & Humphrey (2006).

Third, Manuscript 1 answers the call from work design scholars for a systematic investigation of how working conditions and cultural factors shape the effects of job autonomy on various employee

outcomes (Gagné & Bhave, 2011; Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2020; Oldham & Fried, 2016; S. K. Parker et al., 2017). The meta-analytic results of Manuscript 1 indicate that the motivation-enhancing and strain-reducing effects of job autonomy tend to be stronger in autonomy supporting contexts, characterized by high overall levels of job autonomy, cultural individualism and participative leadership culture. The strain-reducing effects of job autonomy are diminished in autonomy thwarting contexts, characterized by high cultural power distance and malevolent leadership culture. These findings indicate that job autonomy contributes most effectively to work motivation and employee well-being in autonomy supporting contexts.

Synopsis Table 3 summarizes the key contributions and key findings of Manuscript 1.

Synopsis Table 3 Key Contributions and Key Findings of Manuscript 1

	Key Contribution	Key Finding
1	Meta-analytic integration of two major streams of literature on job autonomy, namely job design research on motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and job design research on stress (Karasek, 1979)	Job autonomy leads to better job performance, mainly by enhancing work motivation but also by reducing mental strain
2	Systematic differentiation among different forms of autonomy	Decision-making, method, and scheduling autonomy influence job performance in distinct ways: while decision-making autonomy leads to better job performance by enhancing work motivation, scheduling autonomy improves job performance by reducing mental strain
3	Systematic investigation of how working conditions and cultural factors shape the effects of job autonomy on work motivation and mental strain	Job autonomy contributes most effectively to work motivation and employee well-being in autonomy supporting contexts (i.e., overall high autonomy, individualism and participative leadership cultures)

3.2 Manuscript 2: Muecke & Greenwald (2024)

The purpose of Manuscript 2 is to better understand how and why employees with job autonomy are more engaged and less exhausted in their job. The manuscript presents a novel theoretical perspective that integrates COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) with appraisal approaches from the stress literature (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This integration offers a new way to understand the motivating and strain-reducing potential of job autonomy. The theoretical model focuses on the impact of different forms of autonomy on employee engagement and exhaustion, as mediated by employee feelings of personal responsibility and cognitive appraisals of personal gain and loss.

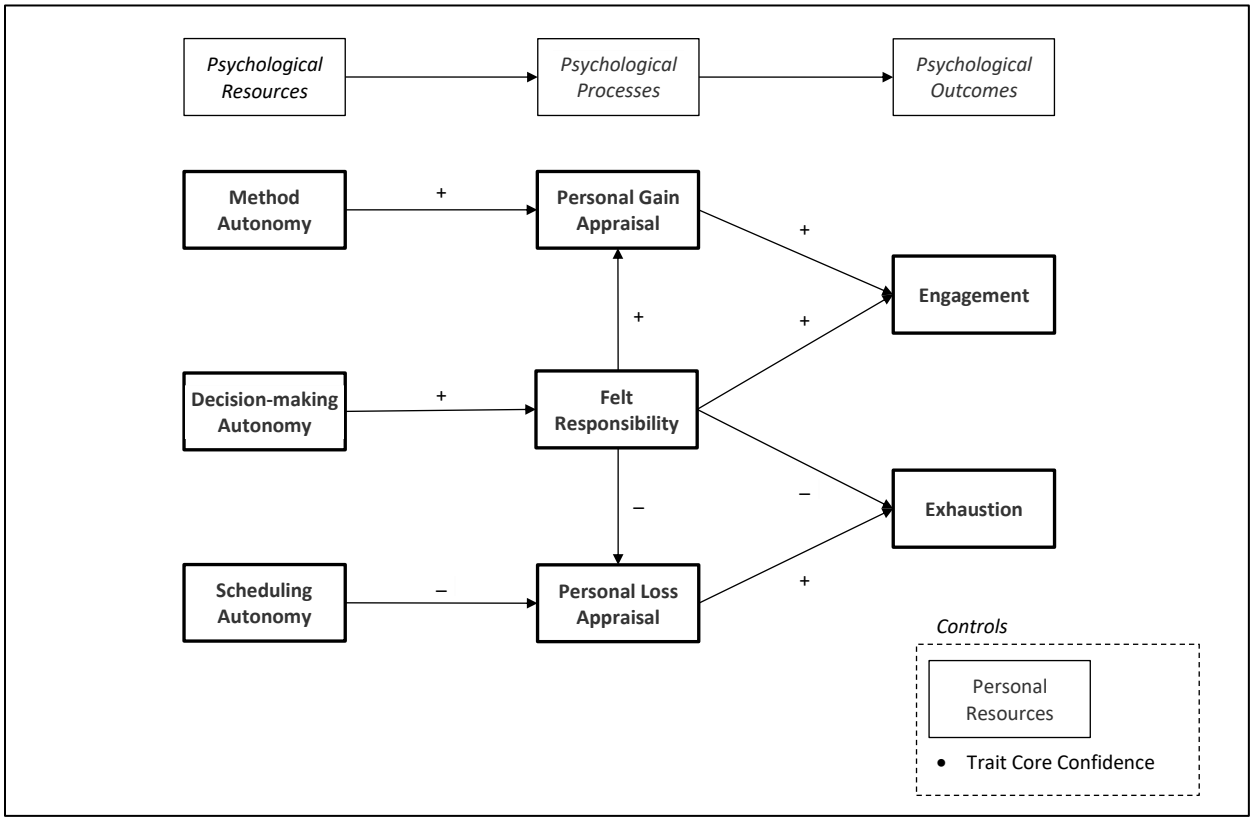
Variables of Manuscript 2

The model includes a) decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy (job resources) as independent variables, b) employee feelings of personal responsibility and cognitive appraisals of personal gain and loss (psychological processes) as mediators, c) employee engagement (attitudinal outcome) and employee exhaustion (well-being outcome) as dependent variable, and d) trait core confidence (personal resources) as control variable. Synopsis Figure 8 illustrates the key variables and proposed relationships of this manuscript.

Results of Manuscript 2

The proposed model was tested using data from 255 employees working in various organizations of several industries (e.g., finance, information, retail, manufacturing). By differentiating between different forms of autonomy, the results show that feelings of personal responsibility are primarily induced by decision-making autonomy. In addition, the results demonstrate that, through felt responsibility, decision-making autonomy does not only enhance employee engagement but also diminishes employee exhaustion. Thus, with regard to research question 7 (Do employees' feelings of personal responsibility, induced by job autonomy, reduce or enhance mental strain in their job?), the results indicate that employee feelings of personal responsibility are leading to less exhaustion.

Synopsis Figure 8 Key Variables and Proposed Relationships of Manuscript 2



Notes: Key variables of the manuscript are **bolded**.

With regard to research question 1 (Are there differences in the effects of decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy on work outcomes?), the results show that the motivating potential of job autonomy on employee engagement refers to decision-making autonomy and method autonomy, but not to scheduling autonomy. In addition, the strain-reducing potential of job autonomy on employee exhaustion refers to decision-making autonomy and scheduling autonomy, but not to method autonomy.

With regard to research question 6 (How do the motivation and well-being consequences of job autonomy come about?) and research question 2 (Do employees appraise their job differently depending on the form of job autonomy (decision-making-, method-, and scheduling autonomy)?), the findings show that method autonomy is associated with personal gain, indicating the motivating

potential of method autonomy, whereas scheduling autonomy is associated with less personal loss, indicating the strain-reducing potential of scheduling autonomy. The results further indicate that felt responsibility is associated with personal gain and less personal loss, indicating the motivating and strain-reducing potential of decision-making autonomy through felt responsibility.

To provide further evidence of model robustness, we tested whether the effects of autonomy hold above and beyond the impact of trait core confidence — a personal resource that could predict employee feelings of responsibility and employee appraisals (Stajkovic, 2006). The analyses show that, although core confidence is related to felt responsibility and personal gain appraisal (but not to personal loss appraisal), the results are unaffected by these relationships. These results provide insight into research question 8 (Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes hold above and beyond the impact of other resources?).

Contributions of Manuscript 2

Manuscript 2 makes several contributions to the literature on work design and occupational stress. First, the theoretical model of Manuscript 2 refines and extends Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model by differentiating between different forms of autonomy and by expanding the criterion space to include employee engagement and exhaustion as work outcomes. The results indicate that the mediating effect of felt responsibility between job autonomy and work outcomes accounts primarily for decision-making autonomy.

Second, applying an appraisal approach contributes to the understanding of why job autonomy is beneficial for employee engagement and exhaustion. The results of Manuscript 2 indicate that when the job is appraised as having the potential to generate personal gain, employees experience higher levels of engagement (motivating pathway), whereas when the job is appraised as having the potential to result in less personal loss, employees experience lower levels of exhaustion (strain-reducing pathway). Given that the two appraisal processes of personal gain and loss can explain the effects of a

wide variety of job characteristics (job resources and demands), this approach may have the potential to fill the research gap on work design models (i.e., job demands–resources model, Demerouti et al., 2001) falling short of explanatory underlying mechanisms (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Synopsis Table 4 Key Contributions and Key Findings of Manuscript 2

	Key Contribution	Key Finding
1	Refining and extending Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model by differentiating between different forms of autonomy and by expanding the criterion space to include employee engagement and exhaustion as work outcomes.	Employee feelings of personal responsibility are primarily induced by decision-making autonomy. Felt responsibility partially mediates the effects between decision-making autonomy and employee engagement and exhaustion.
2	Applying an appraisal approach to explain the motivating and strain-reducing potential of job autonomy	Whereas personal gain appraisal leads to employee engagement (motivating pathway), personal loss appraisal leads to employee exhaustion (strain-reducing pathway)
3	Using an appraisal approach to unveil what aspects of a job represent a resource or a demand (e.g. responsibility)	Felt responsibility is associated with personal gain and less personal loss, leading to more engagement and less exhaustion among employees

Third, the finding of how employees appraise feelings of personal responsibility also informs the literature on occupational stress and the challenge-hindrance stressor framework. In this literature, responsibility is typically classified as a challenge stressor (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; M. A. LePine, 2022; N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2023) and should therefore be positively related to strains (Crawford et al., 2010; Downes et al., 2021; J. A. LePine et al., 2005). The results of Manuscript 2 show that felt responsibility does not translate into higher exhaustion through personal gain appraisal (challenge appraisal), but rather translates into less exhaustion through less personal loss appraisals (less hindrance appraisals). Based on these findings, we argue that those aspects of the job that are appraised as challenging but not hindering (e.g. responsibility) should be classified as job resource, rather than a job demand (N. P.

Podsakoff et al., 2023, p. 183). Therefore, cognitive appraisals represent a promising avenue to unveil what aspects of a job represent a resource or a demand.

Synopsis Table 4 summarizes the key contributions and key findings of Manuscript 2.

3.3 Manuscript 3: Muecke (2024)

The purpose of Manuscript 3 is to better understand why and when empowering leadership prevents versus promotes employee time theft while working from home (TTWH). Using a social exchange perspective, I develop a theoretical model that explains why telework employees may respond positively to empowering leadership by engaging in less TTWH (beneficial mediating effect) and when telework employees may respond negatively to empowering leadership behaviors by engaging in more TTWH (detrimental moderating effect). Since the mediating effect and the moderating effect between empowering leadership and employee TTWH are proposed to influence employee TTWH in opposite ways, this study offers a more balanced and dialectical perspective on the double-edged nature of empowering leadership.

Variables of Manuscript 3

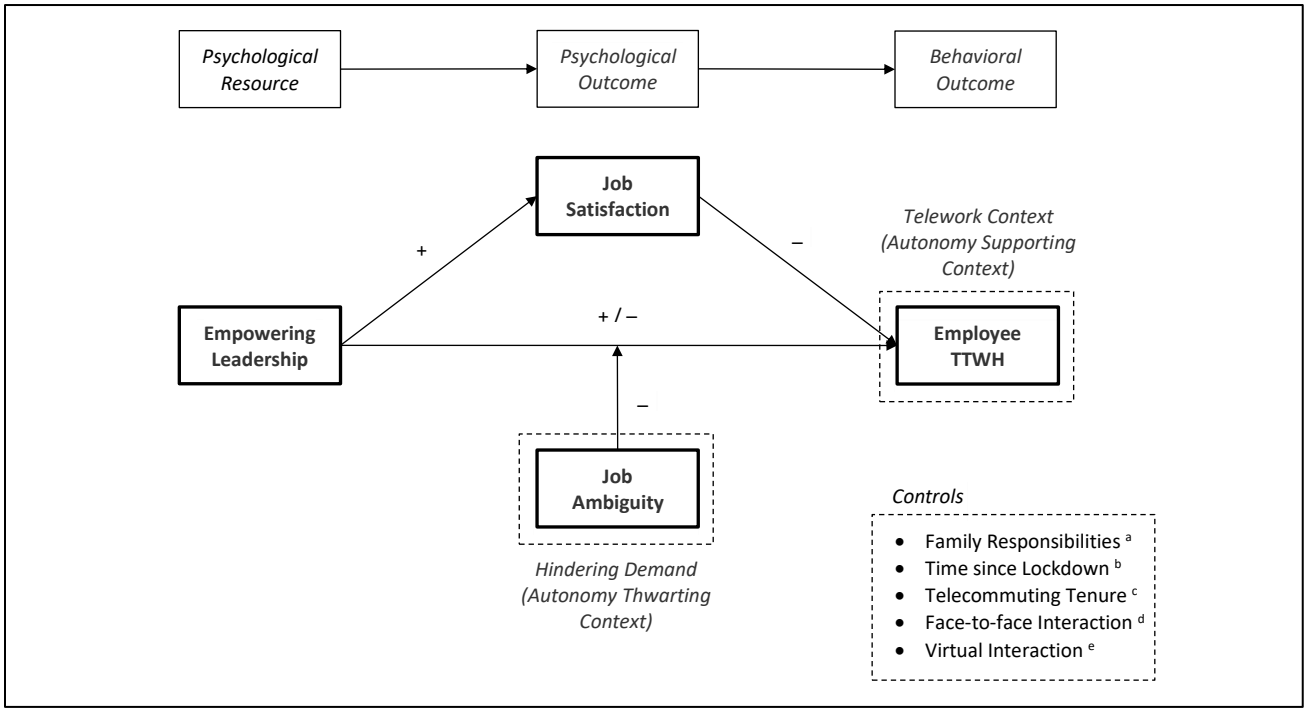
The model includes a) empowering leadership (interpersonal resource) as independent variable, b) employee job satisfaction (attitudinal outcome) as mediator, c) employee job ambiguity (hindrance demand) as moderator, and d) employee TTWH (negative behavior) as dependent variable. Synopsis Figure 9 illustrates the key variables and proposed relationships of this manuscript.

Results of Manuscript 3

The proposed model was tested in a three-wave field study (Study 1) and a scenario experiment (Study 2). Study 1 utilized unique data from 133 full-time employees working from home due to the COVID-19 crisis. Empowering leadership and job ambiguity were measured prior to the lockdown, whereas job satisfaction and employee TTWH were measured during the lockdown. The study findings show no significant bivariate relationship between empowering leadership and employee time theft. Thus, with regard to research question 4a (Do employees with job autonomy engage in more or less negative behavior in their job?), the results do not indicate that empowered telework employees

engage in more or less negative work behavior. However, the considerable confidence interval suggests the existence of moderating effects.

Synopsis Figure 9 Key Variables and Proposed Relationships of Manuscript 3



Notes: TTWH = time theft while working from home. [a] Family responsibilities while working from home (i.e. watch children). [b] Time period since the lockdown. [c] Telecommuting tenure before the lockdown. [d] Extent of face-to-face interaction before the lockdown. [e] Extent of virtual interaction since the lockdown. Key variables of the manuscript are **bolded**.

The results indicate a significant negative indirect effect of empowering leadership on employee TTWH via job satisfaction. Thus, with regard to research question 4b (Why do employees with job autonomy engage in more (or less) negative behavior in their job?), I find that empowered telework employees engage less in negative behavior (i.e., TTWH) because they are more satisfied in their job.

The results further show a significant interaction between empowering leadership and job ambiguity for employee TTWH: under low job ambiguity, empowering leadership has no significant relationship with employee TTWH, but under high ambiguity, empowering leadership is associated with higher employee TTWH. Study 2 replicates the pattern of the interaction effect with 136 telework

employees in a scenario experiment, thereby providing further evidence that the observed positive effect on employee TTWH is driven by empowering leadership and job ambiguity, and that this finding is robust across methods. These results provide insight into research question 4c (Under which conditions do employees with job autonomy engage in more (or less) negative behavior in their job?) and question 9 (Do the effects of job autonomy on work outcomes differ depending on the level job demands?). The findings of Manuscript 3 indicate that empowered telework employees engage in negative work behavior (i.e., TTWH) when they experience high levels of hindering demands in their job (i.e., job ambiguity).

Contributions of Manuscript 3

Manuscript 3 makes several contributions to the empowering leadership literature, as well as to the nascent literature on employee negative work behavior in telework contexts (e.g., TTWH). First, this research focuses for the first time on the effectiveness of empowering leadership in preventing employee time theft in a telework context. Thereby, this research enhances understanding of the antecedents of employee time theft by showing that it can result not only from passive or negative leadership behaviors, but also from leadership behaviors traditionally viewed as positive. By focusing on the telework context, this study offers managers new insights into how their leadership behavior can facilitate and impede successful telework.

Second, by examining the impact of leader behavior (empowering leadership) on employee behavior (TTWH) through employee attitude (job satisfaction), this study sheds light on the mediating mechanism explaining why empowering leadership may represent an effective strategy for managers to prevent negative work behavior in telework contexts.

Third, by examining the moderating role of job ambiguity between empowering leadership and employee TTWH, this study advances understanding of when empowering leadership may not be effective, but instead promote negative work behavior among telework employees (e.g., TTWH). The

results indicate that under certain conditions (high levels of job ambiguity) seemingly positive leadership actions, such as empowering leadership, can also evoke unintended negative responses among telework employees and result in more TTWH. This finding offers new insights on the potential dark side of empowering leadership.

Synopsis Table 5 summarizes the key contributions and key findings of Manuscript 3.

Synopsis Table 5 Key Contributions and Key Findings of Manuscript 3

	Key Contribution	Key Finding
1	Providing a more balanced and dialectical perspective on the double-edged nature of empowering leadership	Empowering leadership has the potential to both promote and prevent employee negative work behavior in a telework context (i.e., TTWH)
2	Explaining why empowering leadership may have the potential to prevent negative work behavior in telework contexts	Empowered employees engage in less negative behavior (i.e., TTWH) because they are more satisfied in their job.
3	Explaining when empowering leadership may have the potential to promote negative work behavior in telework contexts	Empowered telework employees engage in negative work behavior (i.e., TTWH) when they experience high levels of job ambiguity

4 Conclusion: More Good than Bad

"Autonomy [has become] a far more complex, varied, and nuanced job characteristic than it used to be when first conceptualized in formal job design models in the 1970s."

— Langfred & Rockmann (2016)

The concept of job enrichment, which entails increasing employees' level of autonomy, has emerged as a response to the technically oriented design of demotivating and alienating jobs that arose after the Industrial Revolution (S. K. Parker, 2014). Although job autonomy has increased in all kinds of occupations since the 1970s, low-autonomy jobs are still prevalent (Vidal, 2013; Wegman et al., 2018). Many managers still regulate and closely monitor their subordinates' work (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003), partly because they doubt that job autonomy is more good than bad (S. K. Parker et al., 2020).

In light of the growing importance of job autonomy for the future of work, the aim of this dissertation is to develop and test an integrative theoretical framework to better understand why and when job autonomy is good or bad for employees. Within the management and applied psychology literature, several theoretical perspectives have been useful for understanding the influence of job autonomy, such as conservation of resources theory (COR, Hobfoll, 1989), the transactional theory of stress (TTS, Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and social exchange theory (SET, Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Integrating the three theoretical perspectives, I argue that when managers are granting their employees autonomy over decision-making, work methods, and work scheduling, they are providing employees different forms of job resources. Employee subjective perceptions of these job resources (employee cognitive appraisals) elucidate how employees respond to the level of autonomy that have been granted to them. Whereas personal gain appraisal may lead to beneficial outcomes, personal loss appraisal may lead to detrimental outcomes.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation (Synopsis Figure 6) extents previous work design models (e.g., Langfred & Moye, 2004; Morgeson & Campion, 2003; S. K. Parker et al., 2001) by a) differentiating between different forms of psychological resources, b) incorporating employee cognitive appraisals as psychological processes, c) integrating both employee positive attitudes and employee well-being as psychological outcomes, d) considering both positive and negative behavioral outcomes, and e) proposing a variety of contextual influences that may either strengthen or weaken the effects of job autonomy. In testing the theoretical model of this dissertation, I employed various methods: a meta-analysis, a multi-wave field study, and a scenario experiment.

Results from a meta-analytic summary of 370 studies and 195,890 participants (Manuscript 1) indicate that, overall, job autonomy leads to better job performance by enhancing work motivation and reducing mental strain. Thus, the findings of this dissertation may encourage managers to overcome their skepticism and grant employees more job autonomy to improve work motivation, well-being, and, ultimately, job performance. However, the findings of this dissertation suggest that not all forms of autonomy contribute to the same outcomes because they are differently appraised by employees. Moreover, the results indicate that employee subjective evaluation of job autonomy can be influenced by several contextual factors (e.g., leadership culture or level of job demands). Thus, whether job autonomy is good or bad depends on the context and the form of autonomy.

This dissertation provides guidance to managers on key considerations when adopting a more autonomy-supportive leadership style towards employees. In addition, the findings are of considerable significance for the ongoing debate surrounding the future of work. While some new forms of work, such as virtual work, are likely to facilitate specific forms of job autonomy (e.g., scheduling autonomy), other new forms of work, such as algorithmic management, may potentially constrain specific forms of autonomy (e.g., decision-making autonomy).

4.1 Not All Autonomy Is the Same

Managers must be mindful of the form of autonomy they are granting to employees. The prevalence of virtual work in the field of knowledge work is increasing, often resulting in higher levels of scheduling autonomy. According to the findings of this dissertation, an increase in scheduling autonomy promises to have a positive effect on employee well-being, but little impact on work motivation. The findings of Manuscript 1 and Manuscript 2 indicate that scheduling autonomy represents an effective approach to prevent employee personal loss in the form of exhaustion by creating work conditions that help them to cope with job demands and their associated physiological and psychological costs. Employees with discretion over scheduling and sequencing tasks anticipate that the job provides them opportunities to experience less personal loss by taking a rest when required and by flexibility in making use of their coping resources (Fried & Ferris, 1987; Park et al., 2014; S. K. Parker, 2014). For example, employees with scheduling autonomy have the flexibility to adjust their schedules to gain positive experiences with family or friends (Kelly et al., 2011). Such coping strategies can help employees to regain lost emotional resources and obtain additional resources from external social support (Park et al., 2014). In light of the rising prevalence of burnout among knowledge workers, granting employees more discretion over their work schedule represents a crucial strategy for the prevention of poor mental health and burnout (S. K. Parker, 2014). However, with scheduling autonomy, employees do not appraise their job as having the potential to stimulate personal growth and development. Thus, while scheduling autonomy has the potential to reduce strain, it does not necessarily motivate employees.

In addition, managers must ensure they are not unintentionally constraining certain forms of autonomy. In recent times, an increasing number of organizations have begun to implement algorithmic management in the workplace, which may lead to a reduction of employee decision-making autonomy (Gagné et al., 2022; Schafheitle et al., 2020). The findings of Manuscript 1 and Manuscript 2 suggest that among the three forms of autonomy, decision-making autonomy demonstrates the strongest positive

relationship with work motivation. Thus, reducing employees' levels of decision-making authority can inhibit employee motivation and, subsequently, job performance. When employees have the authority to use personal judgment and to make decisions on their own, work outcomes depend on the employee's own actions rather than on explicit algorithmic instructions. Decision-making autonomy may therefore elicit a sense of agency and psychological ownership among employees (Pierce et al., 2001), making them feel more liable and accountable for job results. Moreover, granting employees discretion over decision-making signals a high level of trust and confidence of a leader towards his employees (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Employees who feel trusted by their supervisor may feel obliged to reciprocate by taking charge of their work outcomes (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Restricting employee decision-making autonomy may be perceived as a lack of trust and could potentially result in negative reciprocation (Seppälä et al., 2011). The advent of algorithmic management has given rise to a novel form of human-machine interaction, in which artificial intelligence (AI) and employees will collaborate (Duan et al., 2019). As the roles of humans and autonomous, self-learning technology will have to be re-negotiated, it is crucial to consider employee decision-making autonomy as a central work design variable.

However, granting employees higher levels of decision-making autonomy may also have adverse effects. The meta-analytic findings of Manuscript 1 indicate that decision-making autonomy has the potential to cause mental strain among employees. This phenomenon may be attributed to the potential psychological costs associated with cognitive processes such as evaluating past choices and making future decisions (Langfred, 2008; Langfred & Moye, 2004), leading to higher mental strain. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that feeling trusted can be exhausting for employees (M. D. Baer et al., 2015). However, the strain-enhancing effect of decision-making autonomy was not replicated in a multi-wave field study of Manuscript 2, which indicates that, contrary to Manuscript 1, a higher level of decision-making autonomy is reducing employee exhaustion (via felt

responsibility and less personal loss appraisal). The disparate results observed in this dissertation suggest the potential for contextual moderating effects.

4.2 Context Matters

Managers should consider that the effects of job autonomy vary depending on the context. Over the last few years, the traditional work context (i.e., working in an office environment) has changed for a significant proportion of the workforce, who have begun to work hybrid or full-time remotely (Leonardi et al., 2024; Wigert et al., 2023). Job autonomy is discussed as a virtual work characteristic that may facilitate more effective remote and hybrid working in a post-pandemic world (B. Wang et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2019). However, physical separation from the workplace also gives telework employees more opportunity to abuse their autonomy and engage in negative work behavior. A common concern among managers is that employees may engage in time theft while working from home (TTWH). The findings of Manuscript 3 indicate that on the one side, an autonomy-supportive leadership style (i.e., empowering leadership) has the potential to prevent employee negative work behavior in a telework context (i.e., time theft). On the other side, the findings from a multi-wave field study, and a scenario experiment of Manuscript 3 indicate that telework employees are likely to abuse their autonomy and engage in negative behavior, such as time theft, when they experience high levels of hindering demands in their job (i.e., job ambiguity).

Thus, whether employees perceive empowering leadership as positive (beneficial) or negative (unhelpful) and therefore engage in positive or negative behavior depends on how effectively supervisors address hindering demands, such as job ambiguity, and provide job clarity (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Empowering leaders may tend to undervalue behaviors such as specifying goals, articulating expectations, and monitoring progress (Langfred, 2004; Lorinkova et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2013; Y. Zhang et al., 2014). However, it is crucial that managers who grant their employees autonomy

frequently interact with their employees to identify signs of job ambiguity and take steps to minimize it (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012).

Furthermore, the results of Manuscript 1 indicate that job autonomy has the highest motivational and strain-reducing potential in cultures in which employees are valued as independent individuals (i.e., cultural individualism) and in which managers are expected to delegate control and involve others in decision-making (i.e., participative leadership culture). In contrast, the results of Manuscript 1 indicate that granting employees job autonomy may be less effective in cultures in which individuals do not expect their supervisors to share control (i.e., high cultural power distance) or expect their supervisors to be hostile, dishonest, and cynical (i.e., malevolent leadership culture).

In sum, granting employees more autonomy may be most effective in an autonomy-supporting context, characterized by high levels of resources (e.g., high overall levels of job autonomy, telework context, high cultural individualism and high participative leadership culture). However, granting employees more autonomy can also have detrimental effects in an autonomy-thwarting context, characterized by high levels of hindering demands (e.g., high job ambiguity, high cultural power distance, or high malevolent leadership culture).

4.3 Future Research

Although the multimethod designs of the three studies (i.e., meta-analysis, field study, and experimental study) sought to provide valid answers for the research questions, there remain unanswered questions that could not be addressed in this dissertation.

First, the role of method autonomy remains unclear. The meta-analytic findings of Manuscript 1 indicate that method autonomy has no marginal effects on work motivation and mental strain, above and beyond core self-evaluations and social support. Following recent research that considers job autonomy a determinant of employees' self-efficacy (e.g., Cheong et al., 2016; Oldham & Fried, 2016; S.

K. Parker et al., 2017; Smallfield & Kluemper, 2022), it was tested whether core self-evaluations mediated the method autonomy relationships on work motivation and mental strain. Results of the post hoc analyses indicate that core self-evaluations fully mediate the relationships between method autonomy and work motivation and between method autonomy and mental strain. The analyses suggest that method autonomy may improve employees' core self-evaluations by providing a sense of task mastery, thereby enhancing work motivation and reducing mental strain. However, these findings are considered preliminary as they are based on relatively few correlational studies. Thus, future studies are required to investigate the role of method autonomy, for instance, by examining the temporal dynamics between job autonomy dimensions and core self-evaluations in order to ascertain whether job resources impact personal resources over time (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, 2009).

A related area for future research pertains to the directionality of the effects, as the level of job resources may also be influenced by employees attitudes, well-being, and behavior. For example, a highly motivated employee who feels responsible for work outcomes may proactively craft a job to entail more job autonomy (e.g., Tims et al., 2014), or employees may receive more trust and autonomy from their supervisors if they have shown that they do not abuse their autonomy but rather work effectively on their own (Han et al., 2022). Thus, future longitudinal studies are encouraged to investigate reverse causality, reciprocal effects, and the timing of processes (S. K. Parker, 2014).

Second, this dissertation sought to test the marginal linear effects of job autonomy (dimensions) on work outcomes, after controlling for personal and interpersonal resources. Yet these distinct effects may not simply be additive but conjunctural such that outcomes result from specific combinations of resources (job, personal interpersonal) and demands (challenge, hindrance, personal) (e.g., Ong & Johnson, 2021). Future studies may explore how specific combinations of resources and demands affect work outcomes, following recent configurational approaches in job design research (e.g., Carter et al., 2023; Ong & Johnson, 2021). A configuration approach is likely a fruitful way to identify conditions

under which job autonomy may have particularly positive or even detrimental effects on work outcomes.

Third, drawing on the concept of person-environment fit, researchers proposed several individual differences as contingency factors for the effectiveness of job autonomy, such as need for autonomy, need for achievement, or perceived utility of autonomy (Langfred & Moye, 2004). A systematic investigation of the moderating role of individual characteristics would complement the contextual influences (autonomy-supporting and autonomy-thwarting contexts) identified in this dissertation in order to get a better understanding of when job autonomy is perceived as good or bad by employees.

Conclusion

The concept of job autonomy is as old as the very organizations themselves (Langfred & Moye, 2004). However, as the nature of work has changed over the last decades, job autonomy has become "a far more complex, varied, and nuanced job characteristic than it used to be when first conceptualized in formal job design models in the 1970s" (Langfred & Rockmann, 2016, p. 648). The multifaceted nature of job autonomy, coupled with the influence of various contextual factors, makes it challenging to draw consistent conclusions on whether autonomy is good or bad. By addressing some of the unknowns about job autonomy, this dissertation suggest that job autonomy is likely more good than bad for employees and organizations. Granting employees job autonomy has favorable effects on employee motivation and well-being, resulting in positive behavior (i.e., job performance). However, there is also a downside to job autonomy, as under certain conditions employees may exploit their autonomy to engage in negative behaviors (i.e., time theft). Thus, managers should be mindful of the form of autonomy and the contextual features in the workplace before granting job autonomy to employees.

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Manuscript 1: Job Autonomy and Job Performance: An Integrative Framework and Meta-Analysis

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Manuscript 2: Linking Job Autonomy to Employee Engagement and Exhaustion: The Role of Employee Cognitive Appraisal

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Manuscript 3: The Double-Edged Sword of Empowering Leadership: Investigating Why and When Empowering Leadership Prevents Versus Promotes Employee Time Theft while Working from Home

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