

Remote Work Autonomy and Job Satisfaction-The Moderating Role of Managerial Trust

Vaishali Tuteja¹, Dr. Anwar Ahmad²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, Email- gi2806@myamu.ac.in

²Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, Email- anwarahmadamu@gmail.com

Abstract

The widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work arrangements has transformed the nature of work, placing greater emphasis on employee autonomy and managerial trust. While remote work autonomy is generally associated with positive employee outcomes, its effectiveness may depend on contextual leadership factors. This study examines the relationship between remote work autonomy and job satisfaction and investigates the moderating role of managerial trust in strengthening this relationship. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory and Social Exchange Theory, the study proposes that autonomy enhances job satisfaction by fulfilling employees' psychological needs, while managerial trust acts as a critical boundary condition that reinforces the benefits of autonomy in remote work settings.

Using a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to employees working in remote or hybrid modes across service-oriented industries. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships and examine the interaction effect. The findings indicate that remote work autonomy has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction. Moreover, managerial trust significantly moderates this relationship, such that the positive effect of autonomy on job satisfaction is stronger when employees perceive high levels of trust from their managers.

The study contributes to the growing literature on remote work by integrating autonomy and trust mechanisms and offers practical insights for organizations seeking to improve employee satisfaction in flexible work environments. Implications for theory, managerial practice, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Remote work, Job satisfaction, Work autonomy, Managerial trust, Hybrid work, Employee well-being.

1. Introduction

The nature of work has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, largely driven by technological advancements and accelerated by global disruptions that necessitated remote working arrangements. Remote and hybrid work models have shifted traditional supervisory practices and altered how employees experience control, flexibility, and support in their roles. As organizations continue to institutionalize flexible work arrangements, understanding the determinants of employee satisfaction in remote contexts has become a critical concern for managers and scholars alike.

Remote work autonomy—defined as the degree of discretion employees possess over work schedules, methods, and decision-making—has emerged as a central feature of flexible work environments. Prior research consistently highlights autonomy as a key predictor of positive job attitudes, including job satisfaction, motivation, and engagement. However, empirical findings also suggest that autonomy alone may not guarantee favorable outcomes, particularly when employees operate with limited physical interaction and reduced managerial oversight.

Managerial trust plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' remote work experiences. Trust reflects employees' beliefs that their managers have confidence in their competence and intentions. In remote settings, trust substitutes for direct supervision and monitoring, influencing employees' perceptions of psychological safety and organizational support. When employees perceive high managerial trust, autonomy is more likely to be interpreted as empowerment rather than abandonment.

Despite the relevance of these factors, existing research has largely examined autonomy and trust independently, with limited empirical investigation into their interactive effects in remote work settings, especially within emerging economy contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining how managerial trust moderates the relationship between remote work autonomy and job satisfaction.

The objectives of this study are threefold:

- (1) to examine the direct relationship between remote work autonomy and job satisfaction;
- (2) to assess the role of managerial trust in remote work environments; and
- (3) to test the moderating effect of managerial trust on the autonomy–job satisfaction relationship.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Remote Work Autonomy

Work autonomy refers to the extent to which a job provides employees with freedom and discretion in scheduling work, making decisions, and determining how tasks are performed. In remote work arrangements, autonomy is particularly salient, as employees operate with reduced direct supervision and greater responsibility for structuring their workday. Autonomy has been associated with improved work–life balance, enhanced intrinsic motivation, and reduced job stress.

Self-Determination Theory posits that autonomy is a fundamental psychological need whose satisfaction leads to enhanced well-being and positive work attitudes. When employees are allowed to exercise control over their work processes, they experience greater ownership and meaningfulness, which translates into higher job satisfaction.

2.2 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction represents a positive emotional state resulting from an individual's appraisal of their job experiences. It is influenced by multiple factors, including job characteristics, leadership practices, and work environment conditions. In remote work contexts, satisfaction is shaped by flexibility, communication quality, technological support, and managerial behavior. Given the reduced social cues and informal interactions in remote work, structural and relational factors gain heightened importance.

2.3 Remote Work Autonomy and Job Satisfaction

Prior studies consistently report a positive relationship between work autonomy and job satisfaction. Autonomy allows employees to align work demands with personal preferences, manage energy levels, and integrate work with non-work responsibilities. In remote work settings, autonomy is particularly valued as it mitigates feelings of isolation and role ambiguity. Therefore, it is proposed that:

H1: Remote work autonomy has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction.

2.4 Managerial Trust

Managerial trust refers to employees' perception that their managers rely on them, value their contributions, and believe in their capability to perform job tasks effectively. Trust reduces uncertainty and fosters high-quality social exchange relationships. In remote work arrangements, trust becomes a substitute for physical monitoring and direct supervision.

From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, trust enhances reciprocity norms between employees and managers. When employees feel trusted, they are more likely to reciprocate through positive attitudes, commitment, and satisfaction. Conversely, low levels of trust may lead to excessive monitoring, reduced autonomy, and psychological strain.

2.5 Moderating Role of Managerial Trust

While autonomy can enhance job satisfaction, its effectiveness may depend on the level of managerial trust. In high-trust environments, autonomy is perceived as empowerment and support, reinforcing its positive effects. In low-trust environments, autonomy may be interpreted as lack of guidance or managerial disengagement, weakening its impact.

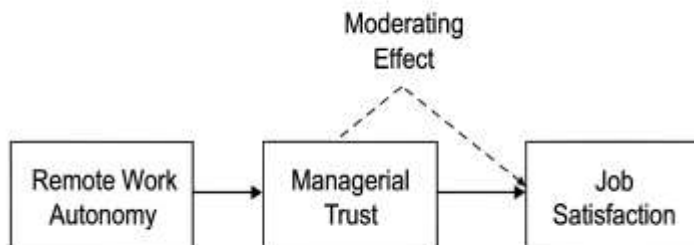
Accordingly, it is hypothesized that managerial trust strengthens the relationship between remote work autonomy and job satisfaction.

H2: Managerial trust moderates the relationship between remote work autonomy and job satisfaction, such that the relationship is stronger when managerial trust is high.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model proposes remote work autonomy as the independent variable, job satisfaction as the dependent variable, and managerial trust as a moderating variable.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework.



Source: Developed by the authors.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design using survey methodology. This approach is appropriate for examining relationships among latent constructs and testing moderation effects.

4.2 Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from employees working in remote or hybrid work arrangements across service-based industries such as information technology, consulting, finance, education, and professional services. Respondents were required to have at least six months of experience working remotely to ensure familiarity with remote work practices. A structured questionnaire was distributed electronically. A total of 312 usable responses were obtained after data screening, which is adequate for Structural Equation Modeling.

4.3 Measurement Instruments

All constructs were measured using established scales adapted from prior studies and modified to suit the remote work context.

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

- **Remote Work Autonomy:** Adapted from the Work Design Questionnaire.
- **Managerial Trust:** Measured using items adapted from McAllister's trust scale.
- **Job Satisfaction:** Measured using a widely used global job satisfaction scale.

4.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a two-step approach. First, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to assess reliability and validity. Second, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypotheses, including moderation analysis using interaction terms.

5. Results

5.1 Reliability and Validity

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Convergent validity was confirmed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50. Discriminant validity was established using the HTMT criterion.

Table 1 Reliability and Validity Statistics

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Remote Work Autonomy (RWA)	5	0.86	0.88	0.59
Managerial Trust (MT)	6	0.89	0.91	0.63
Job Satisfaction (JS)	4	0.85	0.87	0.62

Panel B: Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratios)

Constructs	RWA	MT	JS
Remote Work Autonomy (RWA)	—		
Managerial Trust (MT)	0.63	—	
Job Satisfaction (JS)	0.58	0.61	—

Note: All Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. AVE values are above 0.50, confirming convergent validity. HTMT values are below the conservative cut-off value of 0.85, establishing discriminant validity.

Source: Authors' calculations.

5.2 Hypotheses Testing

The structural model demonstrated acceptable model fit indices. The results indicate a significant positive relationship between remote work autonomy and job satisfaction, supporting H1. The interaction term between remote work autonomy and managerial trust was also significant, confirming the moderating effect proposed in H2.

Table 2 Structural Model Results and Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Remote Work Autonomy $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction	0.42	6.87	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Remote Work Autonomy $\times$ Managerial Trust $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction	0.21	3.94	< 0.001	Supported

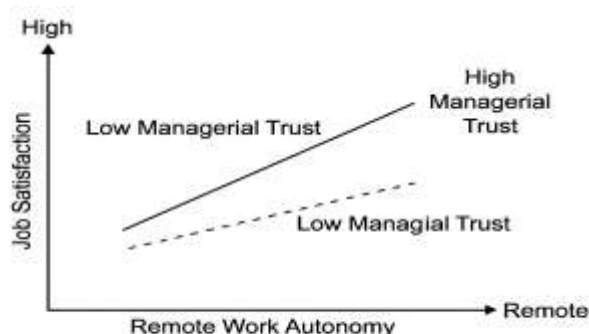
Model Fit Indices:

χ^2/df = 2.31, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.064

Note: All hypothesized relationships are statistically significant at the 0.001 level, indicating strong support for the proposed structural model.

Source: Authors' calculations.

Graph 1. Moderating Effect of Managerial Trust on the Relationship between Remote Work Autonomy and Job Satisfaction



Source: Developed by Authors

6. Discussion

The findings confirm that remote work autonomy is a critical driver of job satisfaction in flexible work arrangements. Autonomy allows employees to manage work demands effectively and enhances intrinsic motivation. More importantly, the results demonstrate that managerial trust significantly strengthens this relationship.

Employees who perceive high levels of trust from their managers derive greater satisfaction from autonomy, as trust reduces uncertainty and legitimizes flexible work practices. This highlights the importance of relational leadership in remote work environments and suggests that autonomy without trust may yield limited benefits.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical Implications

The study extends Self-Determination Theory and Social Exchange Theory by integrating autonomy and trust mechanisms in the context of remote work. It identifies managerial trust as a key boundary condition, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of remote work outcomes.

7.2 Practical Implications

For managers, the findings underscore the need to cultivate trust-based leadership practices rather than relying on control and monitoring. Organizations should design remote work policies that combine autonomy with supportive managerial behaviors to enhance employee satisfaction.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research may adopt longitudinal designs to examine changes over time. Additionally, exploring other moderating variables such as organizational culture or technological support could further enrich understanding.

9. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that remote work autonomy positively influences job satisfaction and that managerial trust plays a crucial moderating role. As remote work becomes a permanent feature of organizational life, fostering trust-based autonomy emerges as a strategic imperative for enhancing employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

References

1. Allen, T. D., Golden, T. D., & Shockley, K. M. (2015). How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16(2), 40–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100615593273>
2. Bailey, D. E., & Kurland, N. B. (2002). A review of telework research: Findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23(4), 383–400. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.144>

3. Bijlsma, K., & Koopman, P. (2003). Introduction: Trust within organisations. *Personnel Review*, 32(5), 543–555. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480310488324>
4. Brayfield, A. H., & Rothe, H. F. (1951). An index of job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 35(5), 307–311. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0055617>
5. Breauigh, J. A. (1999). Further investigation of the work autonomy scales: Two studies. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 13(3), 357–373.
6. Clark, S. C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/family balance. *Human Relations*, 53(6), 747–770. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700536001>
7. Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 874–900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602>
8. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
9. Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory in work organizations. *Journal of Management*, 43(1), 19–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316632058>
10. Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. (2002). Trust in leadership: Meta-analytic findings and implications for research and practice. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(4), 611–628. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.4.611>
11. Donnelly, R., & Johns, J. (2021). Recontextualising remote work in the COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Management Studies*, 26(2), 155–175.
12. Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(3), 500–507. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.71.3.500>
13. Felstead, A., & Henseke, G. (2017). Assessing the growth of remote working. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 32(3), 195–212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12097>
14. Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(6), 1524–1541. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.6.1524>
15. Golden, T. D. (2006). The role of relationships in understanding telecommuter satisfaction. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27(3), 319–340. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.369>
16. Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16(2), 250–279.
17. Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) (3rd ed.). Sage.
18. Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity*. Wiley.
19. Kelliher, C., & Anderson, D. (2010). Doing more with less? Flexible working practices. *Human Relations*, 63(1), 83–106.
20. Konovsky, M. A., & Pugh, S. D. (1994). Citizenship behavior and social exchange. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(3), 656–669.
21. Latham, G. P., & Pinder, C. C. (2005). Work motivation theory and research. *Journal of Management*, 31(4), 485–516.
22. McAllister, D. J. (1995). Affect- and cognition-based trust. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(1), 24–59. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256727>
23. Morgeson, F. P., & Humphrey, S. E. (2006). The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ). *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(6), 1321–1339. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.6.1321>
24. Nahrgang, J. D., Morgeson, F. P., & Hofmann, D. A. (2011). Safety at work: A meta-analytic investigation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(1), 71–94.
25. Parker, S. K., Axtell, C. M., & Turner, N. (2001). Designing a healthier work. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6(4), 335–351.
26. Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2012). Sources of method bias. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 539–569.
27. Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(4), 698–714.
28. Spector, P. E. (1997). *Job satisfaction: Application, assessment, causes, and consequences*. Sage.

29. Staples, D. S. (2001). A study of remote workers and their differences. *Journal of End User Computing*, 13(2), 3–14.
30. Tannenbaum, S. I., Mathieu, J. E., Salas, E., & Cohen, D. (2012). Teams are changing. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 5(1), 1–16.
31. van der Lippe, T., & Lippényi, Z. (2020). Co-workers working from home. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(6), 1066–1087.
32. Wang, B., Liu, Y., Qian, J., & Parker, S. K. (2021). Achieving effective remote working. *Applied Psychology*, 70(1), 16–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12290>
33. Zhang, S., Moeckel, R., Moreno, A. T., Shuai, B., & Gao, J. (2021). A work-life conflict perspective on telework. *Transportation Research Part A*, 141, 154–170.