

## The Relationship Between Job Autonomy and Job Satisfaction in Telecommunication Industry: A Case Study of Telekom Malaysia

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### Abstract

Job autonomy reflects a level of freedom and independence of individuals to carry out work task. Some studies have shown that job autonomy can reduce individual work-leisure conflict (WLC). However, some individuals believe that job satisfaction is stronger in situations of greater job autonomy. This study aims to investigate the effect of job autonomy and job satisfaction of employees in Telekom Malaysia (TM), Terengganu. It is unreasonable to apply a uniform standard daily routine to the unpredictable dispatch environment of these officials without knowing the effect of job autonomy towards job satisfaction. This research focused on one of the factors of work-life balance which is job autonomy and its impact on job satisfaction. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires that has been distributed to 28 respondents whose were employees in the Consumer Sales Unit at TM, Terengganu. Based on data that had been analyzed, the findings indicated that job autonomy had no significant relationship ( $p > .05$ ,  $r = -0.252$ ) with Job Satisfaction. Majority of the employees in Consumer Sales Unit at TM, Terengganu had freedom to make their own decisions and plan their own strategies to achieve the target given by the manager. In other words, they are given enough empowerment to handle and solve the problems while achieving the goals regarding their responsibilities and jobs without being control and supervised by the manager. However, this study was limited because all factors affecting job satisfaction, such as differences in work, dispatch, and job roles by region, could not be analyzed. Hence, future studies could improve upon these results by investigating a standard daily routine that can be commonly applied to all TM officials nationwide. Future researchers may also use different analytical methods to analyze the data such as SEM-PLS to find the differences if there is any.

**Keywords:** Job Autonomy, Job Satisfaction, Telecommunication Industry, Telekom Malaysia.

**Introduction**

Nowadays, the concept of Work-Life Balance (WLB) has become a critical issue in HRM literature and emphasizes on the effective management of employee's career, family responsibilities and other personal activities (Keelan, 2015). Moreover, as industrial revolution has emerged, the role of work in the lives of individuals also evolved (Joshi et al., 2002). Even though work is still seen as important, organization also need to consider improving individual's job satisfaction. Therefore, one of the motivating factors that can help the accomplishment of personal and professional goals is the introduction of work-life benefits and programs in organizations (Joshi et al., 2002). Job autonomy is one of the factors that contributed to the success of work-life balance in organization. Based on the study by De Clercq & Brieger (2022), the researchers concluded that the employee's sense of job autonomy increases the likelihood that they feel satisfied with their ability to balance the needs of their work with those of their personal life. Morgeson and Ojeleye & Jada (2022) stated that job autonomy is defined as the degree to which the job offers considerable freedom, giving the individual a free hand in planning the work as well as defining the means to accomplish their tasks. In the field of organizational behavior, both qualitative and quantitative research advocates positive relationships between job autonomy and job satisfaction.

**Statement of Problem**

Job autonomy is always described as an individual's amount of independence in determining how work is done. This is especially include making decisions in carrying out their jobs (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021), where having flexibility and discretion to accomplish their duties and responsibilities are crucial (Dodd & Ganster, 1996; Lin & Ping, 2016).

There have been few studies outside Malaysia on understanding the effect of job autonomy and job satisfaction in the workplace (Sarinah et al., 2018; Malinowska et al., 2018; Muecke & Greenwald, 2020; Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021). These findings concluded that, job autonomy is a key predictor towards job satisfaction. For instance, Sarinah et al (2018) found that job autonomy had a positive and significant effect of job satisfaction in transportation company in Jakarta, Indonesia. Similar finding was reported by Ade-Adeniji et al (2021) among employees in banking industry in Nigeria. This means that employees are given the authorities to make decision in accomplishing their job processes (Feng et al., 2022).

Apart from that, previous researchers concluded that other than job autonomy, work stress, workload, work-family conflict have also been found to affect job satisfaction, performance, and turnover intentions in developed countries, but there is little evidence from research conducted in Malaysia on job autonomy. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction among employees at Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu, East Malaysia.

**Literature Reviews***Job Autonomy*

The younger generation has entered the workplace in large numbers, and the working model demands have diversified, and they seek to arrange their own working models around freedom in time and place (Feng et al., 2022). Job autonomy refers to individuals' perceptions of their control over their work activities, which is mainly reflected in the degree to which employees can control and determine their own ways of working, work schedules and work standards (Vera et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2015; Dhar, 2016). Job autonomy can provide

employees with a sense of freedom and comfort, which can stimulate passion for their work. Previous studies have found that job autonomy can improve employees' innovative (Giebels et al., 2016) and proactive behaviour (Den et al., 2012), which are conducive to enterprise development. In addition, job autonomy can better meet individuals' role transition needs to not only fulfil roles at work but also balance their nonwork roles (Gary & Dhar, 2017). Job autonomy can help employees transition between work and non-work roles, leading to a lesser sense of role conflict (Feng et al., 2022).

Job Autonomy is a psychological construct, which refers to the sense of discretion, freedom, and independence, to individuals striving toward the development and realization of personal goals, values, and interests (Assor et al., 2002). The perception of job autonomy is an important buffer of negative stress (Mills et al., 2008; Sawang, 2012). Thus, the current study uses the perception of job autonomy at work, which plays a critical role in promoting positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction because job autonomy can be regarded as controllability over one's work which then can mitigate the negative effects of stressful job on individuals' psychological well-being (Karasek, 1979; Hessels et al., 2017; Warr & Inceoglu, 2017). Previous study by Dhurup (2015) examined the relationship between social integration and job autonomy on job satisfaction among school sport facilitators. Hence, it is suggested that high levels of job autonomy may lead to high levels of job satisfaction among sport facilitators. This leads to job autonomy is positively and significantly related to job satisfaction.

In addition, based on the research conducted by Elise (2017), which was to further investigate to which extent the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction exists that can support the result of the finding stated above. Through the motivational method, job autonomy as a workplace tool has positive effects on the well-being of workers such as job satisfaction. Therefore, the result of the finding also found that job autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction (Elise, 2017). Moreover, the researcher stated that job autonomy can also increase positive experiences and it is associated to well-being indicators at work, such as job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). From this study, the finding initiated that job autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction (Zito, 2019). This can link through the research that carried out by Terason (2018) was to examine how job autonomy of the fitness trainer professionals working in fitness facilities was related to job satisfaction. Research in the field of organizational behavior advocates a positive relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction. Therefore, it is believed that more job autonomy is anticipated to be correlated with greater job satisfaction. In other words, high levels of job autonomy may lead to high levels of job satisfaction (Naqvi, 2013; Yang & Brink, 2016). The result of finding posited a positive and significant relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction (Terason, 2018).

### *Job Satisfaction*

Job satisfaction is an attitude in which an individual's behavior is determined by the extent to which he or she is satisfied on the job (Aruldoss et al., 2021). Mukhtar (2012) described three factors affecting job satisfaction which are human factors (personality, employment, marital status, age), social factors (employees, collaboration, supervision) and institutional factors (company size, structured framework, leadership, rules and procedures, technology). In addition, Aziri (2011) stated that satisfied employee is a happy employee and a satisfied employee. This is very true especially when considering the many negative consequences of work dissatisfaction such as lack of loyalty, increased absenteeism, increased number of accidents, etc., the value of job satisfaction comes to the surface.

There is a significant impact of job satisfaction on employees' motivation and the level of motivation has an impact on productivity, hence also on performance (Aziri, 2011). Kappagoda (2012) pointed out that job satisfaction is one of the factors affecting task performance improvement and conceptual performance.

Apart from that, previous researchers had also added the negative relationship between work stress and job satisfaction (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003; Hoboubi et al., 2017). In one study of university staff in Malaysia, it was found that job stress is negatively related to job satisfaction (Ahsan et al., 2009). In contrast, some 30 years back, in one study by Landsbergis (1988), it was documented that high levels of job stress are associated with a lower level of job satisfaction. In literature, it has been well established that job stressors are predictors of job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions of individuals (Cummins, 1990). Employees who can maintain balance in work and life are likely to feel satisfied with their jobs (and non-work activities). One logical explanation for the positive effect of WLB on job satisfaction is spillover, according to which an individual's affective experiences are stored in a psychological space, which can be recalled in a variety of work-life domains such as family, community, leisure, and work (Wilensky, 1960). WLB effected the job satisfaction as employees tend to carry forward the feelings they encounter at home and in life to organizations. Any stress at nonwork tends to result in job dissatisfaction. It was well documented in the literature for over seven decades that happy workers tend to be productive workers (Joo & Lee, 2017).

#### *Job Autonomy and Job Satisfaction*

Morgeson and Hemingway (2005) stated that job autonomy is defined as the degree to which the job offers considerable freedom, giving the individual a free hand in planning the work as well as defining the means to accomplish their tasks. In the field of organizational behaviour, both qualitative and quantitative research advocates positive relationships between job autonomy and job satisfaction. The impact of job autonomy on job satisfaction has been examined in very few studies (Nguyen et al., 2003). Previously, there were a lot of studies that conducted by previous researchers regarding the job autonomy and job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction refers to how employees feel about their jobs (Agha et al., 2017). Employee satisfaction, in general, refers to a person's good feelings regarding his or her job (Bayarcelik & Findikli, 2016). It refers to the happiness or delight felt by an employee when the intended outcome is achieved (Chandra & Priyono, 2016). Despite the fact that a plethora of research (e.g., Raza & Nadeem, 2014; Ang & Rabo, 2018) have found employee engagement to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction. However, when job autonomy is included as a predictor variable, job satisfaction may be employed as a mediator, according to the argument of this study. Meanwhile, while most studies linking job autonomy to employee engagement, for example, Sarinah et al (2018); Malinowska et al (2018); Muecke & Greenwald (2020); Ade-Adeniji (2021), have focused solely on investigating the construct's direct effect on employee engagement, this study delves into the mechanisms of job satisfaction and how it might mediate the relationship between job autonomy and employee engagement; a literature gap this study intends to bridge.

In addition, a variety of research have also used job satisfaction as a mediator of organisational outcomes. For instance, Bayarcelik and Findikli (2016) discovered that job satisfaction mediated the relationship between employee intention to leave and perception of organisational justice, supervisory support and employee performance (Uzun & Zdem, 2017), transformational leadership and employee performance (Rawashdeh et al., 2020), and a flexible work environment and turnover intentions (Berber et al., 2022). However, this

research argued that when employees have a sense of freedom in the workplace, they are more likely to be content with their jobs, and that sense of satisfaction leads to their being engaged in the workplace. Thus, based on the assertion, the study investigates the function of job satisfaction as a mediator of the relationship between job autonomy and employee engagement.

The study of research by Dhurup (2015) was to examine the relationship between social integration and job autonomy on job satisfaction among school sport facilitators. Hence, it is suggested that high levels of job autonomy may lead to high levels of job satisfaction among sport facilitators. This leads to job autonomy is positively and significantly related to job satisfaction. In addition, based on the research conducted by Elise (2017), which was to further investigate to which extent the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction exists that can support the result of the finding stated above. Through the motivational method, job autonomy as a workplace tool has positive effects on the well-being of workers such as job satisfaction. Therefore, the result of the finding also found that job autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction (Elise, 2017).

Moreover, the researchers stated that job autonomy can also increase positive experiences and it is associated to well-being indicators at work, such as job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). From this study, the finding initiated that job autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction (Zito, 2019). This can link through the research that carried out by Terason (2018) was to examine how job autonomy of the fitness trainer professionals working in fitness facilities was related to job satisfaction. Research in the field of organizational behavior advocates a positive relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction. Therefore, it is believed that more job autonomy is anticipated to be correlated with greater job satisfaction. In other words, high levels of job autonomy may lead to high levels of job satisfaction (Naqvi, 2013; Yang & Brink, 2016). The result of finding posited a positive and significant relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction (Terason, 2018).

### Hypothesis

Based on the review of the related literature, the following hypotheses was formulated to guide the study.

*H<sub>1</sub> Job autonomy significantly influence job satisfaction among employees at Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu.*

### Conceptual Framework

Based on the Fig 1, the independent variable used for this study was job autonomy. Meanwhile, the dependent variable in this study was the variable that reflects the outcome of a research study which is job satisfaction. The researchers correlated both variables to examine the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction among employees at Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu.

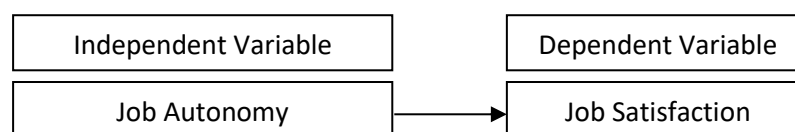


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework for The Relationship Between Job Autonomy and Job Satisfaction among Employees at Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu.

## Methodology

The paper employed a quantitative research approach, which comprises analyzing numerical data to examine the connection between two or more variables using statistical processes (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Salkind (2014) stated that correlational research used to provide some suggestions on how two or more things are related to one another, the similarities they have and how the well specific outcome has been predicted through one or more pieces of information. Variables that relate to one another for this research are Job Autonomy and Job Satisfaction and had investigated in this relationship at Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu. The respondents for this study refer to the 30 individual employee that are currently work at Consumer Unit, Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu. The samples are derived using convenience sampling techniques. Data were collected by using questionnaires, which had earlier been developed and validated by content and language experts. All items were answered by the respondents using five (5) points Likert scale. A total of 30 sets of questionnaires had been distributed to employee in Consumer Unit and 28 questionnaires were successfully collected which indicate 93% of return rate. All questionnaires were cleaned to ensure the quality of the data and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

## Findings

### *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Most of the respondents are male which represent 78.6 % of the respondents. Most of the respondent aged between 21 – 30 years old (42.9 %). Majority of the respondents are Malay and most of them are married (67.9 %). 16 respondents had a diploma and bachelor's degree (57.2%) as highest educational level and most of the respondent's income level are in between RM1000 – RM3000 per months (57.1%).

Table 1 shows that the reliability statistics for Job Autonomy and Job Satisfaction. For each variable, the reliability statistics score was closer to 1. Both variables used for this study indicated a strong reliability score (Job Autonomy: 0.718 and Job Satisfaction: 0.840). The closer reliability score to 1, the more reliable would be the best (Sekaran & Bogie, 2010). Therefore, it can be concluded that the questionnaire used accurately measures what it supposed to measure.

Table 1

*Cronbach's Alpha Score (n = 28)*

Variable	Number of Items (N)	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Autonomy	5	0.718
Job Satisfaction	5	0.840

## Correlation Analysis

Table 2

*The Relationship Between Job Autonomy and Job Satisfaction*

Variables	Mean	SD	1
Job Autonomy	3.3857	.54414	
Job Satisfaction	4.0429	.62148	.252

\*\* Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (2-tailed)

Based on Table 2, the findings indicated that job autonomy had no significant relationship ( $p > .05$ ,  $r = -0.252$ ) with Job Satisfaction at Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu. Majority of the employees in Consumer Sales Unit at Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu had freedom to make their own decisions and plan their own strategies to achieve the target given by the manager. In other words, they are given with enough empowerment to handle and solve the problems while achieving the goals regarding their responsibilities and jobs without being control and supervised by the manager.

### Hypothesis Testing and Discussion

*H<sub>1</sub> Job autonomy significantly influence job satisfaction among employees at Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu.*

Table 3

*The Influence of Job Autonomy on Job Satisfaction*

Variables	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)
Job Autonomy	.252
R Square	.063
Adjusted R Square	.027
F Value	.063
Significant F Value	.197
Durbin Watson	1.294

Based on Table 3, the findings indicated that Work Stress significantly influence Job Satisfaction at Telekom Malaysia, ( $\beta = .252$ ,  $p > .01$ ). Therefore, the  $H_1$  hypothesis which hypothesized that job autonomy significantly influences job satisfaction is rejected. The findings are also similar with the study conducted by Arunika & Kottawatta (2015) in which stated that Job Autonomy had no significant relationship among non-executives in the Public Banking Sector in Colombo. Hence, the results also identified that job autonomy have no influence on job satisfaction among non-executives in Colombo. The job autonomy can decrease or increase over time (due to various factors such as customers' requirement or industry regulation); therefore, individuals attempt to maintain the same level of perceived autonomy. That is why the level of job autonomy may be seen as "wiggles" (i.e., undershoots and overshoots). This pattern is also found in the results relating to job satisfaction (Sawang et al., 2020).

### Conclusion

Employees are the most valuable asset in any organization, and it is important to keep them satisfied at all times to ensure efficacy and efficiency. The study revealed that the flexibility employees have in the office, greatly predicts their job satisfaction. As a result, their energy, devotion, and absorption in the workplace are better from time to time.

However, this study has concluded that job autonomy does not contribute to employee's job satisfaction at Consumer Unit, Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu. In contrast, employees of Telekom Malaysia, Terengganu rarely facing job autonomy issues that can impact their job satisfaction. This is due to the fact that they are given enough flexibility in making decisions by their top management. Thus, autonomous work keeps employees happy at work. Many people enjoy working independently; they feel happier and more confident when they can

choose their work tasks. Working autonomously also increases employee's productivity since they will be focused on tasks rather than navigating the job's rules. Therefore, other companies should allow their employees to work the way they want. This gives workers the opportunity to be as autonomous as possible in their work. Plus, employees are happier because they feel they are in control of their work. Nothing makes someone happier than doing what they do best - and no one is happier when they can do what they do best. Apart from that, the researchers hopes that this study can be continued by other future researchers by using different analytical methods such as SEM-PLS.

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