

Autonomy in the workplace has positive effects on well-being and job satisfaction, study finds

25 April 2017, by Rebecca Hume



Credit: University of Birmingham

New research into workplace culture has found that employees with higher levels of autonomy in their work reported positive effects on their overall well-being and higher levels of job satisfaction.

Researchers at the University of Birmingham, Business School examined changes in reported well-being relative to levels of autonomy using two separate years of data for 20,000 employees from the Understanding Society survey.

The research, published in the journal *Work and Occupations*, found that levels of autonomy differed considerably between occupations and by gender.

Those working in management reported the highest levels of autonomy in their work, with 90% reporting 'some' or 'a lot' of autonomy in the workplace.

Professionals report much less autonomy, particularly over the pace of work and over their

working hours. For other employees, 40-to-50% of those surveyed experienced much lower autonomy while around half of lower skilled employees experience no autonomy over working hours at all.

Dr Daniel Wheatley, University of Birmingham Business School said:

'Greater levels of control over work tasks and schedule have the potential to generate significant benefits for the [employee](#), which was found to be evident in the levels of reported well-being.

'The positive effects associated with informal flexibility and working at home, offer further support to the suggestion that schedule control is highly valued and important to employees "enjoying" work.'

The study found compelling evidence to suggest that men and women were affected in different ways by the type of autonomy they experienced.

For women, flexibility over the timing and location of their work appeared to be more beneficial allowing them to balance other tasks such as family commitments.

Dr Wheatley added: 'The manner of work and control over work schedule was found to be more relevant to the well-being of female employees.

'Flexibility in work location, specifically homeworking, benefitted women with caring responsibilities allowing them to better manage paid work alongside the household.'

Men were found to be more impacted by job tasks, pace of [work](#), and task order.

The research also highlighted that despite the

reported increased levels of well-being, in many cases managers remain unwilling to offer employees greater [levels](#) of [autonomy](#) and the associated benefits, because their primary role remains one of 'control and effort extraction.'

Provided by University of Birmingham

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