

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the impact of work engagement on employee performance, focusing on the mediating role of work autonomy. Using standardized questionnaire data were collected from 268 employees from various service sectors. The results reveal a significant positive relationship between work engagement and work performance, confirming that employees who are deeply engaged in their work demonstrate better work outcomes. The findings suggest that work autonomy which is found to mediate this relationship not only enhances the direct impact of engagement on performance but also serves as a conduit through which the beneficial effects of engagement are realized. Organizations aiming to bolster employee performance should consider strategies to enhance work engagement and provide employees with greater autonomy in their roles. Such interventions can foster a more proactive, dedicated, and high-performing workforce.

Keywords: *Autonomy, Service sector, Mediating effect, work engagement, work performance*

In the contemporary business environment, work engagement has emerged as a pivotal factor in driving organizational success. Engaged employees are often more productive, exhibit greater loyalty, and contribute positively to the workplace atmosphere. However, the mechanisms through which work engagement translates into improved work performance remain an area of significant academic and practical interest (Kahn, 1999). This study delves into the mediating role of work autonomy in this relationship. Work autonomy, the degree to which employees have control over their work tasks and processes, is hypothesized to play a crucial role in determining how engagement impacts performance. The paper posits that when employees are highly engaged and granted autonomy, they are likely to perform better due to increased motivation, creativity, and a sense of ownership over their work.

The study focuses on understanding how employee engagement directly influences performance in the service industry, a sector critically reliant on human interaction and customer satisfaction. The service sector, characterized by its intangible output and the significance of customer relations, offers a unique context for examining the dynamics of work engagement. In this study, work engagement is conceptualized as a positive, fulfilling

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The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. The research investigates how these elements of engagement not only enhance employees' productivity but also improve the quality-of-service delivery, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. To investigate this hypothesis, the paper employs a robust empirical approach, utilizing a combination of quantitative data and qualitative insights. The study's methodology is designed to capture the complexities of work engagement, work autonomy, and their impact on employee performance across various industries. By bridging the gap in understanding the mediator role of work autonomy, this research contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge in organizational behavior and human resource management. It offers practical implications for managers and organizations seeking to enhance employee performance through targeted engagement and autonomy strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It's critical to understand that work engagement involves various facets of a person's psychological, emotional, and behavioural health. The relationship between work performance and work engagement is particularly crucial in the service sector (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Susanto et al., 2022), where employee interactions and outputs are directly linked to customer satisfaction and organizational success. Work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2002), has a profound impact on performance. Engaged employees in the service sector are more likely to go above and beyond in their roles, displaying higher levels of service quality, customer care, and innovative problem-solving (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). This enhanced performance stems from the increased motivation and commitment that engaged employees feel towards their work and the organization. In the service sector, where the quality of human interaction plays a central role, the positive attitude and enthusiasm of engaged employees can significantly influence customer perceptions and loyalty. Furthermore, engagement is linked to lower turnover rates, which is vital in the service industry known for high employee turnover (Conway, 1999; Harter et al., 2002; Saragih, 2012). This relationship underscores the importance for service sector organizations to foster a work environment that promotes engagement, as it directly translates into better performance, improved customer satisfaction, and overall business success (Demerouti et al., 2014; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). On the contrary, the loss of an individual's mental and physical resources can have a profound impact on their overall well-being and job performance. When employees consistently expend energy without adequate recovery, they risk depleting their mental and physical reserves, leading to a state of exhaustion. This energy depletion manifests not just as physical tiredness, but also as mental fatigue, characterized by decreased concentration, impaired decision-making, and reduced problem-solving capabilities (Lu & Tu, 2015). Performance consists of all acts that are pertinent to the objectives and that can be evaluated in terms of each person's competence (Randhawa, 2007).

Work Engagement and Work Performance

The relationship between work engagement and work performance is a dynamic and symbiotic one, playing a pivotal role in the productivity and success of organizations. Work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bouckenoghe et al., 2022; Wang & Chen, 2020), directly influences an employee's performance. Engaged employees exhibit a higher level of energy and persistence in their tasks, often going above and beyond their job requirements. This heightened level of commitment and enthusiasm typically translates into improved performance outcomes, including enhanced productivity, better quality of work, and increased innovation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Qi & Wu, 2018).

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

Moreover, engaged employees are more likely to be proactive, solve problems creatively, and collaborate effectively with colleagues, all of which contribute positively to overall organizational performance. Additionally, engagement has been linked to lower absenteeism and turnover rates, further impacting organizational productivity positively (Harter et al., 2002). A study done by Naqshbandi et al., (2023), revealed that flexible work significantly and favourably impacts job performance. Additionally, it becomes clear that flexible work positively impacts work engagement, and that work engagement plays a major mediating role in the relationship that exists between job performance and flexible work. Numerous studies have proposed that intrinsic motivation may be a more reliable indicator of employee engagement than external motivation, despite the fact that there are numerous possible antecedents to employee engagement (Heyns, McCallaghan, & Wet, 2022; Crome et al., 2019; Parfyonova et al., 2019). In essence, the positive affective-motivational state of work engagement not only benefits individual employees in terms of job satisfaction and well-being but also serves as a key driver of overall work performance and organizational success (Fredrickson, 2001; Ouweneel, LeBlanc, & Schaufeli, 2011). Thus, the hypothesis that can be formulated is:

- **H1:** Work engagement positively influences employee work performance.

Effect of dedication on employee work performance

A person is said to be dedicated if they approach their work with a stable and upbeat attitude with the intention of achieving personally meaningful outcomes (professional demands and identity) (Sadovaya & Korchagina, 2016). A dedicated worker is one who takes ownership of their work and the company as a whole. They embody the values instilled in them by the team culture and are committed to the company's objective (Balaji & Namasivayam, 2021). According to Maisyuri and Ariyanto (2021), high-scoring employees are fervently enthusiastic and proud of their work and the business. They view their work as a challenge that motivates them to perform to their highest potential in order to improve employee performance throughout the organisation. Employees that score poorly on devotion are unable to do their duties effectively because they lack enthusiasm and pride in their work and employer. Thus, the hypothesis that can be formulated is:

- **H1a:** Dedication positively influences employee work performance.

Effect of vigor on employee work performance

One facet of employee engagement is vigor, which is defined as high levels of energy at work, mental toughness, and investment in the work itself, as well as a high degree of tenacity even in the face of challenges (Shekari, 2015). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which incorporates high mental resilience at work, willingness to put effort into work, and tenacity of employees even when confronting problems, can be used to quantify vigor (Schaufeli, 2012).

According to Maisyuri and Ariyanto (2021), each employee's level of vigor has an impact on how well they perform for the organisation. The completion of a specific task yields performance. If the workers accomplish their duties with high vigor, they will finish them ideally and it will have an effect on raising performance. Thus, the hypothesis that can be formulated is:

- **H1b:** Vigor positively influences employee work performance.

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

Effect of absorption on employee work performance

According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), absorption is employee engagement and is characterised by employees who give their work their undivided attention. Employees that are completely focused on their task and experiencing absorption are referred to as such. The tendency of workers to lose track of time while performing their duties makes it challenging for them to leave work on time. According to Maisyuri and Ariyanto (2021), high absorption workers are able to focus entirely on their tasks. This might have an impact on how well they perform for the business. Because employees like participating in their work, time seems to fly by. In addition, they would struggle to leave their task because they feel engrossed in it. Thus, the hypothesis that can be formulated is:

- **H1c:** Absorption positively influences employee work performance.

Work Autonomy, Work Engagement and Work Performance

Organisations are giving employees more flexibility, discretion, and decision-making power in response to the rising environmental complexity and volatility in many industries and marketplaces (Langfred & Rockman, 2016). Autonomy is the degree of freedom and independence workers enjoy while performing their duties on the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Employees who are involved will be more absorbed. Due to their commitment, they will persevere in their efforts and are more likely to exert greater efforts when given the flexibility to finish their work and put their ideas into practise, even when they run into difficulties and unpleasant situations. The sense of competence and confidence that comes with greater job autonomy and makes the work more fun boosts employee satisfaction. A study by Ong et al., (2023) found that the workforce known as Generation Y (born in early 1980s and late 1990s) was raised in a digital age where technological advancements moulded their personalities and traits, making them more productive and efficient at work. Their productivity has increased as a result, and they are now demanding greater flexibility in terms of working hours, how they perform their jobs, and the autonomy to finish their assignments. This could have a beneficial effect on employee engagement. An employee who is motivated is more willing to try new things at work. Employees that are highly engaged will make use of the discretionary possibilities to carry out the task that comes with greater levels of autonomy. The association between work autonomy and inventive behaviour is probably stronger when people are engaged, committed, and active than when people are less so and put out less effort (Swaroop & Dixit, 2018). Thus, the hypotheses that can be formulated are:

- **H2:** Work autonomy mediates the relationship between work engagement and employee work performance.
- **H2a:** Work autonomy mediates the relationship between dedication and employee work performance.
- **H2b:** Work autonomy has a mediating effect on the relationship between vigor and employee work performance.
- **H2c:** Work autonomy has a mediating effect on the relationship between absorption and employee work performance.

Furthermore, executing one's own tasks successfully won't be enough to satisfy an individual if their co-workers aren't doing the same for them. This is because autonomy comes with a bigger perceived responsibility for the output of the organisation. Employees also have the chance to act contextually because of the increased role flexibility that comes

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

with autonomy, whereas poor autonomy would make it more challenging to act outside of behaviours that are particularly related to the work description (Sørli et al., 2022).

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Our sample is composed of the employees from the service sector in India. An online survey was distributed amongst employees working in the service sector. We received a total of 268 responses. The results of the demographic structure analysis is given in Table 1. The data provided shows the gender of the respondents who participated in a study or survey. There was a total of 268 respondents, with 136 (50.7%) identifying as male and 132 (49.3%) identifying as female. From Table 1 we can interpret that that the number of male participants were 1.4% more than the number of female participants.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for demographic profile

Gender of the respondents					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	136	50.7	50.7	50.7
	Female	132	49.3	49.3	100.0
	Total	268	100.0	100.0	

Measures

- **Work Performance** was measured using the 27 items Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ).
- **Work engagement** was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). There were 17 items total, including 6 vigor items, 5 dedication items, and 6 absorption items.
- **Work Autonomy** was measured using Factual Autonomy Scale by Spector and Fox (2003). The scale has a total of 10 items.
The items were scored based on a five-point Likert scale with 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree and 4=Strongly Agree.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

All the statistical analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Reliability Testing of the Scales

The reliability of the scales was tested by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Table 2). All the coefficients were above 0.7 which makes them highly reliable.

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability of the scales used in the research.

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Work and Well-being Scale (UWES)	.927	.928	17
Dedication Sub-scale UWES	.865	.862	5
Vigor Sub-scale UWES	.827	.830	6
Absorption Sub-scale	.778	.783	6

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on Standardized Items	N of Items
UWES			
Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ)	.808	.812	7
Factual Autonomy Scale	.713	.715	10

Correlations

Table 3 Correlation Matrix - Work engagement (WE), work performance (WP), dedication, vigor, absorption, and work autonomy (WA).

	WP	WE	Dedication	Vigor	Absorption	WA
WP	1.00	.628**	.577**	.563**	.594**	.418**
WE	.628**	1.00	.904**	.918**	.938**	.422**
Dedication	.577**	.904**	1.00	.722**	.785**	.434**
Vigor	.563**	.918**	.722**	1.00	.805**	.400**
Absorption	.594**	.938**	.785**	.805**	1.00	.332**
WA	.418**	.422**	.434**	.400**	.332**	1.00

Note: $p > 0.05$ *, $p > 0.001$ **

The correlation matrix shows how strongly and in what direction the scales are related. Work performance (WP) and the other scales had moderate to strong positive relationships, ranging from 0.418 to 0.628. Strong positive associations exist between Work Engagement (WE) and WP (0.628), Dedication (0.904), vigor (0.918), and Absorption (0.938). Dedication has somewhat high relationships with WP (0.577), vigor (0.722), and Absorption (0.785), and a substantial positive association with WE (0.904). The connection between vigor and WP (0.563), WE (0.918), and absorption (0.805) is moderately positive. A moderate to significant positive association exists between absorption and WP (0.594), WE (0.938), dedication (0.785), and vigor (0.805). There is a positive link between Work Autonomy (WA) and WP (0.418), WE (0.422), Dedication (0.434), and vigor (0.400), as well as a smaller positive correlation with Absorption (0.332). These results imply that there are important and substantial links between the scales, demonstrating connections and impacts between many aspects of work-related experiences, performance, engagement, commitment, vigor, absorption, and autonomy.

Regression

Table 5 Direct effect of Work engagement (WE), dedication, vigor and absorption on work performance (WP).

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	R ²	β	Significance
WE	WP	.628	.394	.174	.000
Dedication	WP	.577	.333	.460	.000
Vigor	WP	.563	.317	.418	.000
Absorption	WP	.594	.353	.453	.000

Note: $p > 0.05$ *, $p > 0.001$ **

According to the above presented regression model, it can be seen that work engagement, dedication, vigor and absorption have a significant and positive effect on employee work

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

performance. A moderately significant positive link between work engagement and performance is seen by the R-value of 0.628. The R²-value of 0.394 indicates that differences in Work Engagement can account for about 39.4% of the variance in Work Performance. The β -value of 0.174 shows that an increase in Work Engagement of one unit is accompanied by an increase in Work Performance of 0.174 units. The correlation between work engagement and performance is statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value of < 0.001. This implies that workers who are more committed to their jobs are more likely to excel at their job responsibilities. This shows work engagement has a positive and significant effect on work performance, thus H1 was accepted.

The link between dedication and work performance is moderately good, as indicated by the R-value of 0.577. The R²-value of 0.333 indicates that differences in dedication can account for roughly 33.3% of the variance in work performance. According to the β -value of 0.460, a one-unit rise in the standard deviation of dedication is accompanied by an increase of 0.460 standard deviation in work performance. The correlation between dedication and work performance is statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value of < 0.001. This shows that workers who are committed to their jobs and show dedication are more likely to succeed at greater levels. This shows dedication has a positive and significant effect on work performance, thus H1a was accepted.

A moderately high positive association between vigor and work performance is seen by the R-value of 0.563. Variations in Vigor can account for about 31.7% of the variance in Work Performance, according to the R²-value of 0.317. According to the β -value of 0.418, an increase in standard deviation in vigor of one unit is accompanied by an increase in work performance of 0.418 units. The correlation between vigor and work performance is statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value of < 0.001. This suggests that workers who put in a lot of effort and enthusiasm are likely to produce better performance results. This shows vigor has a positive and significant effect on work performance thus H1b was accepted.

A moderately high positive association between absorption and work performance is seen by the R-value of 0.594. Variations in absorption can account for about 35.3% of the variance in Work Performance, according to the R²-value of 0.353. According to the β -value of 0.453, an increase in standard deviation in vigor of one unit is accompanied by an increase in work performance of 0.453 units. The correlation between absorption and work performance is statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value of < 0.001. This suggests that workers who are fully immersed in their work are likely to produce better performance results. This shows absorption has a positive and significant effect on work performance, thus H1c was accepted.

Table 6 Indirect effect of Work autonomy (WA) along with work engagement (WE), dedication, vigor and absorption on work performance (WP).

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	R ²	β	Significance
WE × WA	WP	.650	.423	.141	.000
Dedication × WA	WP	.607	.368	.156	.000
Vigor × WA	WP	.601	.362	.173	.000
Absorption × WA	WP	.639	.408	.187	.000

Note: $p > 0.05$ *, $p > 0.001$ **

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

According to the above presented regression model, it can be seen that the mediating effect of work autonomy along with work engagement, dedication, vigor and absorption have a significant and positive effect on employee work performance. The interaction of work engagement, work autonomy, and work performance shows a moderately high positive connection with an R-value of 0.650. The R²-value of 0.423 indicates that differences in the interaction between Work Engagement and Work Autonomy can account for about 42.3% of the variance in Work Performance. The interaction between work engagement and work autonomy is related with a 0.141 standard deviation increase in work performance, according to the β -value of 0.141. The relationship between work engagement and work autonomy has a statistically significant impact on work performance, as indicated by the p-value of < 0.001 . This shows that increasing employee autonomy while maintaining employee engagement improves performance outcomes. This shows work autonomy mediates the relationship between work engagement and employee work performance thus H2 was accepted.

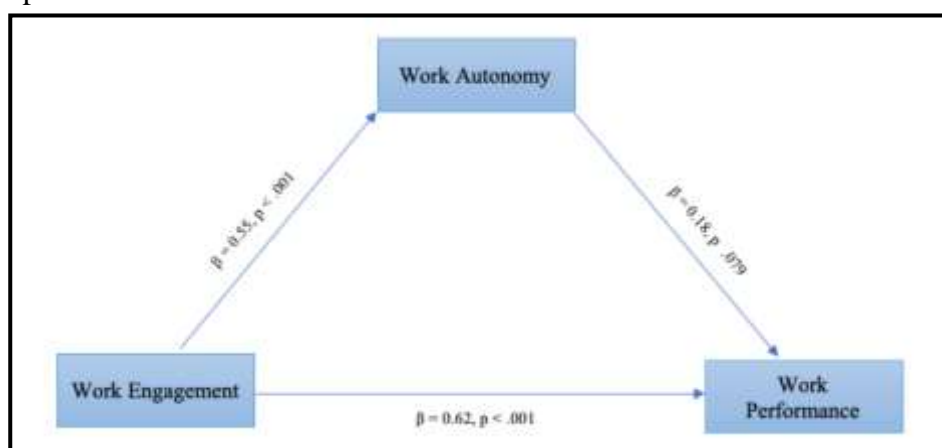


Figure 1: Pictorial representation of work autonomy acting as mediator between work engagement and work performance. [Source: Authors]

The interaction between dedication, work autonomy, and work performance has an R-value of 0.601, which suggests a moderately high positive association. The R²-value of 0.362 indicates that differences in the interaction between dedication and work autonomy can account for about 36.2% of the variance in work performance. A one-unit increase in the standard deviation of the interaction between dedication and work autonomy is associated with a 0.156 standard deviation rise in work performance, according to the β -value of 0.156. The interaction between dedication and work autonomy has a statistically significant impact on work performance, as indicated by the p-value of < 0.001 . This shows dedicated employees who have the freedom to make decisions about their work perform better. This shows work autonomy mediates the relationship between dedication and employee work performance, thus H2a was accepted.

The interaction between vigor, work autonomy, and work performance has an R-value of 0.607, which suggests a moderately high positive association. The R²-value of 0.368 indicates that differences in the interaction between dedication and work autonomy can account for about 36.8% of the variance in work performance. A one-unit increase in the standard deviation of the interaction between dedication and work autonomy is associated with a 0.173 standard deviation rise in work performance, according to the β -value of 0.173. The interaction between vigor and work autonomy has a statistically significant impact on

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

work performance, as indicated by the p-value of < 0.001 . This shows energetic and enthusiastic employees who have the freedom to make plans about their work perform better. This shows work autonomy mediates the relationship between vigor and employee work performance thus H2b was accepted.

The interaction between absorption, work autonomy, and work performance has an R-value of 0.639, which suggests a moderately high positive association. The R^2 -value of 0.408 indicates that differences in the interaction between dedication and work autonomy can account for about 40.8% of the variance in work performance. A one-unit increase in the standard deviation of the interaction between dedication and work autonomy is associated with a 0.187 standard deviation rise in work performance, according to the β -value of 0.187. The interaction between absorption and work autonomy has a statistically significant impact on work performance, as indicated by the p-value of < 0.001 . This shows employees who are focused on their work and have the freedom to make changes to their work perform better. This shows work autonomy mediates the relationship between absorption and employee work performance thus H2c was accepted.

Table 7 *The impact of work engagement on work performance, with the mediating effect of work autonomy*

	Hypotheses	Accepted/ Rejected
Hypothesis 1	Work engagement positively influences employee work performance.	Accepted
Hypothesis 1a	Dedication positively influences employee work performance.	Accepted
Hypothesis 1b	Vigor positively influences employee work performance.	Accepted
Hypothesis 1c	Absorption positively influences employee work performance.	Accepted
Hypothesis 2	Work autonomy mediates the relationship between work engagement and employee work performance.	Accepted
Hypothesis 2a	Work autonomy mediates the relationship between dedication and employee work performance.	Accepted
Hypothesis 2b	Work autonomy has a mediating effect on the relationship between vigor and employee work performance.	Accepted
Hypothesis 2c	Work autonomy has a mediating effect on the relationship between absorption and employee work performance.	Accepted

DISCUSSION

The results of this study were similar to the findings of the study done by Sittar (2020), where there was a positive correlation between work engagement factors like vigour, dedication and absorption on work performance. The result of the linear regression analysis also showed that work engagement was a strong predictor for work performance. The results of the study done by Kumar and Kumar (2019), support the findings of the current study in the way that the coefficient of correlation's findings show a substantial and positive

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

association between various aspects of employee engagement, including energy, devotion, and absorption, as well as overall employee engagement, and work performance. An important predictor of work performance, according to the results of hierarchical regression analysis, is the dedication dimension of employee involvement. According to the study done by Maisyuri and Ariyanto (2021), it was seen that dedication, vigor and absorption had a positive and significant impact on employee performance but at the same time it had a weak impact with R^2 only at 32%. The results of the study done by Bilal et al., (2018) showed employee engagement had a significant connection in engagement and task performance.

The current study also studied work autonomy acting as a mediating factor in the relationship between work engagement, dedication, vigor and absorption on work performance. The results of the regression analysis indicated that there is a moderate positive effect of work engagement, dedication, vigor and absorption on work performance when work autonomy acts as a mediating factor. This finding is consistent with other research that identified job autonomy to be a type of inborn psychological need that gives workers flexibility in how they manage their work (Rahman et al., 2022). According to a study done by Bošković (2021), it has been revealed that employee engagement is significantly influenced by workplace autonomy. Employees' view of the importance of their work is further increased by their discretionary powers to choose the way, where, and when they do duties. The findings indicate that employee engagement in the digital world, namely on its two dimensions of vigor and dedication, is positively impacted by autonomy, but it was also seen during the confirmatory factor analysis that absorption did not meet the requirements for further analysis. It can be seen in this study that absorption has a higher effect with work autonomy on work performance compared to dedication and vigor. Muecke and Iseke (2019), meta-analytically examined an integrative framework that links job autonomy to job performance. Job autonomy frequently enhanced job performance, largely by increasing work motivation but also by reducing mental strain. The findings of the study done by Seppälä et al., (2020), demonstrated that within individuals, the link between autonomy and work engagement can change over time. There are three ways to boost employee performance on the job: first, by providing them with adequate working circumstances that fulfil their demands, allowing them to focus more time and energy on their task; second, by ensuring that people and occupations are reasonably matched. Thirdly, employees develop their own psychological capital, which enhances their overall well-being (Yao et al., 2022). Sheoran, Goyal & Sharma (2022), demonstrated to managers and HR professionals how fostering employee autonomy and providing platforms for opinion-sharing within the workplace may increase an organization's efficacy.

Limitations and Future Scope

Present study has several limitations which can be explored by future researchers. Firstly, the study's reliance on self-reported measures may introduce bias and limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could benefit from incorporating more objective performance metrics and multi-source data. Secondly, the cross-sectional design of the study restricts the ability to infer causality. Longitudinal or experimental studies could provide deeper insights into the causal relationships among work engagement, work autonomy, and employee performance. Additionally, the study's specific context or demographic focus might limit its applicability to different industries or cultural settings. Future studies should consider exploring these variables in diverse contexts to enhance the external validity of the findings. Lastly, this paper opens avenues for exploring other

The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

potential mediators or moderators, such as job satisfaction or organizational support, which could further elucidate the complex dynamics between work engagement and employee performance.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to study the impact of work engagement on work performance with work autonomy as a mediating factor. From the results obtained it can be seen that work engagement has a significant and positive influence on work performance. It was also found that other variables like dedication, vigor and absorption had a significant positive influence on work performance. When the mediating effect of work autonomy on these variables was seen it was found that it has a significant and moderate positive effect on the work performance of the employees. Thus, all the hypotheses of the study were accepted.

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The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

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The Impact of Work Engagement on Employee Work Performance: Mediation Role of Work Autonomy

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Conflict of Interest

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