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JOB AUTONOMY, MANAGEMENT SUPPORT, AND DIGITAL COMPETENCE EFFECTS ON PRODUCTIVITY: ENGAGEMENT MEDIATION

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Abstract

The paper has discussed how employee engagement acts as an intermediary to the inter-relations between job autonomy, managerial support, digital competence, and employee productivity. Based on Job Demands Resources theory, Social Exchange Theory, and the Human Capital Theory, a composite mediation model was developed and tested. The survey design used was a cross-sectional quantitative survey and the number of employees who were able to give data was 364. The analysis of data was done with SPSS and SmartPLS in accordance with the guidelines of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. The findings showed that job autonomy (=.26), managerial support (=.21), and digital competence (=.50) significantly influenced the productivity of the employees. Managerial support and job autonomy were important predictors of employee engagement, whereas digital competence was not. The engagement of employees showed a tremendous positive value with regards to productivity (22). The pattern of mediation found in the analyses per managerial support showed full mediation due to engagement, job autonomy showed partial mediation, and digital competence mediation was not supported. The model explained 88 percent variance in engagement and productivity. The results not only contribute to the theoretical knowledge on motivational mechanisms between job resources and performance outcomes, but also present evidence-based recommendations on organizational interventions that can be used to improve the productivity of the workforce through optimal resource allocation and engagement development.

INTRODUCTION

The modern organizations are placed in a more complex and dynamic environment marked by high rates of technological development, changes in expectations of the working force and constant need of high-quality performance results. In this respect, the productivity of employees has been observed as a decisive factor of organizational competitiveness and survival (Bakker & De Vries, 2021a). However, even though a lot of scholarly efforts were dedicated to the antecedents of productivity, there are still significant gaps in the way to explain how organizational and individual resources can be converted into productive behaviors. The gaps that exist are especially noticeable in terms of the mediational relationships between the resources at workplace and the performance and thus, the necessity of the strict empirical research.

Problem Statement

The modern workplace is such paradox: organizations have never had access to such a range of human-capital development tools, supportive management practices, and digital technologies and yet, they find it difficult to optimize the productivity of employees. The available literature has discussed, on its part, the impact of job autonomy, managerial support, and digital competence on multiple work outcomes (Parker & Grote, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Nevertheless, these piece-meal solutions have provided inconclusive results concerning how the combination of these factors affect productivity. What is more important is that psychology processes behind such relationships are poorly theorized and tested in reality.

The conceptualization of employee engagement has been developed as a motivational condition, which includes vigor, commitment, and immersion in work processes (Schaufeli, 2021). Whereas engagement has always been linked to performance measures, the transmitting role of the engagement between job resources and performance is a subject that needs an elaboration. The Job Demands-, Resources theory suggests that the motivational processes triggered by job resources result in positive outcomes (Bakker & De Vries, 2021a); however, there is not much empirical evidence to support the view that engagement is the particular channel through which autonomy, support, and competence influence productivity. Such theoretical vagueness gives practical difficulties to the organizations working to develop evidence-based strategies to optimize the productivity of workforce with specific interventions.

Besides, the massive implementation of the digital technologies has promoted digital competence to a topical individual resource that has an impact on the workplace efficacy. Digital competence has experienced under-research, even though its significance is increasingly being acknowledged, as part of the integrative models which address various predictors of productivity (Trenerry et al., 2021). The need to know how digital competence functions in conjunction with conventional job resources to determine engagement and productivity is critical in creating holistic human-resource approaches to meet the modern realities of the workplace. Digitization of work has radically changed the skills needed and now digital abilities are mandatory to perform a job in almost all types of occupations (Parker & Grote, 2022).

Scope of the Study

The present study follows a quantitative approach to cross-sectional research design, with using survey methodology as the research tool to explore the links between job autonomy, management support, digital competence, employee engagement, and employee productivity. Theoretical frameworks that the investigation will be based on are Job Demands Resources theory, and the Self Determination Theory and Social Exchange Theory are added to the study so that the hypothesized relationships can be explained in a holistic manner. Data are analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling, which is used to analyses both direct and mediation relationships at the same time, in an integrated model. Through job engagement, the research involves employees in various organizational settings and aims to determine generalizable patterns on how job resources work in order to have impacts on the productivity outcomes. The sample size of 364 employees is sufficient to give the proposed structural model with sufficient power to analyze it (Bakker, 2022).

Study Objectives

The main purpose of the study is to design and empirically test an integrative model to investigate the direct and indirect influence of job autonomy, management assistance, and digital competence upon the productivity of employees based on employee engagement. In particular, the paper will seek to:

✓ Evaluate the one-to-one direct associations between job autonomy, management support, and digital competence and the employee productivity variance.

✓ review the prediction patterns between the three job resources and employee engagement.
✓ Determine the employee engagement as a mediating factor in the correlation between job resources and productivity.
✓ Find out the level of mediation effects between various resource-productivity pathways.

Research Questions

The following research questions are linked to one another, and they are addressed in the study:
✓ How does job autonomy, management support and digital competence have direct impacts on employee productivity?
✓ What is the relationship between job autonomy, management support, and digital competence and employee engagement?
✓ Do job resources have a significant impact in the prediction of employee productivity when employee engagement is taken into account?
✓ Does employee engagement moderate the three independent variable relationships and employee productivity relationship?

Literature Review

The chapter is a synthesis of the current academic discussions related to the variables of study, including job autonomy, management support, digital competence, employee engagement and employee productivity in its theoretical framework. The review creates conceptual clarity as well as gaps that define the need to conduct the current investigation.

Job Autonomy

Job autonomy refers to the level of freedom, independence, discretion of work by employees in terms of scheduling and process through which tasks are to be carried out. Modern research makes autonomy a key job resource that fulfills the lowest tier of psychology needs in self-determination (Parker & Grote, 2022). According to the Job Demands-Resources theory, autonomy is a vital resource that initiates motivational processes that help employees to effectively deal with work demands and remain in optimum functioning. Empirical studies prove that autonomous work structures increase intrinsic motivation through both the competence and relatedness needs and independence demand (Wang et al., 2021). In digitalized work places, autonomy has only taken on a new level of importance because remote and hybrid setups require increased levels of self-regulation and the ability to make independent decisions. When employees are more autonomous, they have stronger problem-solving skills, are creative, and maintain longer attention to the task (Bakker, 2022).

Management Support

Management support involves supervisory behaviors that show real interest in the wellbeing of the employees, offer instrumental support, constructive feedback, and enable their professional growth. Based on the Social Exchange Theory, perceived management support creates reciprocity in which employees would reciprocate supportive treatment with improved commitment and performance-oriented behaviors (Schaufeli, 2021). Supportive, resource-strengthening and inspirational leadership behaviors have been found to be strongly linked with the increased level of engagement. Management is an organizational resource that mitigates job demands and at the same time helps in generating positive work attitudes (Hu et al., 2016). Recent studies highlight that supportive managers who reward their staff, offer developmental chances and show leadership with empathy create psychologically safe environments where employees can engage in and perform at long term levels.

Digital Competence

Digital competence is the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to effectively use digital technologies in work related matters, communication and problem solving. The digital competence has become a crucial individual resource affecting the workplace performance as organizations are digitalized (Trenerry et al., 2021). The Human Capital Theory assumes that digital competence should be treated as a human

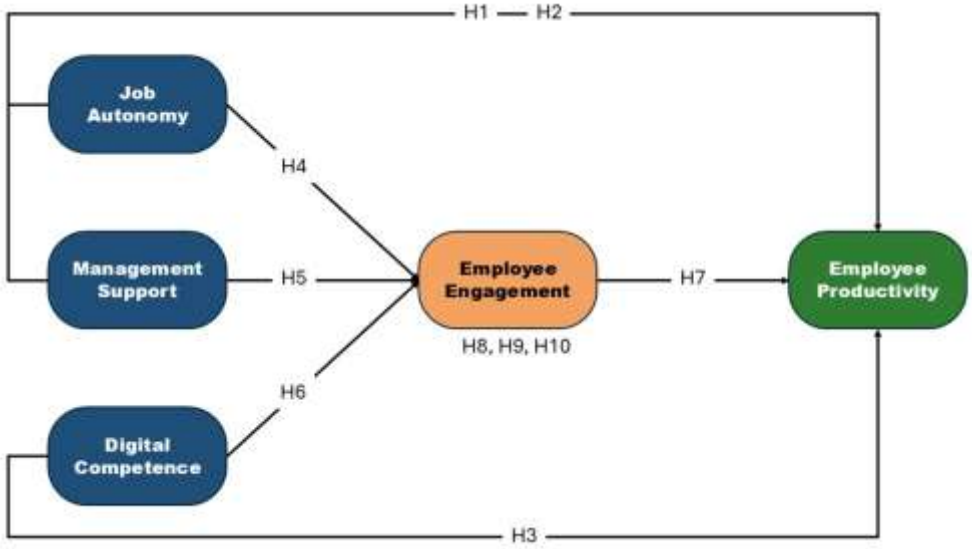
capital that increases the value of employees and their productive capacity. Digital workers with strong digital skills can use IT tools easily, can quickly adjust to new systems, and can use digital platforms to enable more effective teamwork and production. The increased pace of using digital technologies in industries has increased the importance of digital competence as a fringe benefit of efficient work to a necessity (Parker & Grote, 2022). The studies have shown that digitally competent workers report less technostress and have a higher level of confidence in performing technology-mediated work.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a desirable, rewarding, work-related psychological condition described as vigorous, committed and absorbed (Bakker, 2022). Vigor indicates great energy, mental strength in the workplace; dedication is indicated by high involvement and engagement; absorption implies full attention and focus on the work activity. The Job Demands-Resources theory lays engagement as the major motivational process, where job resources determine results of performance (Bakker & De Vries, 2021b). Involved employees put physical, cognitive and emotional efforts in role performance, thus displaying increased persistence and proactive behaviors. The use of meta-analysis-backed evidence proves the effectiveness of engagement as a strong predictor of personal performance, the willingness to act as an organizational citizen, and low turnover intentions (Lesener et al., 2020). Notably, engagement is a mediating process, which conveys the motivational consequences of job resources to performance outcomes.

Employee Productivity

Employee productivity is defined as the efficiency and effectiveness with which the employees perform the work, meet the performance standards, and the contribution to the organizational goals. Modern theatricalizations go beyond quantitative output indicators to the qualitative aspects of work quality, innovation and adaptive performance (Wang et al., 2021). The final result variable of interest to organizations in the need to gain competitive advantage by optimizing human capital is productivity. There is always evidence to show that productivity depends on the interaction between the organizational resources, individual abilities, and motivational states, which explains why integrative studies should be adopted, which focus on multiple predictors at the same time.



Conceptual Model Framework

Development of Research Hypotheses

H1: Job Autonomy positively impacts and significantly influences Employee Engagement.

H2: There is a positive and significant influence of the management Support on the Employee Engagement.

H3: Digital Competence positively influences the Employee Engagement significantly.

H4: There is a positive and significant relationship between Employee Engagement and Employee Productivity.

H5: Job Autonomy positively and significantly influences the Employee Productivity.

H6: Employee Productivity is positively influenced by management Support, which is significant.

H7: A positive and significant influence on Employee Productivity has Digital Competence.

H8: Job Autonomy and Employee Productivity have a mediating variable, Employee Engagement.

H9: There is a mediation of the relationship between Management Support and Employee Productivity through the Employee Engagement.

H10: Employee Engagement is a mediating factor between Digital Competence and Employee Productivity.

Methodology

Research Design

In the current paper, the cross-sectional quantitative approach was taken and conducted via the survey methodology. The cross-sectional design is especially appropriate when the authors are interested in the interrelations between variables at one moment and are commonly applied in organizational behavior research (Bakker, 2022). The study experimented a mediation model which assumed that employee engagement serves to mediate the role of job autonomy, management support and digital competence on employee productivity.

Sample and Data Collection

The sample used in data collection was a sample of 364 employees selected under diverse organizational settings through convenience sampling strategy. The sample size is larger than the minimum required to use Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling and, therefore, it is enough to obtain statistical power to identify the medium effect sizes (Hair et al., 2021). Self-administered questionnaires were employed to involve the respondents in the study, with the questionnaire containing demographic questions and the validated measurement scales. The informed consent was obtained beforehand and anonymity was ensured to minimize the social desirability bias and give the respondents the free hand to provide honest answers.

Measures

Each of the constructs was operationalized using established scales and measured using five-point Likert instruments between one (strongly disagree) and five (strongly agree).

Job Autonomy was determined through four items that are modified versions of the validated work-design measures that reflect decision-making latitude and task-scheduling autonomy (Parker & Grote, 2022).

Management Support considered the five items that assess supervisory assistance, feedback quality and developmental support (Schaufeli, 2021).

Digital Competence was conceptualized through four questions that look at technology competence, use of digital tools and ability to adapt (Trenerry et al., 2021).

Employee Engagement Four items that represented the dimension of Vigor, Dedication and Absorption were used to measure (Bakker, 2022).

Employee Productivity was measured using five questions that measure the efficiency of work, the quality of work and the achievement of certain goals (Wang et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was performed in two phases, according to PLS-SEM procedures (Hair

et al., 2021). To determine the reliability and validity of measurement model, first, measurement model was assessed in terms of Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted and older heterotrait monotrait ratio. Secondly, path coefficients, t-statistics and level of significance were used to test the hypothesized relationships using the structural model. Indirect effects and mediation types that were specified were determined using mediation analysis through bootstrapping using 5,000 resamples.

Data Analysis and Results

This chapter gives the empirical results which were formed out of the statistical analyses carried out through SPSS and SmartPLS. Findings have been presented in chronological order that includes initial descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, reliability, structural model, mediation, and hypothesis summary.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 364)

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness
Job Autonomy	3.62	0.57	2.00	4.75	−0.71
Management Support	3.63	0.55	2.00	4.60	−0.64
Digital Competence	3.71	0.52	2.00	4.75	−0.56
Employee Engagement	3.59	0.56	2.00	4.75	−0.54
Employee Productivity	3.69	0.52	2.00	4.80	−0.63

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of all variables of the study (N=364). Five-point Likert scale mean scores were between 3.59 and 3.71, which represent moderately high construct perceptions. The highest mean (M = 3.71, SD = 0.52) was digital competence, and then employee productivity that had an M of 3.69 (SD = 0.52). The least mean was noted in employee engagement (M = 3.59, SD = 0.56). Every variable showed negative skewness with the values of 0.54-0.71 indicating a minor tendency towards a high scale with acceptable normality levels to conduct multivariate analysis (Khalid et al., 2026).

Correlation Analysis

Table 2 Correlation Matrix Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Job Autonomy	—				
2. Management Support	.92**	—			
3. Digital Competence	.87**	.89**	—		
4. Employee Engagement	.90**	.93**	.84**	—	
5. Employee Productivity	.89**	.90**	.91**	.88**	—

Note. **p** < .01 (two-tailed).

The correlation table is given in table 2. All the bivariate correlations were positive and significant at p <.01 (two tailed). The highest correlation was found between management support and employee engagement (r = -.93), and then the digital competence and employee productivity (r = -.91). Job autonomy was found to have great relationships with employee engagement (r =.90) and employee productivity (r =.89). The proposed mediator-outcome relationship is significantly supported by the fact that there exists a strong relationship between employee engagement and employee productivity (r=.88)(Sarwar et al., 2025).

Construct Reliability

Table 3 Reliability Statistics

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
Job Autonomy	4	.84
Management Support	5	.87
Digital Competence	4	.84
Employee Engagement	4	.84
Employee Productivity	5	.83

Note. All values exceed .70.

Table 3 gives the reliability statistics. The coefficients of alpha of Cronbach were found to be between .83 and .87 and were greater than the recommended value of .70 and this is evidence of satisfactory internal consistency.

Structural Model and R^2

Table 4 Model Summary (R^2 Values)

Dependent Variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Employee Engagement	.94	.88	.88
Employee Productivity (IVs only)	.94	.88	.87
Employee Productivity (IVs + Mediator)	.94	.88	.88

Model explanatory power has been provided in Table 4. Employee engagement variance (R 2) was explained by independent variables 88 per cent (R 2 =.88). Likewise, the productivity of employees also exhibited a high explanatory power (R 2 =.88), which showed that it has significant predictive ability.

Direct Effects (Without Mediator)

Table 5 Direct Effects on Employee Productivity (Without Mediator)

Predictor	SE	β	t	p
Job Autonomy	.046	.26	5.20	< .001
Management Support	.052	.21	3.88	< .001
Digital Competence	.043	.50	11.57	< .001

The three independent variables were significantly used to predict employee productivity (see Table 5). The highest standardized effect was found to be that of digital competence (b = .50, t = 11.57, p <.001), followed by job autonomy (b =.26, t= 5.20, p=.001) and management support (b=.21, t=3.88, p=.001).

Direct Effects (With Mediator)

Table 6 Direct Effects on Employee Productivity (With Mediator)

Predictor	SE	β	t	p
Job Autonomy	.047	.20	3.89	< .001
Management Support	.062	.06	0.87	.384
Digital Competence	.042	.50	11.98	< .001
Employee Engagement	.049	.22	4.20	< .001

With the introduction of employee engagement (Table 6), the management support was no longer significant (b = .06, p = .384), which means complete mediation. Job autonomy (b =.20, p =.001) and digital competence (b =.50, p =.001) were still important. Productivity was also highly correlated with employee engagement (b 2 =.22, t = 4.20, p =.001).

Predictors of Employee Engagement

Table 7 Predictors of Employee Engagement

Predictor	SE	β	t	p
Job Autonomy	.048	.28	5.66	< .001
Management Support	.055	.70	13.13	< .001
Digital Competence	.045	−.03	−0.68	.500

The most significant effect was on management support (b =.70, t =13.13, p =.001), and then on job autonomy (b =.28, t =5.66, p =.001). Digital competence was insignificant (b = .03, p = .500).

Mediation Analysis

Table 8 Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Indirect Path	a	b	Indirect Effect	Mediation Type
JA → EE → EP	.277	.221	.061	Partial
MS → EE → EP	.702	.221	.155	Full
DC → EE → EP	−.028	.221	−.006	Not Supported

Table 8 displays indirect effects. The partial mediating effect was observed with job autonomy (indirect effect =.061). Full mediation was shown to be present in management support (indirect effect=.155). The mediation of digital competence was not facilitated.

Total Effects

Table 9 Total Effects on Employee Productivity

Predictor	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Job Autonomy	.199	.061	.260
Management Support	.057	.155	.212
Digital Competence	.503	−.006	.497

Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 10 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Decision
H1	JA → EP	Supported
H2	MS → EP	Supported
H3	DC → EP	Supported
H4	JA → EE	Supported
H5	MS → EE	Supported
H6	DC → EE	Not Supported
H7	EE → EP	Supported
H8	JA → EE → EP	Partial Mediation
H9	MS → EE → EP	Full Mediation
H10	DC → EE → EP	Not Supported

The results of the hypothesis-testing give significant evidence of the conceptual model, and seven out of ten propositions were supported. Job autonomy, managerial support, and digital competence proved to be important in predicting employee productivity in the direct-effects specification. When the concept of employee engagement was added as a mediating variable, the managerial support lost its significance, which is full mediation, but job autonomy remained a significant direct influence, which is partial mediation. Digital competence continued to have a strong direct impact on productivity but did not have a significant prediction power on engagement, thus it had no mediation effect. Additionally, job autonomy and managerial support had strong positive impacts on the engagement of the employees, and digital competence did not. Taken together, the findings highlight the importance of engagement as a key motivational channel organizing the linkage of organizational resources to productivity, but digital capability affects productivity in a less significant impact on psychological engagement and more on the basis of direct performance.

Discussion

The empirical data in this case supports the synthesized model that investigates the correlation of job resources, employee engagement, and productivity. In line with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theoretical framework, job autonomy and managerial support are some of the variables that facilitate the prediction of employee engagement, thus supporting the argument that organizational resources trigger motivational processes (Bakker & De Vries, 2021b). The strong impact of managerial support on engagement (b = .70) agrees with Social Exchange Theory, which assumes that the employees reflect the supportive leadership with increased psychological commitment to their work positions (Schaufeli, 2021).

Interesting patterns of mediation between them occur. Managerial support is an exclusively operating type, which means that engaged psychological conditions are the main way in which productivity is enhanced by supportive supervision. In contrast, job autonomy is partially mediating, which means that the autonomy influences productivity by both motivational and direct performance-enabling processes (Parker & Grote, 2022). The insignificant correlation between digital competence and engagement was intuited; nevertheless, digital competence exhibited the strongest direct impact on productivity (b = .50) which indicated it is an ability to act as a performance-facilitating skill, instead of a motivational resource (Trenerry et al., 2021).

Theoretical Implications

This study makes contributions towards organizational behavior research in three main ways. First, it provides empirical confirmation of the motivational pathway of the JD-R theory by showing that engagement mediates the correlation between job resources and productivity (Lesener et al., 2020). Second, the diverged mediation patterns define that not all resources work in the same way: managerial support requires transmission of engagement, and digital competence directly supports performance. Third, the combination of Human Capital Theory and JD -R theory explains how individual capabilities enhance organizational resources in the determination of productivity outcomes (Bakker, 2022).

Practical Implications

Managerial support development should be in the priorities of practitioners who have the objective of improving productivity since its impacts are all mediated by engagement. High-leverage intervention points include leadership training programs that focus on supportive behaviors, constructive feedback, as well as developmental opportunities. Jobs that are to be redesigned must incorporate autonomy-enhancing features, as both direct and engagement-mediated productivity gains are also realized. Moreover, the focused development of digital competence should be based on mastering the skills instead of focusing on engagement enhancement, and the emphasis on technical

training programs that allow accomplishing the tasks directly (Parker & Grote, 2022).

Limitations and Future Research

These findings are contextualized by a number of constraints. The design used is cross-sectional and it does not allow causal inference; longitudinal studies are justified to investigate how variables vary over time. The high inter-construct correlations indicate that there might be some issues of multicollinearity and there is the need to replicate using heterogeneous samples. The self-reported measures could cause an introduction of common method variance; objective productivity indicators should be added in future studies. The insignificant digital competence-engagement interaction is also worthy of additional examination in diverse work settings and technological conditions (Trenerry et al., 2021). Also, a study of the boundary conditions by moderation analyses would shed light on situations where or where engagement mediation is enhanced or weakened.

Conclusion

The current research investigated the mediation effect of employee engagement in the connection among job sources and productivity. Results verify that autonomy at work and managerial support increase engagement, and this further reflects on productivity. The entire mediation of managerial support highlights the critical role of engagement as the transmitting factor, and digital competence has a direct facilitating role on productivity regardless of the mediation of engagement. These outcomes contribute to the usage of JD-R theory and provide the empirical evidence to guide organizational interventions to improve the productivity of work-force by means of resource allocations and engagement development.

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