

DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR JOB AUTONOMY, WORK RESILIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

This study examines how job autonomy influences employee resilience, emphasising the mediating role of psychological empowerment. Using as methodology Systematic Literature Review (SLR) under the PRISMA protocol, 62 peer-reviewed articles (2010–2025) were analysed across five databases. Bibliometric mapping with VOSviewer identified three co-occurrence clusters: job autonomy, psychological empowerment and resilience. Findings reveal that job autonomy acts as a vital job resource that enhances psychological empowerment through meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact-thereby strengthening work resilience. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study develops an integrated conceptual framework linking autonomy, empowerment, and resilience. It highlights the importance of autonomy in reducing workplace stressors and the role of empowerment in fostering proactive, adaptive performance. Practically, it recommends culturally responsive HR strategies such as flexible work design, participative decision-making, and resilience-building programs to enhance adaptability and retention, offering an evidence-based framework for resilience development in emerging economies.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, job autonomy, psychological empowerment, SLR, work resilience

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Introduction

This research examines how job autonomy influences work resilience through the mediating role of psychological empowerment, aiming to develop a conceptual understanding of how employees adapt and perform effectively in dynamic environments. Job autonomy reflects employees' freedom, discretion, and control in organising work, fostering responsibility and intrinsic motivation (Jusdienar et al., 2024). Psychological empowerment comprises meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, promoting confidence, engagement, and proactive behaviour (Okatta et al., 2024). Work resilience denotes the ability to adapt, recover, and grow amid workplace stressors (Wursthorn et al., 2023). The study integrates three theoretical perspectives: the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, highlighting autonomy as a vital job resource; Self-Determination Theory (SDT), explaining how autonomy fulfils intrinsic needs; and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, emphasising the protection and accumulation of personal resources. Despite extensive research on these theories individually, no prior study has conceptually linked job autonomy, psychological empowerment, and work resilience together. Addressing this gap, the study offers an integrated explanation of how autonomy-driven empowerment enhances resilience, promoting sustainable motivation, engagement, and organisational development.

Theoretical Grounding

This article reviews research on job autonomy, psychological empowerment, and work resilience, three important factors that support employee adaptability and performance. But critically argues that existing theories are limited when used separately. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model views autonomy as a key job resource that helps reduce strain and improve motivation; however, it gives little attention to the internal psychological processes that explain how autonomy turns into resilience. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) adds value by explaining how autonomy satisfies needs for competence, meaning, self-determination, and impact, leading to empowerment, yet it focuses too narrowly on motivation and overlooks how employees sustain resilience in stressful environments. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory explains how people build, protect, and use resources such as autonomy and empowerment to remain resilient, but it does not clearly show how these resources are activated through motivation or supported by work context. By critically integrating these three theories, the study provides stronger theoretical grounding: JD-R explains autonomy as a structural job resource, SDT clarifies the psychological process that turns autonomy into empowerment, and COR shows how empowered employees protect and grow resilience. This integrated framework offers a more complete and balanced explanation of how job autonomy, psychological empowerment, and work resilience interact to promote employee well-being and performance.

Literature Review

Job Autonomy and Work Resilience

Job autonomy represents employees' freedom, discretion, and independence in organising and executing work tasks (Jusdienar et al., 2024). Work resilience refers to adapting, recovering, and thriving under workplace challenges (Wursthorn et al., 2023). The Job Demands-Resources model recognises autonomy as a crucial resource for resilience (Bakker & De Vries, 2020). Conservation of Resources theory views it as a means to preserve adaptive capacity (Yang & Oh, 2024).

Job autonomy enhances work resilience by enabling employees to effectively manage demands and regulate emotional responses (Park & Johnson, 2022). The Job Demands-Resources model positions autonomy as a protective factor against work stressors (Bakker & De Vries, 2020). Conservation of Resources theory explains that autonomy is a psychological resource supporting sustained performance (Yang & Oh, 2024). Empirical evidence shows autonomy fosters proactive coping strategies and adaptability in service industries (Mehmood & Saeed, 2021). Limited studies address this link in high-pressure organisational contexts (Satwika et al., 2025).

P1: Job Autonomy significantly affects Work Resilience.

Job autonomy satisfies the intrinsic need for self-determination, fostering psychological empowerment (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Psychological empowerment is characterised by meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact in one's work (Spreitzer, 1995). Autonomy enhances empowerment by increasing decision-making authority and aligning tasks with personal values (Zhang & Bartol, 2020). The Job Demands-Resources model highlights autonomy as a resource that promotes proactive behaviour (Bakker & De Vries, 2020). Empirical studies confirm autonomy's positive effect on empowerment in dynamic organisational settings (Okatta et al., 2024).

P2: Job Autonomy significantly affects Psychological Empowerment.

Psychological empowerment strengthens work resilience by equipping employees with confidence, competence, and adaptability (Yang & Oh, 2024). It enhances coping with challenges and maintaining performance levels (Satwika et al., 2025). Conservation of Resources theory identifies empowerment as a resource that mitigates stress (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The Job Demands-Resources model explains empowerment’s role in amplifying job resources to build resilience (Bakker & De Vries, 2020). Studies show empowered employees maintain higher engagement and adaptability under pressure (Mehmood & Saeed, 2021).

P3: *Psychological Empowerment significantly affects Work Resilience.*

Psychological empowerment mediates the link between job autonomy and work resilience by transforming autonomy into adaptive capacity (Yang & Oh, 2024). Self-Determination Theory explains that autonomy fulfilment increases empowerment (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Empowered employees effectively utilise autonomy to address challenges (Okatta et al., 2024). The Job Demands–Resources model positions empowerment as a mechanism converting resources into resilience (Bakker & De Vries, 2020). This mediating role is underexplored in organisational contexts requiring high adaptability and performance (Satwika et al., 2025).

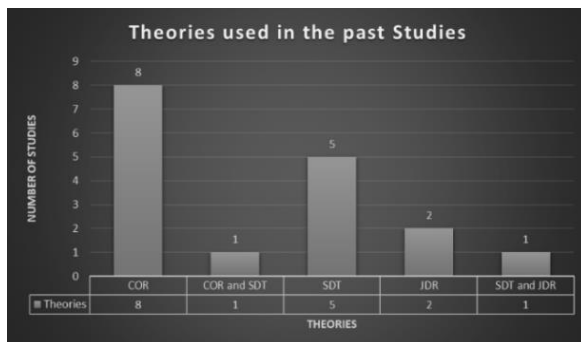
P4: *Psychological Empowerment mediates the relationship between Job Autonomy and Work Resilience.*

Theoretical Gap

Figure 1 demonstrates that existing literature has predominantly employed COR (Conservation of Resources Theory) as the primary theoretical lens (8 studies), followed by SDT (Self-Determination Theory; 5 studies) and JDR (Job Demands-Resources Theory; 2 studies) in examining well-being and performance in high-pressure environments. While minimal research has explored dual-theory integrations (1 study each for COR-SDT and SDT-JDR combinations), a critical gap persists: no study has incorporated COR, SDT, and JDR frameworks simultaneously.

This tripartite integration is theoretically imperative, as COR explains resource dynamics, SDT elucidates motivational pathways, and JDR contextualises environmental demands – three interdependent dimensions essential for comprehensively understanding stress-performance relationships. By developing a novel COR-SDT-JDR synthesis, this study addresses this theoretical limitation and provides a more robust foundation for designing multidimensional interventions in high-stakes occupational contexts.

Figure 1
Theories used in past studies



(Source: Authors’ compilation)

Methodology

This study combines Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis to ensure comprehensive and unbiased results. The SLR offers a structured, transparent process for identifying and synthesising literature (Kraus et al., 2020), while bibliometric analysis provides a quantitative approach to map research trends and relationships (Donthu et al., 2021). As noted by Zupic and Čater (2015), this method minimises interpretive bias and enhances analytical rigour. Using VOSviewer supports accuracy by identifying keyword clusters and emerging themes (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014), ensuring a valid, evidence-based analysis.

Article Selection for the Review

This study adopts a five-stage Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to explore job autonomy and its impact on work resilience. SLR enables a structured examination of literature to identify key constructs, themes, and trends (Kraus, Breier & Dasi-Rodriguez, 2020).

Stage 1: Relevant keywords were identified to define the study scope.

Stage 2: Peer-reviewed articles were selected from five academic databases: ResearchGate, Sage, Emerald, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley Online, covering 2010 to 2025. These sources ensure credibility, broad disciplinary coverage, and up-to-date, high-quality research.

Stage 3: The PRISMA method (Liberati et al., 2009) was used for article selection, including identification, screening, and inclusion. Keywords included “Job Autonomy,” “Work Resilience,” “Psychological Empowerment,” “SLR,” and “Bibliometric Analysis.” Boolean operators "OR" and "AND" were used to refine the search screening involved automatic and manual reviews, with article inclusion validated by two authors through discussion.

Out of 82 initially identified articles, 62 were retained for final analysis. These were exported to Excel and then analysed using VOSviewer. The PRISMA process and inclusion criteria are shown in Table I and Figure 2.

Table 1
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
1. Articles published between 2010 and 2025 in well-known databases: Research Gate, Taylor and Francis, Emerald, Springer, Wiley Online Library, Elsevier and Sage	Any publication before the year 2010 and after 2025
2. Academic journals	Books, online sites and grey literature (conferences, papers, working papers from research groups and technical reports) are excluded.
3. Publication as an article	The publication is not an article.
4. Articles are written in the English language	Articles are written in any language other than English

(Source: Authors' compilation)

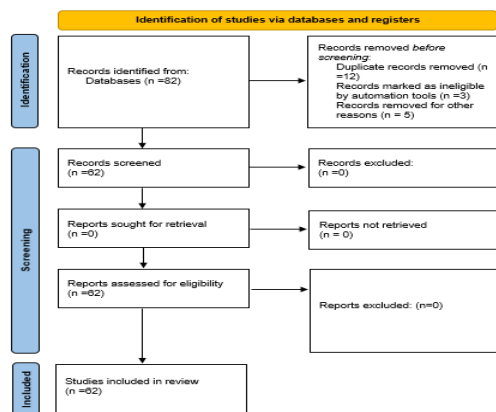
Stage 4: A bibliometric analysis was conducted on 62 articles using VOSviewer software to identify key research patterns and visualise the study areas.

Stage 5: Content analysis was performed on articles within each VOSviewer-defined cluster to examine the relationships between the core variables.

Risk of Bias Assessment

To minimise researcher bias in article selection and analysis, this study followed the PRISMA framework and a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to ensure transparent and objective inclusion of studies. (Xiao and Watson 2019) emphasised that systematic and predetermined selection procedures reduce subjective judgment in reviews. Two independent reviewers conducted parallel quality assessments to further reduce selection bias, as recommended by Brereton et al. 2007). In addition, a predefined protocol specifying analytical techniques was used to prevent analysis bias (Xiao & Watson, 2019). These strategies enhanced the overall credibility and validity of the review.

Figure 2
PRISMA flow diagram



(Source: Authors' compilation)

Analytical Methods

A bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer, which quantitatively maps and analyses research patterns. Aparicio et al. (2019) highlighted that bibliometric analysis helps identify research trends objectively, while Paule-Vianez et al. (2020) supported its use in evaluating scientific output. Co-occurrence analysis was applied to extract and cluster frequently used terms from article abstracts. According to Van Eck and Waltman (2014), this method visually represents conceptual relationships and minimises interpretive bias. The resulting clusters revealed key themes related to the antecedents and outcomes of entrepreneurial intention (Priyashantha et al., 2023).

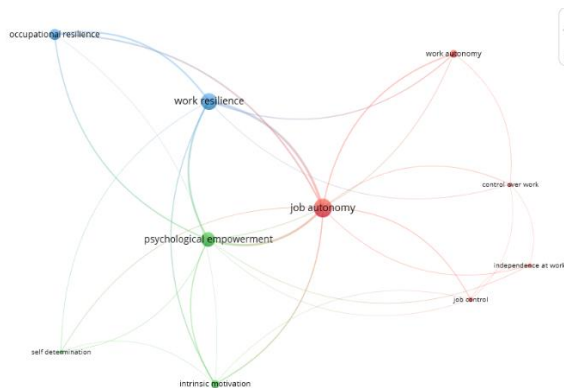
Results

The study analysed 62 articles, with 45% sourced from ResearchGate, highlighting its prominence as an open-access platform. Emerald (16%) and Sage (13%) were secondary sources, while Taylor & Francis (5%) and Wiley (3%) contributed fewer works. Geographically, Europe (40%) and Asia (32%) dominated the research output, followed by North America (18%), Africa (8%), and Oceania (2%), reflecting a strong Euro-Asian scholarly focus with global representation.

Themes of the antecedents and outcomes of work resilience

This section addresses the study's first objective to objectively explore the themes of Job Autonomy and Work Resilience using VOSviewer's term co-occurrence network visualization. The minimum threshold for term occurrence was set at five, meaning only terms appearing five or more times in article abstracts were included. This threshold ensures analytical reliability by focusing on frequently occurring, conceptually significant terms while excluding infrequent or irrelevant ones, as recommended in bibliometric studies (Zupic & Čater, 2015). The network, displayed in Figure 3, identified 10 key terms connected by co-occurrence links, illustrating conceptual relationships.

Figure 3
Co-occurrence network



(Source: Authors' compilation)

The VOSviewer automatically grouped these terms into three distinct colour-coded clusters, justified by their conceptual proximity and thematic coherence. Three clusters were selected to capture the main research variables -work resilience, psychological empowerment, and job autonomy without over-fragmenting the dataset, ensuring interpretive clarity and theoretical alignment (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). These clusters are:

Cluster 01 (Blue) - Work Resilience Factors: This cluster links resilience with optimism, emotional intelligence, and leadership support (Mache et al., 2014). It connects to job autonomy and psychological empowerment, highlighting their joint role in enhancing adaptability and coping (Mehmood & Saeed, 2021).

Cluster 02 (Green) - Psychological Empowerment: Representing empowerment-related terms, this cluster emphasises participative leadership, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation (Thanh & Van Quang, 2022; Van Den Broeck & Parker, 2017). Organisational practices promoting feedback and inclusivity further enhance empowerment (Okatta et al., 2024).

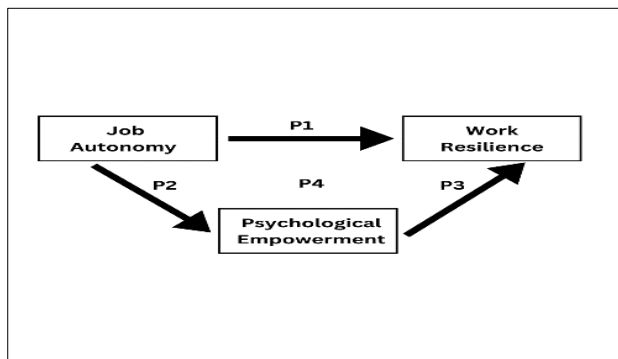
Cluster 03 (Red) - Job Autonomy: Rooted in Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) model, this cluster highlights decision-making freedom, task scheduling, and work methods. Leadership style also shapes perceived autonomy (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Overall, the three-cluster model provides a clear, balanced representation of the interconnections among job autonomy, psychological empowerment, and work resilience.

Conceptual Framework Development

This study integrates the JD-R model, SDT, and COR theory to explain how job autonomy (JA) fosters work resilience (WR) through psychological empowerment (PE). JA functions as a job resource (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and satisfies psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2020), leading to PE (Spreitzer, 1995), which strengthens resilience by protecting psychological resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The framework positions PE as the link between JA and WR, contextualised for Sri Lanka’s insurance sales sector.

Figure 4
Conceptual framework



(Source: Authors’ compilation)

Theoretical Implications

This study advances theoretical integration by connecting Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to explain how job autonomy enhances work resilience through psychological empowerment. (Ryan and Deci, 2020) emphasise autonomy as a critical psychological need within SDT, while Bakker and Demerouti 2017) highlight autonomy as a key job resource in the JD-R framework. Future research could test this integrated model across different industries, cultures, and organisational contexts to examine its generalizability. Seibert et al. (2011) suggest exploring autonomy alongside competence and relatedness to assess multi-dimensional effects on empowerment. Hobfoll et al. (2018) recommend investigating how resource gain and loss cycles sustain resilience over time. Moreover, Kossek and Perrigino 2016) propose analysing autonomy-demand balance in remote or hybrid work settings to refine resilience theory. Future studies could also introduce new moderators or variables, such as emotional intelligence, leadership style, or organisational support, to explore boundary conditions and strengthen the explanatory power of the model.

Practical Implications

These findings offer culturally relevant strategies for organisations across sectors, including software and insurance, to boost workforce resilience. Given Sri Lanka's high-power-distance workplace culture, structured autonomy interventions, such as flexible task scheduling (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and localised decision-making on project execution, can balance hierarchy with empowerment (Thanh & Van Quang, 2022). Training should incorporate collectivist values by framing empowerment as team-based competence development (Satwika et al., 2025), aligning with Sri Lankan communal work norms. Given project pressures and rapid technological changes, HR and policy frameworks should combine autonomy with regular resilience workshops addressing local work stressors such as tight deadlines and resource constraints (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016). Such tailored measures can guide managers and policymakers in enhancing retention and performance across diverse organisational contexts.

Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a specific employee group, limiting generalizability across organisational contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences, as resilience and empowerment may change over time. Third, reliance on self-reported data may introduce common method bias. Fourth, non-English and grey literature (e.g., conference papers, unpublished reports) were excluded, potentially omitting relevant insights. Finally, contextual factors such as organisational culture and market conditions were not controlled, which may affect outcomes. Addressing these limitations in future research can enhance the robustness and applicability of the conceptual framework.

Conclusion

This study establishes a comprehensive conceptual foundation for understanding the dynamic relationships among job autonomy, psychological empowerment, and work resilience. By integrating the Job Demands–Resources model, Self-Determination Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory, it offers a multidimensional framework that positions psychological empowerment as the critical mediating mechanism linking autonomy to resilience. Through a systematic and bibliometric analysis, the study consolidates theoretical and empirical insights, addressing key gaps in prior research that examined these constructs in isolation. The findings emphasise the necessity of exploring autonomy-driven empowerment processes across diverse organisational contexts to better understand how employees adapt and sustain performance in complex, demanding environments. Overall, this work contributes to both theory and practice by advancing a holistic framework that highlights the strategic role of autonomy and empowerment in cultivating a resilient, motivated, and high-performing workforce.

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