

Individual work design as a job demand: The double-edged sword of autonomy¹

Franziska Bredehöft*, Jan Dettmers*, Annekatrin Hoppe** & Monique Janneck****

* Work and Organizational Psychology, University of Hamburg

** Department of Psychology, MSH Medical School Hamburg

*** Work Psychology, Humboldt University Berlin

**** Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Luebeck University of Applied Sciences

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study developed and examined the role of high autonomy in relation to individual work design as a job demand. We argue that designing one's own job may require additional effort beyond dealing with the job demands associated with the core work tasks. We conducted 41 semi-structured interviews with employees with high levels of autonomy and flexibility at work, revealing different work characteristics that need to be designed, along with individual efforts to cope with the work situation. Some of these efforts were clearly necessary to work efficiently, ensure long-term professional success and preserve internal resources. They represented an increase in expended effort in addition to working on regular tasks, supporting our concept of individual work design as a job demand. This study contributes to the research on job autonomy, challenging its positive reputation as one of the most important job resources.

Keywords

Individual work design – autonomy – job demands

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