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# Freedom Brings Thriving: The Impact of Job Autonomy on Job Thriving and Its Boundary Conditions

Xinyi Lu<sup>1\*</sup>, Rixuan Ou<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>SILC Business School, Shanghai University, China

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### \*Correspondence:

[luxinyi200304@shu.edu.cn](mailto:luxinyi200304@shu.edu.cn)

### ABSTRACT

With the continuous enhancement of the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA) attribute of world economic development, how to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and enhance competitiveness with employee management as the entry point has become a topic that academia and enterprises pay more and more attention to. Based on 270 survey data obtained from empirical research, this research explores the impact of job autonomy on job thriving and its influencing mechanism based on self-determination theory and cognitive evaluation theory. In the research process, the regression model was used to test the mediating role of employees' Organization-based self-esteem in the process of job autonomy and the moderating role of employees' job insecurity in job autonomy affecting job thriving. The empirical results show that in the actual work experience, employees' job autonomy has a significant positive impact on Organization-based self-esteem and job thriving, employees' job insecurity plays a significant positive moderating role in the impact of job autonomy on Organization-based self-esteem, and Organization-based self-esteem plays a partial mediating role between job autonomy and job thriving. At the same time, this paper projects the research conclusions into reality and proposes that in the VUCA era, enterprises should pay attention to people-oriented, provide employees with appropriate work freedom and security, and individuals should give full play to their subjective initiative, improve work efficiency, and achieve job thriving.

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Today's society has fully entered the era of continuous and stable VUCA, whose variability, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity make the business competition more and more intense (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Enterprises are faced with the impact of the changing external environment and must constantly adapt and adjust to face brand-new opportunities and

challenges. As an important factor for enterprises to obtain competitive advantage, the size of the value created by employees has a decisive role in the rise and fall of enterprises. How to update the management and incentive strategies of employees to maximize their effectiveness is the most concerning issue for current enterprise managers. The research of Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) shows that compared with the older generation of employees focus on stability and material treatment and conditions, the younger generation born in Generation Z pays more attention to the spiritual level of fulfillment and the mental health and satisfaction at work, coupled with the current turbulent environment will aggravate the employee's sense of insecurity, so the spirit of giving employees incentives and a sense of security at work has an important impact on the new generation of employees' sense of identity and performance enhancement of the company (Parry & Urwin, 2011). In this context, both the organizational level and the individual level of employees hope that the organizational management can be adjusted in a targeted manner, on the one hand, to improve corporate performance and competitiveness, on the other hand, can also enhance the job satisfaction and job happiness of employees.

Job autonomy, as one of the three basic needs of self-determination theory, has been widely discussed in academia. Although the existing literature has found that job autonomy has a significant contributing effect on employee performance through empirical analysis (Park, 2018), it tends to explore only the effect of job autonomy on a single performance, such as employee innovativeness, constructive behavior, and other factors. These studies only indicate that job autonomy has a positive impact on employee performance but do not discuss its underlying mechanism. In addition, job thriving, as a variable with complex characterization and influencing factors, includes the employee's work enthusiasm, work efficiency, work results, and other dimensions, and it lacks systematic manpower and in-depth exploratory research in existing academic studies.

Therefore, this research aims to make two theoretical contributions to fill the research gaps. First, we investigate the mediating effect between job autonomy and job thriving through the self-concept process (i.e., organization-based self-esteem). It will enrich the underlying mechanism of how the job design factors influence job thriving. Second, we extend the current research by proposing job insecurity as the boundary condition between job autonomy and organization-based self-esteem. This study attempts to integrate the theories and methods of these different disciplines, providing a new paradigm for interdisciplinary research and promoting the integration and development of related disciplines on this topic. With 270 questionnaires as the samples, this paper will further improve the exploration of the influence mechanism of job autonomy on job thriving in order to enrich the relevant theories of organizational behavior.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The concept of job autonomy first appeared in the work characteristics model constructed by Hackman and Oldham (1976), who defined it as the degree of freedom, independence, and self-determination of an individual in organizing their work process and determining their work procedures at work. Based on summarizing the previous studies, Dysvik and Kuvaas (2011) gave a more precise definition: job autonomy is regarded as the substantive freedom that

employees have at work, including the discretion to decide how to do work, when to do work, and who to cooperate with to complete the work. This definition encompasses the ability of employees to manage and decide independently on work methods, work schedules, and work standards and is often linked to job flexibility (De Spiegelaere et al., 2014). Since the concept of job autonomy was proposed, many scholars have conducted more in-depth theoretical research and empirical analysis of this concept. Ting et al. (2023) further analyzed and discussed the definition of job autonomy on the framework of the existing research, and they believed that job autonomy is the degree of self-determination of employees on the way of work, the progress of work, and the performance evaluation criteria of the work.

Job thriving is a psychological state in which an individual feels active and learning simultaneously during the work process (Spreitzer et al., 2005). In addition, Spreitzer et al. (2005) proposed the concept of “psychological capital”, which emphasizes the accumulation and utilization of employees' psychological resources by job thriving, thus promoting the development of employees and the continuous progress of the organization. Job thriving has a positive impact on improving employee performance in many ways. Existing studies have shown that job thriving not only enhances an individual's organizational commitment and subjective well-being and reduces burnout as well as the tendency to leave the job (Kleine et al., 2019) but also promotes the shaping of positive work actions such as creative behavior (Isham et al., 2021). Overall, job thriving refers to the positive experience and emotional state of employees at work, which has a positive impact on both the individual employee and the organization.

Organization-based self-esteem is the degree to which members of an organization believe that they can satisfy their own needs by fulfilling their organizational roles, reflecting the recognition and evaluation of their own image, value, and status by individuals in the organization (Pierce et al., 1989). Organization-based self-esteem is not only an individual's emotional projection of the organization but also a reflection of the culture and climate of the organization, which reflects the degree of trust and recognition of the members within the organization. In organizations, self-esteem is regarded as an important organizational attitude, which is closely related to employees' work engagement, satisfaction, and performance. Employees with high organization-based self-esteem show more positive work attitudes and higher collective engagement (Tao et al., 2024).

Job insecurity was first proposed by Heaney et al. (1994); it refers to employees' perceptions and concerns about the uncertainty and insecurity of their working environment, working conditions or job prospects. Specifically, it reflects the degree of concern and anxiety of employees about the stability and security of their jobs (Lee et al., 2018). Job insecurity has a variety of factors; the work environment and atmosphere are some of the important factors; poor working environment, bad labor relations, high-pressure work, and other factors may lead to job insecurity among employees. Macroeconomic factors such as economic instability, inflation, and rising unemployment can negatively affect employees' employment prospects, thus triggering job insecurity (Muñoz Medina et al., 2023).

### **Relevant Theories**

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the theories of Self-determination (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) and cognitive appraisal (Deci et al., 1981).

Self-determination theory aims to explain how individuals form and adjust their self-concepts in organizations by observing their own behavior and the reactions of others to their behavior (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). According to the theory, an individual's self-concept mainly consists of intrinsic self-concept and extrinsic self-concept. Intrinsic self-concept refers to an individual's perception of their own intrinsic traits, abilities, and values, while extrinsic self-concept refers to an individual's perception of themselves formed by observing others' reactions to his or her behavior. Basic psychological need theory is a new development of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which focuses on the characterization of environmental factors that can effectively help individuals integrate their self-activities and establish their foundations and proposes that the ability to meet the three psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relationships is the most important factor in facilitating the growth and refinement of an individual's personality and cognitive structure. Self-determination theory provides a theoretical framework for researchers to understand how individuals perceive and evaluate their own behaviors in organizations, which influences their behaviors and attitudes. Based on self-determination theory, job autonomy satisfies employees' psychological needs for autonomy and thus has a positive impact on employees' behavior, which is consistent with the main effect of this study.

Cognitive appraisal theory (Deci et al., 1981) suggests that environmental factors have an impact on intrinsic motivation through two basic cognitive processes. First, environmental factors can alter the path of causality in an individual's cognitive processes. For example, Liang et al. (2023) claimed that upward reporting, time-limited tasks, supervision and evaluation, and scoring systems tend to make individuals feel that the behavioral process is controlled by others, losing their personal independence and thus reducing their intrinsic motivation. For the contrary, external events such as free scheduling at work, rich opportunities for choices, and democratic advice and suggestions can make individuals feel self-determined and thus increase their intrinsic motivation. In addition, socio-environmental factors can influence an individual's feelings of competence (Fu et al., 2024). Intrinsic drive is elevated when external environmental events make others feel competent without diminishing one's own feelings of competence. Cognitive appraisal theory provides a path for researchers to understand how individuals perceive external environmental factors in organizations and internalize them to enhance or diminish internal motivation. Based on the cognitive appraisal theory, external economic downturn stimuli will be internalized as employees' job insecurity, which will then stimulate changes in employees' work behavior.

### **Previous Studies**

Job autonomy is considered to have an important impact on employees. In order to measure job autonomy, Breugh (1989) developed three latitude measurement scales, including method autonomy, time autonomy, and standard autonomy, and his findings have been recognized by most scholars in this field. On the basis of Breugh's study, job autonomy is believed to enhance employees' freedom to self-define their roles and division of labor within the enterprise, granting them greater autonomy in their work (De Spiegelaere et al., 2014). These effects are divided into two main types in later studies: the first type is the direct effect, such as work initiative may influence employees' work performance, advice and other activities (Lopes et al., 2014). The other type is the moderating effect, such as work autonomy, which plays a

moderating role in employees' psychology, behavior, and work results (Kim et al., 2019). In contrast, job autonomy brings not only benefits but also disadvantages: the findings of Wang and Dong (2024) suggested that uncontrolled job autonomy has a negative impact on a company's work efficiency and its ultimate performance outcomes. Despite these insights, a notable research gap remains: the lack of studies on how the relationship between job autonomy and job thriving is realized and what factors affect it.

Early research on job thriving focused on the effects of job thriving on individual employees. For example, a study by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) found that job thriving is closely related to employees' well-being and job satisfaction, as well as to their performance and performance levels. With the depth of research, more and more scholars began to pay attention to the relationship between job thriving and organizational performance. For example, Bakker and Demerouti's (2017) study pointed out that job thriving is positively correlated with the productivity and employee performance level of an organization, illustrating the positive impact of job thriving on organizational performance. Based on existing research, it has been found that many previous studies often did not have a clear boundary between job thriving and job efficiency. In fact, the two are different concepts. Job thriving includes two aspects: employees' positive psychology and efficient job efficiency. Starting from the psychology of employees, this study constructs the influence path from job autonomy to job thriving, which can help draw the line between job thriving and job efficiency and clarify the path to job thriving.

Early research on Organization-based self-esteem focused mainly on the fields of organizational psychology and organizational behavior. For example, the prototype of this theory is the "organizational identity" theory proposed by Kahn in 1990, which links employees' identification with the organization and Organization-based self-esteem and considers the two to be closely related. In addition, Gordon and Hood (2021) regarded Organization-based self-esteem as an individual's self-perception of their value and effectiveness in the organizational context. It includes beliefs about one's capabilities, significance, and worthiness regarding the organization and its work. In recent years, as the importance of building organizational culture as well as enhancing employee well-being has gradually emerged, more and more studies have begun to focus on the relationship between Organization-based self-esteem and employee well-being. For example, Kim et al. (2022) found through a questionnaire survey of 425 employees that quality environmental resources enhance employees' job crafting by shaping organization-based self-esteem. This indicates that organization-based self-esteem not only has an important impact on organizational performance and employee performance but is also closely related to subjective well-being. Overall, Organization-based self-esteem is a manifestation of organizational members' identification, pride, and loyalty to the organization, which has an important impact on organizational performance, employee work engagement, and well-being. Organization-based self-esteem is often linked with employees' job performance, but there is currently little research mentioning that job autonomy is beneficial for the development of organization-based self-esteem. This research proposes that organization-based self-esteem can serve as a mediator variable connecting job autonomy and job thriving, providing new insights for research on organization-based self-esteem.

Early research on job insecurity focused on the effects of job insecurity on employees' psychological and physiological health. Shoss (2017) proposed that employees' feelings of job insecurity are negatively related to the productivity and performance level of the organization.

Subsequent research confirmed Shoss's view. Dong et al. (2020) found that job insecurity was associated with anxiety and depression and caused employees to have negative self-evaluation. With the depth of research, more and more scholars began to focus on the relationship between job insecurity and organizational performance. While some scholars have proposed the opposite view, De Cuyper et al.'s (2020) study concluded that there is no significant negative correlation between job insecurity and job performance, and not only that, from the workers' perspective, job insecurity urges them to work harder in order to protect themselves from being fired. However, there has been no research to discuss whether job autonomy will be affected by job insecurity, which is exactly the concern of this institute.

### **Research Hypothesis**

With the change in the external environment, the increase in work pressure, and the increase in the complexity of the work content, both the industry environment and the enterprise put forward higher requirements for the adaptability and creativity of the employees. How to give employees appropriate work freedom through decentralized management to stimulate their work motivation has become the focus of attention in the academic world nowadays. According to the self-determination theory, autonomy is one of the three basic conditions that promote the growth and improvement of individual cognitive structure (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In an earlier study, Deci et al. (1989) pointed out that employees with higher levels of job autonomy tend to be more inclined to be engaged in their work and show higher levels of work ethic and positive attitudes. In addition, Muecke and Iseke (2019) found that job autonomy can lead to better job performance by increasing motivation and relieving stress. Discussing from a psychological perspective, a study by Clausen et al. (2022) showed that a higher level of job autonomy would have a non-linear positive impact on the mental health of employees, which in turn promotes job thriving. We therefore predict,

**Hypothesis 1.** Job autonomy is significantly and positively related to job thriving

According to cognitive appraisal theory, environmental factors can enhance internal motivation by altering the perception of competence allowing individuals to build a sense of job competence and confidence (Deci et al., 1981). Based on this theory, this paper proposes a new research idea that a high degree of freedom environment will positively change employees' evaluation of their own work and build organization-based self-esteem. According to Su et al. (2022), job autonomy promotes the formation of employees' organization-based self-esteem and uses this as an intermediary to increase employees' active behavior. We therefore predict,

**Hypothesis 2.** Job autonomy is significantly and positively related to organization-based self-esteem

Organizational self-esteem represents an individual's recognition of self and the worthiness of the work he or she performs in an organization. According to existing research, it has been found that organizations with high levels of organizational self-esteem tend to create more positive work environments that promote employees' feelings of job thriving. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that employees may be more likely to achieve a sense of accomplishment, recognition, and fulfillment in such organizations. Additionally, Filosa and Alessandri (2022) showed that organizational self-esteem is significantly positively correlated

with key organizational results (such as job satisfaction, commitment, and participation) and job performance. There are also studies that state that organizational self-esteem is closely related to employees' identification with the organization. When employees have a sense of identification with and respect for the organization they work for, they are more prone to feel that they are thriving in their jobs. This is because they link their personal accomplishments to the organization's success (Kuo & Wu, 2022). We therefore predict,

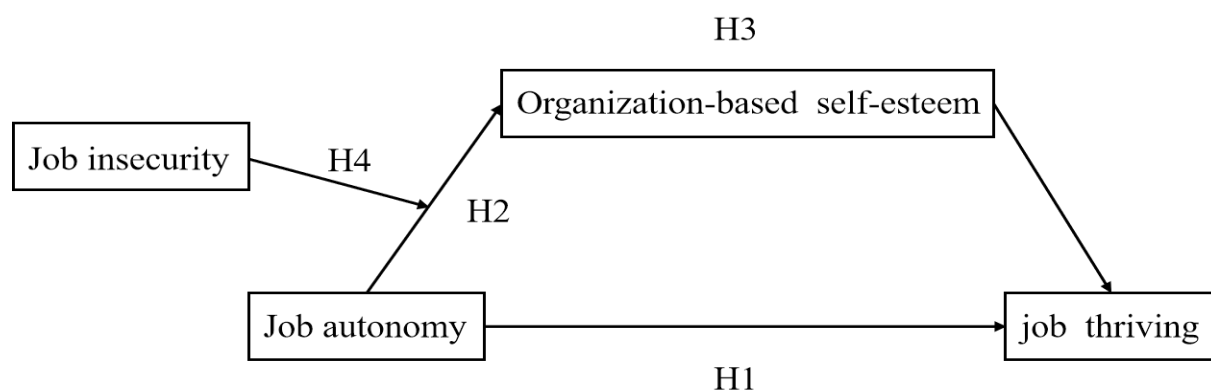
**Hypothesis 3.** Organization-based self-esteem mediates the relationship between job autonomy affecting job thriving

Existing research has concluded that job insecurity is considered to be one of the most prominent sources of job stress among employees. External environmental turbulence or negative feedback within the organization can cause employees to feel job insecurity. Moderate job insecurity is conducive to stimulating employee potential, according to Fu and Lihua (2012), using 334 employees from thirteen large-scale enterprise groups in China as a research sample study, it was concluded that job insecurity has an inverted U-shaped effect on the innovative behavior of team members, and moderate job insecurity is conducive to stimulating the innovative behavior of employees (Wu et al., 2021). In addition, Callea et al. (2019) concluded from a sample of 751 Italian employees' self-assessment questionnaires that job insecurity has a significant moderating effect on employees' self-esteem and indirectly affects employees' well-being (Callea et al., 2019). In the latest research, based on the background that AI is widely used in work scenarios, which showed that the realization of job substitution of employees by AI in some work processes would grow employees' technological insecurity to a certain extent, and motivate employees to improve their innovation ability and to cultivate and enhance their own irreplaceable advantages (Shen, 2024). Based on existing research, it is inferred that appropriate job insecurity will prompt employees to view job autonomy as motivation rather than pressure, which will positively contribute to the formation of a mechanism for building organization-based self-esteem after obtaining job autonomy. We therefore predict,

**Hypothesis 4.** Job insecurity plays a moderating role in the relationship between job autonomy affecting organization-based self-esteem

Based on the above four hypotheses, the research model of this paper is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
Research Model



## Method

### Questionnaire Design

The scales used in the questionnaire design of this study were all well-established scales from the existing literature that have been shown to possess good reliability. In addition, all scale items were standardized for measurement with reference to the Likert 5-point scale (1 indicates strong disagreement and 5 indicates strong agreement).

*Job autonomy.* The job autonomy variable refers to the Job Autonomy Scale proposed by Parker et al. (2006), which consists of nine questions. Typical examples of these questions are “I often assist in monitoring and controlling the overall performance of my work group”. (Cronbach  $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Job thriving.* The job thriving scale for this study utilized a simplified version of the Job Thriving Scale developed by Porath et al. (2012), with 10 items, of which the typical title is “At work, I continue to learn more and more as time goes by”. (Cronbach  $\alpha = .79$ ).

*Organization-based self-esteem.* The organizational self-esteem scale refers to a simplified version of the Organization-based Self-Esteem Scale proposed by Pierce et al. (1989), which has 10 items, of which the typical question is “In the company, I have confidence in myself”. (Cronbach  $\alpha = .51$ ).

*Job insecurity.* The job insecurity variable used in this paper refers to the Job Insecurity Scale proposed by Sverke and Hellgren (2002), which has been simplified based on it and consists of seven questions. Typical examples of these questions are “I am worried that I will have to leave my job before I want to”. (Cronbach  $\alpha = .53$ )

### Sample

This study used an online survey platform (i.e., wjx.cn) to recruit the respondents. It is a well-known research data collection platform, like Mturk. The data were collected in two stages. In the first stage, 400 valid questionnaires were finally collected. On the basis of the first stage, the Second-stage questionnaires were distributed and collected two weeks later, and 270 questionnaires were recovered, with a questionnaire recovery rate of 68%. In the final screening of valid questionnaires, according to the three indicators of the completeness of the questionnaire responses, the consistency of the responses before and after the two phases, and the time of answering the questions, that is to say, screening out the questionnaires containing two or more errors or omissions in the responses, the questionnaires with obvious changes in attitudes before and after, and questionnaires with too short answering time, all the questionnaires met the requirements, and the final number of valid questionnaires was 270.

After obtaining the sample data, this paper analyzed the data of 270 samples, mainly using SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 21.0 software. In order to control the variables that may affect the association, three control variables were identified in this questionnaire: gender, age, and education level. The findings showed that the subjects contained 38.9% males and 61.1% females; 15.2% were aged 18-25, 71.1% were aged 26-35, 11.9% were aged 36-45, and 1.9% were aged 46-55; 3.3% had high school or vocational high school education, 57.4% had a college degree, 37.8% had a university degree, and 1.5% had a graduate, and 1.5% had a postgraduate degree or higher.



## Results

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this study, confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurements. According to Table 1, the measurement model had a good fit index:  $\chi^2/df = 1.471 < 3$ , and RMSEA = .04 ( $< 0.08$ ), and CFI and GFI are greater than .80, NFI = .78, slightly lower than 0.8, the rest of them meet the requirements. Additionally, all of the factor loadings were significant, demonstrating a good convergent validity.

**Table 1**

#### Structural Validity Analysis

Fitting Index	Evaluation Standard	Research Data
$\chi^2/df$	Between 1-3, the closer to 1 the better	1.47
GFI	>0.8, the closer to 1 the better	0.85
CFI	>0.8, the closer to 1 the better	0.92
NFI	>0.8, the closer to 1 the better	0.78
RMSEA	<0.08, the closer to 0 the better	0.04

We further calculate Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable. According to Table 2, the AVE for each variable consistently exceeded the shared variance, defined as the square of the correlation, between the respective variable and any other variable. Consequently, the discriminant validity of the constructs was affirmed, and all four constructs were included in subsequent analyses.

**Table 2**

#### Convergent Validity Analysis

Research variables	AVE	CR
Job autonomy	.48	.82
Job thriving	.49	.79
Organization-based self-esteem	.51	.88
Job insecurity	.53	.85

### Correlation Analysis

As a statistical method, correlation analysis can be used to study the degree of association between two or more variables and assess the strength and direction of the link between them. The present analysis tests the linear correlation between job autonomy, job prosperity, organizational self-esteem, and job insecurity. The Pearson correlation coefficient is used in this study for the analytical test and correlation determination. As can be seen from Table 3, job autonomy and job thriving show a positive correlation ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ), while it is positively correlated with organizational self-esteem ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ). This proves that enhancing job autonomy promotes job prosperity and also enhances employees' organizational self-esteem, which to some extent can lay the foundation for further verification of the hypothesized variable relationships of H1 and H2. Meanwhile, organization-based self-esteem is positively correlated with job prosperity ( $r = .74, p < .01$ ) indicating that enhancing organizational self-esteem positively affects job prosperity, which provides a basis for further verification of H3. Job insecurity showed a negative correlation with organizational self-esteem ( $r = -.37, p < .01$ ), indicating that job insecurity plays a negative role in organizational self-esteem. In conclusion,

there is a significant correlation between all variables, which allows for the next step of sample data analysis.

**Table 3**  
*Correlation Analysis*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1						
2. Age	-.21	1					
3. Educational level	-.62	.12	1				
4. Job autonomy	-.16*	.07	.13*	1			
5. Job thriving	-.11	.10	-.003	.42**	1		
6. Organization-based self-esteem	-.13*	.01*	.08	.44**	.74**	1	
7. Job insecurity	-.16*	-.15*	-.05	-.02**	-.35**	-.37**	1

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

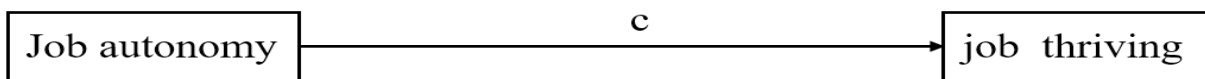
### Hypothesis Testing

This study adopts the experimental model of the intermediary role and adjustment effect in the Process macro program written by Hayes (2018) and uses models 4 and 7 to study the mechanism of the influence of job autonomy on the prosperity and development of engineering. In this process, model 4 verifies the intermediary effect on the internal self-esteem of the organization, while model 7 verifies the regulating effect on the insecurity of the work environment. In the study, the deviation-corrected Bootstrap method was used to test the significance of the regression coefficient, and repeated sampling was set up 5,000 times with a confidence interval of 95%. When the confidence interval does not contain 0, the result is significant. In this study, SPSS 27.0 statistical software was used to complete all data analysis.

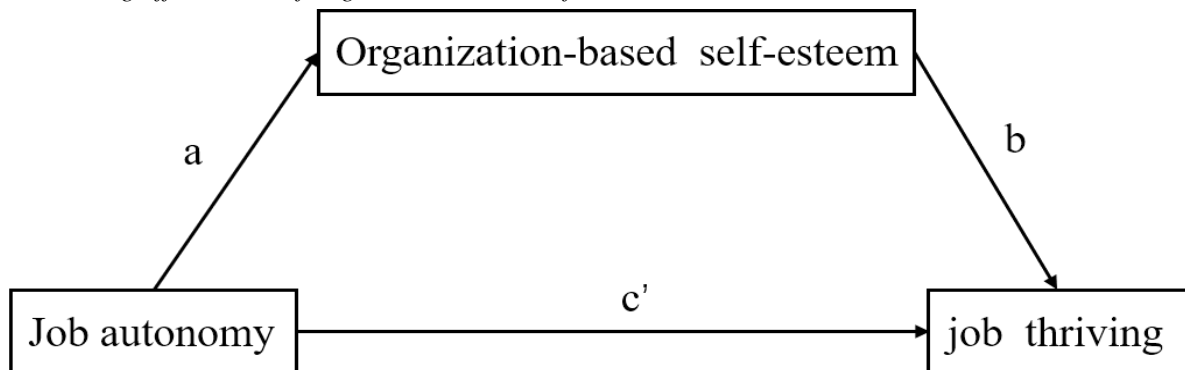
### Mediator Effect Test

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the main effect and intermediate effect of this paper, respectively.

**Figure 2**  
*Main Effect*



**Figure 3**  
*The Mediating Effect Model of Organization-based Self-esteem*



This study is grounded in the theory by Wen et al. (2014), and it first measures the mediating effect. The test uses Model 4 from the Process, with job autonomy as the independent variable, job thriving as the dependent variable, and organizational self-esteem as the mediator. With job autonomy as the independent variable and work flourishing as the dependent variable, the control variables are gender, age, and education level. As shown in Table 4, in the path of the influence of job autonomy on job thriving,  $\beta = .28$  and  $p = .000 < .05$ , proving that job autonomy significantly positively predicts job thriving (c), and Hypothesis 1 is validated. Similarly, with job autonomy as the independent variable and organization-based self-esteem as the dependent variable, with gender, age, and education level as control variables, as shown in Table 4, in the path of the influence of job autonomy on job thriving,  $\beta = .29$  and  $p = .000 < .001$ , proving that job autonomy significantly positively affects organization-based self-esteem (a), and Hypothesis 2 is validated. Furthermore, as indicated by the data in Table 4, when both job autonomy and organization-based self-esteem are input into the regression equation,  $\beta = .09$  and  $p = .04 < .05$ , thus the direct predictive effect of job autonomy on job thriving is significant (c'). In the path of the influence of organization-based self-esteem on job thriving, since  $\beta = .65$  and  $p = .000 < .05$ , organization-based self-esteem significantly positively predicts job thriving (b).

In summary, organizational self-esteem plays an incomplete mediating role in the mechanism of the influence of job autonomy on job thriving. Based on this, the Bootstrap method test results confirm the significance of this mediating effect. As shown in Table 5, the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect is [.12~.27], which does not include 0, indicating the existence of the mediating effect. The 95% confidence interval of the direct effect is [.03~.15], also not including 0, proving that this mediating effect is partial (if it includes 0, it would be complete), and the mediating effect accounts for 68.49% of the total effect (.28); thus Hypothesis 3 is validated.

**Table 4**

*Structural Validity Analysis*

Result Variable	Predictor Variable	$\beta$	SE	t	p	95%CI
Job thriving	Job autonomy	.28	.04	7.37	.00	[.20~.35]
Organization-based self-esteem	Job autonomy	.29	.04	7.46	.00	[.22 ~.37]
Job thriving	Job autonomy	.09	.03	2.86	.04	[.03~.15]
	Organization-based self-esteem	.65	.04	14.93	.00	[.57~.74]

**Table 5**

*Bootstrap Test Results of the Mediating Effect of Organization-based Self-esteem (N=270)*

Effect	Effect Value	Boot SE	Boot CI lower limit	Boot CI upper limit	Relative effect size
Total effect	.28	.04	.20	.35	
Direct Effect	.09	.03	.03	.15	31.51%
Indirect effects	.19	.04	.12	.27	68.49%

## Moderating Effect Test

On the basis of the intermediary effect test, this study uses model 7 provided in Process to test the regulatory effect of job insecurity. In order to avoid multiple collinearities in the data processing process, this study standardized all predictor variables, set control variables such as gender, age, and education level, and established two regression equations. It can be seen from Table 6 that in equation 1, after controlling for the variables of age, gender, and education level, the product of job insecurity and job autonomy has a significant predictive effect on organization-based self-esteem ( $SE = .04$ ,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95%CI [.07~.23]), job insecurity plays a significant role in the positive regulation of job autonomy and organization-based self-esteem. Hypothesis 4 has been verified to be true. Therefore, it can be proved that there is a regulated intermediary effect.

**Table 6**  
Structural Validity Analysis

Variant	Model 1 ( Efficacy marker: organization-based self-esteem )				Model 2 ( Efficacy marker: Job thriving )			
	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	95%CI	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	95%CI
Gender	0.05	-0.04	-0.73	[-0.13~0.06]	0.04	-.01	-0.13	[-0.08~0.07]
Age	0.04	0.04	0.84	[-0.05~0.12]	0.03	0.01	0.34	[-0.05~0.08]
Education	0.04	0.00	-0.05	[-0.09~0.08]	0.03	-0.06	-1.91	[-0.13~0.00]
Job autonomy	0.04	0.30	8.533	[0.23~0.37]	0.03	0.09	2.86	[0.03~0.15]
Organization-based self-esteem					0.04	0.65	14.93	[0.57~0.74]
Job insecurity	0.03	-0.22	-7.89	[-0.28~-0.02]				
Job insecurity $\times$ Job autonomy	0.04	0.15	3.66	[0.07~0.23]				
R2	0.36				0.56			
F	24.46*				67.17*			

\* $p < .05$

In order to further explain the regulatory effect of job insecurity on the influence of job autonomy on organizational self-esteem, this study divided job insecurity into high and low groups according to its average value plus or minus one standard deviation, that is,  $M \pm SD$ , and conducted a simple slope experiment. The results are shown in Figure 4. According to the slope comparison of high and low groupings, it can be seen that job autonomy has a greater predictive effect on organizational self-esteem under high groupings, indicating that with the increase of employees' job insecurity, the stronger the positive influence of job autonomy on organization-based self-esteem, hypothesis 4 is true. As shown in Table 7, Boot CI ranges from .03 to .18, excluding 0. This proves that the mediating effect of the research model in this paper is significant.

**Figure 4***Simple Slope Test Plot***Table 7***Moderated Mediation Index*

Index	Boot SE	Boot CI lower limit	Boot CI upper limit
.10	.04	.03	.18

## Discussion

This study aims to examine the role of job autonomy in promoting job thriving and its interaction with organization-based self-esteem and job insecurity. The results of the empirical study are not only consistent with the existing theoretical framework but also provide a new perspective on the mechanism by which job autonomy affects employees' job thriving.

The findings provide empirical backing for self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory highlights autonomy as a crucial psychological requirement for increasing intrinsic motivation. The substantial positive connection between job autonomy and job thriving (Hypothesis 1) indicates that giving employees more authority over their work procedures creates an environment favorable for learning, development, and engagement. This is consistent with prior research like Spreitzer et al. (2005), which associates autonomy with increased psychological empowerment and thriving. By demonstrating how job autonomy results in job thriving via organization-based self-esteem (Hypothesis 3), this research deepens our comprehension of the self-concept's intermediary function in this process. As a result, it strengthens the significance of cognitive evaluation theory (Deci et al., 1981). Employees' awareness of their autonomy greatly elevates their organization-based self-esteem, which then heightens their sense of thriving at work.

Moreover, the moderating role of job insecurity (Hypothesis 4) extends the literature by revealing its dual influence. Consistent with Yang et al. (2024), moderate job insecurity appears to act as a positive stressor that motivates employees to maximize their work potential. However, these findings underscore the complexity of job insecurity's role: while it enhances the link between job autonomy and organization-based self-esteem, excessive insecurity might

negate these benefits, as suggested by Dong et al. (2020). This nuanced finding highlights the need for organizations to balance job autonomy and job security carefully.

The partial mediating role of organization-based self-esteem between job autonomy and job thriving confirms the pivotal role of self-concept in fostering thriving workplaces. Employees who perceive their work as autonomous are more likely to develop a stronger sense of value and confidence in their organizational roles, thus enhancing their job engagement and productivity. These results are consistent with Pierce et al.'s (1989) conceptualization of organization-based self-esteem and its subsequent validation by Filosa and Alessandri (2022), who noted its positive correlation with job performance and well-being.

## Conclusion

Drawing on self-determination and cognitive evaluation theories, this research proposed and empirically tested models on job autonomy, organization-based self-esteem, job insecurity, and job thriving. Results show job autonomy directly boosts employees' organization-based self-esteem, and led to job thriving. It spurs intrinsic drive, enhances creativity, and fosters better interpersonal relationships. High job autonomy builds employees' organization-based self-esteem, while low autonomy has the opposite effect. Also, job insecurity positively moderates the link between job autonomy and organization-based self-esteem, motivating employees to improve.

This study enriches the literature in multiple aspects. Existing research has often explored job autonomy in isolation. Our findings integrate job autonomy with organizational self-esteem and job insecurity, revealing complex relationships. By establishing the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem and the moderating role of job insecurity in the job autonomy-job thriving link, we offer a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact in the workplace. This fills a gap in the literature, providing new theoretical frameworks for future research on employee well-being and performance.

For organizations, these findings imply that designing jobs with higher autonomy can enhance employees' organizational self-esteem and job thriving. Managers should create work environments that allow employees more freedom in decision-making and task arrangement. Additionally, recognizing the positive moderating role of job insecurity, organizations can use it strategically to motivate employees but must ensure it remains at a moderate level. Understanding job autonomy benefits can empower employees to seek more autonomous work settings and take advantage of opportunities to boost their self-esteem and job satisfaction.

Although the empirical research in this study has an interval of about two weeks, the time span is still too short compared to the long-term follow-up research covering the complete cycle. Therefore, future research can conduct longer-term follow-up investigations of subjects, set up multiple time nodes, and conduct more in-depth research on the formation mechanism of job thriving and the relationship between job autonomy and job thriving.

## Declarations

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