

Exploring the Effect of Job Autonomy on Employee Creativity: The Moderating Contribution of Role Ambiguity

Imaan Saleem Razzak^{1*} and Sana Sadia¹

1-Institute of Business Management

*Corresponding Author: imaanrazzak22@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Organizational innovation and success in the long run depend on employee creativity which is achieved through job autonomy where employees are given freedom to exercise their full potential creatively. The existing research focuses on the connection between job autonomy and employee creativity and the moderating factor of role ambiguity. The findings show that job autonomy and employee creativity have a significant positive relationship, which is moderated by role ambiguity in a significant way. The quantitative and cross-sectional research design was followed where a sample of 300 employees (n=150 male, n=150 female) based on snowball and convenience sampling in multinational and local marketing agencies in Pakistan was used. An online questionnaire including (i) Work Autonomy Subscale of the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman and Oldham, 1974) and (ii) Creative-Self Short Scale (Karwowski, 2018) was used to collect the data. The results also contribute to the scanty literature on the topic of creativity among the marketing community and point to the significance of job autonomy, as well as role ambiguity, in enhancing employee creativity.

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INTRODUCTION

In organizational psychology, there's a growing interest to understand the relationship between job autonomy, employee creativity and ambiguity. Job autonomy is described as the degree of freedom, independence and self-determination which employees possess in determining how they perform their duties including decisions that affect work practices, working schedules and making decisions (Dong et al., 2025). It gives the employees discretion and freedom to explore various methods, which boosts the creative thinking and promotes the exploration of novel ideas without overly supervision.

However, Jiang and Lavaysse (2018) determined that the relation between job autonomy and creativity is complex, and that role ambiguity (uncertainty about job expectations) has a mediating effect. Employee creativity is the ability of employees to come up with new and viable ideas, processes, or solutions that will enhance the effectiveness, products, or methods of work in the organization (Liu et al., 2023). Maden (2021) stresses the role of job autonomy in encouraging creative thinking, and stress the positive association with autonomy and innovative outcomes. Further, the moderating variable of role ambiguity for these two variables will be specifically measured in this study as very few previous researches has focused on these three variables altogether. Role ambiguity is a scenario where employees do not get clear information on what they are expected to do, exercise authority, or meet performance standards, thus they are uncertain when performing their duties (Khawaldeh, 2023).

This paper analyzes workplace organization and cultural requirements in the context of determining the relationship between job autonomy and creative output of employees in marketing agencies in Pakistan. The moderating influence of role ambiguity is also explored, in which the effect of autonomy could be diminished or reinforced by role ambiguity in relation to the cultural background. Although this subject has been extensively researched in western contexts, it has been under-researched in developing economies and cultures other than the West. By solving this gap, the study will offer practical suggestions that Pakistani marketing agencies can use to be more creative and minimise the adverse impacts of role ambiguity.

Research Objectives

- 1) The objective of this particular study is to analyze the effect of autonomy of job on the level of creativity among the employees of marketing agencies in Pakistan.
- 2) The extent to which role ambiguity has a moderating effect on job autonomy on employee creativity in the context of Pakistani marketing agencies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovation is essential in the modern workforce as organizations are competing. Job autonomy, which refers to the freedom and discretion that employees are given to do their duties is largely associated with increased creativity. Nevertheless, the relationship can change in accordance with the workplace conditions. The role ambiguity (that is, unclear job expectations and responsibilities) can affect the impact of job autonomy on creative outcomes. This review of the literature analyses job autonomy and creativity of the employees with a moderating role of role ambiguity.

Job Autonomy

Clausen et al. (2021) defined job autonomy as the degree to which a job allows for independence, discretion and freedom to make decisions, set work and to choose the ways to work. Employees that have flexible work schedules tend to report being more satisfied with work and family life balance (Shobe, 2018). Nonetheless, autonomy also greatly determines and influences the level of employee job satisfaction, stress levels, and employee overall psychological and physical well-being (Koster, 2021).

According to Clausen et al. (2021) autonomy at work emerges as an important factor that has a direct impact on satisfaction within the workplace. The motivational techniques affecting positive impact autonomy recommend to increase job autonomy primarily increases intrinsic motivation (Fleischer & Wanckel, 2024). M Meijerink and Bondarouk (2023) point out that employee involvement is also set up over the idea that the valuable effects of job autonomy depend on the pair of employee motivation, and cognitive reserves.

Employee Creativity:

Creativity refers to bringing novelty to the organization that could include providing something new, unusual, or original; taking a new perspective; thinking innovatively; and bringing ideas that were not previously present (Shehadeh, 2016). Creative employees possess the ability of uncovering hidden customer needs and solving challenges in an inventive efficient way which ultimately leads to superior performance (Obeidat, 2022).

Asbari et al. (2021) in his research discovered that when one feels engaged in their job, there is a high probability for them to be filled with enthusiasm and energy, making them drive to come up with innovative and valuable investing insights. A sense of responsibility and purpose drives employees to explore ideas that they are not familiar with and transform creative ideas into innovative

outputs (Styvén et al., 2021).

Creative employees hold the ability to generate new ideas and innovative viewpoints to their tasks (Imam et al., 2020). In the current era, where customers increasingly demand individualized service offerings customized to their specific requirements, standardized services are also being overlooked (Martinaityte et al., 2019). This trend is particularly obvious in the category of personal services. For businesses, this suggests that strictly formalized job roles and service delivery policies may negatively affect service quality (Aldabbas et al., 2023).

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity occurs when the expectations and responsibilities that come with a position are not clearly defined, uncertain, and not well specified (Ho et al., 2021). Ambiguity happens in various forms, at various periods for various people in an organization. It can lead to the feelings of disappointment, nervousness, worry, and concern, which end up affecting the ability of performing effectively (Andari, 2025).

The workplace is not an exception, and it too can have ambiguity, or it can emerge due to the cultural experience of people (Tang & Vandenberghe, 2021). Ambiguity takes various forms and at different times among varying people within an organization. Nonetheless, Pearce et al. (2024) explain that role ambiguity exists in four types i.e., expectation or goal ambiguity, priority ambiguity, process ambiguity and behavior ambiguity. Besides this, Brun (2016) identifies two forms of ambiguity (subject and resource) which are subject ambiguity (market, product, process, and organization resources) and resource ambiguity (novelty, multiplicity, reliability, and validity). Pathak (2012) postulates that role ambiguity occurs when one is not informed about his or her work.

Job Autonomy, Employee Creativity, and the Moderating Variable of Role Ambiguity

In the field of organizational psychology, research was conducted on the correlation between job autonomy and employee creativity. Volmer et al. (2011) set the stage, and there was a positive relationship between autonomy and creative outcomes. However, with the introduction of role ambiguity this dynamic will change, and when roles are clear, autonomy has a positive effect on creativity but where role ambiguity exists this effect is reduced (Sung et al., 2017). The patterns of communication are presented by Ebbers and Wijnberg (2017) as a factor that can moderate the influence of role ambiguity on creative

performance of employees.

In further refinement, Walmsley et al. (2022) especially considered the role of individual traits in the relation of having more dominance over an individual's job and creativity, considering the role ambiguity. According to de Clercq and Pereira (2023), the link between creativity and job autonomy was revealed to be affected by role ambiguity.

Hypothesis

The hypotheses are formulated as follows based on the theories and literature review that will provide the institution of this proposed study.

1. There would be a correlation between job autonomy and creativity of employees in the marketing agency employees of Pakistan.
2. The relationship of job autonomy to employee creativity would be moderated by role ambiguity

Theoretical Framework:

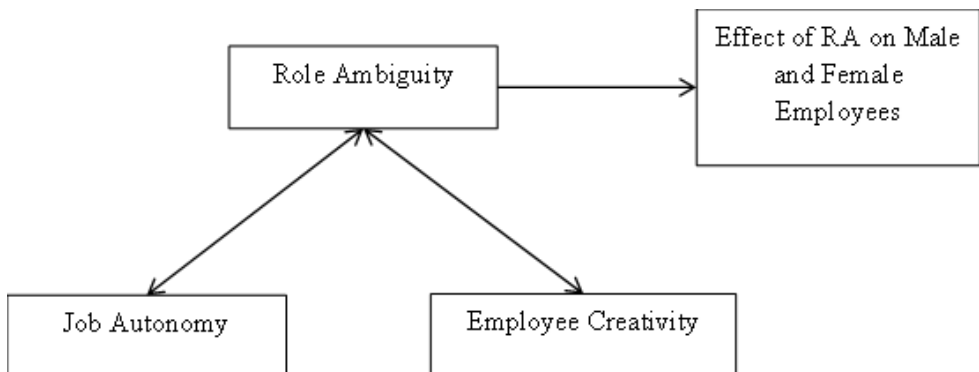


Figure 1: Theoretical framework of the study variables

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

The study adopted was descriptive and quantitative and the data collection was carried out using a tool Google Forms (web-based tool). The snowball and convenient sampling method was employed for the study to gather the sample. The total sample was (N=350) which included people working in the

local and international marketing agencies based in Karachi, Pakistan. The inclusion criteria comprise of participants with minimum 6 months' experience in marketing agency, participants who are permanent employees in their organization and mid-level employees such as managers and executives.

A structured questionnaire was used for this study which included five sections. This included the consent form, demographic form, Work Autonomy Subscale (JDS), Creative- Self Short Scale, and Role Ambiguity Scale. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, survey method, voluntary participation, and assured confidentiality and use of data only for academic purposes. The demographic form collected basic personal and job-related information, including age, education, marital status, socio-economic status, work experience, organizational tenure, job level, and working hours. Work autonomy was measured using a 3-item subscale of the Job Diagnostic Survey by Hackman and Oldham (1970s) on a 7-point Likert scale, with a reliability of 0.934 in the current study. Creative self was measured using the Creative Self Short Scale on a 5-point Likert scale, with a reliability of 0.891 in this study. Role ambiguity was measured using the 5-item scale on a 5-point Likert scale, with a reliability of 0.932 in the present study.

The completed dataset was then coded, organized and analyzed using SPSS version 26.0 to study relationships among variables as also to test study hypotheses.

Correlation analysis was done to determine whether job autonomy and employee creativity were strongly related. Although role ambiguity was taken as one of the moderating elements in the relation between job autonomy and employee creativity, the given relations were examined through regression analysis and SOBEL Test. Moreover, authenticity of analysis was measured with Chronbach Alpha. These statistical methods provide a general overview of the connection of the significant variables to uphold or reject the hypothesis proposed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 statistics on the demographics reveal that the sample size is 300 with 150 (50%) of them being male and the rest being female (50%). The table additionally indicates the age range of 20-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45 and 46-50 indicates that 82 (27.3) participants fall within the age bracket of 20-25, 70 (23.3) within the bracket of 26-30, 47 (15.7) within the bracket of 31-35, 44 (14.7) within the Further, the marital status portrays that 143 (47.7%) of the sample comprise of single people, 122 (40.7) are married, 22 (7.3) are divorced, and 13 (4.3) are separated. In addition, the qualification also includes the fact that 15 (5%)

Table 1.
Demographic Statistics of Marketing Employees in Pakistani Marketing Agency

Demographic Statistics		f	%
Age	20-25	82	27.30%
	26-30	70	23.30%
	31-35	47	15.70%
	36-40	44	14.70%
	41-45	34	11.30%
	46-50	23	7.70%
Gender	Male	150	50.00%
	Female	150	50.00%
Marital Status	Single	143	47.70%
	Married	122	40.70%
	Divorced	22	7.30%
	Separated	13	4.30%
Qualifications	Intermediate	15	5.00%
	Undergraduate	57	19.00%
	Graduate	162	54.00%
	Post-Graduate	66	22.00%
Socio-Economic Class	Upper Class	60	20.00%
	Upper Middle Class	112	37.30%
	Middle Class	128	42.70%
Family Structure	Nuclear	170	56.70%
	Joint	130	43.30%
Physical Illness or Disability	Yes	0	0%
	No	300	100%
Number of members earning in the family	1	26	8.70%
	2	118	39.30%
	3	89	29.70%
	4	3	1%
	4 or more	64	21.30%
Type of Organization	Public	3	1.00%
	Private	297	99.00%

Note. N = 300, f = frequency, % = percentage for each characteristic

possess intermediate level qualifications, 57 (19%) are undergraduate, 162 (54%) are graduated and 66 (22) are post-graduate. The data on socioeconomic status of participants indicates that 128 (42.7%) of the sample participants are in the middle class, 112 (37.3) in the upper middle class, and 60 (20) in the upper class. There are also variations in the number of family members earning with 26 (8.7) have 1 family member earning, 118 (39.3) having 2 family members earning, 89 (29.7) having 3 family members earning, 3 (1) having 4 family members earning, and 64 (21.3) having 4 or more family members earning.

Table 2.
Reliability Analysis of Measures

Scales	Chronbach α
	0.934
Employee Creativity	0.891
Role Ambiguity	0.932

The alpha value of Job Autonomy scale is 0.78, which is nearly equal to 1 indicating that there is high reliability and internal consistency of the items in the scale. In addition, the value of Chronbach Alpha of the employee creativity scale is equal to 0.78 and role ambiguity is 0.87 which is also near to 1 indicating that items in these scales are highly reliable and internally consistent.

Table 3.
Correlation between Job Autonomy and Employee Creativity of Marketing Employees (N=300)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Job Autonomy	-	-	-
2. Employee Creativity	.593**	-	-
3. Role Ambiguity	.796**	.763**	-

Note. **p<0 .01, ***p< .001

Hypothesis 1 states that Job Autonomy is positively related to Employee Creativity. According to the correlation analysis in Table 3, these variables are moderately positively correlated ($r = 0.593$) with a sample of 300 participants. This correlation is statistically significant, having p-value that is below 0.001 ($p < 0.001$) implying that the relationship is not as a result of mere chance. In turn, these results contribute to the fact that Hypothesis 1 is supported, and higher job autonomy is strongly correlated with employee creativity. This finding highlights the possible influence of job autonomy to the development of creative behavior among employees.

Table 4.
Regression Analysis for Moderating Variable

	Unstandardized Co-efficient		Standard Co-efficient		
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.012	.080		.144	.885
Job Autonomy	.633	.028	.796	22.671	.000

Note. Dependent Variable: Role ambiguity

Table 5.
Regression Analysis for Moderating Variable

	Unstandardized Co-efficient		Standard Co-efficient		
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.349	.077		4.542	.000
Role Ambiguity	.716	.056	.796	12.872	.000

Note. Dependent Variable: Employee Creativity

In this study, the moderating effect of Role Ambiguity in the relationship between Job Autonomy and Employee Creativity was tested using regression analysis. Table 4 indicated that the coefficient of B = 0.633 has a standard error (SE) of 0.028 with a p-value of less than 0.001 thus proving a significant effect in which greater job autonomy is correlated with greater role ambiguity. Table 5 also reported that B = 0.716, SE = 0.05, and p = 0.001 and hence, a strong positive relationship existed between Role Ambiguity and Employee Creativity. Such findings are indicative that the more role ambiguity, the higher the employee creativity will be.

These results were supported by the Sobel test that gave the z-score of 11.12 which is significantly higher than the critical value of 1.96. This outcome confirms the role ambiguity as a mediating factor is of significant importance and not just by chance. In general, the results indicate role ambiguity as one of the critical factors that enhance the positive correlation between job autonomy and organizational employee creativity.

DISCUSSION

The current part of the work examines the statistical results of the work along with corresponding theories and past literature. It also indicates constraints and gives recommendations about the future research. The objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between employee creativity and job autonomy in marketing agencies in Pakistan with role ambiguity as a moderator.

Results were compared to previous researches carried out in the same setting.

H1: There would be a correlation between job autonomy and creativity of employees in the marketing agency employees of Pakistan.

The findings showed that there is a strong positive correlation between autonomy and creativity among Pakistani marketing agency employees. The first hypothesis was supported by moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.539$, $p < 0.001$) which showed that greater employee creativity was associated with greater job autonomy.

Such a result supports the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), according to which autonomy can result in the intrinsic motivation and creative action (Mani & Mishra, 2021). Collegiality or autonomy should be applied in marketing agencies, where creativity is directly correlated with performance, and innovation is promoted by giving employees ownership over their work (Zhang & Bartol, 2017). It is also in line with other studies conducted in the field of organizational psychology, which repeatedly show that autonomy positively affects creativity in a variety of situations Ng and Lucianetti (2015).

H2: The relationship of job autonomy to employee creativity would be moderated by role ambiguity.

Role ambiguity was also studied as an intermediate of the relationship between autonomy and creativity. Regression analysis found that role ambiguity moderated this relationship significantly and the unstandardized coefficient $B = 0.633$ ($SE = 0.028$, $p < 0.001$). Additional findings indicated that the role ambiguity had a positive effect on creativity ($B = 0.716$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate role ambiguity reinforces the positive relationship between autonomy and creativity.

This moderating effect was supported by the Sobel test ($z = 11.12 > 1.96$) and proves that the role of ambiguity in this relationship is not incidental. It is possible that these findings are unique to culture dynamics, where Pakistani organizations tend to be hierarchical, which also leads to role ambiguity, which compels employees to use creative problem solving (Jose, 2021). Nevertheless, role ambiguity and autonomy can be interpreted differently in various cultures and, in particular, collectivist and individualistic societies (Choi et al., 2021).

Limitations of the Study

The research had a number of limitations. It used non-probability sampling (snowball and convenience), leaving out of the sample those employees who were not in the loop of social media and networking. Carried out within Pakistani marketing agencies, results are also subject to collectivism and

hierarchical cultural values and are not necessarily relevant to individualistic, flat organizations. There was only one data collection, so it did not provide a lot of information on dynamics. Self-reporting created a bias and some of the key variables such as organizational culture, emotional intelligence, and leadership style were not included. Although there was a balance between gender, other areas of diversity were not considered. The two-fold effect of role ambiguity on creativity was not exhaustively researched. Finally, findings might not be applicable to other markets other than marketing agencies.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the effect that job autonomy has on the creativity of employees, where role ambiguity was used as a mediator and gender as a possible moderator. Findings indicate that more autonomy can increase creativity with flexibility and independence. Role ambiguity may, however, override or reverse this effect, inhibiting creative results. Results also indicate that there is no marked gender difference implying that both males and female workers are equally impacted. The organizations must create a balance between autonomy and well-defined roles as a method of encouraging creativity. These insights help managers and policymakers in the marketing industry of Pakistan implement strategies that can increase autonomy, minimize damaging ambiguity and promote performance among employees in creative industries.

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