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## EVALUATING THE CRITICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING WORK ENGAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN SME

Mas Anom Abudul Rashid<sup>1\*</sup>, Valentine Chukwuma Nwodo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Graduate Studies, Universiti Poly-Tech Mara, Malaysia  
Email: masanom@kuptm.edu.my

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Graduate Studies, Universiti Poly-Tech Mara, Malaysia  
Email: valentinechukwuma16@gmail.com

\* Corresponding Author

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### Abstract:

Globally, poor work engagement has promoted challenges that hinder reputable organisations from generating productivity. Various studies asserted that poor work engagement contributed to the adverse effect on global SMEs' performance. In Nigeria, poor work engagement has affected the SME sector, and employee commitment, job satisfaction, and job autonomy are identified as critical issues impeding employee engagement. Hence, this study examines the critical factors influencing work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. This study uses a population of 290 employees among 10 Top SMEs in the Lagos State of Nigeria. A sample of 165 questionnaires was distributed using a random sampling technique as a quantitative approach, and 150 questionnaires were received with a success rate of 90.9%. The research instruments were developed based on previous studies and theories and underwent validation using expert review. IBM-SPSS version 28.0 tool was adopted for correlation analysis to test the hypotheses. The results showed that employee commitment, job satisfaction, and job autonomy enhanced work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. In addition, it showed that improved employee commitment helped increase employee willingness to engage in the workplace. Adequate job satisfaction and autonomy helped foster greater work engagement of employees. In conclusion, employee commitment, job satisfaction and autonomy would contribute to work engagement. This study is significant in addressing the gap found in the previous studies while contributing to the body of knowledge and promoting the SME sector in the Lagos State of Nigeria.

### Keywords:

Work Engagement; Employee Commitment; Job Satisfaction; Job Autonomy; SME

## Introduction

Work engagement has contributed to the development of most organisations worldwide (Alara, 2021). Work engagement has contributed heavily to harnessing organisations' growth, which has significantly induced success in Nigerian sectors (Shuaib & He, 2021). In Nigeria, work engagement has devastated the economy of SMEs, which was ascertained as an issue hindering the various organisations' success (Omeihe, Simba, Rae, Gustafsson & Khan, 2021). These issues were instigated due to poor job satisfaction, autonomy, and commitment, drastically reducing work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. Lagos State recorded over 3.23 million SME employees, steadily contributing to developing organisation productivity (Alara, 2021). The success of these employees lies in the formation of stable SMEs in terms of managing, coaching, and enhancing the employees towards achieving their desired goals in the organisation (Akinwale & Ogunyomi, 2021). Various studies have concluded that poor commitment influences the employee's level of engagement in the organisation and hinders them from excelling in their job activities (Zakari & Ibrahim, 2021; Alara, 2021). Over 28.1% of employees believe that committed employees yield high productivity and are willing to stay in the organisation (Okeke, Agbasi & Arinze, 2021). A study found that salary and working conditions helped promote an employee's job satisfaction and thereby improved the success of their work engagement (Nimfa, Latiff & Wahab, 2020). Improved job autonomy helps to promote effective decision-making for employees when engaging in their daily work activities, which helps to boost their performance (Shuaib & He, 2021). Most organisations excel in performance and productivity because of employee engagement and commitment (Joshua, Osuma, Ikpefan, Agbeyangi & Isibor, 2021). Work engagement has created various issues in Nigerian SMEs, resulting in poor job satisfaction, autonomy, and commitment (Olusegun, 2021). In addition, these issues have been recorded in the past two decades and have drastically influenced SMEs' productivity. SMEs in Nigeria experience low engagement and productivity, which results in low performance. These low engagements started in 2017 (9.7%), 2018 (12.4%), 2019 (21.5%), 2020 (19.8%), and 2021 (13.4%) (Olabamiji, Ayo-Oyebiyi, Babalola & Fasesin, 2021). The above statistics further affirmed that SMEs suffer economic growth, negatively influencing their reputation and performance in Nigeria. Various studies have concluded that job satisfaction, autonomy and commitment influence employee engagement in the workplace (Abdullahi, Husin & Baharudin, 2021; Akinwale & Ogunyomi, 2021). However, limited studies still focus on the factors influencing work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. A study conducted by Alara (2021) supported the idea that employees' job satisfaction and autonomy helped promote their engagement at the workplace and thereby improve their work productivity. Employee commitment has been an issue in promoting poor work engagement in Nigerian SMEs, resulting in poor productivity and performance (Zakari & Ibrahim, 2021; Shuaib & He, 2021). Inadequate salary, job security, quality of supervision, and working conditions influence poor job satisfaction and hinder employee engagement, leading to poor performance (Nimfa, Latiff & Wahab, 2020). Lack of job autonomy in SMEs has reduced over 23.1% of employees' willingness to engage, share ideas and build effective teamwork, leading to poor work engagement and performance in Nigeria (Effiom & Edet, 2022). Hence, the researcher tends to investigate further the opportunities for work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. This study evaluates the critical factors influencing work engagement in Nigerian SMEs

## Literature Review

### *Work Engagement*

Work engagement refers to the level at which employees identify their job scopes and contributions (Caroline, Ndidi & Adeyemi, 2021). The job demand resource model supported

the development of work engagement, which helped derive the model concept towards employee participation to promote organisational performance (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007). Work engagement helps employees provide strategies that improve the work culture, customer relationships, and productivity and would create added value to the organisation's growth (Noble-Nkrumah, Anyigba & Mensah, 2022). Committed employees are empowered with dedication and vigour to exercise workplace engagement (Akinyemi, George & Ogundele, 2022). Employee Engagement is conceptualised as the individual's investment of his complete self into a role (Ekon & Isayas, 2022). Engagement is a positive attitude where an individual goes above and beyond the call of duty, heightens ownership, and furthers the organisation's business interest (Cheng, Sun, Lu & He, 2022). Work engagement is "a positive thing, comply with the circumstances which are connected to work of mind marked with optimism, dedication, and absorption" (Rai & Maheshwari, 2021). Moreover, it is also a discretionary effort or a form of in-role or extra-role effort or behaviour that fosters change. It affects employee morale, productivity, commitment, loyalty to internal and external customers, absenteeism, and organisational turnover (Okeke, Owulo & Akaegbobi, 2021). Work engagement is an active, positive work-related state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Ekon & Isayas, 2022). Vigour refers to high levels of energy and resilience in work. Dedication is characterised by solid involvement in one's work and a sense of significance and enthusiasm. Absorption is a state of being entirely concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work.

### ***Employee Commitment***

Employee commitment helps boost organisational productivity, which was instrumental to their work engagement (Cheng, Sun, Lu & He, 2022). However, previous studies based employees mainly on employee self-reports of commitment. Also, managers contribute to the dedication of the employees. These contributions may also affect the allocation of rewards on their behalf. The focus of studying the organisations' psychology is to lower the organisations' subjective assessment techniques and practically enhance the correctness of these measures (Folajimi & Oyindamola, 2020). Singh (2022) believes an employee's binding force is experienced differently in an organisation. According to Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2020), employee commitment refers to employee devotion and motivation to promote organisational growth. Megawati, Hamdat and Aida (2022) state that employee commitment is simply an employee's attitude to an organisation. Therefore, employee loyalty to management is deduced from how employees are committed to their jobs. It shows identification with involvement in the organisation's day-to-day activities. Studies found that when employees have high commitment, they contribute their maximum energy and time to achieving the organisational goals and objectives (Cheng, Sun, Lu & He, 2022; Oderinde, 2022). Employees are engaged when an employee is competent and committed (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2020). However, an employee dedicated to the organisation will likely remain and work hard to perform their tasks to increase their positive attitude (Singh, 2022). In their studies, Oderinde (2022) also found that committed employees lead to higher work engagement and a shallow employee shift.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a relationship between employee commitment and work engagement.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

Job satisfaction refers to the feeling or satisfaction an employee attains in completing a job task to receive substantial rewards or benefits from the organisation (Oyovwe-Tinuoye, 2021). Various researchers have identified job satisfaction as a term used to measure employee characteristics and concluded that the impact of these characteristics might reveal employees

are prone to yield high productivity when there is adequate job satisfaction in the organisation (Olive, 2019; Okolocha, Akam & Uchehara, 2021). Adopting fringe benefits and bonuses would help improve such characteristics, constantly enhancing employee satisfaction (Nwagwu, 2020). Job satisfaction relates to work engagement and performance (Nwakasi & Cummins, 2019). Employee career development is impossible without a bright prospectus for job satisfaction because it has been assessed as a crucial factor for the organisation's and its employees' growth. Job satisfaction has evolved as an essential factor in the workplace because an organisation's success can only result in the individual success of its employees. According to Otu, Sun, Akor, Nnam, Wu and Aro (2021), higher levels of employee satisfaction usually contribute to organisational growth, while poor job satisfaction may harm it. More satisfied employees usually show more involvement in their work, develop innovative ideas that incorporate continuous quality improvement into their activities, and encourage them to participate in the entity's decision-making process (Oyovwe-Tinuoye, 2021).

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a relationship between job satisfaction and work engagement.

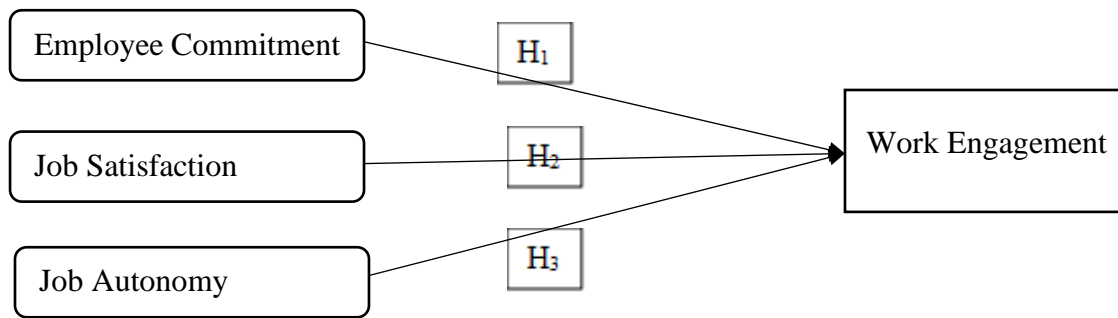
### ***Job Autonomy***

Job autonomy refers to the process in which employees are free to work and decide to actualise their job tasks (Ade-Adeniji, Adeniji & Imhonopi, 2021). Employees are excited when there is a high level of autonomy, which helps boost their performance at work (Shahzad, 2022). A study revealed a strong relationship between freedom at work and performance, which is rooted in the impact of promoting job autonomy in the organisation (Zhou, 2020). Park and Wee (2020) affirm that a new idea in employees could be developed when the organisation explores a better autonomy process, drastically boosting the employee's capability to accomplish their job tasks. Job autonomy allows employees to navigate their ideals and strategies to accomplish job activities and promote organisational performance (Zhou, 2020). Employees are satisfied when there is freedom to work, which would help boost their commitment to the workplace. It would further strengthen employee capability to generate ideas to accomplish job tasks (Zheng, Liu, Wang & Chen, 2021). A study by Lee, Choi, and Kang (2021) affirmed that job autonomy helps employees perform all their job tasks and would enhance and improve the performance of employees and the organisation's performance effectively. However, autonomy and flexibility have been identified as critical elements promoting employees towards enhanced organisational performance (Shahzad, 2022).

**H<sub>3</sub>:** There is a relationship between job autonomy and work engagement.

### ***Conceptual Framework***

This conceptual framework was developed using theories and models associated with this study. The model of commitment and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) supported the formation of this conceptual framework in actualising the necessity of promoting work engagement in Nigerian SMEs (Meyer & Allen; 1991; Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007).



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study**

## Research Methodology

### *Population and Sample Size*

In this study, the research designs adopted were descriptive and correlational to help proffer solutions based on the research questions in this quantitative analysis (Ellis, 2010). In addition, the adoption of research designs has helped to determine the various research approaches in actualising the objectives of this study. It further helped examine the significant relationship between job satisfaction, employee commitment, job autonomy and engagement. The questionnaire design adopted 5 Likert interval scales such as 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), to develop the items relating to work engagement in Nigerian SMEs (Joshi, Kale, Chandel & Pal, 2015). The employee population is 3.23 million among Nigerian SMEs. Lagos State has helped promote SMEs' productivity (Akinwale & Ogunyomi, 2021). In addition, Lagos State comprises 18.6% of SMEs in Nigeria and is considered the first State with the highest number of SMEs with diverse employees among the 36 States of Nigeria (Lateef & Keikhosrokiani, 2022). They have talented employees with innovative, risk-taking, and entrepreneurial mindsets. Nigeria's commercial and industrial State contributes over 42.7% of Nigeria's GDP (Ade-Adeniji, Adeniji & Imhonopi, 2021). In addition, SMEs are known for creating employment and business opportunities. They also contribute to 96% of companies and 84% of jobs in Nigeria (Olusegun, 2021). The respondents of this study focus on the three layers of employees, such as top, middle and lower employees in the SME sector as the participants selected in this study. A pilot study was conducted to help assess the credibility of the items, which revealed that the items' reliability ranged from 0.78 to 0.92, and they are acceptable (Ellis, 2010). Adopting simple random sampling helped distribute questionnaires equally to all SME employees. Out of 165 questionnaires distributed to the SME employees via face-to-face distribution tactics, 150 questionnaires were successfully received, which gave a 90.91% response and success rate in this study.

### *Measurement of Variables*

**Table 1: Measurement of Variables**

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Sources
Work Engagement	0.81	Vischer (2008)
Employee Commitment	0.92	Meyer and Allen (1991)
Job Satisfaction	0.87	Spector (1985)
Job Autonomy	0.78	Breaugh (1985)



### ***Data Analysis***

The SPSS (28.0 version) was adopted to analyse the data obtained from the respondents with the aid of questionnaires (Kumar, 2014). The adoption of SPSS would help analyse the descriptive statistics, normality, and correlation analysis. The normality testing was adopted to assess if the data generated was normally distributed among the respondents to meet the criteria values of skewness and kurtosis in this study (Kothari, 2019). In addition, correlation analysis was adopted to test the hypothesis and examine the relationship between job satisfaction, autonomy, commitment, and work engagement. This tool has helped provide a desirable solution to the challenges associated with work engagement in Nigerian SMEs.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

#### ***Demographic Profile***

Table 4.1 depicts the demographic profile of the respondents concerning their age, marital status, gender, tenure of work, job level of employees, level of income and education. The age group of employees involved in this study, which 18 – 27 years 34.0% (51 respondents), 28 – 37 years 35.3% (53 respondents), 38 – 47 years 17.3% (26 respondents) and 48 years and above have 13.3% (20 respondents). In addition, the 28 – 37 age group have 35.3% (53 respondents), indicating the highest participation rate in this study. The gender of SME employees participating in this study was as follows: Males 47.3% (71 respondents), females 52.7% (79 respondents). It further indicated that female SME employees had the highest participation rate in this study. The marital status of SME employees that participated in this study was as follows: married employees have 40.0% (60 respondents), single employees have 55.3% (83 respondents), and lastly, others have 4.7% (7 respondents). It further proved that single employees had the highest participation rate in this study as they are most affected by the challenges of work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. The tenure of work amongst the employees is stated below: less than 2 years 68.7% (102 respondents), 3 – 4 years 24.0% (36 respondents), and lastly, 5 years and above has 7.3% (11 respondents) participated in this study. In addition, it showed that those less than two years old had the highest participation rate in this study. The level of income for SME employees in Nigeria stated below which has less than #30,000 Naira has 62.0% (91 respondents), #31,000 – 60,000 Naira has 17.3% (26 respondents), #61,000 – 90,000 Naira has 10.7% (16 respondents), and #91,000 Naira and above has 10.0% (15 respondents). In addition, it was agreed that SME employees earned less than #30,000 Naira, which is the highest participation rate. The level of education for SME employees in Nigeria that were involved in this study is that senior secondary school certificates have 7.3% (11 respondents), the Ordinary National Diploma (OND) 36.7% (55 respondents), and the Higher National Diploma (HND) 22.7% (34 respondents). Bachelor's has 25.3% (38 respondents), and Master's education has 6.7% (10 respondents). Lastly, 1.3% (2 respondents) are involved in this study regarding the doctorate level of education. In addition, it revealed that employees with an ordinary national diploma level of education have the highest participation rate in this study. The job level of employees confirmed that top, middle and lower employees are involved. The top employees, 3.3% (5 respondents), middle employees, 27.3% (41 respondents), and lower employees, 69.3% (104 respondents), were involved in the study. It further agreed that confirmed lower employees had the highest participation rate in this study.

**Table 2: SME Employees' Demographic Data**

Items	Frequency (n = 150)	Percentage (%)	Items	Frequency (n = 150)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age Group</b>			<b>Income Level (Naira)</b>		
18 – 27 years old	51	34.0	Less than #30,000	93	62.0
28 – 37 years old	53	35.4	#31,000 - #60,000	26	17.3
38 – 47 years old	26	17.3	#61,000 - #90,000	16	10.7
48 years old and above	20	13.3	#91,000 and above	15	10.0
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Education Level</b>		
Male	71	47.3	Secondary School	11	7.3
Female	79	52.7	OND	55	36.7
<b>Marital Status</b>			HND	34	22.7
Married	60	40.0	Bachelor	38	25.3
Single	83	55.3	Master	10	6.7
Others	7	4.7	Doctorate (PhD)	2	1.3
<b>Tenure of Work</b>			<b>Job Level</b>		
Less than 2 years	102	68.7	Top Employees	5	3.3
3 – 4 years	36	24.0	Middle Employees	41	27.3
5 years and above	11	7.3	Lower Employees	104	69.4

### **Correlation Analysis**

Correlation was adopted to examine the relationship between variables in this study (Kumar, 2014). The relationship would help to examine the impact of job satisfaction, commitment, job autonomy and work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. A valid correlation result must meet the criteria of 0.7 and above to exhibit a high correlation in this study (Kothari, 2019). Table 4.2 indicates that the correlation test, employees at Nigerian SMEs' views on work engagement, proved to have a strong positive impact on employee commitment, job satisfaction and job autonomy at sig (2-tailed) 0.000, N (150). The correlation analysis is 0.886 (employee commitment), 0.789 (job satisfaction) and 0.897 (job autonomy). It agreed that employee commitment contributes to developing work engagement at the SMEs in Nigeria. According to Joshua, Osuma, Ikpefan, Agbeyangi and Isibor (2021), workplace engagement motivates employees to commit to delivering their job activities that tend to reflect positively on the organisational performance. The results revealed that employees at Nigerian SMEs experienced a high level of job satisfaction, such as adequate salary, promotional opportunities, fringe benefits, and work conditions, which led to their work engagement at the workplace. According to Success and Anthony (2021), job satisfaction influences the high work engagement rate, promoting sufficient work conditions for employees, creating conducive career development and increasing their salaries to better their livelihoods. Lastly, the findings showed that employees at the Nigerian SMEs believe that job autonomy influences the rate of work engagement, such as teamwork, brainstorming and involvement, which helps to reflect positively on the organisational performance. Job autonomy enhances the employee's right to make decisions that would significantly yield a high performance rate and engagement among employees (Olabamiji, Ayo-Oyebiyi, Babalola & Fasesin, 2021). Therefore, H1, H2 and H3 are significant to this study.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables**

Constructs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Work Engagement	4.272	0.551	1			
2. Employee Commitment	4.358	0.542	.886**	1		
3. Job Satisfaction	4.313	0.692	.789**	.737**	1	
4. Job Autonomy	4.262	0.676	.897**	.801**	.772**	1

Note: \*\* significant level at  $p < 0.01$

## Discussions

The results showed that employee commitment has an impact on improving work engagement. Exploring the correlation between employee commitment and work engagement asserts that 0.886 was determined as a correlation result from their relationship. It further agrees that improved employee commitment would yield high work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. The result generated proved that committed employees are highly engaged in the workplace. In addition, committed employees tend to create value for their organisations, which signifies the level of commitment and engagement at the workplace. Most organisations promote employee engagement to boost and manage the workforce (Singh, 2022). The essence of organisational growth lies in the capability of employee commitment, which is crucial for developing organisational success (HassenYimam, 2022). It also gives employees a sense of satisfaction, motivating them to give their best. Hence, the organisation needs to develop the employee's commitment by adopting the most acceptable methods to ensure that employees remain committed (Hamdu & Muhammed, 2022). The results revealed that job satisfaction has an impact on promoting an employee's engagement at the workplace in Nigerian SMEs. Exploring the correlation between job satisfaction and work engagement asserts that 0.789 was determined as a correlation result from their relationship. It further agrees that improved job satisfaction would yield a high work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. The result from the analysis proved that job satisfaction tends to promote the employee's willingness to engage at work, which would help boost the performance of both employees and the organisation. According to Anasi (2020), adequate salary provision helped navigate the success of employee job satisfaction, which transcends into work engagement in an organisation. This study further agreed that job satisfaction helps to predict the level of engagement an employee tends to attain at the workplace. The result revealed that improved job autonomy helps promote employee engagement in Nigerian SMEs. It further concluded that there is a correlation of 0.897 between job autonomy and work engagement. The results further indicate a relationship between job autonomy and work engagement, which proved that 0.897 results were obtained from their relationship. It further agrees that improved job autonomy would yield high work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. The result affirms that job autonomy helps improve employee engagement, thereby boosting their creativity and innovation on a given task. Employees are likely to feel uncomfortable when dissatisfied with the poor freedom to work, which conflicts with their roles and hinders their job success (Gardner, 2020). Improving job autonomy at the workplace gives employees a sense of belonging, which would help transcend into productivity efficiency (Demircioglu, 2021). However, job autonomy exhibits a high level of engagement in the workplace when there is a tendency to experience commitment among employees (Zhou, 2020). This study revealed that job autonomy contributes heavily towards developing employee work engagement in Nigerian SMEs (Park & Wee, 2020; Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021).



## Conclusions

In conclusion, the result shows a high tendency to indicate that the employees' commitment, adequate job satisfaction, and job autonomy helped promote work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. Every employee anticipates acquiring skills and knowledge to manage their work activities that would promote work engagement, commitment, and satisfaction. Therefore, employee commitment has proven to efficiently promote workplace engagement when employees have adequate skills, knowledge, and capacity towards productivity. These findings further agreed that employee commitment deals with the professionalism and skills an employee acquires to efficiently execute their job task and yield work engagement at the workplace. They are volunteers who contribute to developing work activities at the SMEs, which would drive the desirable result of increasing the momentum of workflows in Nigerian SMEs. The findings of this study have helped to enhance employee commitment, which reflected their level of engagement and involvement and were result-oriented towards promoting work engagement. The findings of this study concluded that job satisfaction impacts the promotion of work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. It further agreed that adequate salary triggers employee engagement at the workplace. Adequate salary and benefits help promote employee job satisfaction and contribute substantial results that would benefit both the employees and SMEs. Job security is essential in promoting job satisfaction and employee engagement. Lack of job insecurity reduces employees' commitment and engagement at their workplace. The findings of this study affirmed that a lack of company policies hinders employees' success in enjoying their job satisfaction and deters work engagement. The findings of this study affirmed that the relationship with colleagues has helped to promote their work engagement with adequate interactions and communication, which has reflected positively on Nigerian SMEs' productivity. The organisation must encourage employees by providing adequate skills to enhance performance and productivity. In addition, this has helped increase employee job satisfaction with the help of embeddedness and increased work engagement. The finding of this study agreed that job autonomy directly impacts work engagement in Nigerian SMEs. The findings of this study agreed that increased job autonomy might result in happier employees. Happy employees do not feel the need to seek out other work. A team that has worked together extensively is likely to be more efficient. The finding of this study affirmed that job autonomy helped to promote innovation in the workplace. However, innovation is what a workplace needs to keep evolving and developing. Without autonomy in the workplace, an organisation may become stagnant and less experienced in work engagement in Nigerian SMEs.

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