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## Autonomy as a Motivator – Would You Consider it

### What is Autonomy?

Autonomy in the workplace refers to how much freedom employees have whilst working. Many companies differ in their approach to autonomy and go about providing autonomy in different ways, but autonomy can generally be described as the following;

- The freedom to decide how you will carry out your work
- The freedom to decide what project/aspect of work to focus on next
- The ability to use more of your own independent judgement in your work
- The ability to choose between working in the office or at home

When considering autonomy most employers focus solely on employees and not on members of management, but members of management can work with autonomy too. Autonomy for a line manager, for example, would be a line manager who is free to reward and motivate employees as they choose to, rather than working to set guidelines they are not permitted to deviate from.

### Why Should We Consider Autonomy?

The idea behind autonomy is that if you give employees more responsibility in their choice of work they will care about it more. Having responsibility for one's work has been recognised as a large driver for motivation and discretionary effort. It has also been argued that

employees feel a larger level of ownership for their job if they are able to make decisions about their work, and that this ownership can lead them to care more.

Work place autonomy may also result in more resilient and capable employees. When an employee is given the opportunity to think like a small business owner, i.e. deciding what work is more important than others and then completing that work, they are more likely to become confident in their abilities. Confident employees are continuously building a greater level of self-efficiency and they become more able to deal with situations that present themselves, rather than immediately going to their management with an unfamiliar problem they are yet to tackle. As well as being confident enough to deal with troublesome situations, resilient employees are often more confident when handling large demands or "doing more with less" meaning that they can respond to situations with less resources. In summary, autonomy can help employees build a resilient attitude meaning that they tackle work situations with a "Can do" attitude rather than a "Can't do" one.

By providing employees with autonomy you are providing them with the ability to use their own judgement and opinions in their work. This will allow their personality to influence their work and this, according to the CIPD, has been seen to lead to increased levels of performance.

Autonomy also provides positive results outside of work; it can also enable an employee to have a better work life balance. Some employers provide their work force with the ability to decide where they work, meaning that some employees choose to use their autonomy to work at home. They may also decide to leave the office earlier on a specific day due to a child's football game etc. This is because autonomy has a focus on the work produced, if the work produced is timely and of a high quality then why shouldn't employees be able to choose whether that work is completed at home or in the workplace? Employees with these levels of choice feel more gratitude towards their employer, and may be less likely to suffer from work related stress or poor morale and motivation.

## When Autonomy Goes Wrong

It is imperative autonomy is introduced into a company in the correct way. If it is not explained to the employees that they are trusted with the responsibility of their own role, they may perceive the lack of management towards them as neglect or a disinterest in them as an employee. This can have the negative effect of leaving an employee disheartened in their role. It could also lead to an employee believing their role is unimportant in the company.

In truth, some people find autonomy very difficult to cope with. Whilst many employees cherish their newfound freedom and ownership, other employees may not understand how to work with it.

Solving these problems is relatively easy and communication is key.

## How Can We Help?

If you have any queries relating to any of the subjects raised within this newsletter then please don't hesitate to contact us at [hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk](mailto:hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk)

For clarification of any of the above updates or for advice and guidance on any HR and/or Health and Safety Concerns contact us by emailing [hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk](mailto:hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk) or by calling 02476 664092.

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