

# Autonomy With Clear Boundaries Stimulates Innovation Energy of Employees

**Dr. Henk Jan van Essen**

*Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Enschede, the Netherlands*

## Abstract

In this era of rapid global change, an increasing number of organisations recognise that bottom-up innovation is crucial for successful innovation processes (Guterres, 2020; Wijffels in Schröder, 2020). Employees exhibiting Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) are essential as innovation ambassadors, ensuring alignment between corporate strategy and the development and implementation of innovation. This alignment is achieved through problem recognition, idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realisation (Dorenbosch et al., 2005). Such employees channel their innovation energy into this process, which is mutually influenced by their innovation-related properties (creativity, psychological empowerment, and optimism) and stimulating work context factors (perceived autonomy, external contacts, innovative teamwork, and supportive leadership) (Van Essen, 2024).

Findings from three case studies indicate that perceived autonomy is a crucial stimulating factor. However, respondents demonstrating IWB emphasised that the autonomy granted by the organisation in the innovation process requires clear boundaries. Without such boundaries, uncertainty regarding constraints such as time limitations, development regulations, organisational rules, or system requirements may disrupt the process (Van Essen, 2024). Previous research has shown that innovation processes are more successful when the top and middle management ensures strong alignment between the organisation's strategic direction and its required innovations. This prevents employees with IWB from becoming frustrated by excessive autonomy, which may result in developed innovations not being adopted by the organisation (Lee, 2013).

**Keywords:** autonomy boundary, innovation energy, Innovative Work Behaviour