

## **Does Motivation Trigger Autonomy, or Vice Versa?**

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Do firms use autonomy to motivate workers, or do they give autonomous jobs to workers who are already especially motivated? A standard result in economics is that firms offer autonomous jobs to promote worker motivation. But surprisingly, little attention has been given to the details of this practice of giving autonomy to especially motivated workers: for example, does autonomy in fact trigger motivation? In contrast, findings from social psychology demonstrate that how people handle new information is closely related to what motivates them. I argue in this study that motivation may trigger autonomy, and thus that firms may benefit from screening for intrinsically motivated workers by offering autonomous jobs with possibly lower monetary incentives. I assume that workers differ in their degree of motivation, and that motivated workers have a lower cost of processing information than unmotivated ones. While a motivated worker concentrates on searching for available information, an unmotivated one focuses on ignoring certain information as irrelevant. Therefore, firms would gain efficiency from giving the more motivated workers a higher degree of autonomy. I study the interaction between autonomy and motivation empirically using Wave 1 of the Health and Retirement Survey. I have found that motivated people in autonomous jobs are valued more highly, i.e., paid higher wages. This link between autonomy and motivation also has implications for nonmonetary aspects of the job, such as forms of leadership style and job design.