



Australian Government

Australian Public Service Commission

Increasing Autonomy

The APS Employee Census has an underlying framework that identifies and considers conditions within workplaces that influence employee and workgroup performance.

This guide explores one element of this framework, autonomy, and outlines:

- What autonomy is
- Its effects
- The specific questions that measure autonomy
- Tips for improving results

Have
your
say



2026 APS
Employee Census

4 May–5 June

Autonomy or work choice

Autonomy is the ability to make choices around the way we work and has wide-reaching effects for both employees and organisations. Perceptions of workplace autonomy are known to increase productivity, employee engagement, promote job satisfaction, and improve overall wellbeing. Employees are individuals and as such, have differing preferences for the level of choice they desire at work. What is recognised is that some degree of choice is healthy for everyone and is achievable in all roles and levels within an organisation.

Employees who feel their work is unnecessarily controlled may show a lack of interest and enthusiasm for tasks, greater work stress and have higher turnover intentions. The addition of choice within a job's structure provides employees with ways to shape their work and make it their own. This personal investment is known to foster greater motivation, performance and overall capability.

In 2026, the following questions relate to employees' perceptions of autonomy in their workplace.

- **30b.** I have a choice in deciding how I do my work – higher *Always* and *Often* responses indicate higher employee autonomy.
- **19k.** Where appropriate, I am able to take part in decisions that affect my job – higher *Strongly agree* and *Agree* responses indicate higher employee autonomy.

Actions to improve scores on these questions

- Empowering employees to make decisions around the way they do their work increases autonomy. It does this by shifting employee–employer relationships from being transactional to effective and dynamic.
- Promote the greatest level of appropriate decision-making possible. This does not mean an employee should figure out how to do their job themselves or work without supervision.
- Encourage employees to decide what their short and long-term work goals are and how they will reach them.
- Create choice within boundaries. Where possible, offer flexible work options about the way and place employees work, the team they work with, or the resources they may utilise. It is possible for all employees at all levels to contribute in some way to decisions about how they do their job.
- Encourage workplace learning and skill building. The development of new skills and support of existing knowledge will improve feelings of autonomy and increase capability.
- Encourage workplace relationships that support trust. This sends a message that employees are in command of their time and effort. Without trust, autonomy is not possible.
- Promote the purpose of employees' work, by tapping into the meaning that underlies their work.
- Where possible, vary an employee's tasks within the team. This increases team collaboration as well as individual and team capability.
- Discourage micro-management styles of employee supervision.