



# **Managing Autonomy and Control: Enhancing Team Agility through Effective Governance**

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A dissertation submitted to the ALBA Graduate Business School, The American  
College of Greece, in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree  
of

**MSc INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT**

29<sup>th</sup> September 2023

## **Abstract**

*This dissertation explores the complex link between team governance and team agility. The idea of team agility, which originated in software development, has typically been associated with independent, self-managed teams. This study supports the argument that in other team environments, agility is fostered by striking a balance between the opposing forces of autonomy and control, the two primary forces influencing team governance. Through qualitative research involving in-depth interviews with managers and team members from the service sector, this study seeks to unravel the nuanced perspectives surrounding the autonomy-control dilemma. The qualitative data acquired from these interviews is examined to find patterns, themes, and insights that illuminate their interplay. The results of this study shed light on the complex nature of team governance and offer valuable guidance for managers trying to strike a balance between autonomy and control, ultimately enhancing their team's agility.*

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## A. Introduction

In today's increasingly dynamic, competitive and highly complex business environment, more and more companies need to distinguish themselves and establish a competitive edge. In this swiftly evolving business landscape, the pursuit of organizational excellence has become synonymous with **Agility**. The ability to swiftly adapt, innovate, and respond to ever-changing market dynamics is not merely a competitive advantage; it has become an imperative for sustainable success. Central to this transformative journey are the integral engines of organizations: **Teams**. Teams serve dynamic units of collective intelligence and effort that possess the potential to be the driving engines of organizational success (Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999). In this context, effective **Team Governance** emerges as a linchpin that can guide teams towards optimal performance, enabling them to respond swiftly and adeptly to ever-changing market demands. The two key drivers of team governance are **Autonomy** and **Control**. Managers play a crucial role in creating the optimal governance framework that will allow their teams to flourish (Gilbert and Sutherland, 2013).

This study will investigate various aspects of team autonomy and control in the chapters that follow, exploring their unique qualities, beneficial connection, and combined influence on team dynamics and agility. The ultimate objective is to address the research question: *"How can managers effectively utilize the interaction between autonomy and control to cultivate team agility?"*. A thorough qualitative research methodology will be used to answer this question. The research is centered on teams other than those in software development, as there has already been extensive examination of agility in these team settings. In terms of their governance structure, these teams typically exhibit a higher level of autonomy. The study will involve in-depth interviews with managers and team members of small-scale teams, across a diverse range of industries from the service sector. These interviews will serve as a means to gather insights and perspectives regarding the practical implementation of autonomy and control within teams and their impact on team agility. Through the analysis of these interviews, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced relationship between autonomy and control within teams and how managers can leverage this relationship to foster greater agility.

## **B. Literature Review**

### **1. Team Governance**

In recent times, executive and managers have been inundated by a plethora of management theories, philosophies and models. Managers seem to be thirsting for guidance, insight and assistance to tackle the complex role of managing their teams. Team governance, a central concept in the realm of management and leadership, refers to the framework of principles, structures, and practices that guide the functioning of teams within an organization. Governance itself takes on multifaceted meanings, often emerging through narratives that highlight the intricate interplay of control - freedom, and order - chaos (Simard et al., 2018). At its core, team governance encompasses two fundamental and deeply interrelated elements that stand out with paramount significance: autonomy and control. These elements form the foundation upon which efficient governance structures are created.

The terminology associated with governance within the context of teams is rich and diverse, encompassing words such as "steer," "control," "decisions," "formal," "influence," and "manage" (Sergeeva, 2020). Each of these terms reflects a facet of governance, showcasing its multifaceted nature. Although these words often connote a sense of structure and authority, it is essential to acknowledge that the landscape of team governance is evolving. While forcing individuals to be obedient and diligent is easy for managers, inspiring creativity and commitment is more challenging. (Hamel, 2007). Research in this domain has illuminated the fact that rigid, top-down approaches to governance may no longer suffice in the modern, dynamic work environment.

Indeed, contemporary studies have highlighted the pivotal role of flexibility and balance in governance models. Lifshitz et al. (2019) assert that it is the flexible and balanced approach to governance that not only ensures the effective functioning of teams but also enables the emergence of creativity and innovation. This perspective challenges the traditional notion of governance as a rigid system of control, emphasizing instead the need for adaptable structures that empower employees.

### **2. The Concept of Team Agility**

#### **2.1 Historical Background**

It is crucial to demonstrate how agility has been perceived over time and how it has been applied to various settings outside of its initial domains, at the very beginning of this investigation. Agile's guiding principles and ideas were first developed by the manufacturing and software development industries in response to the problems caused by the rapidly changing landscape of business and technology. The term "agile" originally appeared in 1991's "21st Century Manufacturing Enterprise Strategy," which defined it as a skill that would enable a manufacturing organization to respond to shifting customer demands and provide highly customized goods (Nagel, 1992). In the software industry, traditional "heavyweight" development methods struggled to cope with evolving user requirements, resulting in issues such as time and cost overruns, and an inability to adapt to changing needs (Schmidt et al., 2001). In the mid-1990s, Agile software development approaches emerged as innovative solutions to these persistent problems. (Beck and Andres, 2005).

A group of software development professionals created the Agile Manifesto, a document that outlines a collection of ideals and guiding principles, in an effort to counter the widely

used Waterfall approach of software development. Waterfall development emphasized the adherence to detailed and long-term strategic plans, which did not fit well with the dynamics of the volatile software development industry (Maruping et al., 2009). The proponents of the agile manifesto favored a lighter planning approach and called for organizing work around self-managing teams that frequently reflect on whether plans still fit with external demands (e.g., customer preferences). The Agile Manifesto established the framework for these new methodologies by focusing on self-management, self-reflection, quick product delivery, effective resource utilization, close collaboration with stakeholders, and mainly face-to-face communication.

Today, the agile way of working has become a common practice among information technology (IT) teams, leading to its adoption in diverse industries seeking more adaptive and responsive work methods. This change is a result of the realization that, regardless of a team's functional focus, agility provides substantial advantages. Consequently, other domains have started to implement agile methodologies as well (Edmondson and Gulati, 2021; Mergel et al., 2018). Agile methods and techniques have been increasingly popular over time and have shown to be quite useful in a variety of other fields outside of only software and manufacturing. (Beck et al., 2001).

The term "Agility" now represents a set of principles and practices that promote adaptability, collaboration, and customer-centricity. Agility is known as a crucial dynamic characteristic that refers to the ability to recognize, shape, and seize opportunities and threats. (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Winby & Worley, 2014). Teams aspire to be more agile, aiming to swiftly respond to changes and deliver value quickly. The flexibility and iterative nature of agility allow teams to continuously learn, improve, and optimize their processes to meet dynamic challenges.

In conclusion, over time, Agile principles and practices gained traction and proved to be highly effective, not only in the manufacturing and the software industry but also in various other domains. The term "Agility" has since evolved to encompass a broader meaning, describing teams that possess certain capabilities aligned with the agile way of working.

## **2.2 Definition and Elements of Team Agility**

Given the fact that agility is a relatively new concept, there is no widely accepted definition and no consensus on its meaning. The idea of agility and its dimensions quickly rose to prominence among senior scholars as a focal point of reference. At the basic level, flexibility and adaptability are the two fundamental components of agility (Falance, 2012). According to Sharifi and Zhang (1999), agility is defined as the capability to adapt to unplanned and unexpected changes in the correct way and at the right time, as well as the exploitation of these changes by transforming them into opportunities. Therefore, the basis of team agility is focused on two issues: sensing changes and responding to them quickly. In order to notice and react properly to changes, four basic competencies—sometimes referred to as agility capabilities—must be mastered. Responsiveness, competency, flexibility, and quickness (speed) are these four qualities (Lin et al., 2006; Sharifi and Zhang 1999; Yusuf et al., 1999). Responsiveness is described as 'the ability to recognize changes, respond proactively to changes, and recover from changes' (Sharifi and Zhang 1999, p. 17). Competency is referred to as the "abilities that provide an organization with productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness in achieving its purposes and goals" (p. 17). According to the definition on page 18, flexibility is "the ability to carry out different tasks and achieve different goals using the

same resources." Speed is defined as "the ability to complete tasks and operations in the shortest possible period of time" (p.18).

Although 'adaptability' and 'agility' may appear to be relatively similar, they should be clearly separated. An "inherent ability to adjust or modify" is what is meant by adaptability, according to Katayama and Bennett (1999). Adaptability involves reacting and making necessary adjustments to fit the changing conditions. In essence, it focuses on how well an entity can cope with change when it happens. Both agility and adaptability refer to the ability to respond to change, agility however, takes it a step further and implies a more proactive and dynamic approach. Agility emphasizes being quick, nimble, and responsive to not only handle unexpected situations but also to exploit opportunities and stay ahead of the competition. Adaptability is insufficient in *unpredictable* changes; agility is needed instead (Butler and Surace, 2015).

Regarding the key strategies that lay behind agility, *Customer-Centricity* is one of the top priorities. Team agility involves understanding and prioritizing customer needs. Agile teams maintain a close relationship with their customers or end-users, maintaining short work-cycles and seeking regular feedback loops to ensure the product or service meets their expectations (Burchardt and Maisch, 2019). The idea of *Leanness* was later on proposed in relation to team agility. When a team focuses on the consumers and their perceived value, it is considered lean. Lean principles focus on eliminating waste and inefficiencies from processes, allowing teams to deliver value quickly and effectively. The ultimate objective of implementing agile techniques is to enrich customers and meet their demands correctly and on time (Lin et al., 2006). Customers' valuation of items changes as their objectives change. The emphasis on consumers' perceived value shifts dynamically in response to other factors like as context, input, processes, and outcomes (Marks et al., 2001).

Agility emphasizes time-boxed iterative approaches, evolutionary development, and *Adaptive Planning* instead of strict long-term planning. Also, it encourages quick and flexible responses to change (Singh and Chana, 2013). Agile teams embrace change and adjust their strategies and goals based on emerging insights, market shifts, and customer feedback. They have the capacity to exercise constant renewal, which entails both self-reconfiguration for long-term survival and adaptation of current competences to a constantly shifting environment (Weber and Tarba, 2014).

Up to this point, our efforts have centered on elucidating the capacities and key strategies related to Team Agility. An additional pivotal element that significantly influences a team's agility is the Governance structure which is the key concept of this study.

### **2.3. Team Agility in Non-Software Team Settings**

Currently, agility is still mostly associated with software development, and the scientific literature on this topic is dominated by researchers in the field of information systems (Dingsoyr et al., 2012; Hoda et al., 2017). Regarding the governance structure, compared to other teams, software development teams, usually possess a higher level of autonomy, as it has been characterized as more suitable for their work environment (Ramasubbu and Bardhan, 2021). Agility in software teams is greatly enhanced by autonomy. They often operate within flexible governance structures, which allow for iterative and adaptive project management. Self-organizing, self-directed, and self-disciplined teams are encouraged by agile development (Highsmith 2004; Larman 2004). The Agile Manifesto's guiding premise is

that “the best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams” (Beck et al., 2001). Teams become more responsive and adaptable in dealing with dynamic settings when they are given the freedom to make decisions and the flexibility to modify their strategies in response to changing conditions.

The majority of previous studies on the connection between team agility and autonomy has been centered on software development teams. In Scrum specifically, which is one of the most popular agile software development frameworks, the team is empowered with the knowledge and resources to forge their own path and overcome obstacles on their own (Larman, 2004). On the other hand, non-software teams may have varied degrees of autonomy depending on the organization, the industry, and the tasks involved. They may encounter more centralized decision-making, formalized processes, standardized procedures and stricter hierarchical structures compared to software teams. In this situation, the interplay between management control and autonomy becomes crucial.

However, considering how the concept has evolved over time, it is critical that the investigation of team agility extend beyond its origins. Can enhanced autonomy be considered a panacea towards achieving team agility in non-software team settings as well? This question is rather complex and has not yet been thoroughly answered. When transitioning to non-software teams, the question of which is the optimal governance structure to increase their agility emerges. For these teams, an absence of managerial oversight could have unsafe outcomes. What are the risks associated with such an excess of autonomy and lack of control? This inquiry is also explored in the research findings.

### **3. Governance as a Key Aspect of Team Agility**

Effective governance is the cornerstone of successful Team Agility. The present discussion emphasizes the two principal variables pertinent to the concept Governance within a team, namely Autonomy and Managerial Control. There appears to be some early evidence, according to Dewettinck and Buyens (2006), that both autonomy and managerial control may be crucial for enhancing team performance inside an organization.

#### **3.1 Managerial Control in Teams: Definition and Types**

Control, in contrast to autonomy, may be viewed as inflexible, restrictive, and stifling (Ritzer, 1993). However, it has been claimed to be the default management strategy as it offers prominent benefits (Harris & White, 1987). Managerial control is an essential aspect of team dynamics, particularly in the context of agility. It refers to the mechanisms and processes through which managers influence and regulate team activities to ensure alignment with organizational goals and objectives. Different types of managerial control exist, each serving distinct purposes in team management. Two specific types of managerial control in teams are *diagnostic control* and *interactive control* (Simons, 2000).

Monitoring and assessing performance in accordance with specified standards and objectives is the main emphasis of diagnostic control. According to Simons (2000:303), a diagnostic control system focuses on attaining goals for the firm and for each employee in the organization. Managers utilize the diagnostic control system to track organizational output and address any deviations from predetermined performance criteria. It includes measuring team performance quantitatively using metrics, benchmarks, and key



performance indicators (KPIs). Diagnostic control gives managers the unbiased information they need to assess progress, spot performance gaps, and start making readjustments. This style of control focuses on well-defined performance measurements and monitoring systems and is frequently linked to conventional management techniques. Performance metrics and KPIs can provide clarity and accountability, but excessive reliance can lead to stress and hinder creativity. According to Ritzer (1993), this form of control runs the risk of ignoring the human element and treating people like machines. Team goals developed in accordance with an established corporate vision and strategy are a part of diagnostic control systems, as are associated feedback loops. Based on the ongoing gathering of team performance data, the feedback loops regulate any departure from the team's proximal and distal goals and provide various levels of toleration for irregularities.

Conversely, interactive control is a more proactive type of management that encourages managers to interact with their staff members and to assist them (Khanagha et al., 2022). It places a strong emphasis on the utilization of constant discussion and communication between team leaders and members to direct and influence behavior. It is used to analyze opportunities and challenges in the form of interaction, communication, or meetings and focuses on "how to control". (Simons, 2000:216). In order to comprehend difficulties, give feedback, and coordinate efforts, managers communicate with team members in a collaborative and participative manner. Interactive control encourages participation, empowerment, and shared decision-making, allowing for flexibility and adaptation in the face of shifting conditions. Particularly in knowledge-based or creative work contexts, this style of control is frequently linked to more contemporary and dynamic management methods. These kind of managers "personally and regularly involve themselves in the decisions of subordinates" (Simons, 2000, p. 49).

Both interactive control and diagnostic control have advantages and disadvantages. A defined framework for assessment and responsibility is provided by diagnostic control, ensuring that teams are working toward predetermined goals. Diagnostic control often uses a more conventional top-down strategy, concentrating on performance monitoring, adherence to prescribed processes, and standardized procedures. By imposing rigid norms and limiting the freedom for individual decision-making, this sort of control may restrict team autonomy. Conversely, interactive control places a strong emphasis on discussion, cooperation, and open communication. It entails developing autonomy and ownership while including team members in decision-making processes. Interactive control may promote team autonomy by fostering a sense of empowerment and accountability, which may result in greater agility. Teams can react to dynamic events more quickly and efficiently when they are given the flexibility to make their own decisions and actively participate in the design of their work processes.

By comprehending the essence of Managerial Control and its impact on agility, organizations can optimize their internal governance structures to enhance the responsiveness of their teams in the ever-changing business environment. Managerial Control, if utilized properly, can become a tool towards achieving team agility. But what happens if it is used immoderately, and authority takes over? Some of the risks that emerged from the interviews conducted during this research were identified.

### **3.2 Team Autonomy**

As defined by Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 231), autonomy is a state of "integration and freedom". According to Gerwin and Moffat (1997), the idea of autonomy at work refers to the capacity of the practitioner(s) to carry out the task as they consider appropriate, free from outside interference. It also refers to having the freedom to make decisions on the project they are working on. A team's level of collective control and discretion, including the capacity to set their own work schedules, choose how to execute tasks, and/or make decisions related to their job, is known as team autonomy (Cordery et al., 2010; Hackman, 1987). When the team itself serves as the reference of autonomy rather than individual team members, then team autonomy is collective (Chan, 1998).

Self-managing or '*Autonomous*' teams are cross-functional groups where individuals manage their own workload, shift work among themselves based on need and best fit, and participate in team decision making (Couture, 2017). Decision-making autonomy, task autonomy, and team autonomy are just a few of the several categories that autonomy may be categorized under. The power to make decisions on the procedures and objectives of the team is referred to as decision-making autonomy. Teams are better equipped to detect and react to environmental changes when decision-making is decentralized (McGrath 2001). The degree of independence team members have in carrying out their given responsibilities is referred to as task autonomy while team autonomy is the degree to which a team has control over its members, organizational structure, and operating procedures.

The agile paradigm supports giving teams autonomy to adopt practices that quickly or automatically create change, proactively or reactively embrace change, and learn from change (Conboy, 2009, p.340). The available empirical data shows that teams with higher levels of autonomy have better problem-solving abilities, are more motivated, and more dedicated to achieving team goals. A team with greater autonomy may make and carry out choices more quickly and inexpensively since they don't have to go via the time- and money-consuming bureaucratic organizational structure (Clark and Fujimoto, 1991). Additionally, autonomy fosters a sense of accountability and ownership among team members, improving collaboration and stimulating more creative thinking. Employees will feel more motivated and involved within their teams if there is a clear and shared goal, decision-making freedom, and opportunity to advance in their area of specialization (Aghina et al., 2021). Teams are better able to grab opportunities and react to shifting market conditions when they have the autonomy to make decisions and accept responsibility for their work. This eventually leads to greater overall team performance and organizational outcomes.

Taking all the above into consideration, it is clear that granting teams a certain amount of autonomy is crucial for enhancing team agility. However, providing autonomy without the necessary circumstances, may lead to dangerous paths. This research addresses the question of what essential elements teams need to have in order to safely utilize autonomy.

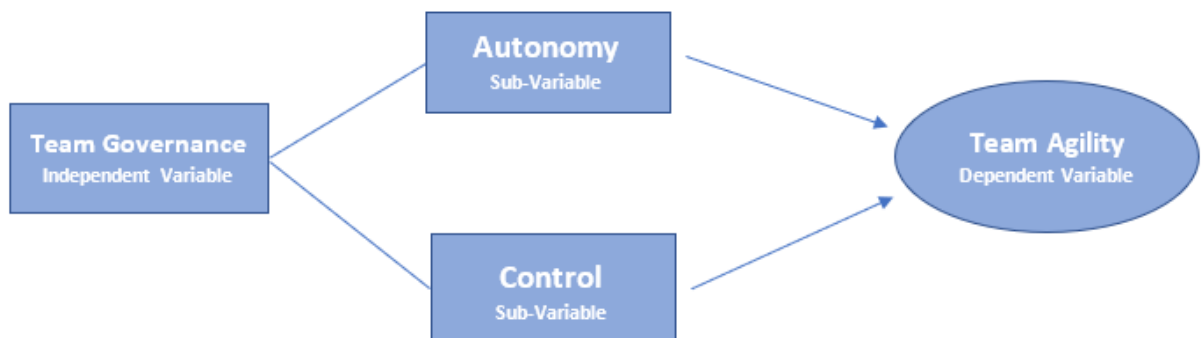
### **3.3 The Balance between Autonomy and Managerial Control**

Governance in a team involves managing the tension between autonomy and managerial control. The level of autonomy and managerial control given to a team can significantly impact its performance, productivity, and overall success. "By 'balanced management', one should understand a balance between control and autonomy," 2017 (Borzillo). Can management successfully blend control and autonomy, two seemingly incompatible

management philosophies? Ambidexterity, according to Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009), is the capacity to effectively manage the tension between exploitation (control) and exploration (autonomy). For teams to be successful and perform well, autonomy and managerial control must coexist in harmony. While management oversight maintains alignment with corporate objectives and promotes responsibility, team autonomy allows teams to make decisions, experiment and innovate. With the exponential complexity of the corporate environment, the need for managing the tensions between control and autonomy is constantly increasing (Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006). But are there specific strategies or practices that can help teams and organizations effectively manage this tension in a way that supports team agility? This is the key question under investigation.

In executive surveys, managers have associated the term "agile" with chaos and a loss of managerial control (Girod & Kralik, 2021). This is quite far from the truth. The "control - autonomy" dilemma (Criscuolo, Gal, & Menon, 2014; Vande Ven, 1986) was brought on by the processes supporting employee autonomy which frequently reduce the accountability of management (Hackman, 1987). However, in order to achieve the proper balance, control techniques must be matched to the level of team, allowing teams to exercise self-governance and decision-making while simultaneously providing adequate monitoring and direction. Teams can work effectively, adapt to shifting conditions, and accomplish their goals while remaining in line with the larger objectives of the business by finding the correct balance between managerial control and autonomy. The relationship between the concepts analyzed in this study is graphically represented in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework – The Link between Team Governance and Team Agility*



The above conceptual framework elucidates the intricate relationship between team governance, which contains autonomy and managerial control, and its impact on team agility. Understanding how these components interact and influence one another is essential for organizations seeking to enhance their teams' responsiveness and adaptability in a constantly changing environment. By investigating this framework, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the mechanisms that underpin effective team governance and its consequences for team performance and agility.

## **C. Research Methodology**

### **1. Research Design**

Two primary research questions are being addressed in this study. The first question investigates the influence of a team's governance structure on its agility, specifically it delves into the impact of two key governance drivers, autonomy and managerial control. The second question aims to identify principles and practices that enable managers to strike a balance between autonomy and control, ultimately enhancing team agility in non-software team settings.

An exploratory qualitative research approach was utilized to investigate the autonomy-control paradox that is being researched. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), studies that rely on extracting deeper meaning from multiple stakeholders and providing insights should utilize a qualitative design. According to Zikmund (2003:54), "Exploratory research is conducted to clarify ambiguous problems" as well as acquire greater knowledge about a concept or to better define a problem.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary data collection method. Face-to-face interviews have the potential to generate accurate and thorough information that can be clarified and confirmed (Zikmund, 2003). Individual interviews can be used to investigate a new topic, develop a new theory or concept, and highlight the key characteristics and factors behind a phenomenon (Blumberg et al., 2008).

### **2. Data Collection**

In order to minimize concentration bias, the interviewees were chosen from four distinct industries and from organizations with various sizes, structures, and cultures. The team settings chosen were all small-scale teams ranging from 4 to 10 team members. The industries represented were real estate, events, finance and information services. A non-probability sample of 5 managers and 7 team members was interviewed. Once the themes and insights started to converge and became steadily repetitive, the sample size of 12 was deemed appropriate. The data was collected via 12 face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted between 20 to 35 minutes. It contained open-ended questions to obtain insights relating to the research questions. Prior to each interview, key terms such as "team agility" and "team autonomy" were explained to ensure a shared understanding.

The particular sequence of the questions differed from one interview to the next based on the interviewee's flow of thought (Tharenou et al., 2007). To address issues that were relevant to a specific organization or sector, more questions were employed. The interviewees were highly engaged in the discussions as they attempted to understand the challenges involved. It was evident that each interviewee had experienced the dilemma under examination to a different extent.

### **3. Demographics**

In the context of this study, the respondents and their teams exhibited diverse demographic characteristics. The age range of participants spanned from 24 to 42 years, ensuring a broad age distribution. Regarding gender representation, both male and female participants contributed their perspectives, with the majority of the participants being females. The study's respondents were highly educated, with the majority holding master's degrees, underscoring a substantial level of educational attainment. Professional experience varied

among participants, contributing to a rich variance of expertise. The majority of the respondents however, had more than 3 years of experience in their field. Participants were drawn from the service sector, and the industries involved were specifically events, finance, information/consulting, and real estate, offering a diverse cross-section of organizational backgrounds. All interviewees were part of small-scale teams, typically comprising 4 to 10 members, indicative of a focus on agile team structures (Nord et al., 2014). Notably, respondents across managerial and team member roles enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy within their teams, with none operating in highly authoritarian or hierarchical team structures. While autonomy levels exhibited variation, none of the interviewees worked in fully autonomous, self-organized teams, thus providing nuanced insights into team autonomy and managerial control. These demographic characteristics, also graphically presented below, collectively form the backdrop against which the findings of this study are presented, enhancing the contextual understanding of the research outcomes.

Characteristic	Range/Representation
Age	24 to 42 years (broad age distribution)
Gender	4 males and 8 females
Education	Majority hold master's degrees
Professional Experience	Varied, majority has 3+ years of experience
Industries	Service sector, including events, finance, information/consulting, and real estate
Team Size	Small-scale teams (4 to 10 members)
Autonomy	Varied autonomy levels, no fully autonomous teams

#### 4. Data Analysis

All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed to enable the verification and analysis process. Content analysis was used which Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:221) define as “a quantitative analysis of qualitative data” allowing the researcher to identify the themes and patterns and then to synthesize them into findings. Specifically, the method of hermeneutics was employed. Hermeneutic content analysis offers a qualitative approach to understanding and interpreting the rich and nuanced meanings embedded within the textual data derived from the interviews. It focuses on uncovering the underlying meanings, contextual nuances, and thematic patterns within the transcribed interviews, ultimately seeking to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences (Prasad, 2002).

In the application of hermeneutic content analysis, the process involved repeated engagement with the interview transcripts. This process included immersing in the text, considering own preunderstandings and biases, and recognizing the importance of the hermeneutic circle – moving between the parts and the whole of the text to reveal layers of meaning (Love, 1994). Through this iterative process, themes and patterns within the interviews were identified and categorized into tables.

During the interviews, key questions were emphasized, and the answers obtained were subsequently analyzed for categorization into tables. In particular, specific quotations provided by the interviewees were highlighted, and elements or patterns were systematically ranked according to their prevalence as mentioned by the interviewees.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the analysis was conducted thoroughly and in-depth, with interpretations and insights being independently cross-verified. The quality of this research was ensured through the practice of personal reflexivity, which, as stated by Willig (2013), involves examining how the research is influenced by personal circumstances, privileges, facets of identity, experiences, and location. In this approach, the researcher consistently acknowledged and addressed their own biases and assumptions, resulting in a more objective analysis of the data. This practice of introspection also contributed to methodological transparency, prevention of confirmation bias, and the enhancement of the research's credibility and trustworthiness.

## **5. Limitations**

Potential limitations of this study should be acknowledged to provide a comprehensive understanding of its scope. Firstly, the sample may not be entirely representative of the population because individuals from other industries may have different perspectives on the dilemma under investigation. The context-dependent nature of the research means that changes in circumstances, societal norms, or participant perspectives over time may impact the relevance and applicability of the findings. The qualitative nature of the research prioritizes in-depth understanding over generalizability, limiting the transferability of findings to other contexts. Also, hermeneutic content analysis, as an interpretive method, inherently involves some degree of subjectivity in interpretation, despite efforts to mitigate researcher bias through personal reflexivity.

## D. Analysis of Findings

### 1. The impact of Autonomy on Team Agility

#### 1.1. Utilizing Autonomy to enhance Team Agility

The findings of this research highlight a consistent theme of autonomy's positive influence on team agility across various sectors. Autonomy is viewed by everyone interviewed as a catalyst for independent decision-making, creative problem-solving, and accountability, all of which contribute to enhanced adaptability and responsiveness within the team. Both team members and managers recognize the significance of autonomy in adapting strategies to the dynamic market, fostering flexibility, and empowering teams to respond adeptly to changes. As one of the managers stated *“If you give your team the potential to operate and make decisions on their own, they will be able to better evaluate their results and change their strategy when needed. The team will be more ready to function under any circumstances and will therefore be more agile. Results are better in the long-term.”* This viewpoint is in line with a large part of the theory. Hamel (2007) believed that in an environment of autonomy, employees will be driven to strive for high performance in a long-term manner. Another manager of the real estate sector emphasized the importance of autonomy specifically in sales teams. He cautioned that *“In a sales team, autonomy is prioritized”*.

However, autonomy isn't a standalone concept; rather, it hinges on a foundation of necessary conditions being met to ensure that it functions efficiently (Langfred, 2007). Based on the insights gathered from the conducted interviews, it becomes apparent that there are specific conditions necessary for a team to effectively exercise autonomy as it cannot be granted indiscriminately. The interviewees were queried about the key qualifications required for enabling autonomy within a team environment, and their responses were documented and transcribed. After a thorough analysis of their feedback, specific patterns and recurrent themes were identified. Table 1 provides a summary of the conditions that interviewers stressed the most, listed from the most to the least frequently mentioned. The results highlight the need for a strategic and thoughtful approach towards granting autonomy to a team, with the main focus being on maintaining a shared direction across all team members.

Table 1. The Necessary Conditions to Exercise Autonomy

Ranking	Necessary Conditions to Exercise Autonomy	Number of Respondents
1	Shared Direction and Goals	8
2	Training and Learning	6
3	Open Communication	5
4	Team dynamics and Complementary Characteristics	3
5	Work Experience	3

### **Shared Direction and Goal**

The importance of having a Shared Direction and Goal was highlighted by eight out of the twelve interviewees. Having a shared direction and goal is crucial for enabling a team to operate autonomously as it provides a clear and unified purpose that guides individual efforts toward a common objective. *“To enhance team agility, I believe it is necessary to foster an environment where autonomy is encouraged but guided by a shared vision and clear expectations”* and *“As I see it, the manager plays a huge role in cultivating an agile team. He has to establish clear goals and purposes. This clarity empowers team members to make informed decisions and adapt swiftly to changing situations”* two interviewees stated. When team members understand and align with the overarching direction, they can make independent decisions that consistently contribute to the team's desired outcome. As one respondent stated: *“Team members should be aware of what is expected from them while having the freedom to achieve it in their own way.”*

### **Training and Learning**

Half of the survey respondents emphasized the critical significance of proper training and continuous learning within their teams. The following quotes, extracted from the interviews, underscore this sentiment:

*“Continuous training and seminars would be highly beneficial in maintaining a balanced approach and fostering a culture of increasing performance. I believe that the more a team receives knowledge and training, the less it needs to be monitored.”*

*“As I see it, giving your team more freedom doesn't mean losing control completely. It's more about helping them take charge and feel responsible. Continuous training and learning is the key here. It gives our team the knowledge they need to make smart choices while staying connected to our main goals.”*

*“Our manager has always been very supportive and I appreciate her for that.. she allows us to learn from our mistakes and grow, both individually but also as a team. This attitude has definitely helped us gain confidence in ourselves and be able to make decisions without her assistance, whenever necessary.”*

The respondents emphasized how important it is to provide team members with the necessary training and learning opportunities in order to equip them with the skills, knowledge, and self-assurance they need to make informed decisions and act independently. Through thorough and continuous training and learning processes, team members not only improve their comprehension of their roles and responsibilities but also develop a better understanding of the larger organizational procedures, allowing them to use autonomy effectively. Furthermore, one manager highlighted the customization aspects of training methods and stressed the value of adapting the training process to suit each individual's needs rather than using a one-size-fits-all strategy.

### **Open Communication**

The findings of the research underscore the fundamental role of open communication within a team when striving for effective autonomy. Through a comprehensive analysis of interviews, it became evident that open communication serves as the linchpin for enabling a



team to operate autonomously with success. This dynamic exchange of information, ideas, and feedback forms the foundation upon which effective autonomy is built. Five of the twelve interviewees dwelled on its significance. The following statements were derived from the interviews:

*“Open communication is certainly necessary. It encourages collaboration between team members which is vital when providing autonomy to a team.”*

*“I believe that as a team, we are all quite open and honest with each other. Everyone can express themselves freely and ideas are always welcome. I think this is what helps us perform better and more independently.”*

To streamline the research findings and unify the core concepts highlighted by the interviewees, - specifically, 'Trust,' 'Transparency,' and 'Regular Feedback' – these elements were collectively categorized as integral components of "Open Communication" within the study.

Trust was identified as another critical component closely intertwined with open communication. Cultivating an environment of trust emerged as a crucial aspect of managing an autonomous team. One interviewee emphasized *“Cultivating an environment of trust and honesty is crucial when managing a team”* while one manager acknowledged that *“If you want your team to be able to operate autonomously, they should feel trusted and supported”*.

Transparency was deemed virtuous, with team members valuing full disclosure regarding their team's work and results. *“I appreciate it when my manager is being fully transparent regarding our team's performance and results. If something is not going well, we want to be the first ones to know”*, said one team member. This transparency not only keeps team members informed but also empowers them to proactively address challenges and make necessary improvements.

Additionally, the research highlighted the essential role of regular feedback within teams. The interviewees made several references on its importance when providing autonomy to their teams. Two managers specifically stated: *“I use very frequent feedback to guide my team members. It's not just about performance evaluations; it's about creating an ongoing conversation that leads to continuous improvement”* and *“As a manager, I value giving my teams the freedom to make their own decisions. However, I support their autonomy by offering them regular feedback, in order to discuss choices and make adjustments if needed”*. The team members interviewed also suggested that they view feedback positively, provided that it is constructive. *“My team and I are trusted with a significant amount of autonomy in our work, but that doesn't mean we are left alone. We do have frequent feedback sessions with our manager. I see it more like a safety net rather than micromanagement”*, one of them noted.

### **Team Dynamics and Complementary Characteristics**

Three respondents, all of whom were managers, highlighted the importance of Team Dynamics and Complementary Characteristics as a significant element that enables a team to operate autonomously. A manager of the events industry stated that *“For me the most important thing is the team dynamics. You want a team with members that fit with each*

*other and have complementary characteristics.”* Another manager elaborated: *“I also think that different dynamics are needed within the team, the solution oriented and the one that brings motivation to the team. By combining these dynamics, a complete team can be created that will be fully able to operate autonomously.”* When team members possess diverse skills, strengths, and perspectives that complement each other, they can collaboratively take more informed decisions. Effective collaborative decision-making thrives when team members have complementary characteristics. One of the managers interviewed highlighted that it falls upon the managers to harness these diverse qualities and determine the most suitable governance structure that aligns seamlessly with their team's unique composition.

*“As I see it, the manager plays a very important role in cultivating agility within his team. He has to know the unique traits of each one of his members. A good manager can adapt to their team members instead of wanting them to adapt to his managerial style.”*

### **Work Experience**

Although it may be generally perceived as of high importance, work experience was not that high in the ranking as some managers indicated that they see team members with insignificant experience achieving commendable results when receiving the right training and put in the right position.

### **1.2 The Risks of Excessive Autonomy**

Based on the insights gathered from conducted interviews, it becomes evident that granting excessive autonomy with a lack of oversight within a team environment may result in unfavorable consequences. High levels of individual autonomy within teams have been linked to poor performance, according to Langfred (2004). He explained the risk of having too much autonomy within a team, emphasizing the necessity of equipping the team members with the ability to manage themselves. Without the right conditions, autonomy can present many difficulties and have a negative impact on a team's performance as a whole, limiting its ability to become agile. The interviewees were inquired regarding the potential outcomes associated with granting too much autonomy to a team, and their responses were recorded and transcribed. The results underscore the need for thoughtful evaluation when deciding the extent to which autonomy should be granted. After closely examining their feedback, notable patterns and recurrent themes emerged. Table 2 provides an overview of the interviewees' most commonly expressed concerns, ranked from the most frequently mentioned to the least.

Table 2. The Risks of Excessive Autonomy

Ranking	Risks of Excessive Autonomy	Number of Respondents
1	Loss of common direction	6
2	Lack of coordination and collaboration	5
3	Errors and inconsistent quality	5
4	Unaccountability	4
5	Uneven Workload Distribution	2

### ***Loss of Common Direction***

Six interviewees agreed that in an environment of absolute autonomy within a team, devoid of necessary conditions, it is quite likely that a Loss of Common Direction may occur after a certain point. When every member is granted absolute independence, it becomes easy for divergent paths and goals to emerge. This divergence arises from varying interpretations of tasks and objectives, and the absence of overarching guidance can foster a disjointed sense of purpose. A manager from the events sector specifically stated: *“Another danger of complete autonomy is that the team may lose its direction and misinterpretations might occur. Boundaries may be breached, and certain things may become negotiable when they shouldn’t.”*

### ***Lack of Coordination and Collaboration***

As a consequence to the above, the team's performance can suffer, as efforts become dispersed and inefficient, hindered by the Lack of Coordination and Collaboration, which was also mentioned as a very common danger of absolute autonomy. One team member specifically mentioned *“Personally, I think I perform better under my manager’s oversight. It provides me with a sense of safety”*. According to Langfred (2004), even if employees have significant degrees of autonomy, there should still be some form of employee oversight in place to prevent coordination and process loss. When team members are allowed to pursue their tasks without aligning with others, a lack of coordination inevitably arises. Collaborative synergies, essential for innovative problem-solving, are stifled as communication channels erode due to the absence of a shared context. The team's ability to work cohesively and adapt rapidly is compromised, hindering their agility.

### ***Errors and Inconsistent Quality***

Giving a team unrestricted autonomy without providing the circumstances essential to maintain high quality standards might result in a dangerous situation where the team's production suffers by constant Errors and Inconsistent Quality, as indicated by almost half of the interviewees. *“Excessive autonomy, particularly in the financial sector, may result in errors, fraudulent activities, and potential issues with clients and suppliers”* said a team member working in the financial sector, highlighting the value of maintaining high-quality, precise services in their industry. A manager from the events industry also cautioned that

*“Complete Autonomy may sometimes be a risk especially in our industry, where a strict timeline is of high importance. Something might go wrong and it is not very easy to fix it when time is running out.”* The latter statement emphasizes the large effect that errors may have on short term projects. This lack of reliability obstructs the team's agility, as valuable time and effort are expended in rectifying errors and realigning divergent work.

### ***Unaccountability***

Granting a team unmitigated autonomy in the absence of control mechanisms can lead to a precarious scenario where Unaccountability flourishes. Decisions can be made without transparency, and the lack of oversight might hinder the identification of areas needing improvement. A manager particularly indicated *“Without a strong sense of responsibility and transparent communication, autonomy risks becoming a license to avoid consequences”*, one of the managers cautioned. *“Character integrity then becomes vital, as it ensures autonomy is used responsibly”*, he continued.

### ***Uneven Workload Distribution***

Concurrently, without clear guidelines for workload allocation, certain members might shoulder disproportionate responsibilities while others contribute less, leading to feelings of resentment and demotivation. This imbalance not only disrupts team cohesion but also hampers their agility, impacting timely problem-solving and stifling innovation. The 2 interviewees that mentioned this danger of complete autonomy were both team members. One, in particular, stated: *“...we have to be quite careful with how work is allocated among the team. Autonomy should make things better for all, not create an unfair divide.”*

From the above analysis, the research findings underscore the dual nature of autonomy's impact on team agility. The interviews emphasized that autonomy, when harnessed within the right conditions, is pivotal for enabling teams to thrive and evolve. However, they also bring to light the inherent risks associated with an environment of absolute autonomy devoid of oversight. Therefore, a balanced perspective emerges; autonomy is a means to enhance team agility, requiring, however, essential elements. It should empower innovation and experimentation, while anchored in shared purpose and direction.

## **2. The impact of Managerial Control on Team Agility**

### **2.1 Different Control Mechanisms and Their Impact on Team Performance**

Effective governance plays a pivotal role in shaping a team's agility – its ability to respond swiftly and effectively to changing circumstances. The interviews conducted with both managers and team members, provided significant insights into how different control mechanisms are perceived and how they influence team performance and agility.

The interviewees were asked to first review the use of performance metrics and KPIs within their team setting. Managers emphasized the importance of these mechanisms, typically referred to as *“Metric-Driven Control”* to measure team achievements. According to one Manager, *“KPIs offer insights into progress, leading to necessary adaptations ...it provides a*

*clearer picture.*". Another manager echoed this sentiment, saying, "KPIs provide clear targets, focusing on outcomes." These mechanisms aim to establish a benchmark for success and accountability. Another manager highlighted the importance of these performance metrics on identifying the overachievers. "For me, performance metrics can distinguish someone who goes the extra mile from others that simply complete their tasks", she stated. Team members, however, although saying that these mechanisms can act as motivators, also shared concerns about pressure and potential stress when used extensively. One Team Member mentioned, "Meeting predefined goals can be stressful," while another one added, "Excessive focus on continuous performance tracking may hinder team dynamics." The quantitative nature of these metrics can inadvertently lead to undue stress on team members which inevitably affects their overall performance and ability to be proactive.

The interviewees were later on asked to identify instances of control that places less emphasis on performance metrics and instead emphasizes open communication and collaboration within their team. All of the people interviewed highlighted the importance of this type of control within every team setting. A manager from the real estate industry elaborated on the matter by stating that "Open communication between team members and the manager fosters a collaborative environment. Quality, not just quantitative KPIs, matters. Team members can take ownership of challenging cases, showcasing effort and dedication beyond mere numbers." Viewing the matter from a team member's perspective, this type of control is seen as vital for enhancing individual and team morale. Two of them specifically mentioned "I believe that introducing more open communication and participative decision-making within my team would make me feel that my opinion is more valued" and "Open communication instead of mere numbers reporting is essential for a team to function efficiently".

The overview of the interviews highlight that managerial control, when used in the correct way, utilizing different mechanisms, can enhance team agility. This perspective was captured essentially by one of the interviewees. "Balanced control and feedback mechanisms can encourage our team's growth and ability to respond to changes promptly", he cautioned, when asked about how different control mechanisms may impact their team's agility.

## **2.2 The Risks of Excessive Managerial Control**

The use of managerial control, however, has the potential to disrupt team relations and adversely affect the group's performance and agility when used carelessly. Excessive control, even though it may result in some "quick wins" in the short run, cannot be sustained over the long run since it may disrupt a rather well functioning team. Taylor (2010) stated that the majority of employees in fact demonstrate control-adverse behavior that leads to poor performance.

The information gathered from the conducted interviews, confirmed the fact that an extensive application of managerial control within a team environment might result in unfavorable consequences. During the interviews, participants were asked about the possible outcomes that may occur when managerial control prevails in a team. Their responses were documented and transcribed. Upon analyzing the responses, certain commonalities and recurring themes emerged. Table 3 presents a summary of the interviewees' most frequently stated concerns, arranged in order from the most frequently mentioned to the least. The results emphasize the importance of conducting a thorough assessment when determining the degree of managerial control to be exercised.

Table 3. The Risks of Excessive Control

Ranking	Risks of Excessive Control	Number of Respondents
1	Stifles creativity	7
2	Pressure and demotivation	6
3	Lowers employee confidence	4
4	Hinders innovation	4
5	Lack of Ownership and Responsibility	3

### **Stifling of Creativity**

The Stifling of Creativity is the main risk posed by excessive managerial control within a team, as imposed by the interviewees. When managers exert excessive control over every aspect of a team's work, they inadvertently create an environment where team members are discouraged from thinking outside the box and exploring their creative side. *"I feel that when excessive control is exercised, it distracts my creativity as a person, and it hinders our ability to be innovative as a team"* said one of the interviewees. A manager expressed his concern on the matter, especially when a team is faced with emergent situations. He specifically stated that *"Excessive control stifles creativity, hindering agile responses, especially during emergent situations."* Such control often results in rigid guidelines, micromanagement, and a focus on adherence to predefined processes, leaving little room for experimentation or the free flow of ideas.

### **Pressure and Demotivation**

Half of the interviewees reported that excessive managerial control within a team carries the peril of creating an environment rife with pressure and demotivation. When managers overly dictate tasks, monitor progress meticulously, and maintain a constant presence, team members can feel a heightened sense of scrutiny and performance anxiety. This, in turn, erodes their intrinsic motivation and passion for their work, as the focus shifts from personal growth and accomplishment to meeting managerial expectations. *"The employees may feel like they are tools of the company and that they constantly have to prove their worth to their managers. They will inevitably lose motivation and interest in their work."* said one of the managers, clearly expressing his concern on the matter. Some of the team members also commented on this matter: *"I don't want to be checked by my manager all the time; it makes me feel anxious. I believe I am much more productive when I have the freedom to manage my own work"* and *"In my previous work environment, I often felt like a tool, just executing orders. Now, I'm engaged in team conversations, where my ideas are valued. This shift has encouraged me to take more initiative, knowing that my ideas and insights matter."* The last quote perfectly highlights the importance of fostering a collaborative and empowering, rather than a stifling work environment. When team members are treated as valuable contributors rather than mere task executors, they tend to be more motivated, engaged, and proactive.

### ***Lowers Employee Confidence***

Closely related to the loss of motivation is also the loss of employee confidence, which was up next in the ranking. *“Excessive control may lead to micromanaging which is very toxic within a team. Tracking, delegating, reporting is completely healthy, but micromanaging can lead to a person losing their trust and confidence in themselves and creates a sense of uncertainty in their job”*, said another interviewee, clearly portraying the risk imposed. The weight of this pressure often leads to burnout and decreased job satisfaction. As a result, team performance suffers due to reduced morale and the inability to maintain a cohesive and agile approach. In this context, excessive managerial control risks transforming a once-thriving team into one plagued by disengagement and a lack of enthusiasm, ultimately hampering both individual and collective success.

### ***Hinders Innovation***

Excessive managerial control within a team poses a significant risk by inhibiting Innovation, suggested four interviewees. When managers exert overly tight control over decision-making processes, idea generation, and project execution, they inadvertently create an atmosphere where team members are discouraged from exploring new and unconventional approaches. In such an environment, the fear of making mistakes and facing reprimand often overshadows the inclination to think creatively and experiment with novel solutions. To cite the exact words of some of the respondents, *“Excessive control stifles individual initiative, negating the potential contributions of highly educated and innovative individuals”* and *“...thus it may lead to members just fulfilling their tasks without considering quality and giving innovative ideas”*. As a consequence of extreme control, the team's capacity for innovation becomes stifled, leading to a lack of fresh ideas and a reliance on established methods. This rigid adherence to managerial directives limits the team's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and seize emerging opportunities, ultimately impeding their potential for breakthrough achievements. The outcome is a team that is confined to a narrow scope of possibilities, unable to tap into its collective creativity, and consequently falling behind in a rapidly evolving landscape that thrives on innovative thinking.

### ***Lack of Ownership and Responsibility***

Some of the interviews also suggested that an extensive amount of control can derive the ownership and responsibility of a team. When managers micromanage every aspect of a project, team members are robbed of the opportunity to take ownership of their work and make decisions autonomously. This lack of ownership leads to a decrease in accountability, as team members may become detached from the outcomes of their efforts when managerial guidance dictates their every move. A team member particularly expressed her concern, *“Excessive control can stifle initiative from us. I believe in being accountable for my work. When I take ownership, I'm more committed to delivering quality results”*, she noted. Consequently, a culture of passivity and dependency develops, where team members feel disconnected from the bigger picture and the impact of their contributions. *“One thing I've learned through my experience as a manager is that excessive control can unintentionally lead to team members feeling disconnected from their responsibilities. It's important to strike a balance between providing guidance and allowing them to take ownership of their tasks”*, a manager cautioned. The lack of responsibility not only hampers individual growth and development but also weakens the team's collective cohesion and ability to function with agility. Innovation and problem-solving suffer as compliance takes precedence over creative

thinking. In this environment, the team's performance suffers, and its capacity to adapt and excel in a rapidly changing landscape is compromised, resulting in missed opportunities and a failure to achieve their full potential.

Ultimately, the findings underscore the intricate relationship between managerial control and team agility. While the concept of team agility, when examined in the software industry, is primarily associated with autonomous, self-organized teams, in other team environments, managerial control can significantly contribute to enhancing agility, if applied effectively and not excessively.

## **E. Discussion**

### **1. The Impact of Autonomy and Control on Team Agility**

The comprehensive exploration of the impact of both autonomy and managerial control on team agility highlights a nuanced and delicate relationship. The study's findings highlight the fact that managerial control as well as autonomy may be valuable instruments for influencing a team's capacity to react quickly and effectively to changing situations. All interviewees felt that autonomy and control are not mutually exclusive and achieving the ideal balance between the two forces is crucial for maintaining high team performance. A one-size-fits-all strategy is ineffective, though, as each component has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Autonomy, when appropriately harnessed within the right conditions, emerges as a catalyst for team agility. The key lies in fostering a shared direction and goal, providing proper training, nurturing open communication, and fostering complementary team dynamics. These elements empower innovation while being anchored in a shared purpose, and they drive teams to excel in a dynamic market. On the other hand, excessive autonomy poses significant risks to a team's performance and agility. Loss of common direction, fragmentation of goals, and a lack of coordination and collaboration can undermine the team's collective efforts. Therefore, autonomy must be coupled with the necessary conditions and oversight to ensure its benefits are fully realized.

Similarly, managerial control, when skillfully applied, can enhance team agility. Control mechanisms like performance metrics and KPIs offer insights into progress, leading to necessary adaptations and a clearer picture of accomplishments. However, an overemphasis on quantitative metrics can lead to undue pressure and demotivation, hindering a team's proactive stance. Excessive managerial control poses its own set of risks, including stifling creativity, inducing pressure and demotivation and eroding employee confidence.

Therefore, the research findings suggest that achieving the right balance between autonomy and managerial control is essential for enhancing team agility. In the following section, recommendations will be offered on how organizations can strike this governance equilibrium to create an environment that promotes team agility.



## 2. Strategies for Balancing Autonomy and Control

Successful agile implementations must consider team governance as a key component. In order to make their teams more agile, managers must strike the correct balance of involvement to promote team autonomy while also ensuring the team has the necessary support system to thrive (Couture, 2017). The following suggestions, derived from the theoretical exploration and the comprehensive analysis of the research findings, address the ultimate research question of this study: *“How can managers effectively utilize the interaction between autonomy and control to cultivate team agility?”*.

### ***Guided Autonomy***

Granting absolute autonomy to a team could introduce substantial risks and is generally infeasible if provided without the necessary terms. However, confining autonomy within defined parameters could foster agile capabilities within a team and enhance its overall performance. Wageman (1995) argues that the manager must be responsible for setting the goals, creating a framework and structure and should then grant employees autonomy to perform within these guidelines. Gilbert and Sutherland (2013) suggested that team members will respond positively when provided freedom to operate, but within a well understood “brief”. To effectively implement guided autonomy, managers need to establish a foundation of clear communication and shared expectations. This involves articulating well-defined goals that reflect the organization's mission and values and ensuring that team members understand how their individual contributions tie into these overarching aspirations. When creating high-performing teams, one should ensure that everyone is committed and aware of the necessary actions on both a personal and team level. (Hakanen and Soudunsari, 2012).

Research by Cass Business School (Chatham, 2015) suggests that:

- 6 percent of people like to be told what to do
- 4 percent of people prefer complete freedom
- 90 percent of people respond best to freedom within guidelines

The managers need to provide the guidelines, but make sure there is freedom within them. They should invest time in communicating and establishing the vision, objectives, targets, and best practices. Ensure that the team takes the time to decide on roles and expectations; everyone needs to know what is expected of them and how decisions are going to be made. This shared understanding helps team members make quicker decisions aligned with the team's goals, a crucial aspect of agility.

### ***Collaborative Decision Making***

The process of making decisions that affect a team's objectives, tasks, and overall functioning is known as collaborative decision making. This method involves the team as a whole. It seeks to make decisions that are informed and accepted by all team members by utilizing their different perspectives, knowledge, and insights. This type of decision-making contrasts with conventional hierarchical approaches, where choices are often made by

managers or leaders with little or no involvement from the team. A significant portion of the research has emphasized the significance of a collaborative decision-making method as a means of enhancing team performance because of different perspectives that are taken into consideration. 'It is widely regarded that the real value of collaboration lies in the ability to draw from diverse perspectives and expertise to solve complex problems' (Thayer, Petruzzelli, and McClurg 2018, 363).

The idea of collaborative decision-making provides managers with a useful framework for striking a balance between control and autonomy within their teams. By include people in the decision-making process, it provides team members greater authority and promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility. The advantage and effect of lower-level decision making results in increased effectiveness and employee morale as a result of autonomy (Harraf et al., 2015). This increased autonomy can lead to higher levels of motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment as team members feel their voices are heard and their contributions valued. By distributing decision-making authority, managers also reduce the burden of micro-management, allowing them to focus on broader strategic issues.

The implementation of collaborative decision making can significantly impact team agility. By involving team members in decisions, organizations tap into a broader pool of ideas and insights. Decentralization and deference of decision-making power, rather than centralization, generally increases the overall agility of teams and subsequently, organizations. (Harraf et al., 2015). As team members engage in joint decision-making, they combine their individual expertise to create a collective intelligence that drives smarter, more informed choices. This enables quicker adaptation to changes in the external environment, as teams can identify and respond to emerging trends more effectively.

### ***Adaptive Management***

The interviews conducted underscored a fundamental principle: the tendency for autonomy or control as the leading governance driver is far from uniform across team members. Some thrive when afforded the latitude to work autonomously, while others flourish with varying degrees of managerial control.

The responsibility rests on the manager's shoulders to discern the inclinations of individual team members, thereby determining the optimal management style for each. The decision-making process regarding the choice of management style for each team member, whether leaning towards more autonomy or control, may be influenced by a variety of factors, such as individual competence and experience, risk tolerance or character attributes. When evaluating leadership in teams, some authors (Stewart, 2006, Burke et al., 2006) define leadership as the way a leader acts toward the team as a whole. In this strategy, it is implicitly expected that every team member would react the same manner to a particular kind of managerial behavior. Other authors disagree with this strategy, arguing that team members may respond differently to different management styles and that managers should modify their approach depending on the maturity, experience, or inner characteristics of the relevant subordinate (see, for instance, Hersey and Blanchard, 1993; Graeff, 1997). The majority of the managers interviewed acknowledged the significance of the manager's adaptive skills in utilizing each member's strengths. *"In my opinion, a manager's role in building an agile team is essential. He needs to be aware of the qualities that make each of his members unique. A good manager can adapt to their team members instead of wanting them to adapt to his managerial style"*, one of them quoted.

In conclusion, adaptive management serves as a dynamic framework that enables a manager to effectively balance autonomy and control by tailoring their approach to the unique characteristics and preferences of each team member. This approach acknowledges diversity, responds to individual needs, and fosters a culture of flexibility and collaboration. The Agile Manifesto ultimately emphasizes “valuing individuals and interactions over processes and tools” as a core tenet (Beck et al., 2001).

### ***Continuous Learning Culture***

By fostering a culture of continuous learning, training and skill development, managers create an environment that empowers team members to expand their skillset, thus building confidence in their own capabilities. Agile principles have long advocated for teams where the role of the leader is more often referred to as a “Coach” or a “Facilitator”. (Tarakci et al., 2001). Several workplace learning researchers assert that managers can facilitate the learning of their staff by building and maintaining a ‘learning culture’ within the organization (e.g. Ellinger 2005; Warhurst 2013). But how can this culture be cultivated?

Amy (2008, 220) writes ‘facilitating refers to making a process less difficult for others while supporting their progress’. Facilitating continuous learning demands a multifaceted approach on the part of the manager. Empirical and conceptual literature on workplace learning is replete with references to the importance of managers encouraging risk taking and experimentation. Managers who espouse a learning-orientation engage in practices that support workplace learning, such as encouraging employees to challenge the status quo without fear of retaliation or retribution (Lans, Verhees, and Verstegen 2016). Vera and Crossan urge managers to foster opportunities for learning by encouraging experimentation and inspiring people to “take “intelligent risks.” (2004, 228). Autonomy, in this case, becomes a means to experiment and implement newfound knowledge, while control serves as a guiding mechanism to ensure that experimentation remains aligned with overarching team and organizational goals.

Other strategies for promoting learning were mentioned in a study by Kotey, Saini, and While (2011), such as clearly defining employees' roles and monitoring and correcting employees while they carried out their tasks. Clarifying roles and expectations establishes a controlled framework while facilitating learning integration. Actively observing and correcting tasks not only maintains oversight but also serves as a teaching opportunity.

Coetzer (2006) reported that managers supported learning in several ways, such as through sharing their personal learning experiences with employees, providing incentives for employees to learn, and encouraging employees’ continuous improvement efforts. Participation in continuous learning and development makes important contributions to the development of employees’ positive work attitudes such as job satisfaction and engagement (Cerasoli et al. 2018) and to employee well-being (Watson et al. 2018). Providing access to various learning resources, such as workshops, online courses, and mentorship opportunities, further fortifies this culture of ongoing learning. One of the managers agreed that “*continuous training that focuses on personal development rather than just the operations of the business has many benefits in the long run.*” In addition, managers can set up routine one-on-one meetings with team members to talk about their personal development priorities and design learning paths that support both collective and personal goals.

Therefore, there seems to be broad agreement in the literature that managers may support workplace learning in essentially two ways: by creating a learning environment (e.g. Ellinger 2005) and by implementing developmental interventions (e.g. Beattie et al. 2014). The integration of continuous learning within a team yields tangible benefits that extend beyond the realm of skill enhancement. As team members engage in continuous learning, they naturally become more proactive to change. This enhanced agility is a direct consequence of exposure to diverse concepts and perspectives, which encourages innovative thinking and problem-solving attitude.

### ***Open Communication***

Open communication within a team refers to an environment in which team members and their manager are encouraged to share information, thoughts, ideas, feedback, emotions and concerns freely and transparently. The common view in the literature on the matter is summed up in the following quote from Daft (2002): "Open communication improves the operations of a company, builds trust, spreads knowledge, and provides a foundation for communicating vision, values, and other crucial, big-picture information" (p. 322).

Open communication is a vital mechanism of effective team governance. Qualitative research conducted by Gilbert and M. Sutherland (2013) emphasized that, when trying to maintain proportional levels of autonomy and control, clear, unambiguous communication is far more effective than a series of prescriptive rules and policies. To foster open communication within their teams, managers should create a safe space where team members feel comfortable to discuss their thoughts, ideas and concerns. Integral elements within open communication such as building trust, fostering transparency, and nurturing regular constructive feedback, are all crucial components contributing to the equilibrium between autonomy and control.

### ***Open Communication: Trust***

Trust emerges as the foundation upon which open communication is built. Trust is difficult to define. Ring and van de Ven (1992) define trust as "confidence in another's goodwill". Trust, according to Fukuyama (1996), is a result of expecting others to act honorably and cooperatively. Larson and LaFasto (1989) argued that four elements are needed in trust building: honesty, openness, consistency and respect. Without one of these components, trust may become fragile or even collapse. The building materials of trust are also empathy, respect, interest in others, and genuine listening (Hakanen and Soudunsaari, 2012). Research has suggested that trust might promote more open and effective communication among team members (e.g., Frazier, Johnson, Gavin, Gooty, & Snow, 2010). Thus, trust supports open communication and vice versa.

The Agile Manifesto's guiding idea to "build projects around motivated individuals, give the teams the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done" (Beck et al., 2001) is (mis)interpreted to only mean tools, infrastructure, or systems. This principle, however, highlights the importance to also give teams a psychologically safe and trusting environment. By establishing an environment of trust, managers facilitate the team's inclination to embrace autonomy while respecting necessary control measures. When team members feel their opinions are valued and listened to, they are more likely to respect the manager's guidance and exercise autonomy responsibly. Furthermore, recent research conducted by Renault and Tarakci (2023) present evidence that positive emotions, teamwork, supportive behaviors, and psychological safety—related to trust and affective

intra team relations—is linked to teams adapting better to change and can significantly impact team agility. These positive emotions help create bonds among members, and this subsequently enables a team's fast and flexible responses.

### ***Open Communication: Transparency***

Open communication ensures that information is shared promptly and transparently. Organizations' attempts to give their employees accurate, substantial, and useful information are emphasized by the notion of transparency. Such quality of information can help avoid confusion and improve communication efficiency within every team setting (Rawlins, 2008). Managers who embrace transparency create a culture where information, decisions, and reasoning are shared openly. Perhaps the strongest advocate of transparency as a component of open communication is Peters (1987). He even went so far as to deem secrecy and "information distortion" as "management enemy number one" (p. 513). This transparency alleviates uncertainties and mitigates potential conflicts arising from a lack of understanding. By engaging in transparent communication, managers provide the contextual landscape within which autonomy can be exercised, ensuring alignment with overarching organizational goals. Research conducted by Li, Sun and Tao (2021) suggests that transparent communication generates a sense of shared control and can help employees feel more prepared and able to actively cope with change. Transparency is also related to a rapid information flow within teams, and as mentioned earlier, speed is one of the four main capabilities of agile teams.

### ***Open Communication: Regular Feedback***

Regular feedback is the cornerstone of effective team governance. It is an essential and integral component of maintaining open communication within teams. The definition of feedback in organizations and business is an ongoing, open, two-way communication between two or more parties (Wilhelm, 2008).

The process of feedback can be negative or positive but the important thing is that it should be constructive and not destructive in nature (Hamid and Mahmood, 2010). According to Rolland (1996), feedback is considered constructive when there are agreed standards of behavior and performance, and two-way communication about what has gone right as well as what has gone wrong. Constructive feedback promotes development, improves self-awareness, and provides options.<sup>1</sup> As long as it is constructive and not destructive, regular feedback serves as a cornerstone for fostering a positive and productive work environment, encouraging personal and collective growth. Managers that want to safely cultivate autonomy within their teams should incorporate regular feedback mechanisms, such as one-on-one meetings, group discussions, or performance reviews, into the team's workflow.

According to the agile manifesto, teams should reflect on their activities and plans very regularly (Beck et al., 2001). When team members receive and provide feedback regularly, it encourages a culture where everyone feels comfortable sharing their viewpoints, raising

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<sup>1</sup> Centre for learning and teaching UoS. Principles of constructive feedback 2003. [Online]. Available from URL: [www.clt.soton.ac.uk/Events/Workshops/OPS/feedback.htm](http://www.clt.soton.ac.uk/Events/Workshops/OPS/feedback.htm).

concerns, and offering suggestions. This open exchange fosters a collaborative atmosphere. Furthermore, regular feedback sessions enable managers to monitor progress and intervene when necessary. This maintains a level of control that is proactive and supportive rather than stifling. It demonstrates that while autonomy is encouraged, the manager remains invested in the team's achievements and is available to provide assistance when needed.

Overall, open communication is a cornerstone for achieving a balance between autonomy and control. It empowers team members, strengthens relationships, and enables effective decision-making within a controlled framework. As a manager, one needs to develop a unique set of skills to move from command and control to communication and enablement (Couture, 2017). Moreover, communication is repeatedly mentioned to be one of the most important success factors of agile teams (Hummel et al., 2013). By fostering an open communication environment, team leaders empower their members to contribute to agile practices. Agile approaches benefit from an open communication culture, which also improves the team's capacity for innovation, collaboration, and adaptation to constantly shifting conditions.

## **F. Conclusions and Recommendations**

In conclusion, this study underscores the intricate nature of autonomy and managerial control and their impact on team agility across various team contexts beyond software development. Autonomy, when appropriately fostered within conducive conditions, emerges as a pivotal factor in enabling teams to thrive and evolve. A shared direction and common goal serve as the foundational pillars that unite team members under a coherent objective, driving their collective efforts towards success. However, the research findings also shed light on the inherent risks associated with absolute autonomy. An environment devoid of oversight can lead to a loss of common direction, fragmentation of goals, and a dearth of coordination and collaboration, ultimately eroding the very essence of team agility. Conversely, when it comes to managerial control, it is emphasized that it can significantly contribute to cultivating agility. While the concept of team agility, when examined in the software industry, is primarily associated with autonomous, self-organized teams, in various other team environments, managerial control, when applied effectively, can significantly contribute to enhancing team agility. Nonetheless, an excessive and overbearing use of control measures can stifle creativity, demotivate team members, hinder innovation, and undermine individual ownership and responsibility. Micromanagement, in particular, can lead to disengagement from duties and a disconnection from the team's overarching goals. In light of these findings, it is clear that a balanced perspective emerges. The key lies in striking the right balance, recognizing that both autonomy and managerial control are tools that, when used wisely, can foster agility within teams.

Achieving the delicate equilibrium between autonomy and control is an endeavor demanding ongoing reflection and adaptability. The adoption of a multifaceted approach is imperative. Foremost, managers must provide clear guidelines and a well-defined framework, while granting team members the freedom to navigate within these confines, a notion characterized as *"Guided Autonomy"*. Simultaneously, the active involvement of team members in decision-making processes is pivotal, as it not only empowers them but also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to team objectives. Promoting a culture of continuous learning and nurturing open, transparent communication also appear as key to this approach. These principles resonate deeply with the tenets of agility, positioning the team to be adaptive and responsive in a constantly evolving business landscape. Recognizing the individuality of team members is equally critical; tailoring management styles to

accommodate diverse preferences for autonomy and control ensures that each member thrives. Ultimately, the key lies in valuing individuals, encouraging their growth, and creating a culture of collaboration and trust, which are the cornerstones of agile and resilient teams. By diligently implementing these strategies, managers can cultivate an environment where autonomy is encouraged and control is judiciously maintained, striking the intricate balance essential for team agility and success.

Overall, this study offers significant implications for both theoretical understanding and practical application in the realm of team governance and agility. From a theoretical standpoint, it highlights the intricate relationship between autonomy and managerial control. It emphasizes that they are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary tools that can enhance team agility in team settings beyond software development. This challenges traditional notions that lean heavily towards one approach over the other. Practically, the findings of this study resonate with contemporary challenges faced by organizations seeking to enhance their teams' agility and adaptability in an ever-evolving business landscape. By recognizing the value of a nuanced balance between autonomy and control, organizations can better guide their teams towards achieving greater flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness. Future research could explore contextual variations in the balance between autonomy and control across specific industries and team types and delve into the psychological and cultural factors influencing management preferences of their team governance structure.

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