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# Does it fit? The relationships between personality, decision autonomy fit, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion in self-managing organizations

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## Abstract

The novel organizational form of self-managing organizations decentralizes decision authority, thus promising higher adaptability and sustainability. However, recent practical experiences showed that such organizations struggle with employee turnover and lack of engagement, and thus, levers to improve personnel selection are required. This work investigated the relationship between person-environment fit regarding perceived and ideal decision autonomy and the employee outcomes of work engagement and emotional exhaustion in self-managing organizations. Furthermore, the associations with personality traits were examined. The study relied on cross-sectional survey data from two subsamples of employees working in self-managing and traditional organizations. Group comparison was used to test the elevated level of decision autonomy in self-managing organizations, polynomial regression with response surface analysis was used to investigate the effect of (mis-)fit, and multiple regression analyses evaluated the relationship with personality traits. The findings showed that employees in self-managing organizations experienced higher decision autonomy than those in traditional organizations. Additionally, the fit between ideal and perceived decision autonomy predicted higher work engagement, while extraversion, openness to experience, and low neuroticism predicted higher ideal decision autonomy. As a result, individual person-environment fit regarding decision autonomy and personality requires attention in self-managing organizations to engage employees. The findings imply that the effect of decision autonomy on engagement is not positive per se but depends on the intraindividual characteristics, which must be of concern when decentralizing decision authority organization-wide. Therefore, personnel selection and recruitment processes in self-managing organizations should consider ideal decision autonomy and personality traits as assessment criteria.

## KEYWORDS

decision autonomy, ideal decision autonomy, personality, person-environment fit, self-managing organization

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### Practitioner points

- Personality assessment focusing on high extraversion, high openness to experience, and low neuroticism may help identify those employees with high ideal decision autonomy.
- Recruitment and selection processes in self-managing organizations (SMOs) focused on finding employees with high ideal decision autonomy may help to promote engagement and prevent emotional exhaustion.
- When transforming a traditional organization toward an SMO, human resource management should consider the changes in job characteristics for employees and provide corresponding HR interventions to enable the employees to handle them.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Hiring a suitable employee for an organization that strongly deviates from traditional organizational setups, for example, by eliminating almost all managers, is undoubtedly one of the crucial challenges practitioners face in self-managing organizations (SMOs). "SMOs radically decentralize authority in a formal and systematic way throughout the organization" (Lee & Edmondson, 2017, p. 39). The popularity of New Work<sup>1</sup> approaches and the need for organizational agility fostered the general trend of authority decentralization and hierarchy reduction in organizations in the recent past. Agile organizations adapt to new circumstances in a more flexible, competent, and responsive way and rely on their entire workforce to adapt to changes and challenges rather than depending on only a few top-level decision-makers (Muduli, 2016; Petermann & Zacher, 2020). Thus, they may also benefit from decentralized authority structures, like in SMOs (Alavi et al., 2014; Muduli, 2017). The specific organizational form of an SMO also raised practitioners' and scholars' attention. Although there were early pioneers, such as Semco (Vanderburg, 2004), and popular examples like Whole Foods, W. L. Gore and Morning Star, or Mobile Basel (Demailly, 2014; Stamm & Kaegi, 2019), it is still a rare and novel organizational form (Laloux, 2014; Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Martela, 2019; Schell & Bischof, 2022). An increasing number of organizations has taken incremental approaches toward organizational self-management by experimenting with single principles of SMOs that partly decentralize authority (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). However, SMOs, the subject of this study, follow the most radical approach.

Practitioners and business philosophers considered SMOs a promising future organizational form due to their adaptive capacities and human and holistic approach toward organizations, fostering organizational sustainability (Carney & Getz, 2009; Getz, 2009; Laloux, 2014). Organizational sustainability refers to the sustainable effects of organizational activities and human resource management practices on employee health, well-being, and performance (Pfeffer, 2010; Salgado et al., 2019).

SMOs discard the key control mechanism employed in most organizations – the reporting relationship between the manager and

the subordinate (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). This allows for faster, decentralized decision-making and, at the same time, affects several organizational core issues, such as labor division, as well as individual-level factors, such as job autonomy (Martela, 2019). Although authority decentralization presumably affects many other job characteristics, this work's focus is on decision autonomy, as previous research has shown that individual job autonomy could function as a resource but could also create new demands and even become a burden (Banai et al., 2000; Dettmers & Bredehöft, 2020; Lam, 2016; Pérez-Zapata et al., 2016). Similarly, research on person-environment fit (P-E fit) revealed that the effect of autonomy on well-being depends on the fit between individual ideal and perceived autonomy (Ford, 2012; Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018).

Besides the organizational practices fostering employee performance, well-being, and health must be promoted to ensure sustainable performance in organizations (Salgado et al., 2019). The entry processes, including employee selection and assessment, played a crucial role in the well-being as they could enable a better P-E fit, which is the "compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched" (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 281). P-E fit shaped the effect of specific job characteristics as they could only evolve their full positive effects on well-being and performance and, thus, promote organizational sustainability, when individual needs and environmental supplies matched (Edwards et al., 1998; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009). Therefore, to realize the potential benefits of SMOs and create a sustainable organization, employee characteristics, such as values, skills, and traits, must fit the organizational and job characteristics.

Previous literature showed the relevance of orienting personnel recruitment and selection toward P-E fit and demonstrated the benefit of personality assessments in personnel selection, particularly in modern, dynamic business environments (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Barrick et al., 2013; Ostroff & Zhan, 2012; Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). A broad body of research related personality traits with job performance as a criterion (Barrick & Mount, 1991), but as successful personnel selection goes beyond focusing on performance predictors, the investigation of other criteria, such as well-being, was

also necessary (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006; Salgado et al., 2019). Thus far, the literature on selection did not address the challenge of selecting employees who fit well into the specific context of SMOs and, more generally, into jobs with unexpectedly high decision autonomy. However, specific consideration of selection criteria for the work in SMOs is necessary as job characteristics presumably differ from those of traditional organizations due to the SMOs' organization-wide authority decentralization. As P-E fit studies suggested that individual differences in ideal autonomy shaped the effect of autonomy on well-being (Ford, 2012; Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018), knowing who desires high decision autonomy could contribute to filling an important gap in the literature on personnel selection. These insights could provide good criteria to select for fit, which is particularly important in SMOs, as wrong personnel decisions might have a worse impact on the whole organization due to the individual employee's large sphere of influence and responsibility in SMOs.

Therefore, this paper aimed to test whether SMO models were indeed associated with more perceived decision autonomy at the individual level than organization models with centralized authority. Secondly, the study aimed to explore the general associations between decision autonomy and important factors for sustainable performance in organizations (Salgado et al., 2019): Individual work engagement and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, the study intended to explore the interactions with the individual ideal decision autonomy and personality traits (Christian et al., 2011; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008). Therefore, the following sections will explore the SMO characteristics and relevant prior research regarding autonomy and personality traits and present and discuss the study results eventually.

## 1.1 | Individual decision autonomy in self-managing organizations

SMOs handled several organizational core issues differently from other, more centralized organizations; thus, the work context for individuals was different and presumably required other skills and behaviors. Firstly, SMOs were characterized by the radical, organization-wide, and systematic decentralization of authority, which implied abolishing middle management and shifting more power toward employees, empowering teams and individuals (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). The disciplinary managerial power over employees' was almost nonexistent, as decision-making was radically decentralized in SMOs (Martela, 2019). Besides, employees and the top management shared the responsibility to create new tasks, and the employees allocated tasks, as they had sufficient authority to choose roles and tasks in which they felt competent. In SMOs, the focus was on intrinsically motivating job conditions instead. Employees ensured performance monitoring and accountability for each other and were trained in explicit conflict resolution techniques to resolve conflicts and combat free-riding effectively. Furthermore, these organizations exhibited exceptional information transparency

that enabled every employee to make the best decisions in the interest of the whole organization (Martela, 2019). SMOs often relied on self-managing teams which were responsible for specific issues, highly autonomous in their decisions, and highly self-managing (Doblinger, 2021; Hackman, 1986). Traditional organizations with centralized decision authority (hereafter non-SMOs) differed in those organizational core principles; for instance, task identification and distribution occurred in top-down processes; supervisors allocated compensation and rewards and monitored and controlled work outputs; and broad information distribution was needless due to precise instructions and strict task boundaries (Martela, 2019).

The SMO's way of addressing organizational core issues presumably also affected the individual-level job characteristics: For instance, authority decentralization should increase individual job autonomy in SMOs compared to non-SMOs. Job autonomy was often classified into three types based on the autonomy over the following: autonomy regarding work methods, work schedules, and decisions (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Decision autonomy refers to the extent of freedom, independence, and discretion in decision-making (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Individual autonomy varies based on organizational or job-related characteristics, such as job position or organizational form. Based on the previously described SMO frameworks, which explicitly allowed and required employees to make decisions on their own (Martela, 2019; Robertson, 2015), individual decision autonomy presumably was enhanced, and thus the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H1:** On average, employees of SMOs perceive higher individual-level decision autonomy than employees of non-SMOs in their daily work.

## 1.2 | Relation between autonomy and work engagement and emotional exhaustion

Well-being, a state of mental health (Page & Vella-brodrick, 2009), could be positively or negatively influenced by work (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Work engagement, a work-related, fulfilling, positive mental state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002), could increase well-being, while emotional exhaustion, characterized by "feelings of being emotionally drained by one's work" (Bakker & Costa, 2014, p. 113), could decrease well-being (Schaufeli et al., 2009). This study focused on those two outcomes as the promotion of work engagement and prevention of emotional exhaustion were particularly important in SMOs due to their firm grounding in individual self-responsibility (Martela, 2019; Mazmanian et al., 2013; Pérez-Zapata et al., 2016).

The well-established job demands-resources model (JD-R; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) proposed job resources and demands as opposite antecedents of well-being. Job resources, which were beneficial in either achieving work goals, reducing the cost of job demands, or stimulating personal development, fostered well-being through their positive effect on work engagement and their

protective effect by preventing exhaustion from job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In turn, the effort-requiring, cost-generating job demands diminished well-being as they strained employees' health and consumed their energy due to effortful performance-protection strategies. Job autonomy was commonly considered a resource (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014), and a broad body of research showed a positive relationship between job autonomy and increased well-being, satisfaction, work engagement, and performance (Clausen et al., 2022; Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2011; Hakanen et al., 2021; Humphrey et al., 2007). Building on that, the presumably high autonomy level in SMOs should result in high work engagement and low health strain.

However, this study seeks to challenge this assumption for high levels of decision autonomy like in SMOs, as the JD-R's flexibility hypothesis proposed that one particular job characteristic, such as autonomy, acted as a demand or resource, depending on its level and the interactions with one's personal resources as well as the context (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Therefore, using the JD-R as a theoretical framework helps develop a nuanced picture of the effect of decision autonomy. Additionally, the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2011) assumed that a high resource level needed an increased investment of other resources to maintain the high level; thus, these resources could become demanding. For instance, the high decision autonomy prevalent in SMOs may be associated with high levels of particular demands, for example, an increased workload. This was in line with research showing that high job autonomy required designing one's job (Dettmers & Bredehöft, 2020), thus demanding extra investment.

Some studies have already reported a nonlinear effect of autonomy, indicating a leveling out or even inversion of the positive effect of job autonomy. For instance, using a longitudinal study design, Kubicek et al. (2014) found curvilinear effects of job control on work engagement and depersonalization. Work engagement was highest for medium levels of job control, while the burnout facet depersonalization was lowest. Stiglbauer and Kovacs (2018) also discovered a leveling out of the positive effect of autonomy on affective well-being, although, regarding flourishing, the effect was linearly positive. However, findings were mixed: Some studies identified curvilinear relations opposite to the expectation with moderate levels of autonomy relating to the highest levels of depression (Jonge et al., 2000) or poorest mental health (Rydstedt et al., 2006).

Different studies indicated that job autonomy's (non-)linear effect depended on the job type, characteristics, and context (Chung-Yan, 2010; Clausen et al., 2022). However, as participants of these previous studies reported moderate levels of autonomy it seemed like only traditional organizations without decision authority decentralization were examined. This range limitation may have obscured potential curvilinear relations as attenuation presumably occurs only at high autonomy levels. Thus, filling this research gap, it was expected that the positive relation of autonomy with well-being would attenuate at exceptionally high decision autonomy levels, such as those prevalent in SMOs, and therefore, testing it in a combined sample of employees of SMOs and non-SMOs could reveal this

curvilinear relation. To understand how decision autonomy relates to well-being, investigating its relationships with positive and negative antecedents of well-being was helpful (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Consequently, the following hypotheses were proposed for the entire sample:

**H2:** Perceived decision autonomy shows a curvilinear relationship with work engagement, with an almost linear positive relationship at lower levels of autonomy, but at higher levels of autonomy, the slope becomes more negligible and even negative.

**H3:** Perceived decision autonomy shows a curvilinear relationship with emotional exhaustion, with an almost linear negative relationship at lower levels of autonomy, but at higher levels of autonomy, the slope becomes more negligible and even positive.

### 1.3 | Person-environment fit and autonomy

The broader P-E fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof, 1996) proposed that if the environmental resources (E) fit employees' demands for these resources (P), they would show optimal effect. P differed among individuals depending on personal characteristics, such as values, needs, and traits. If the environmentally provided resources did not fit the person's standards ( $P \neq E$ ), well-being would be reduced. A good P-E fit was associated with higher well-being, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, performance, and less strain and turnover (Bednarska, 2017; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Morrow & Brough, 2019; O'Reilly et al., 1991; Yu, 2016); thus, it was of concern for organizational sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010; Salgado et al., 2019). The theoretical lens of P-E fit was valuable as it allowed focusing on interindividual differences in the work conditions' effects relevant to personnel selection.

Because every employee in SMOs had exceptionally high individual decision autonomy and previous research showed that job autonomy exceeding the expected level for a specific job position decreased well-being (Ford, 2012), the consideration of decision autonomy fit is essential for well-being in SMOs. SMO practitioners reported that the required decision-making would discourage some employees (Breidenbach & Rollow, 2020; Laloux, 2014), and in line with that, Stiglbauer and Kovacs (2018) showed the moderating influence of individual preferences for autonomy regarding perceived autonomy: Highest levels of well-being and flourishing were reported in the case of fit. As long as the perceived autonomy fell below the ideal level, further autonomy was associated with higher well-being and flourishing but with poorer well-being when perceived autonomy exceeded the ideal level. However, the relationships were only significant for method and schedule and not for decision autonomy, yet that probably reflected a statistical artifact due to the lack of autonomy surplus cases in traditional organizations. Nonetheless, individual decision autonomy is essential in SMOs. Connecting the

P-E fit theory to the JD-R theory, this study proposed autonomy surplus as a job demand based on the JD-R. Due to lacking supporting resources such as supervisor guidance, we expected a detrimental effect of autonomy surplus, particularly in SMOs, and a need to invest in effortful coping strategies (Hobfoll, 2011). In turn, we expected a positive effect of autonomy when the perceived decision autonomy equated to the individual ideal decision autonomy ( $P = E$ ). However, the closer the perceived decision autonomy level got to the individual ideal level, the lower the increase in well-being would be, as the need is already satisfied. We expected to find significant relationships with (mis-)fit in SMOs and non-SMOs, although it was presumably more salient and statistically detectable in SMOs as the likelihood of a surplus was higher due to the elevated decision autonomy levels. Including employees of SMOs and focusing on the motivational and health antecedents of well-being, the previous findings of Stiglbauer and Kovacs (2018) were extended by testing the following hypotheses in the sample including SMOs and non-SMOs:

**H4a:** Less discrepancy between the perceived and ideal decision autonomy is associated with higher work engagement. The optimal fit ( $P = E$ ) between the perceived and ideal decision autonomy is associated with the highest level of work engagement. Increasing decision autonomy shortage ( $P > E$ ) or surplus ( $P < E$ ) is associated with decreasing work engagement.

**H4b:** If the level of perceived decision autonomy matches the level of ideal decision autonomy ( $P = E$ ), increases in perceived and ideal decision autonomy are related to an increase in work engagement.

**H5a:** Less discrepancy between the perceived and ideal decision autonomy is associated with less emotional exhaustion. The optimal fit ( $P = E$ ) between the perceived and ideal decision autonomy is associated with the lowest level of emotional exhaustion. Increasing decision autonomy shortage ( $P > E$ ) or surplus ( $P < E$ ) is associated with increased emotional exhaustion.

**H5b:** If the level of perceived decision autonomy matches the level of ideal decision autonomy ( $P = E$ ), increases in perceived and ideal decision autonomy are related to decreased emotional exhaustion.

## 1.4 | Role of personality in the effect of decision autonomy on motivation and well-being

The introduction of organization-wide self-management affected employees differentially (Kumar & Mukherjee, 2018; Lam, 2016). Hence, understanding the factors responsible for interindividual differences is important, for example, in personnel selection. Building

on the assumption of the P-E fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) regarding the influence of individual standards for job characteristics on the actual effect of those job characteristics, possible antecedents of the individual ideal decision autonomy level were considered. Adding to previous literature, showing that the ideal decision autonomy level was a personal characteristic relatively independent of the environment but likely influenced by personality traits (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2003), the relation of personal characteristics with ideal decision autonomy was considered.

Various personal characteristics might influence the ideal decision autonomy level. For instance, the individual motivation *autonomy orientation*, the tendency to perceive behaviors and choices as volitional (Olesen et al., 2010), was identified as a moderator between empowering leadership and engagement (Li et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2011). Additionally, core self-evaluations, such as *locus of control*—the belief that the results of one's behavior are influenced by oneself (Rotter, 1966), *self-esteem*—the overall assessment of one's self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965), or *generalized self-efficacy*—the belief that one could handle and perform successfully in different situations (Chen et al., 2001), could increase the desire for individual job autonomy as the individuals may feel more confident in their ability to handle autonomy. However, thus far, no study has demonstrated an apparent effect of those concepts on the individual ideal decision autonomy, although positive correlations with perceived job autonomy have been reported (Chang et al., 2012). An empirical study could only find a positive association of self-efficacy with agile orientation but not with the need for autonomy (Seeger et al., 2008). Moreover, the individual *desire for power*, referring to the control of others and one's resources (Galinsky et al., 2003), was also a personal characteristic discussed as relevant in the context of autonomy (Lammers et al., 2016).

Building on the initial finding by Bipp (2010) that some Big Five personality traits were predictive of the individual importance attached to job autonomy, this study focused on the relationship between job autonomy and these personality traits, as their assessment was a popular and valid procedure in personnel selection processes (Robertson & Smith, 2001; Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). The Big Five personality traits offered an indicator that was not as obviously related to job autonomy as other indicators, for example, autonomy orientation; thus, measures would be less biased by the effects of social desirability. Consisting of neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience, the Big Five personality traits proved their good predictability and validity in the organizational context, as well as in research on self-managing teams, job autonomy, and P-E fit (Barrick & Mount, 1991, 1993; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2003; Mount & Barrick, 1995; Thoms et al., 1996). They predicted higher job performance, performance motivation, and job satisfaction (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, 2005; Judge & Heller, & Mount, 2002; Judge & Ilies, 2002; van den Berg & Feij, 2003) and were related to P-E fit (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2003) and to job-related attitudes in general and in self-managing teams in particular (Rubenstein et al., 2019; Taggar et al., 1999; Thoms et al., 1996).

High neuroticism manifested as the tendency to experience emotional instability, feelings of fear, worriedness, insecurity, and moodiness (Parks-Leduc et al., 2015; Raab et al., 2010), whereas low neuroticism was equated with emotional stability, referring to the tendency of feeling confident, secure, and steady (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Neuroticism was negatively related to performance motivation and work engagement, while it was positively related to experiencing stress, dysfunctional coping strategies, and emotional exhaustion (Alarcon et al., 2009; Bolger, 1990; Gallagher, 1990; Janssens et al., 2019; Judge & Ilies, 2002; McCrae, 1990; Waldmann et al., 2017).

High extraversion, manifested in sociable, talkative, active behavior (Barrick & Mount, 1991), was positively associated with work engagement, job satisfaction, and performance motivation and negatively associated with burnout indicators, such as emotional exhaustion and withdrawal behavior (Alarcon et al., 2009; Janssens et al., 2019; Judge & Ilies, 2002; Wilmot et al., 2019). High openness to experience, manifested in being imaginative, curious, original, broad-minded, intelligent, and artistically sensitive (Barrick & Mount, 1991), was positively correlated with performance motivation, job engagement, job change into managerial positions over time, stress resilience, and team performance in self-managing teams (Janssens et al., 2019; Judge & Ilies, 2002; Nieß & Zacher, 2015; Ongore, 2014; Williams et al., 2009; Yeatts et al., 2001). High conscientiousness, manifested in responsible, dependable, persistent, and achievement-oriented behaviors (Barrick & Mount, 1993), was related to higher performance and job satisfaction and less emotional exhaustion (Judge & Heller, & Mount, 2002; Periard & Burns, 2014; Zell & Lesick, 2022). High agreeableness, manifested as the tendency to show flexibility, trust, cooperation, forgiveness, and tolerance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), was associated with higher organizational commitment, less emotional exhaustion, and less counterproductive behavior (Periard & Burns, 2014; Wilmot & Ones, 2022).

Building on previous theory and literature, we assumed that personality traits were predictive of individual ideal decision autonomy. The theory of purposeful work behavior assumed that personality traits triggered purposeful goal strivings, and if the job characteristics had matched the purposeful motivational strivings, meaningfulness would be experienced (Barrick et al., 2013). It proposed that openness to experience was related to striving for autonomy, and employees higher in openness to experience preferred jobs with higher autonomy levels. Additionally, it argued that extroverted employees would prefer jobs with power and significance. In turn, employees higher in neuroticism would search for security (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Barrick et al., 2013). When meaningfulness was experienced, motivation would increase (Barrick et al., 2013).

Moreover, empirical findings also supported the relevance of personality traits. Bipp (2010) showed that openness to experience predicted significantly higher perceived importance of the job dimensions of responsibility and autonomy. Longitudinal data indicated that extraversion and openness to experience predicted higher decision latitude, while neuroticism predicted lower decision latitude over time (Sutin & Costa, 2010). Neuroticism was positively

related to the tendency to try to yield the best, associated with a negative relationship between high choice and satisfaction (Purvis et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2002). Research on leadership showed that extraverted employees evaluated transformational leadership, which provided employees with relatively high autonomy and empowerment (Bass, 1999), more positively than less extraverted employees (Felfe & Schyns, 2006).

Sharpening the scope of the research question, this study only focused on the personality traits of extraversion, openness to experience, and neuroticism. Conscientiousness was certainly important for the functioning of SMOs because the organizational principles were primarily based on self-responsibility and responsible behaviors. However, a connection with the desire for decision autonomy could not be identified as this was independent of the ability to cope well with decision autonomy. Similarly, agreeableness was likely important in SMOs to ensure a harmonious collaboration, but no evidence was found suggesting a relation between agreeableness and ideal autonomy. Therefore, despite the benefit of investigating conscientiousness and agreeableness as beneficial personality characteristics in SMOs, they were not considered antecedents of ideal decision autonomy in the current study. Although the relationship of personality traits with ideal decision autonomy, particularly relevant in SMOs, was considered due to the elevated decision autonomy level, this association was still expected to form independently of the organizational form based on the prior research findings. Consequently, based on the previous theory and research, the following relationships were suggested for any employees, including those of SMOs and traditional organizations:

**H6:** Personality traits relate to the level of ideal decision autonomy (P) in such a way that neuroticism (H6a) predicts lower ideal decision autonomy, while extraversion (H6b) and openness (H6c) both predict higher ideal decision autonomy.

As a result, we also expected an association of personality traits with P-E fit through the level of ideal decision autonomy in SMOs. Prior research examined the relationship of personality traits with the needs-supplies fit in the population of college students, but neither for (decision) autonomy nor in the context of (self-managing) organizations. For instance, Harms et al. (2006) identified openness to experience as the only significant predictor of better needs-supplies fit among the Big Five personality traits. Meanwhile, Roberts and Robins (2004) identified low neuroticism and low agreeableness as the only significant predictors of better needs-supplies fit. However, these studies did not specify the mechanism of how P-E fit was affected. As argued in H1, individuals were expected to perceive higher decision autonomy in SMOs due to the radical authority distribution (Martela, 2019). Therefore, when the perceived decision autonomy was high, and the personality traits predicted the individual ideal level of decision autonomy, the personality traits were expected to predict the fit accordingly, as the level where the ideal and perceived decision autonomy would match in SMOs would be high. Thus, extraversion and openness were expected to predict a

better fit in SMOs due to their positive relationship with ideal decision autonomy. In turn, neuroticism was expected to predict a worse fit due to the negative relationship with ideal decision autonomy. Importantly, these predictions were made exclusively for employees in SMOs, as traditional organizations varied substantially from SMOs. Thus, as the current paper focused on generating insights for SMOs, the sole interest was to test these predictions in the sample of SMO employees. Therefore, the following was proposed:

**H7:** Personality traits predict the decision autonomy fit in SMOs such that neuroticism (H7a) predicts a worse fit, while extraversion (H7b) and openness (H7c) both predict a better fit.

For a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between the decision autonomy fit and the personality traits, this study also examined the interactions of the personality traits predicting ideal decision autonomy with perceived decision autonomy, which is sensible due to the naturally occurring interaction between personality and the environment (Endler & Magnusson, 1976). Previous literature supported the notion that extraversion and openness to experience increased the resource function of decision autonomy, while neuroticism decreased its resource function. First, the positive relation between extraversion and supervisor-rated and contextual performance was higher under conditions of high autonomy (Barrick & Mount, 1993; Gellatly & Irving, 2001). Second, extraversion predicted a higher mitigating relationship between autonomy and emotional exhaustion and its positive relation with job satisfaction, while neuroticism predicted a less positive relationship between autonomy and job satisfaction (Farfán et al., 2020). Third, research on leadership showed that high autonomy predicted a stronger negative relationship between neuroticism and leader self-efficacy, which was relevant for leader effectiveness (Ng et al., 2008). Fourth, Smith and DeNunzio (2020) reported that higher autonomy predicted less counterproductive work behavior for employees with high openness to experience or high extraversion. Consequently, we suggested that personality and decision autonomy interacted in their prediction of work engagement and emotional exhaustion in any organization, including SMOs and traditional organizations:

**H8:** Personality traits moderate the positive relationship between perceived decision autonomy and work engagement in such a way that neuroticism (H8a) is associated with a weaker positive relationship, while extraversion (H8b) and openness (H8c) are associated with a stronger positive relationship.

**H9:** Personality traits moderate the negative relationship between perceived decision autonomy and emotional exhaustion in such a way that neuroticism (H9a) is associated with a weaker negative relationship, while extraversion (H9b) and openness (H9c) are associated with a stronger negative relationship.

## 2 | METHOD

### 2.1 | Participants and procedure

**H-29** The sample for this study included two different groups of employees without managerial responsibility. Subsample 1 consisted of employees working in SMOs for at least 6 months, whereas subsample 2 comprised employees working in traditional organizations. Based on calculations with the G\*Power tool (Faul et al., 2009), the required sample sizes were estimated a priori. The estimated minimum sample size was  $N > 130$  for the subgroup of SMO employees to yield satisfying statistical power for the SMO-focused hypotheses, assuming moderate effect sizes. For the more complex hypotheses 4 and 5, testing the effects of fit, a higher sample size of  $N > 222$  was needed<sup>2</sup>, which was achieved as the analyses were based on both samples. Participants were recruited by sharing the link to the online survey in various self-managed organizations and networks of SMO practitioners or business-related social media platforms. Most participants were recruited through the direct distribution of the questionnaire in SMOs. The authors knew from previous interviews and evaluations that the selected organizations fulfilled the criteria to be considered an SMO. Participants were excluded from the analysis if they had no prior experience in SMOs, did not complete the questionnaire, or had substantially missing data (more than 10% of the questions).

Subsample 2 consisted of employees working in non-SMOs for at least 6 months. Participants were recruited using the research panel Prolific ([www.prolific.com](http://www.prolific.com)), which has proven to yield good data quality (Eyal et al., 2022). Participants who did not complete the questionnaire, had substantially missing data (more than 10% of the questions), or failed at least one of the five attention checks within the questionnaire were excluded from the analysis. Thus, high data quality was ensured. In the questionnaire for subsample 1, attention checks were not included for parsimony because participation was voluntary and only incentivized by providing personalized feedback, which should have motivated people sufficiently to answer honestly and carefully. In turn, for subsample 2, financial interests were presumably a stronger motivation; thus, attention checks were used to exclude inconclusive, careless answers.

The primary data collection for the cross-sectional study was done through an online questionnaire; the survey was available in English and German. Informed consent for participation was gathered from every participant in advance of participation. As a reward for their contribution, all participants were given the option to receive automated, individual feedback on their personality profiles. Participants of subsample 2 (research panel) additionally received a small financial compensation of 0.63€ (7.56€/hour) for their participation. The final sample included 259 participants whose characteristics are presented in Table 1. After data cleaning, the size of the subsample of SMO employees was  $n_{\text{SMO}} = 143$ , and the size of the subsample of employees of traditional organizations

**TABLE 1** Sample characteristics.

	All	SMO	Non-SMO
<i>Year of birth</i>			
<1964	4%	3%	6%
1965–1979	33%	30%	29%
1980–1994	52%	54%	39%
>1995	10%	11%	6%
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	46%	44%	40%
Female	53%	54%	41%
Diverse	0%	1%	0%
<i>Autonomy</i>			
P < E	4%	5%	2%
P = E	52%	61%	39%
P > E	44%	34%	59%

Note:  $N = 259$ ,  $n_{\text{SMO}} = 140$ , and  $n_{\text{non-SMO}} = 113$ . Some data could not be characterized into SMO or non-SMO due to missing data and, therefore, were only considered for the overall analyses.

Abbreviation: SMO, self-managing organization.

was  $n_{\text{non-SMO}} = 113$ . Due to missing data, some data ( $n = 3$ ) could not be categorized into SMO or non-SMO and were only considered for the overall analyses. The sample size of traditional organization employees was smaller than intended, as cases with failed attention checks were excluded; however, the subsample was still sufficiently large for the planned group comparison (H1), and the entire sample was sufficiently large for the response surface analysis (RSA). The participants in both samples worked in different business sectors, including software development, financial services, and social services, and across three countries: Germany, the UK, and Portugal.

## 2.2 | Measures

### 2.2.1 | Ideal and perceived decision autonomy

The ideal and perceived decision autonomy were assessed based on the corresponding three items in the German and English versions of the Work Design Questionnaire (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Stegmann et al., 2010). The items (e.g., “The job allows me to make many decisions on my own”) were rated on a 5-point scale with options ranging from *not at all* to *completely*. Following the approach of Stiglbauer and Kovacs (2018), the items to measure the ideal and perceived decision-making autonomy were the same but introduced by two different questions: The introduction for perceived decision autonomy was “To what extent does this apply to your current job?,” and for ideal decision autonomy “To what extent does this apply to your ideal job?”.

### 2.2.2 | Personality

The personality traits were assessed using the scales for extraversion (four items), neuroticism (four items), and openness to experience (five items) of the short version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI-K) developed by Rammstedt and John (2005). The items were rated on a 5-point scale with options ranging from *very incorrect* to *very correct*.

### 2.2.3 | Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion as an indicator of work-related stress was assessed using the emotional exhaustion scale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Thorsen et al., 2011) and consisted of nine items (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The items, for example, “I feel emotionally exhausted because of my work,” were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*every day*), indicating the frequency of experiencing certain situations such as frustration at work.

### 2.2.4 | Work engagement

To assess work engagement, the three-item ultrashort Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-3) was used (Schaufeli et al., 2019). Three items measured each dimension of work engagement, vigor, dedication, and absorption. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*).

### 2.2.5 | Self-managing organization

To determine whether the participants worked in an SMO, they had to complete a checklist with seven statements about the organization, reflecting the characteristics of SMOs based on Martela (2019). Participants confirmed every statement that applied to their current employer by ticking it. Subsequently, participants had to judge whether they worked in an SMO based on the information that all the criteria mentioned above must be met in the case of an SMO. That measure was developed for this study as no previous works investigated SMOs quantitatively. Although an extension was made, the items aligned with the definition of SMOs by Lee and Edmondson (2017) as organizations that radically decentralize decision-making authority. An example item was “Performance control occurs mainly mutually among employees.” Only those cases for which the subsequent confirmation of SMO was in line with the checklist were counted as a case of the SMO subsample in this study.

## 2.3 | Data analysis

H1, referring to the group difference in perceived decision autonomy, was tested by conducting a two-sample *t*-test, a suitable method to

identify mean differences between two independent groups (Bortz, 2005). If the statistical requirements were not satisfied sufficiently, the nonparametrical Mann–Whitney *U* Test would have been used instead. The hypotheses on the relationships of perceived decision autonomy with work engagement and emotional exhaustion (H2 and H3) were assessed using hierarchical polynomial regression analysis performed on both subsamples. The hierarchical approach was adopted to identify the added value of the polynomial term compared with the linear term and thus to evaluate whether the data fit better with a curvilinear relation than a linear relation (as applied by Kubicek et al., 2014). To assess the hypotheses on the associations of (mis-)fit between ideal and perceived decision autonomy (H4 and H5), we relied on the entire sample as well as polynomial regression and response surface analysis, as suggested for analyses of personality fit (Edwards, 2002; Schönbrodt et al., 2018; Shanock et al., 2010). A multiple regression analysis based on the entire sample was conducted to identify the predictiveness of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience regarding ideal decision autonomy (H6), as it allows for evaluating the different predictors' unique contributions (Licht, 1995). Likewise, multiple regression analysis based on the entire sample was used to evaluate the interaction effects of autonomy and neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience (H8). To test the hypothesis on personality and autonomy fit (H7), only the SMO subsample's data were used for the analysis by multivariate regression and delta method (Bednall & Zhang, 2020). As recommended (Handl & Kuhlenskasper, 2018; Spieß, 2010), a significance level of 5% was chosen for the data analyses.

### 3 | RESULTS

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study variables for the entire sample, and Tables 3 and 4 provide data for the two subsamples. Internal consistencies were satisfactory, as Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was  $\geq .70$  for all scales, except for openness to experience within the non-SMO sample ( $\alpha = .67$ ; Streiner, 2003). The analysis of the distributions of the variables showed that for no

variable, the assumptions of normal distribution were violated to the extent that would have impeded parametrical tests. However, the distributions of ideal and perceived decision autonomy showed elevated skewness (perceived decision autonomy =  $-0.85$ ; ideal decision autonomy =  $-1.59$ ). Most analyses were controlled for age and gender. However, the analyses did not control for further factors to avoid unnecessary power reduction as the sample size was (due to the specific sample population) at the lower acceptance limit. Instead, the central characteristics of age and gender were focused, as they were associated with many other variables, such as seniority, work experience, and self-esteem (Daveri & Maliranta, 2007; Robins et al., 2002).

#### 3.1 | Differences in perceived decision autonomy between the SMO and non-SMO samples

The Welch two-sample *t*-test, testing the difference in perceived decision autonomy between SMO employees and non-SMO employees, indicated a significant difference between the mean perceived decision autonomy of both groups ( $M_{\text{SMO}} = 4.20$ ,  $SD_{\text{SMO}} = 0.75$ ,  $M_{\text{non-SMO}} = 3.28$ ,  $SD_{\text{non-SMO}} = 0.97$ ),  $t(206.63) = 8.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.07$ ). Therefore, H1 was confirmed. Explorative analysis showed that the group difference regarding ideal decision autonomy ( $M_{\text{SMO}} = 4.57$ ,  $SD_{\text{SMO}} = 0.61$ ,  $M_{\text{non-SMO}} = 4.21$ ,  $SD_{\text{non-SMO}} = 0.84$ ) was also significant, with  $t(251) = 4.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.51$ .

#### 3.2 | Perceived decision autonomy as a predictor of engagement and exhaustion

H2, stating that perceived decision autonomy relates curvilinearly to work engagement, was tested by hierarchical regression analysis based on the entire sample, including employees of SMOs and non-SMOs. The first step included the control variables and the linear term for perceived decision autonomy. The second step added the squared term to test for curvilinearity. The results (see Table 5) indicated no curvilinear relation between decision autonomy and work engagement ( $\beta = .02$ ,

**TABLE 2** Means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and zero-order correlations between study variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Ideal decision autonomy	4.41	0.73	(.92)						
2. Perceived decision autonomy	3.80	0.96	.48**	(.92)					
3. Work engagement	4.95	1.21	.34**	.59**	(.89)				
4. Emotional exhaustion	3.18	1.41	-.18**	-.43**	-.47**	(.93)			
5. Neuroticism	2.76	0.90	-.24**	-.32**	-.26**	.51**	(.78)		
6. Extraversion	3.30	0.99	.30**	.40**	.44**	-.28**	-.33**	(.85)	
7. Openness	3.68	0.67	.27**	.14	.18**	-.09	-.10	.26**	(.70)

Note:  $N = 259$ , except for extraversion with  $N = 254$ , and openness with  $N = 255$ . Values in parentheses are Cronbach's  $\alpha$ .

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**TABLE 3** Means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and zero-order correlations between study variables for self-managing organization (SMO) sample only.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Ideal decision autonomy	4.57	0.60	(.91)						
2. Perceived decision autonomy	4.20	0.75	.54**	(.86)					
3. Work engagement	5.32	1.01	.31**	.41**	(.84)				
4. Emotional exhaustion	2.84	1.16	-.12	-.33**	-.33**	(.90)			
5. Neuroticism	2.71	0.78	-.26**	-.33**	-.16	.49**	(.70)		
6. Extraversion	3.68	0.83	.15	.23*	.21*	-.12	-.13	(.77)	
7. Openness	3.99	0.63	.26**	.21*	.13	-.15'	-.13	.14	(.70)

Note: *N* = 143, except for extraversion with *N* = 138 and openness with *N* = 139. Values in parentheses are Cronbach's  $\alpha$ .

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

**TABLE 4** Means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and zero-order correlations between study variables for non-self-managing organization (non-SMO) sample only.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Ideal decision autonomy	4.21	0.84	(.92)						
2. Perceived decision autonomy	3.28	0.97	.34**	(.92)					
3. Work engagement	4.46	1.3	.27**	.60**	(.90)				
4. Emotional exhaustion	3.58	1.58	-.12	-.40**	-.50**	(.96)			
5. Neuroticism	2.83	1.04	-.21**	-.33**	-.33 <sup>†</sup>	.53**	(.84)		
6. Extraversion	2.86	0.98	.32	.30*	.48*	-.27	-.49	(.87)	
7. Openness	3.72	0.68	.24**	-.04*	.14	.07'	-.05	.23	(.67)

Note: *N* = 113. Values in parentheses are Cronbach's  $\alpha$ .

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10.

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

**TABLE 5** Perceived decision autonomy as predictors of work engagement and emotional exhaustion in SMOs and non-SMOs.

	Work engagement			Emotional exhaustion		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-.04	-.04	-.03	-.03	.05	-.04
Male gender	.02	.02	.01	.04	-.04	.05
Perceived autonomy	.59***	.61***	.53***	-.44***	.04***	-.45***
Perceived autonomy		.02	.03		-.47	-.10 <sup>†</sup>
SMO			.10			-.01
SMO × perceived autonomy			-.13 <sup>†</sup>			.09
SMO × perceived autonomy <sup>2</sup>			.07 <sup>†</sup>			-.04
<i>N</i>	254	254	248	254	254	248
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> )	.36 (.35)***	.36 (.35)***	.38 (.36)***	.19 (.18)***	.19 (.18)***	.21 (.19)***

Note: Standardized regression weights  $\beta$ .

Abbreviations: Aut (E), perceived decision autonomy; SMO, the respondent's organization is self-managed.

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10.

\*\*\**p* < .001.

$p = .681$ ). In a third explorative step, the interaction terms of decision autonomy and the factorial variable SMO versus non-SMO were explored to test for sample-specific associations. The results showed no curvilinear association of autonomy specific to the subsamples ( $\beta = .07$ ,  $p = .186$ ). However, the results suggested a significant main effect of perceived decision autonomy on work engagement ( $\beta = .53$ ,  $p < .001$ ): Regardless of the organizational form and level, higher autonomy was related to higher work engagement. Consequently, H2 was rejected.

For testing H3 (perceived decision autonomy relates curvilinearly to emotional exhaustion in SMOs), a hierarchical regression analysis based on the entire sample, analogous to the approach for H2, was conducted. The results (see Table 5) showed no curvilinear relationship of autonomy within the whole sample ( $\beta = -.04$ ,  $p = .374$ ) nor within a specific subsample ( $\beta = -.04$ ,  $p = .449$ ). Instead, the results demonstrated a significant main effect of perceived decision autonomy ( $\beta = -.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that an increase in perceived decision autonomy was related to a decrease in emotional exhaustion. Consequently, H3 was rejected.

### 3.3 | Relationship of autonomy (mis-)fit with work engagement and emotional exhaustion

(Mis-)fit involves the interaction between the ideal and perceived decision autonomy. To assess the associations with (mis-)fit within the entire sample, including employees of SMOs and non-SMOs, polynomial regression and response surface analysis (RSA) were used, following the approach proposed by Shanock et al. (2010). For the RSA, the RSA package in R (Schönbrodt & Humberg, 2021) was used, and grand mean centering was applied, recommended for skewed data (Schönbrodt et al., 2018). The analyses indicated that 44% of the sample experienced less than their ideal decision autonomy, while 4% experienced more than their ideal decision autonomy. For 52% of the participants, the ideal and currently perceived decision autonomy levels were congruent (cutpoint of  $|\Delta z| < 0.5$ ). In line with the current theory, the share of persons indicating an autonomy surplus was higher in the SMO subsample than in the non-SMO subsample (see Table 1). Figure 1a shows the response surfaces for work engagement with ideal (P) and environmental (E) levels of autonomy as predictors and Figure 1b depicts the corresponding surface for emotional exhaustion (see Table 6 for the corresponding parameters).

To test H4a, describing the relationship of decision autonomy (mis-)fit with work engagement, the shape of the surface was considered first. As expected, it was saddle-shaped, and the shape along the line of misfit ( $E = -P$ ) was convex (see Figure 2). The better fit between the perceived and desired autonomy predicted higher work engagement, as indicated by the RSA parameter  $a_4$ , which represents the effect of the degree of discrepancy ( $a_4 = -0.52$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Besides, the results showed that the direction of discrepancy was irrelevant ( $a_3 = -0.08$ , n.s.). Consequently, the significant relationship of (mis-)fit with work engagement confirmed H4a. To test H4b, stating that in the case of fit, higher perceived decision autonomy was associated with

higher work engagement, the surface's shape at the line of congruence ( $P = E$ ) was decisive. The respective parameters showed a positive linear relationship (significant, positive  $a_1$ , and nonsignificant  $a_2$ ): In the case of fit ( $P = E$ ), an increase in perceived decision autonomy was related to an increase in work engagement (see the line on  $P = E$  in Figure 1a). Consequently, the data showed that the absolute level mattered besides the fit, confirming H4b. Interestingly, the ridge was shifted away from the line of congruence, indicating that at lower levels of autonomy, the highest work engagement levels were found when ideal decision autonomy marginally exceeded perceived decision autonomy.

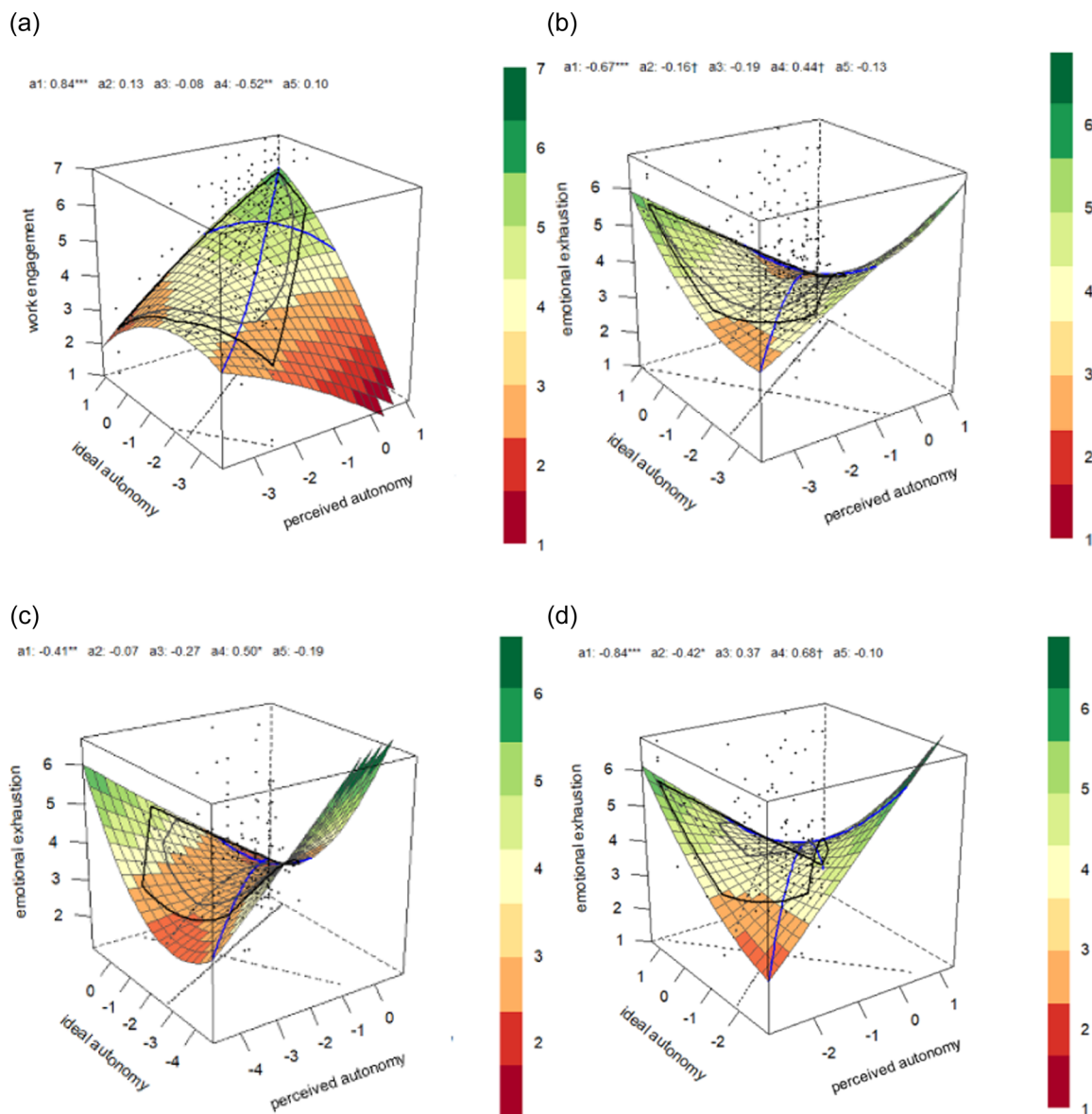
To test H5a, describing the relationship of (mis-)fit with emotional exhaustion, the shape of the surface was initially examined. It was, as expected, bowl-shaped, and the surface at the line of incongruence was u-shaped. The corresponding  $a_4$  coefficient failed to reach the significance level of  $\alpha = .05$ , although it showed the expected slope ( $a_4 = .44$ ,  $SE = 0.24$ ,  $p = .063$ ), meaning increased levels of incongruence between the perceived and ideal decision autonomy were related to higher emotional exhaustion. Thus, H5a was not confirmed. To confirm H5b, which assumed that an increase in perceived decision autonomy was related to a decrease in exhaustion in the case of fit ( $P = E$ ), the slope of the surface along the line of congruence ( $P = E$ ) had to be negative and significant, while the curvature had to be nonsignificant. A negative, linear, and marginally significant squared term ( $a_1 = -0.67$ ,  $se = 0.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $a_2 = -0.16$ ,  $se = 0.09$ ,  $p = .079$ ) predicted the surface along the line of congruence (see the line at  $P = E$  in Figure 1b). Therefore, H5b was confirmed.

Post hoc analysis showed that the relation of (mis-)fit with exhaustion was significant ( $a_4 = 0.50$ ,  $SE = 0.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ) for the subsample of SMO employees ( $n_{SMO} = 140$ ; see Figure 1c). However, the effect was nonsignificant for the subsample of non-SMO employees ( $a_4 = 0.68$ ,  $SE = 0.40$ ,  $p = .091$ ,  $n_{non-SMO} = 113$ ; Figure 1d). Instead, the slope and curvature along the line of congruence were significant ( $a_1 = -0.84$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $a_2 = -0.42$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating an initial increase in emotional exhaustion for low to moderate autonomy levels followed by a decrease for moderate to high autonomy levels.

### 3.4 | The association with personality traits

#### 3.4.1 | Personality traits as predictors of ideal decision autonomy

To test H6a–c, which assumed that personality traits predicted ideal decision autonomy, ideal decision autonomy was regressed on neuroticism, extraversion, and openness, using the entire sample (see Table 7 and Figure 3). Neuroticism showed the expected negative relationship and predicted lower ideal decision autonomy ( $\beta = -0.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while extraversion ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and openness ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ) showed the expected positive relationships, predicting higher ideal decision autonomy. Therefore, H6a–c were confirmed.



**FIGURE 1** Response surface of the perceived level of autonomy (E) and the person's ideal level (P) predicting work engagement and emotional exhaustion. (a) Prediction of work engagement based on the entire sample. (b) Prediction of emotional exhaustion based on the entire sample. (c) Prediction of emotional exhaustion based on the self-managing organization (SMO) subsample. (d) Prediction of emotional exhaustion based on the non-SMO subsample.

### 3.4.2 | Personality traits as predictors of autonomy fit in SMOs

To test H7a–c, predicting the association of personality traits and decision autonomy fit in SMOs, the approach proposed by Bednall and Zhang (2020) was followed. More precisely, an effect on the absolute directional difference (the systematic difference in the levels of P and E) was expected (Edwards et al., 1998). Based on subsample 1, including only SMO employees, the expected increasing effect of neuroticism and the mitigating effects of extraversion and openness on the absolute directional difference,  $|(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2) + X_j \cdot (\beta_1 - \beta_2)|$ , were sequentially tested by first running the multivariate regressions of ideal and perceived decision

autonomy on the traits to receive the corresponding regression parameters (Table 7). Then, the significance of the directional differences was assessed using the delta method. The resulting, zero-including 95% confidence intervals ( $CI_{\text{Neuroticism}} [-0.07, 0.17]$ ,  $CI_{\text{Extraversion}} [-0.32, 0.16]$ ,  $CI_{\text{Openness}} [-0.19, 0.27]$ ) indicated that none of the personality traits significantly affected the autonomy fit, leading to the rejection of H7a–c. Notably, the multivariate regressions of ideal and perceived decision autonomy showed that personality traits predicted not only ideal but also perceived decision autonomy, which was not foreseen. That might have undermined the relationship with the fit measure. Interestingly, extraversion was a stronger predictor of perceived decision autonomy than ideal decision autonomy, while openness was only

**TABLE 6** Perceived and Ideal decision autonomy as predictors of work engagement and emotional exhaustion.

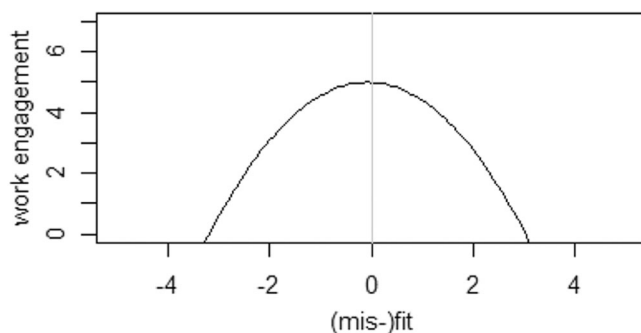
Variable	Work engagement <i>b</i> (SE)	Emotional exhaustion <i>b</i> (SE)
Constant	5.00 (0.11)***	3.09 (0.13)
Perceived autonomy	0.38 (0.13)**	-0.43 (0.16)*
Ideal autonomy	0.46 (0.16)**	-0.24 (0.19)
Perceived autonomy <sup>2</sup>	-0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)
Perceived autonomy × ideal autonomy	0.32 (0.11)**	-0.30 (0.13)*
Ideal autonomy <sup>2</sup>	-0.15 (0.10)	0.13 (0.11)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.38***	.21***
<i>a</i> <sub>1</sub>	0.84 (0.09)***	-0.67 (0.13)***
<i>a</i> <sub>2</sub>	0.13 (0.09)	-0.16 (0.09) <sup>†</sup>
<i>a</i> <sub>3</sub>	-0.08 (0.27)	-0.19 (0.32)
<i>a</i> <sub>4</sub>	-0.52 (0.20)**	0.44 (0.24) <sup>†</sup>

Note: *N* = 259.

Abbreviations: *b*, unstandardized regression coefficient; SE, standard error; *a*<sub>1</sub> to *a*<sub>4</sub>, specific parameters of the RSA.

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10.

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .001.

**FIGURE 2** Relationship between (mis-)fit of environmental and ideal decision autonomy and work engagement. Lines are based on linear and quadratic regression estimates.

predictive of ideal decision autonomy. Possible content-related and methodological reasons are discussed in the next section.

### 3.4.3 | Personality traits as moderators

Hypotheses H8a–c, which expected the relationship between perceived decision autonomy and work engagement to be moderated by personality traits in SMOs and traditional organizations, were tested through a multiple regression based on the entire sample. Work engagement was regressed on the perceived decision autonomy, neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, and

**TABLE 7** Multivariate regression of ideal and perceived decision autonomy on the personality traits neuroticism, extraversion, and openness.

	Full sample <sup>a</sup>		SMO subsample <sup>b</sup>	
	Ideal autonomy $\beta$	Perceived autonomy $\beta$	Ideal autonomy $\beta$	Perceived autonomy $\beta$
Age	-.02	.06	.00	.08
Male	-.03	.03	-.01	.03
Neuroticism	.03*	-.21**	-.23*	-.25**
Extraversion	-.15**	.32***	.10	.20*
Openness	.19***	.04	.23**	.17 <sup>†</sup>
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> )	.15 (.14)**	.20 (.18)***	.14**	.16***

Note: Values in parentheses are adjusted *R*<sup>2</sup>.

Abbreviation: SMO, self-managing organization.

<sup>a</sup>*n*<sub>SMO</sub> = 127.

<sup>b</sup>*N* = 246.

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10.

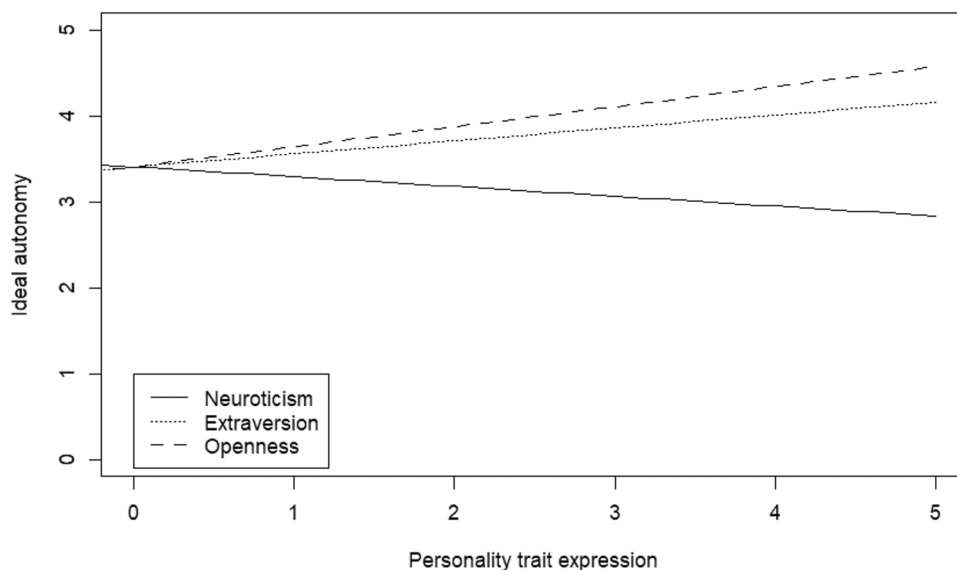
\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .001.

their corresponding dual interactions (see Table 8). The total model, including the covariates of gender and age, the four direct effects, and the three interaction terms, explained a significant part of the variance (*R*<sup>2</sup> = .43, *p* < .001). The regression showed small but significant interactions of perceived decision autonomy with extraversion ( $\beta$  = -.14, *p* < .05) as well as with neuroticism ( $\beta$  = -.13, *p* < .05). The interaction term of perceived decision autonomy and openness was not significant ( $\beta$  = .02, *p* = .661). In line with the predictions, in the case of high neuroticism, the relationship between perceived decision autonomy and work engagement was less positive than in the case of low neuroticism. However, in contrast to the predictions, high extraversion was also related to a less positive relation between perceived decision autonomy and work engagement (see Figure 4). Consequently, H8a was confirmed, while H8b and H8c were rejected.

Similarly, testing the moderation hypotheses H9a–c within the entire sample, emotional exhaustion was regressed on perceived decision autonomy, personality traits, and their dual interactions (see Table 8). The regression model explained a significant part of the variance (*R*<sup>2</sup> = .35, *p* < .001). However, no interaction term reached significance. Therefore, further analyses of the moderation effects were irrelevant, and H9a–c were rejected.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The current study examined the relationship between the interaction of perceived and ideal decision autonomy and the antecedents of well-being—work engagement and emotional exhaustion (see Figure 5 for a visualization of the hypotheses). Additionally, the associations with personality traits were investigated. It thus gave



**FIGURE 3** Regression of ideal decision autonomy on the personality traits neuroticism, extraversion, and openness. The regression model controlled for age and gender.

**TABLE 8** Perceived decision autonomy (E) and personality traits as predictors of work engagement and emotional exhaustion.

	Work engagement	Emotional exhaustion
Age	-.01	.02
Male gender	-.01	-.09
Perceived autonomy	.47***	-.30***
Neuroticism	-.03	.42***
Extra	.23***	-.05
Open	.04	.00
Perceived autonomy x neuroticism	-.13**	.01
Perceived autonomy x extraversion	-.14*	-.04
Perceived autonomy x openness	.02	.00
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted R <sup>2</sup> )	.43 (.41)***	.35 (.33)***
$\Delta R^2$		

Note: N = 246. Standardized regression weights  $\beta$ .

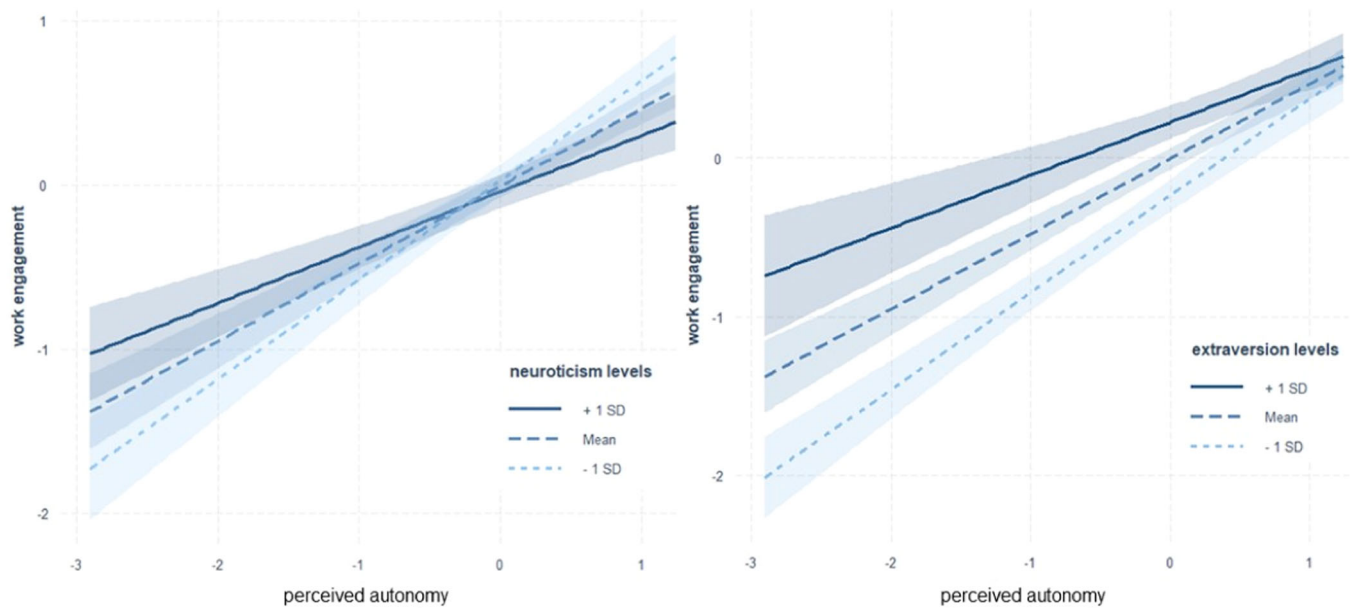
\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

insights into employee characteristics associated with a better fit with high individual decision autonomy, as found in SMOs. First, the results confirmed our basic assumption that SMO employees perceive significantly higher decision autonomy than non-SMO employees (H1), verifying the proposition of previous literature on SMOs (Lee & Edmondson, 2017), which is essential in understanding the impact of the self-managing organizational framework on the individual level.

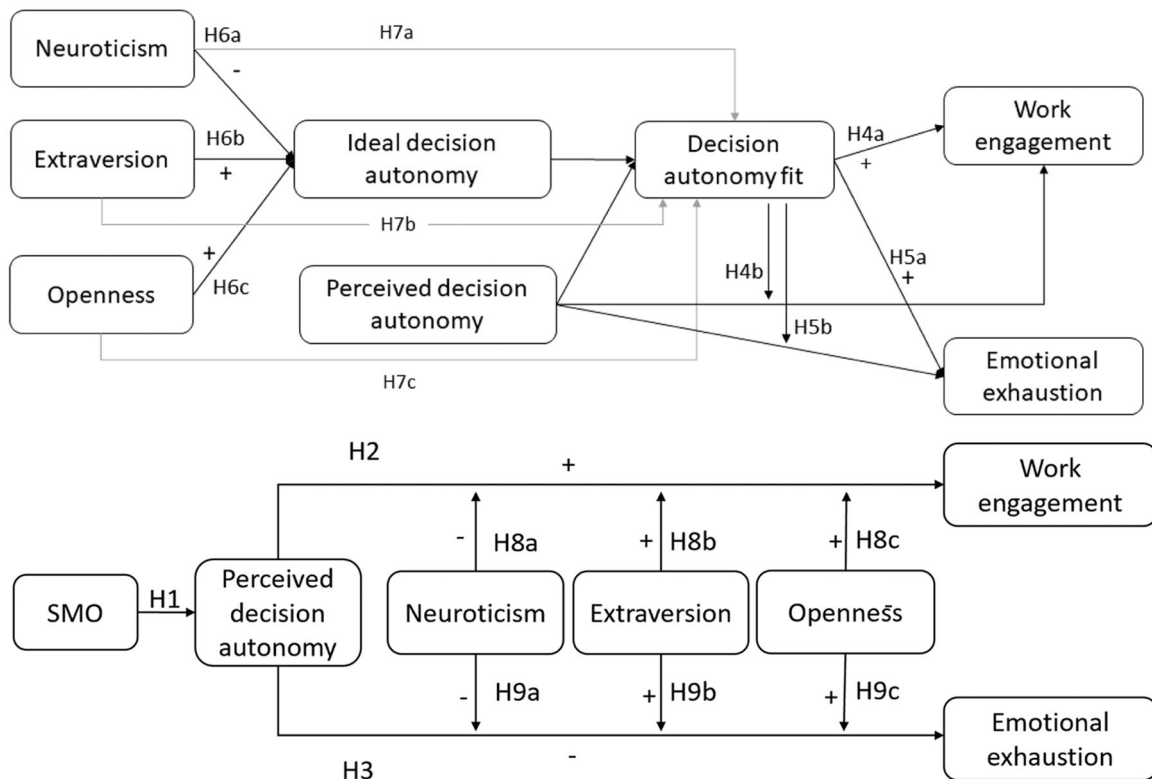
Second, the applicability of the previously described linear relationship between decision autonomy and work engagement/

emotional exhaustion was challenged for exceptionally high levels of decision autonomy, as prevalent in SMOs. The results contradicted the curvilinear relationship of decision autonomy with work engagement (H2) and emotional exhaustion (H3) and supported linear relationships. This aligns with the previously mixed findings and shows that a more detailed examination is required. The selective attraction of individuals with high ideal decision autonomy to SMOs and vice versa (Schneider et al., 1995a) may have restricted the variance and thus obscured the curvilinear effect.

To better understand how individual characteristics interact with the potential resource of high decision autonomy in SMOs, we tested whether there was a significant relationship between decision autonomy (mis-)fit and work engagement (H4a) or emotional exhaustion (H5a). The results confirmed H4a, showing the highest levels of work engagement when the perceived decision autonomy fitted the ideal one. Notably, the perceptions of autonomy surplus or shortage were equally related to lower work engagement. Hence, by showing that decision autonomy misfit was also related to lower work engagement, the study extended the previous findings regarding autonomy (mis-)fit and flourishing (Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018). In turn, H5a was not confirmed, as the results showed that (mis-)fit was a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion only in the sample of SMOs, while it was only marginally significant in the total sample. These results align with previous findings of Stiglbauer and Kovacs (2018), who found a nonsignificant curvilinear relationship between decision autonomy misfit and job-related affective well-being in a sample of non-SMO employees. However, for the current study's subsample of SMO employees, the expected relation of (mis-)fit and emotional exhaustion was significant; thus, decision autonomy surplus seemed to reveal its health-detrimental effect only in SMOs. One reason for this difference may be a lack of alternatives: High decision autonomy also entails the



**FIGURE 4** The moderating effect of neuroticism and extraversion levels on the relations of work engagement and perceived decision autonomy. Colored fields display 80% confidence intervals. Moderator levels were determined by standard deviations.



**FIGURE 5** Conceptual depiction of hypotheses. H7a–c only refer to the self-managing organization (SMO) sample and are in light gray.

demand to make the required decisions. In contrast to non-SMOs, in SMOs, this responsibility cannot be handed back to a supervisor or a colleague; thus, the demand to fulfill the autonomy-related responsibility consumes resources, causing higher emotional exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Consequently, to benefit from high

levels of decision autonomy, such as those provided by SMOs, employees must also aim to perform according to such high levels, as it may otherwise impede work engagement and health strain.

To further understand the effect of perceived decision autonomy, it was tested whether, in the case of fit, higher decision

autonomy showed its job resource characteristic by relating positively to work engagement (H4b) and negatively to emotional exhaustion (H5b). The results confirmed both hypotheses. These insights support the interplay of the P-E fit theory and JD-R theory. Decision autonomy can have motivational and health-protective characteristics attributed to job resources, but they become more salient when there is a good fit between the person's needs and perception of decision autonomy.

Additionally, we investigated the relationship between personality traits and ideal decision autonomy to enhance the understanding of the interindividual differences in P-E fit. The results supported the hypothesis that neuroticism is related to lower (H6a), while extraversion (H6b) and openness to experience (H6c) are related to higher ideal decision autonomy. As previous research rarely looked into predictors of individual ideal (decision) autonomy, the findings are innovative and support the theory of purposeful work behavior (Barrick et al., 2013) by showing a positive relationship between ideal autonomy and extraversion or openness but a negative one with neuroticism. Openness might motivate the desire for decision autonomy as it allows one to pursue new ideas, shape structures and processes, and seek personal growth, which are openness-associated interests (Mount et al., 2005). In turn, the negative association of neuroticism with ideal decision autonomy might be explained by the preference for security (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019) and the link with worse decision-making performance (Byrne et al., 2015; Denburg et al., 2009). Thus, employees higher in neuroticism may have a reduced interest in decision-making and the corresponding autonomy.

In addition, it was investigated whether personality traits are, as a result, also related to (mis-)fit in SMOs, where perceived decision autonomy would be high (H7a-c). Although personality traits predicted ideal decision autonomy and ideal decision autonomy predicted (mis-)fit, the results contradicted the direct relation of personality traits with autonomy (mis-)fit, resulting in the rejection of H7a-c. However, the significant relationship between personality and perceived decision autonomy could explain the finding: Neuroticism predicted lower perceived decision autonomy, while extraversion and openness predicted higher perceived decision autonomy. That is in line with previous findings (Rubenstein et al., 2019; Sutin & Costa, 2010) and may result from individual job crafting: Job crafting refers to the proactive modification of one's job characteristics (Tims et al., 2012) and can increase not only job resources (Tims et al., 2013) but also P-E fit, specifically, the needs-supplies fit (Tims et al., 2016). Additionally, the tendency to craft one's job was related to personality traits (Roczniewska & Bakker, 2016; Rudolph et al., 2017). Therefore, individual job-crafting behaviors might have blurred the relation between personality and (mis-)fit. On the other hand, other unknown factors could also have obscured the relationship, which is worth exploring in future research.

Lastly, to get the whole picture, we also investigated whether certain personality types could benefit more or less from decision autonomy by examining whether and how personality traits interact with the relation between perceived decision autonomy and work

engagement (H8a-c) or emotional exhaustion (H9a-c). In line with our predictions, neuroticism was associated with a less positive relation between decision autonomy and work engagement. The results indicated that individuals scoring high on neuroticism felt more engaged when perceiving higher decision autonomy but less than employees scoring low on neuroticism. Two possible mechanisms might explain the attenuated positive relation: On the one hand, neuroticism was associated with difficulties in decision-making (Byrne et al., 2015; Denburg et al., 2009) and thus might impede work engagement when facing the need to live up to the decision autonomy. On the other hand, decision autonomy might give certain freedom, reducing the anxiety of making wrong decisions.

In contrast to the predictions, extraversion was also associated with a less positive relationship between decision autonomy and work engagement. With increasing extraversion, the relationship between decision autonomy and engagement became less positive, although even for highly extraverted individuals, an increase in decision autonomy was still associated with an increase in engagement. The unexpected mitigation related to extraversion may result from the fact that extraverted people generally tend to feel more engaged, and hence the incremental effect of decision autonomy becomes less relevant for them (Akhtar et al., 2015; Langelaan et al., 2006). The results did not show an interaction between openness to experience and perceived decision autonomy, contradicting H9c.

In contrast to this study's hypotheses, personality traits did not moderate the relationship between decision autonomy and emotional exhaustion. This points to a personality-independent, health-protective character of decision autonomy, which aligns with previous research based on the JD-R, considering it a job resource with a buffering effect on demands. When considering the nonsignificant relation between (mis-)fit and emotional exhaustion in this study, P-E fit seems to play a minor role in emotional exhaustion. This contrasts the core assumption of the P-E fit theory, proposing increased stress in case of a misfit (Edwards et al., 1998). Two possible explanations may justify this finding: First, selective attraction and job crafting may have reduced variance within the sample and obscured relationships. Secondly, the job characteristic decision autonomy may have a particular health-protective role through the increased possibility for self-determination (Ng et al., 2012). Additionally, the findings that neuroticism is relevant for work engagement, and not exhaustion, may point to the fact that the increased autonomy may reduce pressure in general but lead to excessive relaxation in more neurotic persons, resulting in reduced engagement.

Generally, as this study was a cross-sectional nonexperimental study, the effects of selective attraction or job crafting may have skewed the analysis through variance restrictions. For instance, extraverted or open-minded persons might have chosen a job with a decision autonomy level that corresponds to their ideal level or crafted their decision autonomy accordingly and thus reduced variance in the decision autonomy-extraversion combinations (Rubenstein et al., 2019; Schneider et al., 1995; Sutin & Costa, 2010). This is in line with previous research on the relation of personality

traits with perceptions of job demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2010) and the present study's exploratory findings: Ideal decision autonomy was also higher for the SMO group, and personality traits predicted not only perceived decision autonomy but also ideal decision autonomy. Therefore, experimental designs are necessary to account for the potential causalities.

#### 4.1 | Theoretical and practical contributions

This study provides four critical contributions to further theory development. First, the study adds to the literature on P-E fit by proving that decision autonomy (mis-)fit is related to affective well-being (Edwards et al., 1998; Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018) and also motivational outcomes such as work engagement. Moreover, it shows that the misfit of decision autonomy is not necessarily associated with increased emotional exhaustion, underlining the need for a more detailed examination. Additionally, it offers insights into the relation of personality traits theory with the intrapersonal antecedents of P-E fit. The findings add to the theory of purposeful work behavior (Barrick et al., 2013) by showing that extraversion and openness to experience were positively related to ideal decision autonomy, while neuroticism was related negatively. The findings support the theory's proposition of openness as a motivator for autonomy striving and also suggest extraversion and neuroticism as further (de-)motivators for autonomy striving.

Second, the study results contribute to the JD-R theory and the research on job resources, providing a more nuanced picture of decision autonomy. The study results show no evidence that decision autonomy functioned as a demand by causing health strain. However, the results support the notion that decision autonomy is a resource whose strength depends on individual values and personality, extending the personal resources considered thus far (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Third, it contributes to the connection between the P-E fit and the JD-R theory. The findings of the (mis-)fit-wellbeing-relationship and the additional linear autonomy-wellbeing relation occurring when the environmental supplies fit the person's values add to the understanding of decision autonomy as a resource as well as the mixed findings on (inverted) u-shaped versus linear relationships (Clausen et al., 2022; Kubicek et al., 2014). Additionally, decision autonomy surplus, resulting from misfit, could function as demand and exert detrimental health effects in certain contexts, such as SMOs.

Fourthly, the present study contributes to the research on SMOs. Thus far, research has mainly focused on outcomes and processes at the organizational level; accordingly, adding the individual-level perspective helps clarify the picture. It provides initial quantitative data on SMOs, confirming the so-far theoretical assumption that employees in SMOs perceive more decision autonomy due to the adapted organizational principles. This finding is important as prior research showed that self-managing practices at the team level did not necessarily result in more perceived individual autonomy (Barker, 1993). Besides, the fact that the relation of (mis-)fit and

emotional exhaustion was significant only for SMOs supports the notion that P-E fit is essential for mental well-being in SMOs.

The present findings also have relevant implications for organizational practice in SMOs and other organizations experimenting with decentralizing autonomy, as extreme cases can offer valuable transferable insights. The finding that employees perceive high decision autonomy in SMOs helps to understand the requirements and benefits for employees in such organizations; thus, recruitment and selection criteria can be adapted accordingly for better P-E fit (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019). The findings help utilize personality assessment more specifically, as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, and ideal decision autonomy were identified as related to employee well-being. This facilitates the selection of candidates who fit better into the organization and optimally benefit from the provided autonomy. As P-E fit is related to individual work engagement, its consideration is crucial in SMOs: Due to the associated reduced control mechanisms, the intrinsic motivation to do one's job optimally becomes more critical for the organization's success. Consequently, besides considering technical skills, choosing people with high openness to experience and extraversion but low neuroticism levels may be better for SMOs. In turn, people with higher neuroticism and less openness to experience may fit better into organizations with more centralized authority structures because, in such organizations, a surplus in perceived decision autonomy is less likely: Decision autonomy is lower on average and more centralized toward managers, who can give security and support. Additionally, considering the interindividual differences in desired autonomy allows matching employees with apt roles and can help improve person-job fit in organizational transformation and personnel development processes.

Besides, the results are relevant for organizational practices beyond the context of SMOs and recruitment and selection. According to our findings, when developing people, customizing jobs, or developing organizational cultures (e.g., New Work initiatives), providing more autonomy is not a universal motivational mechanism; instead, it must address individual preferences. In turn, as prior research has shown that openness to experience can be developed (Jackson et al., 2012), this could be a lever to make employees more comfortable with decision autonomy.

#### 4.2 | Limitations and future research

An important limitation of this study is the potential bias through uncontrolled covariates. Although this study included important control variables (age and gender), which are associated with other potential intrapersonal control variables, further individual and organizational control variables would have strengthened the validity of the results. Unfortunately, collecting further variables was waived to reduce participant burden, particularly for SMO employees, who had already received many research requests because of their organizational uniqueness. This limits the significance of the group comparison of SMOs versus non-SMOs (H1), as controlling for

potential systematic biases by the organization's size and age or the individual's organizational tenure was not possible. Although a preselection was made regarding the type of organization in the research panel, the full equivalency of the subsamples could not be ensured. Additionally, individual-level organizational tenure may have influenced the relations proposed in H2-9. For instance, organizational tenure was found to be related to work engagement and emotional exhaustion (Bal et al., 2013; Karatepe & Karatepe, 2009; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009); Increasing tenure was associated with decreasing vigor and engagement but also with a weaker relation between role conflict and emotional exhaustion. Thus, differences in organizational tenure may have biased the relationship between decision autonomy (fit) and work engagement or emotional exhaustion found in this study. These biases might be particularly critical in the context of SMOs, as they strongly rely on the long-term engagement of their employees due to the high individual autonomy and lack of central steering mechanisms. Therefore, the lack of control of this potential covariate clearly limits the significance of the results. Despite the limited significance, the results show a first important tendency of difference in decision autonomy, which should be consolidated in future studies.

Ceiling effects regarding perceived and ideal decision autonomy were observed in the subsample of SMO employees. The used scale was initially developed to describe work situations in non-SMOs, where employees have less decision autonomy than those in SMOs. The left-skewed data showed that the scale probably could not capture the entire autonomy variance in the sample, which may have restricted the analyses, although the conventions for the statistical analyses' requirements were satisfied. Thus, using an adapted scale to measure decision autonomy in SMOs would probably have improved the results. Based on our assumption that SMOs would particularly affect decision autonomy, only decision autonomy was assessed, for which the effects of (mis-)fit seemed to be different from those in other forms of autonomy (Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018). However, the conditions in SMOs also likely affect other forms of autonomy, such as method autonomy, and therefore, its future investigation is also relevant.

Another challenge of this study was measuring SMOs appropriately. A scale for measuring the SMO characteristics was not available from previous research; thus, we developed one based on the qualitative data gathered by Martela (2019). A limitation of the current study is that the scale was not previously validated, but the preselection of organizations to recruit participants from ensured the inclusion of SMO employees only in our SMO subsample. Nonetheless, using a validated scale to measure the affiliation to an SMO would further improve the significance of the data.

The questionnaire was provided in English and German so that most participants could answer in their native language. However, the sample also included Portuguese participants, answering in English as a foreign language. Nonetheless, we are confident that this did not endanger the validity, as the participants were fluent in English due to their workplace's conversation language English.

Another challenge of the study was the minimum sample size. The sample sizes were calculated to guarantee sufficient power to detect an effect of moderate size within the whole sample of employees of SMOs and non-SMOs. The total sample size of  $N = 259$  was sufficient, but for the explorative analyses limited to the subsamples, the sizes were not sufficiently large for RSA, which limited these analyses' significance. However, this limitation is acceptable as the subsample analyses were post hoc and explorative. Further, the samples were sufficiently large for all hypothesis-testing analyses.

The study's SMO subsample comprised employees mainly working in the software, social, and finance sectors. The sample included only employees of organizations with a workforce smaller than 500. A broader range of organizational size would have been desirable, but accessibility reasons proved to be a hindrance. Although this offers a selective perspective, the sectors and organizational sizes presumably did not affect the investigated relations of ideal and perceived decision autonomy significantly, as those relations are supposed to be universal.

Due to the limited accessibility of SMO participants and presumably high dropout rates in longitudinal designs, a cross-sectional approach was adopted to gain first valuable insights into how the autonomy surplus is related to current work engagement and mental health. However, as cross-sectional studies cannot account for causality but only correlations, the results regarding the relational hypothesis must be interpreted as correlations accordingly. Those first promising insights should be extended by future research by employing additional longitudinal or experimental approaches.

Due to the complex nature of difference scores, polynomial regression analyses were used. This method is a valuable tool for investigating fit hypotheses (Shanock et al., 2010), but it cannot account for the integrated analysis of several interdependent hypotheses like structural equation modeling can. Thus far, there has been no seminal paper on the usage of difference scores in structural equation models; thus, a molecular measure of P-E fit would be necessary to use structural equation models, but this would impede the investigation of the role of ideal decision autonomy. As discussed above, the findings pointed to certain effects of selective attraction and job crafting, which probably limited the analyses. Therefore, using experimental designs could help get a less biased picture. On the other hand, examining potential job-crafting-fit relations is promising, as they can be enhanced through interventions (Gordon et al., 2018) and are thus of interest for personnel development and selection.

For parsimony, the traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness were excluded from the study. Although they were found to be related to performance, burnout, and work engagement (Akhtar et al., 2015; Barrick, 2005; Barrick & Mount, 1993), there was no evidence of their impact on ideal decision autonomy and thus fit, which was the main focus of the paper. However, investigating conscientiousness or agreeableness as moderators of the relationship between autonomy and work engagement or emotional exhaustion could offer even more insights and thus be subject to future research. Building on the finding

of high decision autonomy in SMOs and the relevance of fit, other predictors of ideal decision autonomy and additional characteristics of such organizations should be considered, for example, the need for collaboration. Moreover, in addition to personality, the role of competencies could be addressed, as they are trainable. Additionally, team-based research could add information regarding the intrateam interactions of individual personality traits or ideal decision autonomy levels and their impact on team performance and work engagement. Moreover, although predictors of job performance were addressed in the present study, a direct investigation of the misfit-job performance relationship would be beneficial.

SMOs are based on various unique and intertwining principles, and despite their many advantages, quantitative research can only grasp a few aspects of these complex constructs. Besides, the extent of certain job characteristics, such as decision autonomy, exceeds the usual dimensions and previously validated scales presumably cannot capture the entire range. Therefore, more holistic approaches whereby the researcher can interact with the participants, like in qualitative methodologies or action research (Huxham & Vangen, 2003), could provide valuable insights into individual behaviors and reactions toward those organizational principles.

### 4.3 | Conclusions

The present study provides initial empirical evidence that self-management at the organizational level is associated with higher perceived decision autonomy at the individual level. The previously mentioned is essential to consider in personnel selection processes, as the study also showed that the fit between the individual ideal decision autonomy and the perceived decision autonomy was related to feeling engaged in one's work. This adds to the literature on job resources and P-E fit as it might explain the mixed findings on linear versus curvilinear relations between autonomy and work engagement or mental health. To select suitable candidates for job positions in SMOs or positions with high decision autonomy, individual personality traits can be considered, as this study revealed that extraversion and openness to experience were related to higher ideal decision autonomy. In contrast, neuroticism was related to lower ideal decision autonomy. Hence, this work also advances the research on the predictors of P-E fit and the interindividual differences in the associations of perceived decision autonomy. Conclusively, high decision autonomy is not the best choice for everyone. Instead, suitable individual characteristics are related to the motivational character of decision autonomy.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> New Work is a philosophy pursuing the inversion of the former relationship between work and humans such that work would serve as a source of fulfillment and energy for employees, instead of consuming their energy and using them as a tool (Bergmann, 2019). The purpose-oriented, self-managed work in SMOs is in line with those aims.
- <sup>2</sup> Due to the relatively complex nature of the response surface analysis (RSA), the sample size must be at least 2–3 times as high for the detection of the linear main effects (Aiken et al., 1998; Humberg et al., 2019). According to power analysis in G\*Power, the minimal sample size to detect the linear main effects (assuming moderate effect sizes) was  $N = 74$ .

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