

# Affective Synchrony in Autonomy: Emotional Contagion in Self-Managing Teams

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## ABSTRACT

This literature study examines the intricate relationship between emotional contagion and autonomous work teams. It investigates how the structural characteristics of autonomous teams modify the fundamental process of emotional contagion and explores the subsequent functional and dysfunctional impacts on team performance. The analysis reveals that autonomy amplifies contagion through dense peer networks, internal feedback loops, task interdependencies, and the absence of external emotional regulation. This results in faster, more potent, and more sustained spread of affect. Functionally, such contagion can enhance implicit coordination, collective resilience, norm formation, and creative problem-solving. Dysfunctionally, it can trigger spirals of stress and anxiety, erode trust, impair decision-making quality, escalate conflicts, contribute to collective burnout, and stifle team learning. The study concludes that emotional contagion in autonomous teams is not a peripheral phenomenon but a core dynamic that fundamentally shapes their effectiveness. Understanding these modified processes and dual outcomes is critical for designing interventions that help autonomous teams harness the benefits of positive emotional synchrony while developing the capacity to mitigate the risks of negative affective spirals, thereby ensuring their long-term viability and success.

## INTRODUCTION

Team dynamics have long been a subject of intensive study in organizational science and social psychology, with a focus on how interactions among members shape collective processes and outcomes. In the evolution of modern organizational structures, a paradigm that has become increasingly popular is that of autonomous teams. Such teams are granted significant authority and responsibility to manage their own work, ranging from goal setting, task division, and method selection to outcome evaluation, with minimal intervention from traditional managerial hierarchies (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019). This autonomy is expected to trigger intrinsic motivation, increase adaptability, and produce more innovative solutions because decisions are made by those closest to the work. This structural flexibility has proven to be a crucial element in strengthening managerial roles in creating a culture of sustainable team innovation and creativity (Özkaya et al., 2023). However, granting

such broad freedom also creates a unique social environment where mechanisms of regulation and influence among team members develop organically, without being heavily filtered or moderated by strict external oversight structures (Zychová et al., 2023). In such a space, interpersonal influence becomes more direct and potentially more powerful.

One of the most fundamental and potent forms of interpersonal influence is the spread of emotions from one individual to another, a process known as emotional contagion. This process often occurs unconsciously, where facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and even an individual's choice of words can trigger similar emotional states in those interacting with them (Kleef et al., 2017). This phenomenon of affective contagion becomes increasingly complex to study when placed within the psychological perspective of society in the Society 5.0 era, which demands the alignment of technology and humanistic aspects (Darmawan et al., 2021). In traditional teams with strict

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supervision, the emotional influence of a leader or manager might be dominant, or emotional conflicts can be quickly intervened upon. Conversely, in autonomous teams, no party possesses the formal authority that is constantly present to manage the emotional climate (Wróbel, 2010). Team members rely almost entirely on one another, and their interactions are more equal and intense. This condition creates an ideal petri dish for emotional contagion to thrive, both in positive and negative directions, with direct consequences for the work climate, coordination, and team performance.

From a phenomenological perspective, the experience of working in an autonomous team is the experience of being within a complex and fluid network of interdependence. Each member is not only responsible for their own tasks but must also constantly read and respond to the states of their colleagues to maintain coordination and harmony (Hout & Davis, 2021). This chain of horizontal interaction underscores the importance of healthy communication functions in building and maintaining high-quality relationships that transcend organizational boundaries (Gardi et al., 2021). In this direct experience, emotion is not merely a private affair, but becomes an important social signal. An expression of frustration, joy, anxiety, or confidence from one member immediately becomes part of the social reality experienced by other members (Wróbel, 2010). Such emotions can be captured, internalized, and then radiated back, creating a cycle that can reinforce or alter the atmosphere of the team as a whole (Paulsen & Kauffeld, 2016). Collectively, organizational social capital and such solid team collaboration act as the main pillars for the implementation of Total Quality Management (Putra et al., 2021). This process is very subtle and often unconscious, yet it forms an affective background that influences every decision, conversation, and collaborative effort within the team.

Because of their autonomous nature, such teams often lack protocols or formal mechanisms to manage this emotional dynamic (Hout & Davis, 2021). Work protocols may focus on output and technical processes rather than on managing the psychological climate. Consequently, autonomous teams become highly dependent on the emotional competence and social awareness of each of their members, as well as on the unwritten norms that develop among them (Wang et al., 2020). This internal need positions psychological capital as a strategic asset that must be possessed by members to boost personal and group work performance (Hariyani & Putra, 2024). If one

member has a tendency to spread anxiety or anger, and other members have a high vulnerability to catching those emotions, the team can quickly plunge into a negative spiral that erodes trust and hinders productivity. Conversely, if the members are skilled at spreading enthusiasm, calmness, and trust, the team can build extraordinary resilience and synergy. Therefore, understanding emotional contagion in this specific setting becomes highly important.

Therefore, examining the relationship between emotional contagion and autonomous work teams is not merely applying existing theory to a new context. It is an effort to understand how the structural characteristics of autonomy such as the decentralization of power, the intensity of horizontal interaction, and the lack of external oversight strengthen, weaken, or modify the underlying process of emotional spread. This study begins with the assumption that autonomy does not only free teams from external control, but also places a new burden on the team's capacity to regulate themselves emotionally. Emotional contagion, in this view, emerges as a primitive yet highly powerful self-regulation mechanism that can be a primary support or a major obstacle to autonomous team effectiveness. In the macro context, the understanding of this self-governance aligns with the need for formulating adaptive situational leadership strategies to improve change management and periodic team performance (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). This exploration is necessary to reveal how teams can leverage this natural dynamic to build a supportive climate or, at the very least, prevent it from causing damage.

The main problem that arises is the potential for amplification of negative emotional effects within a relatively autonomous and closed system. In teams under strict supervision, an individual's negative emotional outburst can often be immediately tempered by supervisory intervention or disciplinary procedures. In autonomous teams, no such external mechanism exists. The absence of such control is vulnerable to triggering organizational misalignment and normative tension due to conflicting value mechanisms (Irfan, 2023). Negative emotions such as frustration over a setback, distrust of a colleague's competence, or anxiety regarding deadlines can spread from one member to another through subtle contagion processes. Without a clear authority to intervene, this negative spiral can continue to rotate and reinforce itself. Initially neutral members can become affected, the team atmosphere becomes tense, communication

becomes defensive, and collaboration is hampered. To mitigate such risks, ethical values and the strengthening of organizational cultural structures must be optimized as constructive internal conflict resolution instruments (Khayru et al., 2021). Autonomy, which should be empowering, can instead become a trap if the team lacks the ability to break this cycle of negative emotional contagion from within, as they cannot rely on external resolutions.

The second problem is the uneven variation in vulnerability and the ability to spread emotions among team members. Not all individuals have the same tendency to "catch" the emotions of others, and not everyone is equally effective in "transmitting" their emotions. In autonomous teams, the presence of one or two individuals who are highly emotionally expressive or who possess high negative affect can have a disproportionate impact on the overall team climate, regardless of their formal position or technical expertise. This inequality of affective influence demands mastery of precise communication strategies to manage conflict, especially in multicultural teams (Marsal & Darmawan, 2022). On the other hand, more emotionally stable members may struggle to neutralize this influence if they lack adequate skills or awareness. In situations of such informal role discrepancy, the application of precise situational leadership plays a vital role in balancing and boosting team work performance within multicultural organizations (Gardi et al., 2024). This imbalance can create invisible informal power dynamics, where emotional influence replaces influence based on expertise or role. This makes efforts to build a stable and positive team climate difficult, as the root of the problem may lie in individual dispositional characteristics that are not easily changed, while the autonomous structure of the team provides ample space for those characteristics to manifest their influence without restraint.

The importance of examining this topic is closely linked to the widespread adoption of organizational models that are flat, agile, and team-based, relying on high autonomy. Many companies in the technology, creative, and professional services sectors are shifting toward such structures in the hope of increasing innovation and response speed. However, investments in this structural design are often not balanced with an adequate understanding of their psychosocial implications, particularly regarding the management of emotional dynamics. This uncertainty in emotional governance is similar to the complexity of resolving minority shareholder conflicts in public companies, which requires legal

certainty based on national regulatory systems (Rahayu et al., 2024). The failure to understand and manage emotional contagion can be a hidden reason why many autonomous teams do not reach their full potential, experience collective burnout, or even dissolve due to unresolved conflict. This phenomenon of internal fracturing due to information and emotional distortion is also highlighted by studies on the role of media in the global era in shaping public opinion regarding conflict, which ultimately carries major implications for democratic stability (Khayru et al., 2024). Therefore, a systematic academic study of this topic provides an essential knowledge base for organizational leaders, team coaches, and consultants to design appropriate interventions, not only for work processes but also for the development of team emotional capacity.

Furthermore, developments in neuroscience and social psychology research over the last two decades have provided more sophisticated conceptual tools to understand the mechanisms behind emotional contagion, such as mirror neurons and nonverbal affective transmission. Leveraging these advancements to analyze the specific setting of autonomous teams is a logical and necessary step. Moreover, in a post-pandemic world where hybrid and virtual work have become the norm, autonomous teams often have to coordinate via digital channels. Emotional contagion in virtual environments possesses different characteristics; it may be more difficult to detect yet no less powerful. Therefore, a deep understanding of the formation processes and implications of team cohesion in virtual work environments has become a determining factor for modern team resilience (Irfan, 2024). Understanding how autonomy and contagion interact across these various work modalities is highly relevant for creating resilient and effective teams in the new era of work. This study, therefore, does not merely address theoretical needs but also provides much-needed practical insights for managing modern teams.

This literature study aims to conduct a systematic conceptual analysis to elucidate the dynamic relationship between emotional contagion and autonomous work teams. Specifically, this study seeks to investigate how characteristic features of team autonomy such as decentralization of authority, intensity of horizontal interaction, and self-regulation influence the mechanisms of emotional spread among members, particularly regarding its speed, amplitude, and polarity. Furthermore, this research aims to identify and

categorize the spectrum of impacts generated by this emotional contagion, ranging from functional impacts such as improved cohesion, intuitive coordination, and collective resilience, to dysfunctional impacts such as stress spirals, emotional conflict, and reduced decision-making quality. The expected theoretical contribution is the integration of insights from affective contagion theory, team theory, and self-regulation theory into a coherent framework for understanding emotional regulation within autonomous social systems. Practically, this synthesis can inform the design of emotional competence training for teams, the development of team norms that proactively manage affective climates, and organizational policies that support psychological well-being within decentralized work structures.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is developed as a qualitative literature study using an exploratory and interpretative approach. The qualitative approach is considered most appropriate for examining such a dynamic and complex topic, as it allows the researcher to explore the various dimensions, nuances, and conceptual relationships present within the existing body of literature (Silverman, 2013). The objective of the research is not to test hypotheses or perform statistical generalizations, but rather to build a deep and comprehensive understanding of how the phenomenon of emotional contagion manifests and impacts autonomous team environments. The nature of the research, as a purely literature-based review, provides the researcher the flexibility to cross disciplinary boundaries such as organizational psychology, social neuroscience, and team management studies to generate a rich and multidimensional synthesis.

The research procedure is carried out systematically by adopting the thematic analysis method as outlined by Nowell, White, and Moules (2017). Primary data sources consist of highly reputable scientific journal articles, academic book chapters, and relevant literature reviews, obtained through searches in leading scientific databases including PsycINFO, Business Source Complete, and Scopus. The combination of keywords used includes "emotional contagion," "autonomous teams," "self-managing teams," "affective processes in teams," "team emotional climate," and "nonverbal influence." The analysis phase begins with active and repeated reading of the entire corpus of collected literature to gain a comprehensive understanding. The researcher then performs

coding on text segments containing information related to the characteristics of autonomous teams, mechanisms of emotional spread, or their impacts on team functioning. These initial codes are subsequently grouped, compared, and revised to produce broader and more abstract themes. These themes are then organized into a coherent analytical narrative that directly addresses the formulated research questions, while maintaining logical consistency and depth of argumentation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Modifications to the Process of Emotional Contagion within the Structure of Autonomous Teams

Key determinants place collective affective dynamics within the context of modern work. Autonomous team structures fundamentally modify the process of emotional contagion by strengthening the intensity and accelerating the speed of affect transmission among members. In traditional hierarchical teams, channels of emotional influence are often vertical, flowing from leaders to team members, with managerial oversight acting as a counterbalance or inhibitor to horizontal spread. Such traditional models are ill-suited for managing employees with high emotionality. Therefore, a new human resource (HR) model is required, focusing on employee well-being, providing greater organizational support, and improving employees' skills in managing their emotions (Xerri et al., 2023). Providing space for healthy emotional expression is highly aligned with organizational behavior principles that underlie the formation of motivation and effective group work dynamics (Darmawan, 2013). Autonomous teams remove these hierarchical filters, creating dense and egalitarian networks of influence. In the absence of an authority figure consistently regulating interactions, emotional signals emitted by one member can be received and processed more directly by others. The high frequency of interaction and the collaborative nature of autonomous teams increase the number of emotional "exposures," akin to increasing the rate of contact in biological spread models. This means that an individual's affective state, whether positive or negative, has a higher probability of being transmitted throughout the team's social network in less time, thereby modifying the scale and speed of the contagion process compared to more controlled structures. Structural configuration establishes the foundational conditions for collective emotional transmission.

Feedback dynamics serve as the primary amplifier for affect transmission in autonomous systems. The next significant modification occurs through feedback amplification mechanisms arising from the self-managing nature of autonomous teams. Because such teams are responsible for their own collective outcomes, members tend to be highly sensitive to signals indicating progress, obstacles, or threats to shared goals. A member's task-related emotion, such as anxiety over a deadline or excitement over a minor breakthrough, is not merely a personal expression but is interpreted as crucial information regarding project status. This interpretation increases the social significance of the emotional signal, making it more "contagious." When one member's anxiety is captured by another, the resulting collective anxiety can reinforce the initial signal, creating a feedback loop that exacerbates the situation. Conversely, spreading enthusiasm can create a self-reinforcing positive momentum. Controlling this affective climate is increasingly essential to maintaining the psychological well-being of all members through proper emotion management in daily work routines (Irfan & Darmawan, 2021). In externally managed teams, such feedback might be interrupted or moderated by managerial intervention, while in autonomous systems, it is allowed to resonate and develop internally, modifying contagion dynamics into a more cyclical and high-impact process. This mechanism demonstrates that affect functions as an operational signal with systemic consequences.

Task architecture plays a role in shaping the pattern of emotional flow. The characteristic high task interdependence in autonomous teams also modifies the direction and selectivity of emotional contagion in fundamental ways. Autonomous team members typically rely on one another to complete complex, interrelated work, where one member's success depends heavily on the contributions of others (Wageman et al., 2012). To ensure these interdependent workflows run smoothly, organizations often design and implement cross-functional training to enhance team collaboration (Fared & Darmawan, 2021). This interdependence creates mandatory and continuous communication channels, making these contact paths the primary routes for affective transfer. Emotional contagion no longer spreads randomly or solely through friendships but tends to follow the structured path of task interdependence (Barsade & Knight, 2015). A member frustrated by a bottleneck in a task that serves as an input for another member will easily transmit that frustration through necessary

coordination interactions. The contagion process becomes more structured by the work architecture itself, creating predictable patterns of emotional flow (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Individuals in positions central to the task interdependence network, despite lacking formal titles, can become disproportionate epicenters for emotional spread whether constructive or destructive as they act as natural hubs for the exchange of information and resources. Thus, autonomous task structures transform emotional spread patterns from potentially diffuse to more directed and closely tied to the workflow, making collective emotion management an integral component of work process effectiveness. This approach highlights the close link between job design and team affective dynamics, which constitutes one of the six primary factors enhancing overall organizational effectiveness (Darmawan, 2024).

Social cohesion in this case forms an intensification of emotional resonance. The level of psychological and social proximity that typically develops in effective autonomous teams is another modifying factor. Autonomy often encourages teams to develop a strong group identity, a sense of togetherness, and deep trust among members. Autonomous teams may have additional effects on team members, including making them feel more confident in the mission, increasing team resilience by improving task readiness, and fostering overall team efficacy (Lakhmani et al., 2022). Paradoxically, this psychological proximity can become a primary amplifier for emotional contagion. Empathy mechanisms and mirror neurons, which underlie contagion, operate more powerfully when individuals feel connected and similar to one another. This team emotional attachment demonstrates the close reciprocal relationship between psychological well-being and the quality of social interaction as explained in social exchange theory (Darmawan & Gani, 2024), even when reviewed through the reconstruction of social exchange theory from a cross-cultural perspective (Oluwatosin & Darmawan, 2024). In cohesive teams, members more easily 'read' and unconsciously mimic each other's micro-expressions, tone of voice, and body language. The transmission process becomes nearly automatic and more difficult to inhibit cognitively because it is driven by positive social bonds. Therefore, autonomy that successfully builds cohesion can actually create conditions where emotional contagion becomes more subtle, faster, and more complete, modifying it from an interpersonal

process into a nearly unified group phenomenon. This condition shows that cohesion acts as a highly efficient medium for affective transmission.

Implications arise from the absence of formal regulatory mechanisms regarding the continuity of collective emotions. The lack of external protocols to manage conflicts and emotions formally modifies contagion by extending the duration of spreading affective states. In teams with traditional management, negative emotional outbreaks might be quickly ended with mediation meetings or direction from a superior. In autonomous teams, there are no clear extrinsic procedures to 'quarantine' or 'treat' emotional outbreaks. Emergent emotions must be resolved by the team itself through dialogue, which may take time and not always be effective. This dilemmatic condition demands a reliable conflict management strategy to maintain harmony, considering that causal factors and conflict handling methods directly influence team work effectiveness (Al-Hakim & Irfan, 2024). During this protracted internal resolution process, negative affective states can continue to circulate, be re-triggered in every conversation about the issue, and even crystallize into part of the team's permanent climate. In other words, the autonomous structure removes external circuit breakers, allowing the flow of emotion to continue and potentially become a lingering burden, a modification that changes contagion from an incidental event into a chronic condition if not managed well. This situation emphasizes the importance of internal regulatory capacity as a prerequisite for emotional stability, as well as the crucial nature of understanding communication practices to manage global teams working under diverse cultural frameworks (Sajjapong & Irfan, 2022).

Sources of systemic pressure are a distinct part of the overall autonomous arrangement. Finally, the unique pressures inherent in autonomy itself, such as collective responsibility for failure and the absence of external parties to blame, can modify the valence and source of emotional contagion. Autonomous team members may experience unique forms of anxiety and stress stemming from the burden of independent decision-making and shared accountability. This psychological burden is often influenced by the individual personality characteristics of each person, as mapped in the Big Five personality theory regarding work performance (Darmawan, 2017). This specific type of affect then becomes available fuel for the contagion process. The source of emotion does not only stem from individual personality or

interpersonal events but is systemically generated by the autonomous structure itself. Thus, contagion in autonomous teams may often carry emotional loads associated with the burden of autonomy, such as pressure to prove oneself, fear of peer judgment, or exhaustion from constant self-regulation. This modifies the content or emotional 'color' being spread, making it qualitatively different from contagion in teams that are more structured and protected by hierarchy. Through this explanation, it is affirmed that work structure can be a producer of collective emotions.

These modification dimensions are integrated into a cohesive conceptual framework. The entirety of these modifications illustrates that an autonomous team is not a neutral vessel where emotional contagion occurs. On the contrary, its specific structural characteristics dense egalitarian networks, internal feedback mechanisms, high task interdependence, psychological cohesion, the lack of external protocols, and unique systemic pressures actively reshape the process of emotional spread. They transform it into a force that is faster, more amplified, more task-directed, more cohesion-driven, more prolonged, and more distinct in its emotional content. To steer this affective force toward performance targets, the implementation of servant leadership can be practiced as a critical success factor in improving team effectiveness and organizational performance (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022). Understanding these modifications is the key to anticipating how emotions will move within autonomous teams and, more importantly, to designing interventions that align with the internal logic of an autonomous system, rather than the logic of controlled systems that are no longer applicable. This synthesis positions team design as a key variable in the management of collective emotional dynamics.

### **The Impact of Emotional Contagion on the Functioning and Performance of Autonomous Teams**

The affective dimension is placed as an operational component in the effectiveness of autonomous teams. The first significant functional impact is the enhancement of implicit coordination and the speed of collective response. In autonomous teams facing complex and dynamic tasks, the contagion of positive emotions such as focus, calmness, or enthusiasm can function as a rapid internal alignment system. When a member exhibits calmness and focus while facing deadline pressures, this affective state can spread to other

members, subconsciously aligning their levels of arousal and attention. This affective alignment reduces the need for explicit verbal communication to coordinate efforts, as team members intuitively begin to operate on the same emotional "wavelength." They become more synchronized in work rhythms, attention priorities, and even risk-taking. Positive contagion thus acts as a social lubricant that facilitates seamless and adaptive cooperation, enabling teams to respond to changes with nearly instantaneous cohesion a critical advantage for autonomous teams that must move quickly without top-down instructions. This mechanism demonstrates that emotional alignment functions as an efficient nonverbal coordination device, where the fluidity of this horizontal interaction chain depends heavily on the effective functioning of communication to build and maintain quality relationships in the work environment (Gardi et al., 2021).

Through the role of affective transmission in the formation of collective resilience, impacts are distributed across several aspects. The second functional impact is the strengthening of collective resilience and the ability to overcome setbacks. Autonomous teams often face failures or obstacles without a managerial safety net. The contagion of emotions such as optimism, determination, and confidence from one resilient member can spread and become a shared psychological resource. When one individual maintains a positive and constructive attitude amidst difficulties, this attitude not only influences their own behavior but, through the transmission process, can alter the entire group's perception of the challenge. Challenges that initially seemed threatening can be reframed into solvable problems. This spread of positive affect builds a collective psychological buffer, which increases the team's capacity to maintain effort and creativity even under pressure. This adaptive capacity affirms the position of psychological capital as a strategic asset that must be possessed by members to boost work performance, both personally and collectively (Hariani & Putra, 2024). In other words, resilience becomes a property that can be "transmitted" and reinforced through contagion dynamics, allowing autonomous teams to bounce back from failure more quickly and effectively. This phenomenon shows that team bounce-back ability can stem from emotional resonance among members.

The framework of collective affective dynamics places social norms as a product of emotional interaction. The third functional impact is the

acceleration of the formation and maintenance of productive team norms. Group norms, such as standards for work quality, response speed, or levels of mutual support, are often formed and enforced through social and affective cues, rather than through written rules. Emotional contagion serves as a powerful and efficient mechanism for norm enforcement. Expressions of pride in high-quality work or a sense of satisfaction after completing a task well can create an atmosphere that associates positive feelings with specific behaviors. Conversely, subtle expressions of disappointment or discomfort regarding behavior that violates norms can provide immediate corrective feedback without the need for verbal confrontation. This organic system of social control is fundamentally rooted in organizational behavior principles that govern how group dynamics and motivation are intertwined (Darmawan, 2013). This process allows autonomous teams to socially regulate themselves in an organic and low-cost manner, where the collective emotional climate naturally encourages behaviors aligned with team goals and prevents deviant behaviors. This condition demonstrates that collective affect functions as a medium of social regulation that works subtly yet effectively.

Variations in affective states within work groups correlate with changes in higher-level cognitive capacity. The fourth functional impact is the enhancement of creativity and innovation through the contagion of specific affective states. Research indicates that certain affective states, such as calm excitement or genuine curiosity, are more conducive to creative thinking and idea exploration. In autonomous teams, if one member successfully enters such a state for instance, due to discovering an interesting new approach that state can spread to other members through collaborative interaction. The spread of affect that supports creativity can transform an entire brainstorming or problem-solving session from routine to highly productive. The team becomes locked in a positive feedback loop where one person's enthusiasm triggers ideas in others, which in turn reinforces that enthusiasm, thus creating a fertile environment for the emergence of innovative solutions. This stimulation of a creative climate serves as clear evidence of how supportive managerial roles can create a culture of sustainable team innovation and creativity (Özkaya et al., 2023). Thus, contagion does not merely influence the general mood, but can specifically facilitate the higher-level cognitive processes that are at the core of an autonomous team's value. This phenomenon demonstrates the role of affect as a

catalyst for collective intellectual exploration.

The spectrum of collective affective consequences also includes destructive outcomes for the work system. However, the dysfunctional impacts of emotional contagion can be severe and equally powerful. The first and most destructive dysfunctional impact is a collective stress and anxiety spiral. In autonomous teams facing high pressure, an individual member's anxiety arising from the fear of failure or the burden of responsibility can spread rapidly. Individuals under high pressure may be more sensitive to the impact of anger absorbed during social interactions at work, thereby resenting the consequences of negative emotions more than individuals under low pressure (Petitta et al., 2023). This process can be amplified by the autonomous nature itself, as there is no external party to rely on or blame. As anxiety spreads, it disrupts individual cognitive functions, such as working memory and the ability to concentrate, which further decreases performance and creates more minor failures, which in turn triggers more anxiety. This negative spiral can result in collective panic, task avoidance, or escalating conflict as members seek scapegoats among themselves, thereby completely undermining the team's ability to self-regulate effectively. The symptoms of psychological fracturing in this modern era clarify the relevance of reviewing the psychological perspectives of society in the Society 5.0 era, which demands a balance between the adoption of autonomous systems and the fulfillment of employees' humanistic aspects (Darmawan et al., 2021). The accumulation of these dynamics forms a collective psychological condition that hinders the functioning of the work system.

The team's relational foundation heavily relies on the stability of the emotional climate that develops among its members. The second dysfunctional impact of unmanaged emotional contagion is the erosion of trust and the emergence of suspicion that damages the team's social foundation. The contagion of negative emotions such as disappointment, cynicism, or suppressed anger can subtly poison the team's psychological climate, creating an unsafe environment for risk-taking or mutual dependence among members (Jones & George, 1998). A member who feels unappreciated may emit subtle signals of dissatisfaction through body language and tone of voice. These nonverbal signals are then caught by other members through the contagion process, creating a general atmosphere of discomfort and vigilance that further inhibits open communication

(Elfenbein, 2014). This condition of mutual suspicion reflects a reciprocal relationship between the decline of psychological well-being and the deterioration of social interaction quality within the perspective of social exchange theory (Darmawan & Gani, 2024), a correlation that also proves consistent even when tested through the reconstruction of social exchange theory from a cross-cultural perspective (Oluwatosin & Darmawan, 2024). Over time, this sustained spread of negative affect can significantly weaken the foundation of trust essential for autonomous teamwork, as explained in trust models that view emotion as a central component in interpersonal assessment (McAllister, 1995). Members may begin to question each other's motivations, become reluctant to share information, or avoid the dependency actually required to complete tasks. Thus, trust, which takes a long time to build, can erode rapidly through continuous cycles of negative emotional contagion, effectively transforming a cooperative team into a group of isolated and defensive individuals. This situation marks the weakening of social capital that is a prerequisite for effective collaboration.

The quality of collective decisions is inseparable from the affective state surrounding the group's reasoning process. The third dysfunctional impact is the deterioration of collective decision-making quality. Emotional contagion has a transmission effect and significantly influences the positive and negative emotions felt by members. The use of positive emotional contagion will enhance perceived group reflection and reduce conflict. Meanwhile, negative emotional contagion mediates emotional transmission for them (Kane et al., 2023). Spreading emotions can introduce systemic bias into the team's cognitive processes. For example, if the general team mood is dominated by euphoria or excessive confidence stemming from positive contagion, the team may become less critical, ignore negative information, and take uncalculated risks. Conversely, if the mood is dominated by anxiety or excessive vigilance, the team may become overly cautious, reject viable opportunities, and become trapped in over-analysis. This dilemma of decision distortion due to group sentiment has a complexity equivalent to the intricacies of resolving minority shareholder conflicts in public companies, which requires legal certainty based on national regulatory systems (Rahayu et al., 2024). In both cases, emotional contagion reduces the team's ability to evaluate information objectively and in a balanced manner.

A shared affective state creates a lens that distorts group reality, leading to decisions that may not be supported by data but are aligned with the prevailing collective emotion. This condition shows that affective distortion can transform into systemic decision bias.

Conflict dynamics in autonomous groups are highly sensitive to the spread of negative affect. The fourth dysfunctional impact is the increasing potential for conflict and difficulty in conflict resolution. Emotional contagion can turn small substantive disagreements into large relationship conflicts. When two members have a disagreement about a task, the resulting negative emotions like frustration or anger can easily spread to other team members, polarizing the group. Members may unconsciously "take sides" based on affective contagion rather than a deep analysis of arguments. This phenomenon of internal polarization due to the transmission of emotional sentiment is similar to the pattern of public opinion manipulation by media in the global era when shaping conflict narratives, which carries broad implications for democratic stability (Khayru et al., 2024). Moreover, in an atmosphere already tense due to negative contagion, efforts to resolve conflict become far more difficult because high emotions disrupt rational communication and empathy. Autonomous teams, which rely on their own ability to solve problems, may find their conflict resolution processes paralyzed by the cloud of negative emotion that has spread, thereby requiring external intervention that should not have been necessary. To mitigate the risk of such escalation, the integration of ethical values and the strengthening of organizational cultural structures must be optimized as constructive internal conflict resolution instruments (Khayru et al., 2021). This state represents an escalation of conflict from the task realm to the more destructive relational realm, demanding the implementation of conflict management strategies and effective harmony maintenance to secure group productivity (Al-Hakim & Irfan, 2024).

The sustainability of team performance is influenced by the distribution of its members' psychological energy. The fifth dysfunctional impact is the contribution to collective exhaustion and burnout. Stress and fatigue are highly contagious. Work-related emotional communication can lead to job burnout, which is the result of chronic exposure to workplace stressors. Emotional labor and emotional work function as stressors that cause tension leading to burnout (Powers & Myers, 2020). This tendency to absorb extreme work stress is also

significantly influenced by dispositional characteristics or innate personality, (Darmawan, 2017). In autonomous teams with high workloads, one member's fatigue manifesting through emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased personal efficacy can become a model for other members. Through contagion, this state of exhaustion can become a group norm. The team begins to accept overtime work, constant complaining, and feelings of overwhelm as normal. This norm, reinforced by affective transmission, can accelerate the occurrence of burnout across the entire team, as members no longer have role models showing balance or healthy resilience. The long-term impact is a sharp decline in productivity, increased absenteeism, and member turnover, which destroys the stability and institutional memory of the autonomous team. This phenomenon signifies the degradation of the team's long-term adaptive capacity.

Collective learning capacity requires an emotional climate that is safe for openness. The final dysfunctional impact is the inhibition of learning and constructive feedback. For autonomous teams to develop, they must engage in critical reflection about their performance and processes. However, the contagion of emotions such as shame or defensiveness can create an environment where honest feedback is perceived as a threat. If one member reacts defensively to suggestions for improvement, this defensive reaction can spread, causing other members to also shut down or avoid providing necessary feedback. An emotionally fragile atmosphere hinders open discussion about mistakes and lessons, which are the lifeblood for teams that learn and adapt. Therefore, to intervene in this emotional stagnation, leaders need to consistently practice servant leadership to foster team effectiveness and optimize work performance (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022). Without the ability to engage in safe and constructive feedback, autonomous teams risk stagnation, repeating the same mistakes because emotional contagion dynamics prevent them from processing their experiences effectively. Furthermore, the formation of cohesion and a sense of safety in the modern era must also consider communication dynamics in virtual work environments so that the learning process remains resilient across physical boundaries (Irfan, 2024). This phenomenon signifies a long-term degradation of the team's adaptive capacity.

Collective learning capacity requires an emotional climate that is safe for openness. These collective impacts, both functional and

dysfunctional, demonstrate that emotional contagion is not an unimportant epiphenomenon within autonomous teams. It is a driving force that can fundamentally shape a team's trajectory. Positive contagion serves as the psychological infrastructure supporting coordination, resilience, self-regulation, and innovation. Conversely, negative contagion acts as a social pathogen that can trigger spirals of anxiety, destroy trust, impair decision-making, fuel conflict, cause collective exhaustion, and freeze learning. This dual effect places the understanding and management of emotional contagion at the core of effective autonomous team leadership, which must involve honing collective emotional awareness and building the capacity to influence the direction and content of that inevitable affective spread. Its theoretical and practical implications demand systematic attention to emotional dynamics as a core organizational variable.

## CONCLUSION

This literature study concludes that the relationship between emotional contagion and autonomous work teams is a highly significant, dynamic, and mutually shaping interaction. The structural characteristics of autonomous teams namely, dense peer networks, internal feedback mechanisms, high task interdependence, developing psychological cohesion, a lack of external regulation protocols, and the unique pressures of self-accountability collectively modify the fundamental processes of emotional contagion. This modification manifests as emotional spread that is faster, amplified through internal resonance, guided by task architecture, driven by social proximity, prolonged by the absence of intervention, and distinct in its emotional content related to the burden of autonomy. Furthermore, this modified emotional contagion generates a broad spectrum of impacts on team functioning and performance. Functional impacts include enhanced implicit coordination, strengthened collective resilience, accelerated formation of productive norms, and increased creativity. Conversely, dysfunctional impacts include spirals of stress and anxiety, erosion of trust, deterioration of decision-making quality, escalation of conflict, contribution to collective burnout, and the inhibition of team learning processes.

The theoretical implication of this study is the enrichment and specification of emotional contagion theory by incorporating organizational structural variables as crucial moderating factors. These findings demonstrate that contagion does not

occur in a social vacuum but is deeply shaped by the architecture of power, interdependence, and regulatory mechanisms within a group. The implication necessitates that models of contagion and group affective dynamics explicitly account for the level of team autonomy as a key contextual variable. From the perspective of management practice and organizational development, the implications are substantive. Organizational designs that choose autonomous team models must simultaneously consider investments in building collective emotion regulation capacity. This shifts the focus from merely providing technical training and decision-making authority toward developing deep emotional and social competencies at the team level. Furthermore, the implication for leadership in decentralized organizations is the need to shift from a role of direct controller to that of a facilitator who builds team awareness of their own emotional dynamics and creates support structures, such as coaching or reflection spaces, that help teams proactively manage contagion.

Based on the study's findings, suggestions for future research include developing and testing empirical models that measure the strength of the relationship between specific dimensions of team autonomy and the characteristics of contagion processes, as well as between patterns of contagion and multidimensional team performance outcomes. Longitudinal quantitative research would be valuable to establish causal directions and explore critical points where positive contagion can turn negative. Qualitative research, such as ethnographic case studies, is also necessary to capture the nuances of how team members subjectively experience and navigate the process of emotional contagion in their daily work. For practitioners, it is recommended to integrate emotional awareness and regulation assessments into the formation and development processes of autonomous teams. Interventions could include training that specifically addresses the phenomenon of contagion, helping teams identify their key emotional "transmitters," and developing internal protocols to "interrupt" negative spirals, such as using agreed-upon keywords or holding brief, routine emotional check-ins. Organizations are also advised to evaluate whether their reward and recognition systems inadvertently trigger negative contagion for instance, by creating excessive internal competition and to design systems that instead support the spread of positive emotions such as gratitude, appreciation, and collective trust.

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