



Received: 17 October 2022

Accepted: 21 March 2023;

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Reviewing editor:  
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## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A bibliometric analysis of team autonomy research

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**Abstract:** Organisations all around the globe are beginning to promote autonomy rather than imposing restrictions. Thus, the use of teams with certain levels of autonomy as an organisational structure has increased in recent years to achieve corporate objectives. The article aims to review the records in the team autonomy research domain. Given the number of possibly interchangeable terms connected to the teams with certain levels of autonomy (self-managing, self-organizing, self-regulating, self-directed or semi-autonomous), a bibliometric analysis was used to obtain data from the Web of Science and Scopus databases. According to annual scientific production and coverage of the terms over time in both databases, bibliometric analysis has shown that the Scopus covers more significantly the total number of records and the time span. The most used term in both databases was



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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kristýna Zychová is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Economics and Management, the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. Alongside her academic pursuits, she is also an Open Science coordinator at the CZU Library. With a keen interest in Management, Kristýna's research explores the importance of autonomy at work, especially in connection with autonomous teams and self-management. Her research focuses on how autonomy can be leveraged as a powerful tool for unlocking the full potential of employees and organisations alike.

Tereza Šímová is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Science Prague, where she is also a teaching librarian. In her research, she focuses on bibliometric analysis to map the research domains. As part of her dissertation, she study virtual teams, digital nomads, remote working and other flexible forms of working. Martina Fejfarová holds MSc in the field of Economics and Management and PhD in Management granted by the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. In 2019 she became an Associate Professor. She is the main researcher and a co-researcher of several projects focused especially on human resource management. The main areas of her research cover human resource management, risk management and crisis management.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The use of teams with certain levels of autonomy in organisations has been increasing in recent years to achieve corporate objectives. However, several terms are used to describe these types of teams, which can cause confusion and make it challenging to analyse research in this area. This article uses a bibliometric analysis to review the records related to team autonomy in the Web of Science and Scopus databases. The results show that the most commonly used term is "self-managing team". The article also describes the geographic distribution of the terms and proposes future research opportunities in this area. Our article sheds light on the development of the research domain related to team autonomy and can help organisations better understand the implications of using teams with certain levels of autonomy in their structures.

“self-managing team”. Further, the article provides specific occurrences and frequencies of the terms and descriptions of the records associated with its first occurrences. This article provides the first review of records using bibliometric methods in the team autonomy research domain. It helps to describe the development of the research domain and proposes several bases for future research opportunities.

**Subjects:** Personnel Selection, Assessment, and Human Resource Management; Human Resource Management

**Keywords:** bibliometrics; Scopus; team autonomy; Web of Science

### 1. Introduction

One perceived and experienced aspect of everyone's life is belonging to a particular group. Shaw et al. (1981) defined a group as two or more people who interact in such a way that each person influences and is influenced by the other. These groups include families, colleagues, friends, or other interest groups (Webber & Klimoski, 2003). However, a team is not any group working together. In a team, everyone works to achieve shared goals (Thompson, 2018). Members of a team work together, collaborate, and cooperate, so the team achieve more than individual members (Partridge, 2007). Teams are the heart of how work is done in modern life (Andrejczuk et al., 2017; Kozłowski & Ilgen, 2006) and have become the basic building blocks of organisations (Mathieu et al., 2014). Notably, in the current variable environment, effective teams are crucial for organisations (Andrejczuk et al., 2017). A qualified team can improve productivity and the quality of the performed tasks, just as overall organisation performance (Andrejczuk et al., 2017; Kendall & Salas, 2004).

Since teams have been the focus for a long time, various ways exist to categorise them and their function. According to earlier research (Banai et al., 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Langfred, 2004; Moe et al., 2010), autonomy is an essential factor affecting team performance and member well-being. In a team context, autonomy is a person's level of discretion and freedom to complete assigned tasks (Hackman et al., 1983). A sense of autonomy greatly influences individual performance and attitude (Langfred, 2005), and its combination with freedom is vital for creativity (Thompson, 2018). Further, Langfred (2005) refers to a slew of research confirming that people prioritising autonomy and intrinsic motivation have higher self-esteem, stronger interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being. Higher productivity and reduced burnout are also benefits of autonomous motivation (Langfred, 2005; Stankiewicz et al., 2019). As stated by Martin et al. (2013), a crucial factor in cultivating a team culture lies in giving employees reasonable autonomy, so employees can make independent decisions regarding how to achieve required outcomes. According to Slemp et al. (2021), people who work in teams with a higher level of autonomy are happier than those who work in traditional teams predetermined by the hierarchical structure. As stated by Hackman (2002), it allows teams to thrive. However, researchers are discussing the downsides and risks of autonomy and whether teams with certain autonomy are more effective than conventional teams (Weerheim et al., 2019). As possible downsides and risks, researchers are mentioning challenges in managing some leadership responsibilities, team conflicts (Power & Waddell, 2004), low authority differentiation, harmonisation of all team members' efforts (Nederveen Pieterse et al., 2019), time and money costs (Weerheim et al., 2019) and reduced effectiveness in crises (Demirtas & Karaca, 2020).

In recent years, many organisations have shifted towards teams providing more autonomy than traditional teams. Manager-led, also called traditional, teams represent the most traditional type. This team provides the most significant control over performed work and team members (Thompson, 2018). The team is responsible only for carrying out the assigned tasks (Hackman, 2002). According to Arregle et al. (2022), as organisations strive to keep up with the demands of the modern era, they increasingly provide their teams' with certain levels of autonomy to improve their structure and

operations. Teams significantly differ depending on the level of team autonomy and control (Thompson, 2018). However, terms describing different types of autonomous teams (like self-managing, self-organizing, self-regulating, self-directed or semi-autonomous) may be used interchangeably, especially if people are unfamiliar with the specific meanings and implications. This can lead to confusion and misunderstanding about the level of autonomy and decision-making authority teams have. Several previous studies have pointed out this fact (see Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Kozlowski & Bell, 2003; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003). While the definitions may overlap, each term has a unique focus and emphasizes different aspects of team autonomy and decision-making.

To fulfil organisational goals, the use of self-managing team is recently increasing (von Bonsdorff et al., 2015; Weerheim et al., 2019). Besides carrying out the assigned tasks, the team is also responsible for monitoring and controlling the results to be achieved, the structure and distribution of tasks and shaping and monitoring frameworks of the desired behaviour (Hackman, 2002). High autonomy and experience of independence and discretion are the significant characteristics of self-managing teams (Doblinger, 2022; Weerheim et al., 2019). The team comprise members with a wide range of skills relevant to the team's goals (Cummings, 1978), and all work activities are controlled by them (Hackman, 1986). Team members also have greater autonomy to plan their work (Cummings, 1978; Wolff et al., 2002). The team is empowered to make decisions and take actions without being micromanaged by a supervisor or manager (Jiang, 2010; Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2016). In comparison to self-directed teams, they are responsible not only for task execution but also for the coordination of the team's activities and the resolution of conflicts and problems (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). According to Van Wingerden et al. (2015), a self-organizing team represents a group of individuals capable of adapting to changing circumstances and working together to achieve a common goal without needing external direction or supervision. The team can take on new tasks, make decisions, and adapt to changing circumstances without being told what to do. Self-organizing teams prioritise the internal functioning of the team over external coordination and problem-solving, compared to self-managing teams (Morgeson, 2005). A self-regulating team comprises individuals who can monitor and manage their behaviour and performance without needing external direction or control. The team can set goals, establish norms and standards, and ensure that their actions align with their objectives (Janssen et al., 2004). According to Lanaj et al. (2016), self-regulating teams exhibit traits such as a unified vision, strong interdependence among team members, well-defined performance expectations, and a mutual commitment to holding each other accountable for results. Additionally, using self-monitoring tools and feedback mechanisms can assist self-regulating teams in tracking progress and making necessary adjustments to achieve their objectives. A self-directed team comprises individuals empowered to make independent decisions regarding their objectives and work procedures without the requirement for external guidance or supervision (Hackman, 2012). Among team members, a shared sense of purpose, a high level of interdependence, and a willingness to engage in collaborative problem-solving and decision-making are present (Stewart et al., 1999). In a semi-autonomous team, individuals are granted a certain level of independence to make decisions and set goals while still being subject to some external direction or supervision (Sosa et al., 2004). The team can make some decisions independently but still requires guidance and oversight from a supervisor or manager (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003).

The success of the mentioned teams with certain levels of autonomy may depend on various factors, including the level of expertise and experience among team members, the complexity of the task, and the organisational culture and structure. Given the importance of autonomy mentioned earlier and the impact of globalisation, digitisation, and rapid technological advances, teams with certain levels of autonomy are becoming increasingly relevant in organisations nowadays (Renkema et al., 2018). Ryan and Deci (2017) point out that, in the present information and digital age, work requires committed, engaged, flexible, and proactive people. Greater relative autonomy and the factors that promote it within organisations make companies excellent places to work (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Organisations worldwide are finding that fostering autonomy rather than imposing constraints benefits not just their employees but also that having more self-motivated individuals benefits the whole organisation's profitability and performance (Deci et al.,

2017). As a result, organisational management practices are thus shifting from attempting to control employees with carrots and sticks to deliberately developing work environments and supervision styles that lead to intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Such facts suggest that the concept of autonomy in teams is essential for the field of organisational psychology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, unfortunately, reshaping effective modern organisations to foster higher employee autonomy is still a challenge worldwide (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

### **1.1. Web of Science and Scopus**

Web of Science (WoS) is the oldest multidisciplinary database with a wide range of journals, journal titles, conference proceedings and monographs (Norris & Oppenheim, 2007), covering a vast range of disciplines (Vieira & Gomes, 2009). For a long time, it was the only citation database covering all science domains (Chadegani et al., 2013). In 2004 competitor emerged in the term of the Scopus multidisciplinary database. According to Chadegani et al. (2013), the Scopus is the most extensive database with a broad range of records. Researchers are comparing these two databases to see which one is the best. However, finding an answer is not easy, and the points of view are different. In their analysis, Norris and Oppenheim (2007) point out that the Scopus might be used instead of the WoS to evaluate research in the social sciences. Vieira and Gomes (2009) compared the coverage of both databases using the set of Portuguese universities. They found that the Scopus provides 20% more coverage than the WoS but drew attention to partial coverage for some journals (Vieira & Gomes, 2009). Also, Gavel and Iselid (2008) claim that the Scopus covers the most significant number of records (compared to the WoS). Further, a comprehensive comparison by Chadegani et al. (2013) highlighted that the WoS has extensive coverage dating back to 1990. Still, on the other hand, the Scopus has a superior number of journals but with a lower impact (Chadegani et al., 2013). From the point of covered disciplines, Mongeon and Paul-Hus (2016) compared the coverage of journals in the WoS and Scopus with Ulrich's extensive periodical directory. Results indicated that the coverage of Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities in the WoS is still relatively low and that these disciplines are underrepresented (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Considering the Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities are underrepresented in the WoS database (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016), and also according to Vieira and Gomes (2009) claim that the Scopus offers 20% more coverage than the WoS, we decided to compare the two databases and see how their range overlaps within a single Social Science research domain.

### **1.2. The geographical origin of the authors does matter**

The production of scientific articles is influenced by the environment in which scientists publish. Researchers often use English because it matches the new sociolinguistic science landscape of the current century (Lillis et al., 2010; Rose et al., 2021) and increases the readership and potential impact of the findings (Saier et al., 2022). Research has also shown that researchers feel pressured to cite anglophone publications because it will improve their work and increase their chances of more citations (Canagarajah, 2002; Flowerdew, 2000). For these reasons, even if they are not native English speakers, researchers still publish their work in English. Thus, possible differences may appear in the translation of some terms. Likewise, researchers can use synonyms to capture the same meaning. As Lillis et al. (2010) point out, the linguistic instrument, and its associated geographical location, are often overlooked in studies. At the same time, there is a growing interest in the geolinguistics of citation, which is intertwined with knowledge production practices and their evaluation and contextualisation (Lillis et al., 2010). The usage of the terms might be further influenced by factors such as country, culture, and industry.

The presented article aims to review the records in the team autonomy research domain. Given the number of possibly interchangeable terms connected to the teams with certain levels of autonomy (self-managing, self-organizing, self-regulating, self-directed or semi-autonomous), we decided to look at the bibliographic information from the WoS and Scopus. Using bibliometric methods, we compared the occurrences of the terms to see the coverage of the WoS and Scopus databases. We also focused on the geographic aspect of using the selected terms.

The research questions follow:

- How are the terms “self-managing team”, “self-organizing team”, “self-regulating team”, “self-directed team”, and “semi-autonomous team” represented in records indexed in the WoS and Scopus?
- Which of the terms appeared first in the WoS and Scopus databases?
- Which of the terms is the most frequently used?
- Does the geographical origin of the authors really influence the choice of terms?

The article is organised into several sections. The first part provides a theoretical background of the research topic, while the second section outlines the methodology used. The third part presents the results of the conducted bibliometric analysis. The fourth section discusses the implications of the results and suggests areas for future research. The final section offers overall conclusions based on the findings.

## 2. Materials and methods

Based on the theoretical background, we focused on five possibly interchangeable terms connected to the teams with certain levels of autonomy (self-managing, self-organizing, self-regulating, self-directed or semi-autonomous team). We used a bibliometric analysis to overview these terms and their coverage in the WoS and Scopus databases. We searched the WoS and Scopus databases to determine the usage of each term. We downloaded bibliographic information from these citation databases on January 5th, 2022. Table 1 below shows the search queries for each search area, along with the time span and the number of records the search returned. We searched through the following WoS indexes: SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, CPCI-S, CPCI-SSH, ESCI, CCR-EXPANDED, and IC.

A significant advantage of bibliometrics is that it systematically, transparently, and reproducibly measures science, scientists and scientific activity (Aria et al., 2020; Broadus, 1987; Pritchard, 1969). This approach has several attractive features, such as performance analysis or science mapping. Bibliometrics can uncover an entire domain and show the underlying schools of thought and their connections (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). It can also highlight the movement of new ideas and trends into the community and the existence of barriers (Aria et al., 2020). We did a fundamental bibliometric and frequency analysis to summarise the annual scientific production and the geographical origin of the terms.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Annual scientific production (the WoS vs the Scopus)

The use of individual terms and time span from the WoS and Scopus citation databases can be seen in Table 2. The frequency analysis results show that the “self-managing team” term is used most in both databases. This is followed by “self-organizing team”, “self-directed team”, “semi-autonomous

**Table 1. Basic information about the searching in the WoS (Source: own elaboration)**

Term	A search query in the WoS	A search query in the Scopus
Self-managing team	TS = “self manag* team*”	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“self manag* team*”)
Self-directed team	TS = “self direct* team*”	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“self direct* team*”)
Self-organizing team	TS = “self organiz* team*”	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“self organiz* team*”)
Self-regulating team	TS = “self regulat* team*”	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“self regulat* team*”)
Semi-autonomous team	TS = “semi-autonomous team*”	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“semi-autonomous team*”)



**Table 2. Comparison of the development of the terms (Source: own calculations based on data from the WoS and Scopus)**

Term	Time span in the WoS	Number of records in the WoS	Time span in the Scopus	Number of records in the Scopus
Self-managing team	1985:2021	385	1985:2021	463
Self-directed team	1990:2021	96	1991:2021	134
Self-organizing team	1998:2021	92	1971:2021	180
Self-regulating team	1994:2020	17	1989:2020	16
Semi-autonomous team	1997:2021	14	1991:2021	20
Total	1985:2021	604	1971:2021	813

team”, and “self-regulating team” terms in the Scopus database and by “self-directed team”, “self-organizing team”, “self-regulating team” and “semi-autonomous team” term in the WoS database. Thus, while the term “self-directed team” is more frequently used in the WoS, the term “self-directed team” ranked third in the Scopus.

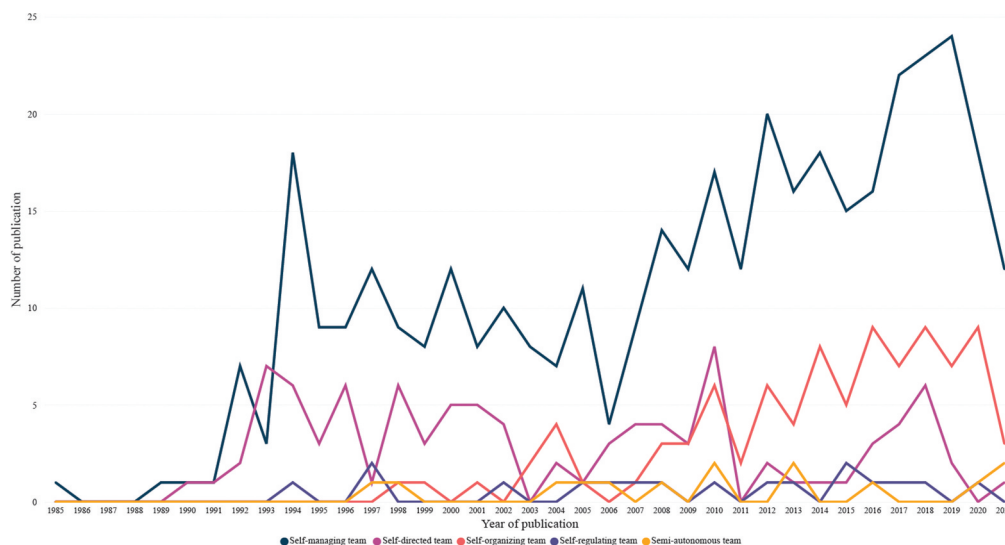
According to the data obtained from the WoS and Scopus databases, the total number of records is larger in the Scopus (specifically by 34.6%) just as the time span (specifically by 14 years, from 1971 to 2021).

### 3.2. Coverage of the terms over time in the WoS and Scopus databases

Figure 1 shows the development of the terms over time in the WoS database. Compared to the Scopus database, the “self-managing team” term is even more represented by 63.7%. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, it is not the earliest occurrence of this term, and it appeared in the Scopus 3 years earlier.

Second, but significantly less represented (15.9%), is the “self-directed team” term. Moreover, it is the first occurrence of the term from the point of both databases. Varney and Cashen (1990) wrote an article entitled “Introducing Self Directed Teams in a Greenfield Plan”. Unfortunately, there

**Figure 1. Coverage of the terms in time in the WoS (Source: own calculations based on data from the WoS, created in the Power BI).**



is no abstract available in the WoS, and we have not been able to track down the full text of the paper. Therefore, we can only guess what Varney and Cashen (1990) addressed from the title.

The term “**self-regulating team**” appears for the first time in Kolodny’s (1989) article, indexed in the Scopus. In this article, Kolodny’s (1989) focused on changing organisational forms regarding self-regulating teams, group technology, parallelisation, and product shops.

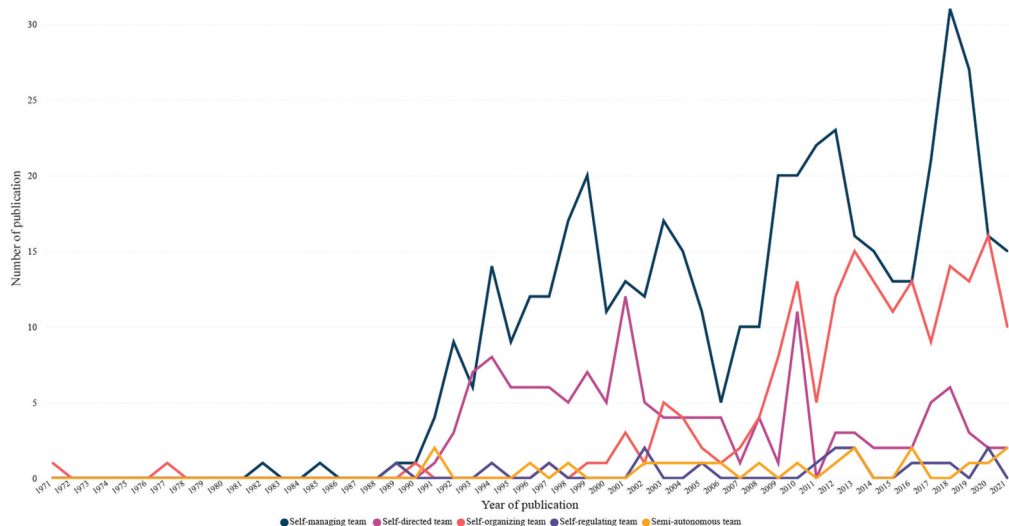
The development of the terms over time in the Scopus database is shown in Figure 2. What stands out in Figure 2 is the term “**self-managing team**”, which is represented by 56.9%. The history of this term in the Scopus goes back to 1982. According to the WoS and Scopus records, the term “self-managing team” was first used by Williams (1982), studying the possibilities of increasing organisational effectiveness and employee satisfaction. In that context, Williams (1982) mentioned that new models of participation and cooperation must be developed rather than creating self-managing work teams in turbulent environments.

The term “**self-organizing team**” is the second most common term in the Scopus (22.1%), in contrast to the WoS, where it is at the third position, represented by 15.2%. In 1990, 2016 and 2020, the use of the terms “self-organizing team” and “self-managing team” in the Scopus was even equal (see Figure 2). Based on obtained data, the term “self-organizing team” was used in the article by Kennedy (1971) for the first time. This is a surprising result because this research is ten years older than most of the early research that indicated the results of our analysis. In the mentioned article, Kennedy (1971) studied a self-organized team using a laboratory business game. This result also suggests that the Scopus database has deeper historical coverage than the WoS. However, more research is needed to confirm this finding.

The term “**semi-autonomous team**” appears for the first time in two articles by Adler (1991a, 1991b) indexed in the Scopus. In both articles, Adler (1991a, 1991b) studied the organisation of two teams in a flexible manufacturing system (the first team was organised in a conventional manner and the second as a semi-autonomous team). Workers showed significant satisfaction and motivation levels, and their systems operated very effectively (Adler, 1991a, 1991b).

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, using one term does not affect the use of other terms (the individual axes do not copy the development of different axes). This implies that researchers need to address the differences between the terms. To avoid confusion and ensure clear communication, using these terms appropriately and understanding their specific meanings and

**Figure 2. Coverage of the terms in time in the Scopus (source: own calculations based on data from the Scopus, created in the power BI).**



implications for team autonomy and decision-making is important. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the definitions of the terms according to the literature and draw attention to the fact that each term has a unique focus and emphasises different aspects. Furthermore, research should address the content of the records and possible confusion and misunderstanding about the level of autonomy and decision-making authority.

### 3.3. Geographical origin of the terms

Given the number of possibly interchangeable terms connected to the teams with certain levels of autonomy, it is fascinating to look at their geographic origin. Our results show that the terms' usage differs through the WoS and Scopus databases (see Tables 3 and 4). Although most countries appear in both databases (specifically, the same countries appear out of 76.9%), Austria and Italy solely appear in the Scopus database and Sweden in the WoS. Therefore, the results indicate the use of these two databases across continents. From this point of view, Europe stands out. Following the frequency analysis results, we can see from Figures 3 and 4 the dominance of the "self-managing team" term in both databases.

In connection with the geographical origin of the terms, Figure 3 shows a total number of 11 countries in the WoS database. In more than half of the countries (Australia, England, China, Netherlands, Norway and the USA), the term "self-managing team" is used the most. Likewise, in the Scopus database, the terms overlap differently in seven countries. For countries like Australia, England, Germany, China, Netherlands, and the USA, the situation with the use of terms identical to the Scopus database. This fact indicates that interchangeable terms do not differ from one database to another but are a matter of differences across countries. It would certainly be worth examining in greater depth what causes this different use of the terms, whether it is a distinct understanding or, for example, a location specific.

As stated by Lawler and Mohrman (2003), self-directed teams are frequently linked to cultural values of individualism and self-expression that are prominent in Western societies. Thus, cultural values and norms can affect the usage of the terms. For instance, in cultures that value hierarchy and respect for authority, team autonomy may face greater resistance and challenges in gaining acceptance and legitimacy. On the other hand, high-tech and knowledge-intensive industries with specialise and expertise employees might require greater autonomy in decision-making. Further standardised processes and procedures in some industries or sectors may also enable and encourage greater autonomy. Unlike the Scopus database, in addition to using the term "self-managing team" in Norway, the "semi-autonomous team" term also appears. Other countries where the term "self-managing team" does not appear at all are New Zealand and Sweden, where dominate the term "self-organizing team", Canada with the "self-directed team" term and Switzerland with the "self-regulating team".

According to Figure 4, a total number of 12 countries appears in connection with the geographical origin of the terms in the Scopus database. In half of the countries (Australia, England, China, Netherlands, Norway and the USA), the term "self-managing team" is used the most. In seven of the countries, the terms intersect differently. In countries such as England, the Netherlands and the USA, the term "self-managing team" is followed by "self-directed team" and other terms. On the other hand, in Australia and China, the term "self-managing team" is followed by the term "self-organizing team" and is followed by the term "self-directed team". Surprisingly, in Canada and Germany, the term "self-managing team" does not appear at all, and the most widely used terms are "self-organizing team" and "self-directed team". Other countries where the term "self-managing team" does not appear at all are Austria, Italy and Switzerland, where dominate the term "self-regulating team", and then New Zealand, where prevails the term "self-organizing team".

## 4. Discussion

Our article shows that the Scopus has greater coverage in the self-managing team area (by 34.6%). Thus, it can be suggested that the Scopus cover more records than the WoS. This finding



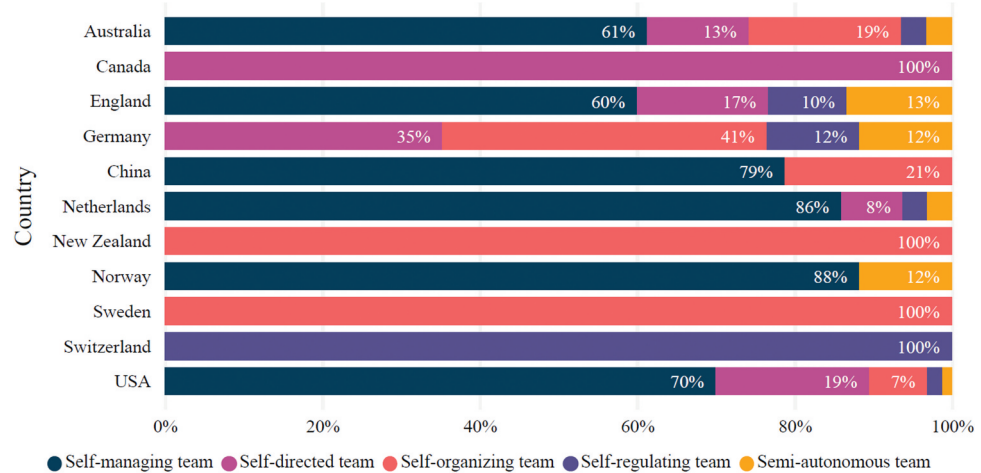
**Table 3. Coverage of the terms based on the country of correspondence author (Source: own calculations based on data from the WoS)**

Self-managing team	Self-directed team		Self-organizing team		Self-regulating team		Semi-autonomous team	
	180	USA	50	USA	19	USA	5	England
Netherlands	55	Germany	6	New Zealand	13	England	3	USA
China	26	England	5	Germany	7	Germany	2	Germany
Australia	19	Netherlands	5	China	7	Netherlands	2	Netherlands
England	18	Australia	4	Australia	6	Switzerland	2	Norway
Norway	15	Canada	4	Sweden	6	Australia	1	Australia
Canada	11	Japan	2	Finland	5	Austria	1	Austria
Spain	10	China	2	Iran	4	Canada	1	Belgium
Belgium	7	South Africa	2	Canada	3	Czech Republic	1	Brazil
Germany	7	India	1	Japan	3	Denmark	1	Malaysia

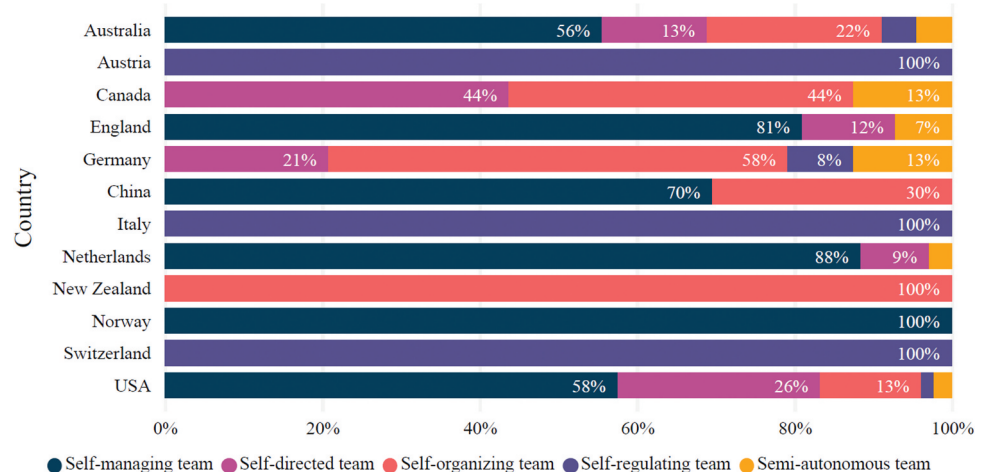
**Table 4. Coverage of the terms based on the country of correspondence author (Source: own calculations based on data from the Scopus)**

Self-managing team	Self-directed team		Self-organizing team		Self-regulating team		Semi-autonomous team	
	179	USA	80	USA	40	USA	5	USA
USA								
Netherlands	61	Canada	7	New Zealand	17	Italy	3	Germany
England	34	Australia	6	Germany	14	Australia	2	England
Australia	25	Netherlands	6	Australia	10	Germany	2	Australia
Norway	17	Germany	5	Canada	7	Switzerland	2	Canada
China	16	England	5	China	7	Austria	1	Netherlands
India	15	Finland	3	Finland	7	France	1	Norway
Spain	13	South Africa	3	Norway	7	Netherlands	1	Argentina
Canada	12	Argentina	1	Sweden	7	Singapore	1	Belgium
Germany	8	Japan	1	Switzerland	7	Spain	1	New Zealand

**Figure 3. Coverage of the terms based on the country of correspondence author (Source: own calculations based on data from the WoS, created in the Power BI).**



**Figure 4. Coverage of the terms based on the country of correspondence author (Source: own calculations based on data from the Scopus, created in the Power BI).**



reflects those of Gavel and Iselid (2008), Singh et al. (2021) and Visser et al. (2021). Likewise, these results are consistent with Vieira and Gomes (2009), who claim that the Scopus offers 20% more coverage than the WoS. Another issue is the overlapping of the Scopus and WoS databases. Vieira and Gomes (2009) found that the Scopus and WoS overlap by two-thirds. According to Visser et al. (2021), the Scopus and WoS databases have the most considerable overlap compared to Dimension and Microsoft Dimension. We did not address the issue of information overlap in this study, but it is a topic that deserves further attention. Therefore, we propose a direction for future research: the records overlap in databases focusing on social sciences, arts, and humanities.

Our results have also shown that the Scopus has better historical coverage than the WoS, only one term, “self-directed team”, first occurred in the WoS (all other terms occurred earlier in the Scopus). This result conflicts with Chadegani et al. (2013), who claim that the WoS has greater book coverage from the 1990s. In our article, however, we did not look at the differences in the range of different types of records (like articles, conference papers or books). For this reason, we recommend that future research should specifically address the database coverage of different types of records.

Looking at the history of the terms, our results have shown that the earliest term is “self-organizing team”. This term was first used in an article by Kennedy (1971). However, the historical primariness of this term did not bring the highest usage. According to our results, “self-managing team” is the most used term in the team autonomy domain (in the Scopus, this term covers 63.7% of results, and in the

WoS 56.9%). Williams (1982), who first used the term self-managing team in the article indexed in the Scopus, argues that there is a need to find new models in a turbulent environment rather than create self-managing work teams. However, according to further research in this area, researchers have found that a self-managing team benefits the work environment and employees. For example, lower costs (Manz & Sims, 1980; Power & Waddell, 2004; Weerheim et al., 2019); increased involvement and organisational commitment (Rousseau & Aubé, 2013; von Bonsdorff et al., 2015); higher team performance (McIntyre & Foti, 2013; Nederveen Pieterse et al., 2019; von Bonsdorff et al., 2015; Weerheim et al., 2019); motivational environment (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Salas et al., 2015); greater flexibility (Manz & Sims, 1980; Power & Waddell, 2004) and higher working-life quality and job satisfaction (Jönsson & Jeppesen, 2013; Manz & Sims, 1995; Rashkovits, 2015; Weerheim et al., 2019). Nevertheless, a self-managing team may not be beneficial under all circumstances (Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997; Lanaj et al., 2013; Manz & Sims, 1982; Moorhead et al., 1998). For example, some aspects of leadership, such as personnel questions and external relations, are difficult to replace (Weerheim et al., 2019). Contradictorily, Pearson (1992), Cohen and Ledford (1994) and Cohen et al. (1996) argued that self-managing teams could be more effective than traditional work teams. For instance, increased team performance is correlated with low authority differentiation (Nederveen Pieterse et al., 2019). According to the literature, the concept of a self-managing team is still ambiguous. As mentioned at the beginning of our article, given the importance of autonomy in self-managing team, it is appropriate to examine further the individual autonomy role in a self-managing team and how it can be supported to achieve a higher level of collaboration and team performance.

Looking at the geographical location of each term, the term “self-managing team” is used most frequently across both databases and countries. An interesting result is the non-use of the word “self-managing team” in Germanic countries. In Germany, Austria and Switzerland, scientists use the term “self-regulating team” or “self-organizing team” and “self-directed team”. This result shows the differences of the Germanic countries and their translations of the words into English, confirming the results of Günther et al. (2019). A valuable area for future research is to conduct a more comprehensive investigation into the reasons behind the various usage of the terms, whether due to divergent interpretations or specific in certain locations. Examining the reasons for the differing usage of terms related to team autonomy could have important implications across various research areas. For instance, understanding why certain terms are more commonly used in certain regions or cultural contexts could inform the design and implementation of teamwork practices in organisations that operate globally or in multicultural settings. Additionally, gaining a deeper understanding of the underlying factors that influence the use of specific terms could help researchers to develop more precise and nuanced conceptual frameworks for studying the phenomenon of team autonomy.

## 5. Conclusion

The present article aimed to review the records in the team autonomy research domain using bibliometric methods. We compared the occurrences of possibly interchangeable terms connected to the teams with certain levels of autonomy (self-managing, self-organizing, self-regulating, self-directed or semi-autonomous) to see the coverage of the WoS and Scopus databases in this concrete research domain.

According to annual scientific production and coverage of the terms over time in both databases, this article has shown that the total number of records is more significant in the Scopus, just as the time span. Moreover, this supports the finding that only one term, “self-directed team”, first occurred in the WoS (all other terms occurred earlier in the Scopus). This finding provides insight for future research that the Scopus database has deeper historical coverage than the WoS. The most used term in both databases was “self-managing team”, which suggests that this term may be the most widely recognised and accepted term in the field of team autonomy research.

The specific occurrences, frequencies of the terms and more detailed descriptions of the records associated with its first occurrences are described in the Results section. Further, the article has also

shown that using one term does not affect other terms. The term “self-managing team” is used most frequently across most countries. An interesting result was the non-use of the word “self-managing team” in Germanic countries. This result shows the differences of the Germanic countries and their translations of the words into English. The geographic aspect indicates that cultural differences may influence the usage of certain terms related to team autonomy. Organisations operating in multi-cultural environments should be mindful of this when implementing teams with certain levels of autonomy.

The article provides a comprehensive overview of the development of the team autonomy research domain and identifies areas for future research opportunities. This can help researchers and practitioners better understand the field’s current state and identify gaps that need to be addressed. For instance, future research should examine the definitions of the terms related to team autonomy and highlight each term’s distinct focus and emphasis. Additionally, there is a need to investigate the content of records to address potential confusion and misunderstanding about the level of autonomy and decision-making authority associated with each term. It would be valuable for future research to verify if researchers do not address the differences between the terms. Likewise, focusing on the different use of the terms in the context of location specific. The results of the bibliometric analysis could also be extended in future research according to the WoS and Scopus categories. Thus, more information about using concrete terms related to concrete subgroups (fields of research) could be provided in both databases. Other options for future research might also be to review the records in the team autonomy research domain using other bibliometric methods. For example, focus on coverage through leading authors, countries, languages, records type or fields. Another possibility for future research is to study the overlap of records in databases with a focus on social sciences, arts, and humanities and study the deepness of historical coverage of databases.

This article provides the first review of records using bibliometric methods in the team autonomy research domain. Our findings can be helpful for organisations looking to implement teams with certain levels of autonomy and researchers interested in studying team autonomy. By providing a detailed analysis of the literature on team autonomy, the article can help to guide future research and practice in this area.

The limitation of this article is the bibliometric approach itself. We compared only two databases (the WoS and Scopus). Another limitation is that we focused only on analysing the frequency of occurrence of individual terms in citation databases. Future research should cover a larger number of indicators to describe the variation in the coverage of databases and specify sectors and subgroups.

#### Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we would like to thank Prof. Tichá (Czech University of Life Sciences Prague), whose idea to analyse the coverage of concepts based on the country of correspondence contributed to more interesting research results. Further, we sincerely thank the editor and reviewers for reviewing our manuscript and providing constructive feedback to improve our manuscript.

#### Funding

The work was supported by the Provozně Ekonomická Fakulta, Česká Zemědělská Univerzita v Praze [2022A0022].

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#### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.  
An ethics statement is not applicable.

#### Citation information

Cite this article as: A bibliometric analysis of team autonomy research, Kristýna Zychová, Tereza Šimová & Martina Fejfarová, *Cogent Business & Management* (2023), 10: 2195024.

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