

Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement: A Two-Way Street

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the reciprocal relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement using a quantitative cross-sectional research approach. Data was collected from 213 participants in financial services organisations in Gauteng using pre-established and validated measures administered online. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between all dimensions of psychological empowerment (meaning, impact, self-determination and competence) and work engagement (vigour, dedication and absorption). The dimensions of work engagement were also found to be positively correlated with psychological empowerment. Furthermore, the study revealed that the dimensions of meaning, impact and competence significantly predicted work engagement, while vigour and dedication significantly predicted psychological empowerment. These findings emphasise the importance of promoting work engagement among employees to enhance psychological empowerment. Organisational interventions, such as job redesign, training programmes and employee involvement initiatives, may be beneficial in fostering both work engagement and psychological empowerment. The study demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement, highlighting the positive associations between their respective dimensions. The findings underscore the significance of promoting work engagement to enhance psychological empowerment in the workplace. Organisational interventions can play a crucial role in fostering these positive outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Early research in the 1990s emphasised the significance of employee empowerment and the need for business leaders to implement interventions to enhance employee empowerment and understand its implications (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). However, subsequent studies by Spreitzer et al. (2005) revealed that employees' psychological experience of vitality has proven elusive, leading to feelings of stagnation and depletion (Porath et al., 2012). Furthermore, organisational scholars have confirmed that employees are languishing rather than thriving (Porath et al., 2022). As such, investigating the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement is critical.

While the concept of employee empowerment has gained recognition (Honold, 1997; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Yin et al., 2019), it has become evident that simply implementing empowerment interventions may not be sufficient to foster a sense of vitality and well-being among employees. There is a need for employees who are psychologically empowered (Younas et al., 2023). Employees who possess psychological empowerment demonstrate a strong level of enthusiasm and dedication towards their tasks, indicating their active involvement and commitment to their work (Macsinga et al., 2015). In the last three decades, work engagement has gained significant prominence in contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM) (Markoulli et al., 2017). This concept has captured the interest of both scholars (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018) and organisations (e.g. the Gallup Institute), resulting in substantial growth in our understanding of this phenomenon.

Organisations often assume employee engagement increases productivity, profits (Mackay et al., 2017), and other positive organisational outcomes. Engaged employees exhibit enthusiasm, energy, and complete immersion in their work activities (Bakker, 2017), fostering high performance and creativity (Christian et al., 2011). Engaged employees are self-motivated individuals who take charge of their lives. Moreover, the more engaged employees are, the more likely they are to receive positive feedback, such as appreciation and recognition for their work (Norris & Norris, 2020), which stimulates their cognitive processes and encourages continuous learning and personal development (Fredrickson, 2001). These enhanced capabilities can further improve work performance. In light of the persistent challenges employees face, such as feelings of stagnation and depletion (Porath et al., 2022), it is crucial to explore how psychological empowerment and work engagement can mutually reinforce and support each other.

Understanding the reciprocal nature of this relationship can offer valuable insights into creating sustainable and resilient work environments (Shah et al., 2019), where employees not only feel empowered but also remain engaged and motivated over time and reduce turnover intention (Ngqeza & Dhanpat, 2021). Furthermore, given the evolving nature of work and the increasing complexity of organisational dynamics, it is essential to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement in contemporary contexts. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the

well-being of employees and the overall success of organisations by fostering a positive and reciprocal relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement.

1.1. Background to the study

Scholars in the early nineties agreed that an organisation's ultimate and enduring competitive edge lies within its workforce, stressing that all members of the organisation must be engaged and proactive for the company to prosper (Lawler, 1992, 1996). This viewpoint underlines the pivotal role of human capital in driving an organisation. Within organisational sciences and, more so, organisational psychology, understanding the factors that contribute to employee motivation, job satisfaction, and performance has long been a focal point of research. The outcomes of such studies are beneficial for human resource practitioners. The current study researches two key constructs that have garnered considerable attention in recent years: psychological empowerment and work engagement. Psychological empowerment refers to the individual's perception of having control over their work, feeling competent, and having a sense of impact and meaning (Spreitzer, 2006). Work engagement, on the other hand, is characterized by high levels of energy, dedication, and absorption in work-related activities (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

Existing research has provided evidence for the positive association between psychological empowerment and work engagement (Thakre & Mathew, 2020), highlighting their importance for individual and organisational outcomes. However, a crucial gap remains in our understanding of the reciprocal relationship between these constructs. It is essential to investigate how psychological empowerment influences work engagement, as well as how work engagement, in turn, impacts psychological empowerment. Such reciprocal effects can have significant implications for both employees and organisations, necessitating a quantitative exploration to provide empirical evidence.

Addressing the motivation for studying psychological empowerment and work engagement among support staff in a call centre context is paramount due to the negative impact of the demanding call centre environment, leading to psychological dissatisfaction and high turnover rates (Hastings & MacKinnon, 2017; Dhanpat et al., 2018). These stressors are particularly salient for call centre employees who often experience job demands that can strain their well-being (Money et al., 2009). Support staff, vital to achieving organisational goals, are often overlooked, despite their crucial role, which further underscores the importance of their psychological empowerment (Iqbal et al., 2020).

In this challenging environment, psychological empowerment emerges as a potential remedy, as empowered employees exhibit higher work engagement (Gong et al., 2020). Work engagement, characterized by eagerness and absorption, is associated with increased investment of cognitive and physical resources, ultimately enhancing job performance (Norris & Norris, 2020; Eldor et al., 2020). Recognising that engaged employees contribute to high-performance work levels, the cultivation of psychological empowerment and work engagement among support staff becomes pivotal for improving

overall call centre performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). By addressing the empowerment and engagement of support staff in the call centre setting, this research strives to mitigate the adverse effects of the demanding work environment and foster an environment conducive to both employee well-being and organisational success.

1.2. Problem Statement

While previous studies have established the positive association between psychological empowerment and work engagement, there is a need for a quantitative examination of the reciprocal effects between these constructs. The reciprocal relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement suggests that these constructs are mutually reinforcing. This means that they can feed off each other, creating a positive cycle that can lead to improved employee well-being. By understanding the reciprocal relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement, organisations can develop interventions and strategies that target both constructs. This will lead to more effective interventions and strategies that can have a greater impact on employee well-being and organisational performance. The imperative to study the reciprocal relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement extends well beyond its potential benefits for organisational interventions. Delving deeper into this intricate interplay is likely to provide insight that can enhance our understanding of employee well-being, performance dynamics, and organisational success.

While prior research has laid the foundation for recognising the positive correlation between psychological empowerment and work engagement, a quantitative exploration of their reciprocal effects is considered an essential next step. This reciprocal relationship signifies a dynamic synergy where psychological empowerment fuels elevated levels of work engagement and concurrently, heightened work engagement bolsters psychological empowerment. This mutual amplification sets the stage for a virtuous cycle, fostering a continuous upsurge in both constructs that can substantially enhance employee flourishing and organisational effectiveness.

This study aims to address this research gap by conducting a quantitative investigation into the reciprocal effects of psychological empowerment and work engagement. By quantifying the relationship between these constructs, this research seeks to contribute to the existing literature by providing robust empirical evidence.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study aims to assess the following objectives:

- Determine the relationship between the dimensions of psychological empowerment and work engagement.
- Determine the relationship between the dimensions of work engagement and psychological empowerment.

- Identify the dimensions of psychological empowerment that best predict work engagement.
- Identify the dimensions of work engagement that best predict psychological empowerment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological Empowerment

Over the years, empowerment has not been defined clearly (Rowlands, 1995; Lee & Koh, 2001). Researchers on the subject seem vague in defining the concept; nonetheless, empowerment has been described as enabling individuals to make choices autonomously and promoting independence in controlling their work (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000). Conger and Kanungo (1988) were pioneers in applying a motivational perspective to define empowerment as the psychological drive of individuals in the workplace. They proposed that psychological empowerment involves improving employees' belief in their capabilities by identifying and eliminating conditions within the work environment that create a sense of powerlessness. This can be achieved through formal organisational practices and informal systems that provide information on efficacy. Empowerment is the ability to control one's environment and live up to one's potential (Lee, 2005).

The phenomenon of empowerment is derived from two perspectives. The first is a structural perspective from Kanter's (1977) theory of structural empowerment, suggesting that empowerment is derived from particular elements at work that enable employees to achieve their work in more meaningful ways. Structural empowerment theory considers the organisational structures, processes, and resources that contribute to employees' sense of empowerment and control over their work. This theory contends that providing employees with access to information, resources, and decision-making power can empower them to take ownership of their tasks and contribute more meaningfully to organisational goals (Kanter, 1977).

The second perspective is psychological, also known as psychological empowerment, suggesting that empowerment is derived from the feeling of power (Jamian et al., 2019). The psychological empowerment constructs do not have an ideal definition, and the definition is aligned with the context of the effectiveness of the work environment. Meaning, impact, and competence may improve concentration, improving employees' job performance (Kimpah & Ibrahim, 2020).

Psychological empowerment exists when employees believe they have some control over their work lives. Psychological empowerment consists of cognitions that are shaped by the work environment (Spreitzer, 1995). Psychological empowerment is a significant motivational source that may enhance employees' engagement towards their job (Gong et al., 2020; Meng & Sun, 2019; Ugwu et al., 2014). Wang et al., (2013) highlighted the significance of personality, including self-esteem and self-evaluations, in psychological empowerment. Psychologically empowered individuals generally have higher job satisfaction and fulfilment (Nikpour, 2018).

Characteristics of psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment commences with changes in one's beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts. Individuals need to believe in their ability to perform tasks and feel in control of their career objectives. Individuals should feel that they pursue meaningful goals and are treated fairly (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Barari & Jamshidi, 2015). Empowerment is considered an essential tool for increasing performance and effectiveness in the workplace (Safari et al., 2016). Employees who are empowered have a sense of trust towards the organisation; this assures that they will receive fair treatment, even in a subordinate position (Zhao & Liu, 2020). The empowerment process is enhanced by adopting practical and productive strategies and increasing human resources capabilities (Nastiezaie & Ghalavi, 2020). Spreitzer (1995) suggested that organisations prefer a universal approach to empowerment and its application to all situations. Employees should be empowered psychologically before any action is taken.

Types of psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment is a self-determined motivation that is derived from how individuals perceive their work (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). The four cognitive dimensions of psychological empowerment are meaning, competence, impact, and choice (Thomas & Velthouse 1990; Singh et al., 2015). Meaning refers to one's perception of their role and standards; it replicates one's interest in their work and involves a connection between purpose and job fit (Brief & Nord, 1990). Meaning can be referred to as harmony between experience, beliefs, and values in an individual's work (Yürür & Demir, 2011). Meaning refers to the condition whereby an individual finds meaning and can connect with their work (Janighorban et al., 2020).

Competence stems from self-efficacy, a concept established by Bandura and Cervone (1986) and is described as the belief one has in oneself in completing or performing a task. Competence is the extent to which an individual can complete tasks using their skills. Competence is related to the confidence one has in their role (Kanbur et al., 2016). Competence is the belief in completing one's work tasks according to a certain standard or expectation (Janighorban et al., 2020). Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Vansteenkiste (2004), outlines three key elements for individuals to thrive. First, individuals are proactive and capable of navigating internal and external forces. Second, they are invested in their personal growth and development.

Finally, people have the potential to enhance and fulfil their abilities, but this requires a supportive environment (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2017; Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). Self-determination, as defined by Iqbal et al., (2020) and Spreitzer (1995), involves the freedom to initiate and carry out tasks. Self-determination focuses on developing an autonomous orientation towards doing things, in which behaviour is intrinsically motivated and aligned with one's values (Wandeler & Bundick, 2011). Impact can be associated with high performance and dealing with difficult situations (Ashforth, 1990). Impact

arises when individuals believe they have the power to influence both strategic and operational results (Whitaker & Westerman, 2014). It is linked to high performance and the ability to handle challenging situations (Ashforth, 1990). Moreover, impact extends to situations where individuals perceive their actions as affecting their work environment (Janighorban et al., 2020).

Outcomes of psychological empowerment

Empowerment enhances employee competence to meet the requirements and standard that has been set in their work environment. The concept of empowerment is realized through management actions such as allowing access to resources, participation in making decisions, and delegation; this is examined through psychological empowerment (Kanbur & Kanbur, 2020). When employees are empowered, it is easier for them to exchange thoughts and ideas at large (Newman et al., 2017). The framework developed by Wu and Lee (2017), using the integration of social exchange theory and positive perspectives of organisational behaviour, suggests that empowered employees show high knowledge and more willingness to learn and share. Empowerment enables employees to pursue a course of action in which they are accountable for their results and take responsibility. Although attitude and behaviour impact each other, self-belief creates a variation in attitude and behaviour among employees. Work objectives, responsibilities, and resources are easily distributed among empowered employees (Iqbal et al., 2020; Kirrane et al., 2019).

From an organisational view, psychological empowerment is used to motivate and increase employees' ability to perform their jobs effectively, exercise their values, and work autonomously without fear (Çalışkan, 2011). Psychological empowerment encompasses employees' recognition of the factors that hinder them from achieving their goals in the organisation and identifying efforts and beliefs that assist with achieving goals in the organisation (Zimmerman, 1995). Psychological empowerment is how employees focus on performing their jobs better (Oğuz & Kalkan, 2014).

Psychological empowerment entails utilising employees' individual and collective talents to accomplish work-related outcomes. It serves as a means for organisations to effectively respond to changes. The importance of psychological empowerment lies in its influence on employees' capacity to attain organisational goals (Mahmoud et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2011). When employees experience psychological empowerment, they tend to exhibit positive behaviours that enhance organisational performance. The literature on organisational psychology underlines the ability of psychological empowerment to strengthen performance (Wallace et al., 2011).

2.2. Work Engagement

Kahn's influential article in 1990 sparked considerable interest in work engagement, attracting attention from both researchers and practitioners (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Kahn (1990) defined engagement as expressing one's preference in work behaviours that motivate work and enable full performance in work duties. Another standard definition is that work engagement is an attitude

characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Work engagement is a self-determined motivation through which employees display enthusiasm and satisfaction when performing work activities (Bakker, 2017). Bakker et al. (2011) state that work engagement refers to one's proactive allocation of resources and energies in performing work. Work engagement has become an essential contributor to organisational behaviour studies, as it has established its contribution to the performance and success of an organisation (Christian et al., 2011).

Dimensions of work engagement

Work engagement encompasses self-determined motivation and behaviours, such as enthusiasm and satisfaction, exhibited by employees during work activities (Bakker, 2017). It is characterised by three dimensions:

Vigour: This dimension involves displaying positive energy, resilience, and a willingness to put effort into work (Schaufeli et al., 2006). It encompasses overcoming challenges and consistently investing energy and resilience in work tasks (Vallières et al., 2017).

Dedication: Dedication refers to being intensely involved in one's work, showing eagerness and experiencing pride and motivation (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Vallières et al., 2017). It entails being committed to work tasks and exhibiting a strong sense of engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Absorption: Absorption signifies employees' interest, focus, and difficulty detaching from their work (Schaufeli et al., 2006). It reflects being deeply captivated by work, but it should not be confused with workaholism (Mäkikangas et al., 2013; Vallières et al., 2017).

Work engagement emphasises energy, participation, and commitment, leading to employees' sustained organisational commitment, enthusiasm, and personal and professional development (Demirtas, 2015; Brandebo et al., 2016). Absorption represents strong involvement in work that makes it challenging to detach, but it should not be mistaken for workaholism (Mäkikangas et al., 2013; Vallières et al., 2017).

Outcomes of work engagement

Work engagement has recently gained significant attention in organisational psychology literature (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Engaged employees exhibit enthusiasm, energy, and complete immersion in their work (Bakker & Leiter, 2017). Sustaining work engagement is a concern for organisations prioritising HR interventions and employee character strengths (Van Wingerden et al., 2017). Work engagement contributes to employees' lives by promoting community involvement and life satisfaction (Eldor et al., 2020). It is a motivational concept that reflects investment of physical and cognitive resources in one's job (Eldor et al., 2020). Work engagement is essential for improving organisational performance and has been linked to various performance measures (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Engaged employees are more likely to take self-initiated actions, exhibit dynamism, and work harder (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Bakker et al., 2011; Bakker, 2011). Work engagement has positive outcomes for

organisations, including increased innovation and creativity, higher staff engagement, and reduced absence rates (Bakker, 2017).

Different approaches are employed to increase work engagement, categorised as top-down and bottom-up strategies (Bakker, 2017). Top-down approaches involve initiatives and leadership by HR managers, while bottom-up approaches include job crafting, self-management, and maximising strengths and ego resources. These approaches optimise the work environment (Bakker, 2017). Work engagement has been linked to reduced absenteeism (Shimazu et al., 2015) and decreased mental health problems (Roelen et al., 2015). Engaged employees demonstrate attentiveness, absorption in their work, and self-motivation (Norris & Norris, 2020; Bardhan, 2020). Engaged employees are more likely to receive positive feedback, leading to continuous learning and enhancement of personal capabilities, positively impacting work performance (Norris & Norris, 2020; Fredrickson, 2001; Bardhan, 2020).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research approach, participants and procedure

The study followed a quantitative research approach, and a cross-sectional research design was employed whereby data were collected from support staff in an insurance financial services industry, classified as a call-centre organisation in Johannesburg, South Africa. Data were collected through electronic surveys, which were distributed through Google Forms. Before administering the electronic surveys, access to the organisation was gained, and permission was sought from the human resources department. The questionnaires were distributed via email using a link, and a reminder was sent when responses were low. A non-probability sampling technique was selected, and a convenience sample was used. The electronic survey was distributed to a sample of 473 employees and yielded a response of 213, accounting for a 45% response rate. In total, the participants comprised 54.9% females and 45.1% males. Most participants [31%] were employed for more than ten years.

3.2. Measures

Psychological empowerment

The PES is a 12-item measure of four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. The items are scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and include statements such as “I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.” Nqgeza and Dhanpat (2021) reported acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the four dimensions: meaning (.88), competence (.79), self-determination (.85), and impact (.85).

Work engagement scale

The UWES-9 is a nine-item measure of dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. The items are scored on a 7-point frequency scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always) and include statements such

as “I feel happy when I am working intensely.” Patience, de Braine, and Dhanpat (2020) reported an acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the full UWES-9 of .88.

3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 28. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data. Exploratory factor analysis was performed using principal axis factoring (PAF), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity were used to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the data, with values greater than .70 considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. Additionally, a multiple regression analysis was used to determine which dimensions of psychological empowerment predict work engagement and vice versa. To assess multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance were examined, with VIF measuring the impact of collinearity between variables in the regression model (Pallant, 2011).

3.4. Ethical considerations

All research protocols were followed to ensure that the study was carried out in accordance with the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management’s research ethics committee. An online consent form was provided, which detailed the nature, purpose, and scope of the study. Participants were made aware of their rights in participation, including voluntary participation, the right to withdraw from the study without reprisal, and ensured confidentiality and anonymity. The study was approved by the research ethics committee [IPPM-2020-458(M)].

4. Results

Table 1 presents the mean values and reliability analysis of the variables used in the study. The reliability scores are represented by the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and Cronbach alphas

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	alphas
Meaning	6.14	0.84	.90
Competence	6.22	0.75	.87
Self determination	5.80	1.05	.75
Impact	5.12	1.29	.86
Vigour	5.11	1.08	.89
Dedication	5.71	0.99	.84
Absorption	5.59	1.02	.74

Table 1 represents the mean values, standard deviation, and alphas for psychological empowerment and work engagement dimensions. For the dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, the mean values ranged from 5.12 to 6.22, with the highest mean value for competence and the lowest for impact. This suggests that employees felt most competent in their work, followed by meaning, self-determination, and impact.

The mean values ranged from 5.11 to 5.71 for vigour, dedication, and absorption, indicating that respondents felt moderately engaged in their work on average. Dedication had the highest mean value, followed by Absorption and Vigour. This suggests that respondents felt more emotionally invested in their work and willing to put in extra effort (Dedication and Absorption) compared to feeling energised (Vigour). The alphas ranged from .74 to .90, indicating good internal consistency for all dimensions. The highest alpha value was for meaning, followed by vigour and competence.

Overall, the results suggest that employees feel moderately empowered and engaged. The highest mean value for competence suggests that employees feel confident in their ability to perform their job tasks, which is an essential aspect of psychological empowerment. The lower mean value for impact suggests that employees may not feel that their work significantly impacts their organisation, which could be a concern. The relatively high mean values for dedication and absorption suggest that employees are emotionally invested in their work, an essential aspect of work engagement. However, the lower mean value for vigour suggests that employees may not feel as energised or enthusiastic about their work, which could lead to burnout or reduced job satisfaction.

4.1. Factor analysis

The principal axis factoring method, along with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization, was applied to the 12 items of the PES. Examination of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of coefficients of .30 and above. The KMO value obtained was .83, surpassing the recommended threshold of .60 as proposed by Pallant (2011). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded statistically significant results, indicating support for the factorability of the correlation matrix. Principal axis factoring identified three components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, collectively accounting for 67.41% of the cumulative variance. Following Pallant's (2011) criteria, factor loadings above .40 were considered strong, with all items loading above this threshold. Cattell's (1966) scree plot confirmed a three-factor solution (refer to Figure 4.2). However, despite this result, previous studies conducted in a South African context utilizing confirmatory factor analysis have suggested a strong factor-analytic fit of the PES with a four-factor solution (see Stander & Rothman, 2009). Therefore, a four-factor solution was employed.

The nine items of the UWES-9 underwent principal axis factoring, utilizing varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization. The correlation matrix was examined, revealing numerous coefficients of .30 and higher. The KMO value obtained was .88, surpassing the recommended threshold of .60 as stipulated by Pallant (2011). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded statistically significant results, indicating the factorability

of the correlation matrix. Principal axis factoring identified two components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, which collectively accounted for 71.96% of the cumulative variance. Following Pallant’s (2011) criteria, factor loadings above .40 were considered strong. Notably, all items loaded above .40 on only one component, as Cattell’s (1966) scree plot confirmed. However, in line with suggestions from Romer (2016) and Kulikowski (2017), a one-factor solution was adopted. This approach aligns with Patience et al.’s (2020) study on work engagement, where a one-factor model was also utilized.

Table 2 Correlation analysis: Psychological empowerment dimensions and overall work engagement

Factors	Meaning	Competence	Self-determination	Impact	Work engagement
Meaning	1	.536**	.412**	.422**	.654**
Competence	.536**	1	.478**	.235**	.455**
Self-determination			1	.520**	.381**
Impact				1	.524**
Work engagement					1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients between each of the four variables (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) and work engagement. The correlation coefficient between meaning and work engagement is .654, indicating a strong positive correlation between the two variables ($r = .654, n = 213, p < .01$). Similarly, the correlation between competence and work engagement is .455, indicating a moderate positive correlation ($r = .455, n = 213, p < .01$). The correlation between self-determination and work engagement is .381, indicating a moderate positive correlation ($r = .381, n = 213, p < .01$). Finally, the correlation between impact and work engagement is .524, indicating a moderate positive correlation ($r = .524, n = 213, p < .01$).

Overall, the results suggest that all four variables are positively and significantly correlated with work engagement, with meaning having the strongest correlation and competence having the weakest correlation. The sample size of 213 suggests that these correlations are likely to be reliable and representative of the larger population.

Table 3 Correlation analysis: Work engagement dimensions and overall psychological empowerment

Factors	Vigour	Dedication	Absorption	Psychological empowerment
Vigour	1	.726**	.550**	.577**
Dedication		1	.633**	.590**
Absorption			1	.451**
Psychological empowerment				1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 presents the results of a Pearson correlation analysis between the three dimensions of work engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption) and overall psychological empowerment (PE). The table illustrates that all three dimensions of work engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption) are positively and significantly correlated with overall psychological empowerment (PE). The correlation coefficients range from 0.45 to 0.58, indicating moderate to strong positive relationships.

The strongest correlation was observed between vigour and psychological empowerment ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$), followed by dedication and psychological empowerment ($r = 0.59, p < 0.01$), and absorption and psychological empowerment ($r = 0.45, p < 0.01$). Overall, the results suggest a significant positive relationship between work engagement and psychological empowerment. This implies that higher levels of work engagement are associated with elevated levels of psychological empowerment.

Table 4: Regression model: Psychological empowerment and work engagement

	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta							Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.273	0.403		.720 ^a	0.519	0.51	0.644	0.676	0.5		
Comp	0.197	0.075	0.16					2.617	0.01	0.619	1.615
SD	-0.043	0.055	-0.05					-0.795	0.428	0.595	1.682
Imp	0.229	0.042	0.321					5.43	0.01	0.663	1.509
Meaning	0.498	0.067	0.454					7.422	0.00	0.619	1.616

Comp = competence; SD = self determination; Imp = Impact

The regression analysis in Table 4 demonstrates that the model possesses a significant overall predictive power, with an R-square of 0.519 and an adjusted R-square of 0.510. Upon examination, a substantial regression equation was attained ($F(4,208) = 56.010, p < .001$). Among the predictor variables, only competence, impact, and meaning significantly predict work engagement, as indicated by their low p-values (0.010, 0.000, and 0.000 respectively). The standardised coefficients, or beta values, suggest that meaning has the most substantial impact on work engagement ($\beta = 0.454$), followed by impact ($\beta = 0.321$) and competence ($\beta = 0.160$). Self-determination does not significantly predict work engagement ($\beta = -0.050$). The tolerance and VIF values indicate no issue of multicollinearity among the predictor variables, as all tolerance values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.2 and all VIF values remain below the recommended threshold of 5.

Table 5: Regression model: Work engagement as a predictor of psychological empowerment

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta							Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.665	0.287		.632	0.399	0.391	0.662	9.28	0		
Vigour	0.233	0.062	0.298					3.765	0.01	0.46	2.175
Dedication	0.274	0.073	0.322					3.771	0.01	0.395	2.532
Absorp	0.069	0.059	0.083					1.184	0.238	0.582	1.718

The regression analysis in Table 5 features a dependent variable of R Square, indicating that the predictor variables (vigour, dedication, and absorption) are significant in predicting the outcome. Upon examination, a significant regression equation was achieved ($F(3,209) = 46.302, p < .001$). The model accounts for 39.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, as denoted by the R Square value. The Adjusted R Square value is also 0.391, suggesting that the model fits the data reasonably well. The Beta values denote the standardized coefficients of each predictor variable. The noteworthy predictors are vigour with a Beta of 0.298 and dedication with a Beta of 0.322. The higher Beta value is dedication, implying that it holds a stronger relationship with the dependent variable than vigour.

The tolerance values range from 0.395 to 0.582, exceeding the recommended cut-off of 0.1, signifying the absence of significant multicollinearity between the predictor variables. The VIF values range from 1.718 to 2.532, also below the recommended cut-off of 10, further indicating no noteworthy multicollinearity. The regression model implies that vigour and dedication significantly predict R Square, and there exists no significant multicollinearity among the predictor variables.

5. Discussion

The study addressed the mutual relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement, creating a positive feedback loop.

Psychological empowerment and work engagement correlation

The findings reveal a relationship between the four variables (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) and work engagement. Significant positive correlations between each of the variables and work engagement were achieved, with a strong positive correlation for meaning, followed by impact, self-determination, and competence. These findings align with previous literature and theoretical frameworks highlighting the importance of these variables in predicting work engagement. The strong positive correlation between meaning and work engagement supports the notion that when individuals perceive their work as meaningful and purposeful, they are more likely to be engaged in their job (see Khan et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2022). This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the significance of meaningful work in fostering employee engagement (Geldenhuis et al., 2014).

Similarly, the moderate positive correlations observed between competence, self-determination, and impact on work engagement align with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Deci et al., 2017) and previous empirical studies (see Joo et al., 2019). Competence refers to individuals' perceived capability to perform tasks effectively (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998), and its positive association with work engagement suggests that employees who feel competent and skilled in their work are more likely to be engaged. Self-determination, which pertains to individuals' sense of autonomy and control over their work, also contributes to work engagement, as employees who feel empowered and self-directed exhibit higher levels of engagement. Finally, the positive correlation between impact and work engagement suggests that when employees perceive that their work significantly impacts others or the organisation, they are more likely to be engaged.

Work engagement and psychological empowerment

The findings of the study reveal a significant positive relationship between the three dimensions of work engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption) and overall psychological empowerment (PE). These results align with previous research that has examined the relationship between work engagement and psychological empowerment in the workplace. For instance, previous studies have shown that work engagement is associated with increased job satisfaction (see Karanika-Murray et al., 2015) and improved performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Work engagement reflects the employee's level of energy, dedication, and absorption in their work, indicating a high level of motivation and commitment (Leiter & Bakker, 2010; Rana et al., 2019). This intrinsic motivation is closely related to psychological empowerment, which encompasses feelings of competence, meaning, self-determination, and impact (Li et al., 2015). When individuals are engaged in their work and experience a sense of vigour, dedication, and absorption, they are more likely to feel empowered and have greater control over their work environment. The findings highlight that organisations need to consider implementing strategies and interventions that promote work engagement through supportive work environments (Albrecht et al., 2015; Bakker & Leiter, 2017), recognition of employees (Nel et al., 2015), and the provision of training and development opportunities (Amor et al., 2021). In doing so, organisations can create a work culture that fosters both work engagement and psychological empowerment, leading to positive individual and organisational outcomes.

Predictive power of psychological empowerment and work engagement

The significant predictive power of impact supports the literature that emphasizes the importance of perceiving one's work as having a significant impact on others or the organisation. This finding suggests that employees who believe their work creates positive outcomes and contributes to something meaningful are likelier to be engaged.

Interestingly, self-determination did not significantly predict work engagement. This result is somewhat unexpected, as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Malinowska & Tokarz, 2020) posits that

individuals' sense of autonomy and control over their work should contribute to higher levels of engagement. Other factors not included in the model may be influencing the relationship between self-determination and work engagement. The findings suggest that meaning, impact, and competence are important factors in predicting work engagement. These results provide valuable insights for organisations aiming to enhance employee engagement by focusing on these specific dimensions. Further research could explore additional variables or contextual factors that may influence the relationship between self-determination and work engagement to better understand the underlying mechanisms at play.

Predictive power of work engagement dimensions on psychological empowerment

The findings reveal that the dimensions of work engagement, specifically vigour and dedication, significantly predict the outcome variable of psychological empowerment. This implies that individuals who experience higher levels of energy, dedication, and enthusiasm in their work are more likely to feel empowered in their professional roles (Bakker & Leiter, 2017). The stronger relationship between dedication and psychological empowerment suggests that there is an influential role in fostering individuals' sense of competence, self-determination, and impact within their work domain. Absorption did not emerge as a significant predictor. It is possible that absorption may have a weaker association with psychological empowerment compared to vigour and dedication in the specific sample or context of the current study. Different individuals may engage in their work in various ways and the importance of each dimension may vary depending on the organisational or occupational setting. Secondly, the potential interplay of other contextual factors, such as organisational support or job characteristics, might influence the relationship between absorption and psychological empowerment. Further investigation is needed to explore these factors and provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of absorption in predicting psychological empowerment. Organisations should consider implementing strategies that promote vigour and dedication among employees, such as fostering a positive work climate, providing opportunities for skill development, and encouraging a sense of purpose in work tasks.

6. Implications for management and organisations

Delving deeper into the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement allows researchers to identify the underlying mechanisms that influence employees' engagement levels. This understanding can then guide the development of targeted interventions and strategies to promote psychological empowerment and work engagement, thereby improving employee well-being and organisational outcomes. The findings of this study have significant implications for managers and organisations seeking to enhance employee engagement and psychological empowerment. To foster work engagement, organisations should prioritise creating a work environment that instils a sense of meaning, impact and competence among employees. Providing opportunities for employees to

comprehend the significance and impact of their work can contribute to higher levels of engagement and motivation. Clear goals and objectives that align with the organisation's mission and values and feedback and recognition for employees' contributions and achievements can also foster engagement. Investing in employee development programmes and training to enhance skills and competence further positively influences work engagement.

Additionally, organisations should strive to empower employees by promoting autonomy and self-determination. This can be achieved by involving employees in decision-making processes, delegating responsibilities and providing platforms for them to contribute ideas. Managers must ensure that employees have access to necessary resources and support to effectively perform their tasks, which enhances their sense of control and empowerment. Creating a supportive work environment that nurtures trust, open communication and collaboration also plays a pivotal role in fostering psychological empowerment and work engagement. Prioritising the promotion of work engagement and psychological empowerment within organisations is essential. Organisations can effectively enhance employee engagement and empower individuals in their professional roles by establishing a work environment that fosters meaning, impact and competence while supporting employee autonomy and self-determination. These practices contribute to improved job satisfaction, performance and overall organisational outcomes.

7. Limitations and recommendations for future research

The study's limitations should be acknowledged, as the data were collected only from support staff at a call center. This sample may not accurately represent the broader population of call center employees, as different call centers may have varying work environments, job demands and employee characteristics. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalising the findings to other industries or types of call centers. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of call center employees, future research should consider a broader sample that includes different call centers, such as inbound or outbound call centers, various sizes of call centers and call centers in other industries. This would help increase the findings' external validity and provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement.

Moreover, longitudinal studies, such as diary studies, could provide valuable insights into the fluctuating nature of the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement over time. This would help researchers better understand how concentration and attention may vary within individuals across different time points and how these fluctuations may impact psychological well-being and job satisfaction among call center employees. By addressing the current study's limitations through a more diverse sample and longitudinal designs, future research can enhance our understanding of the dynamics between psychological empowerment and work engagement and potentially inform interventions and strategies to improve employment outcomes in this unique work environment.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between all dimensions of psychological empowerment and work engagement, emphasising the reciprocal nature of these constructs. Specifically, meaning, impact and competence were identified as predictors of work engagement, while vigour and dedication predicted psychological empowerment. These findings have important implications for researchers and practitioners alike and contributes towards the theory of psychological empowerment and work engagement, more so from a South African context. Understanding the underlying mechanisms that influence employee engagement enables organisations to develop targeted interventions and strategies to foster psychological empowerment and work engagement, ultimately enhancing employee well-being and organisational outcomes. This research contributes to our understanding of the interdependent relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement, providing practical insights for promoting employee engagement and psychological empowerment within organisations. By prioritising these factors, organisations can cultivate a motivated and empowered workforce, leading to positive outcomes and success.

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