

Empirical Article

Structural empowerment, personal initiative, and job satisfaction in service employees: Exploring the mediating role of psychological empowerment

ALEJANDRO ORGAMBÍDEZ,¹  MIRYAM BENÍTEZ,² JOSE M. LEÓN-PÉREZ² and FRANCISCO J. CANTERO-SÁNCHEZ²

¹Grupo de Investigación Cármides. Departamento de Psicología Social, Trabajo Social y Servicios Sociales, y Antropología Social, Universidad de Málaga (Spain), Málaga, Spain

²Grupo de Investigación Cármides. Departamento de Psicología Social, Universidad de Sevilla (Spain), Sevilla, Spain

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Introduction

This study explores how empowering human resource management (HRM) practices based on structural empowerment (access to opportunities, resources, support, and information) affect both personal initiative and job satisfaction of service employees through individual-level factors (psychological empowerment).

Methods

We conducted a cross-sectional survey study and collected 439 valid responses from service employees in Spain. The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) with confidence intervals based on 10,000 resamples (i.e., bootstrapping technique).

Results

Our results showed that psychological empowerment partially mediated the relationship between structural empowerment and job satisfaction. It also fully mediated the relationship between structural empowerment and personal initiative at work.

Conclusion

These findings emphasize the importance of HRM practices that can empower employees as key determinants of job satisfaction and personal initiative at service companies. Furthermore, a structural empowerment approach is a valid theoretical framework for studying and understanding employees' affective evaluations of work and, more specifically, their personal initiative.

Key words: Empowerment, personal initiative, job satisfaction, HRM practices, service employees.

Miryam Benítez, Departamento de Psicología. Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de Sevilla (Spain), C/Camilo José Cela, s/n, Sevilla 41018, Spain. E-mail: mbenitez7@us.es

INTRODUCTION

Continuous changes in both social and economic contexts pose numerous challenges for service companies, especially those in the tourism, hospitality, and commerce sectors (Hamouche, 2021). Previous studies have shown that these organizations are more likely to survive and adapt to ongoing changes if they implant empowering human resource management (HMR) practices (e.g., New Ways of Working [NWW]; Peters, Poutsma, Van der Heijden, Bakker & de Bruijn, 2014) that promote employees' job satisfaction and personal initiative at work (Hunsaker & Ding, 2022; Stouten, Rousseau & De Cremer, 2018). These individual factors are associated with key performance indicators such as service quality, creativity and innovation, and lower turnover and dropout rates (Díaz-Carrión, Navajas-Romero & Casas-Rosal, 2020; Hunsaker & Ding, 2022). In that sense, Kanter's theory of power in organizations should be highlighted as one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks for analyzing organizational strategies and their impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, we frame our study on the structural empowerment theory (Kanter, 1993; Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004) and explore the mediating role of employees' psychological empowerment on the

relationship between HRM empowerment-enhancing systems and employees' outcomes and performance (i.e., job satisfaction and personal initiative at work).

Theoretical background and hypotheses

The concept of structural empowerment is based on Kanter's (1993) theory of power in organizations. According to Kanter (1993), empowerment is a function of power within an organization, being defined as the ability to mobilize resources for getting things done. From this point, this author offers an empirically grounded theoretical model of the structural elements (i.e., structural empowerment) that foster employees' empowerment, including the work environment, as far as it allows for flexibility, supportive relationships, opportunities for learning and growth, and access to the information necessary to accomplish the work. Kanter (1993) maintains that work behaviors and attitudes are largely influenced by social factors rather than by personal characteristics and predispositions. Therefore, employees feel empowered when their work contexts provide them with the conditions and access to the power that they need to accomplish their tasks.

Based on the findings of Kanter (1993), Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, and Wilk (2004) identified four organizational factors that have the capacity to empower workers: access to information, resources, opportunities, and support. Information refers to the knowledge, both formal and informal, necessary to perform job tasks successfully (e.g., knowledge about the company's service standards). Access to resources refers to the availability of time, materials, and financial resources necessary to meet job demands. A person's access to opportunities includes promotions and growth opportunities within the company as well as the opportunity to acquire and apply professional skills. Finally, access to support consists of receiving feedback, advice, and guidance from supervisors, peers, and subordinates to perform tasks effectively (Laschinger & Finegan, 2001; Read & Laschinger, 2017).

Several studies have shown that structural empowerment is linked to positive work outcomes, such as job satisfaction and personal initiative, in samples of nursing staff and teachers (García-Juan, Escrig-Tena & Roca-Puig, 2020; Kelly, Baratucci & Ahmad, 2022; Orgambidez, Millán, Domínguez & Borrego, 2021). Regarding access to opportunities, several studies have expressed that training and development of professional competencies have been associated with higher job satisfaction and performance in multicultural workforces (for a revision, see Bhatti, Alshagawi, Zakariya & Juhari, 2019). Perceived help and supportive interactions between co-workers and supervisors, that is, access to support, is found to be related to employee performance and productivity. Employees with high levels of organizational support show more adaptive and effective behaviors when they encounter obstacles and difficulties (Audenaert, George, Bauwens, et al., 2020; Jolly, Kong & Kim, 2021; Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart & Adis, 2017). In addition, access to immediate and complete information about the organization (tasks, functions, roles) allows team members to make decisions and work autonomously, fostering team performance (Marlow, Lacerenza, Paoletti, Burke & Salas, 2018). Finally, the availability of resources, both physical and temporal, improves decision-making and increases employees' self-determination, thereby giving greater meaning to the work tasks and enhancing performance (Arvanitis, Seliger & Stucki, 2016; Eden, Ganzach, Flumin-Granat & Zigman, 2010).

However, the relationship between structural empowerment and work attitudes and behaviors is mediated by psychological empowerment, according to the Expanded Workplace Empowerment Model (Laschinger & Finegan, 2001). These authors suggest that when levels of structural empowerment are high, employees feel psychologically empowered at work, which, in turn, facilitates workers' improved health, well-being, and job performance. In that sense, prior research seems to validate the claim that the impact of structural empowerment on employees' work attitudes and behaviors is indirectly mediated by psychological empowerment (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004; Monje Amor, Abeal Vázquez & Faiña, 2020; Zhang, Ye & Li, 2018). For example, Zhang, Ye, and Li (2018) conducted a meta-analysis to test the relationship between structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and emotional exhaustion ($k = 24$, $n = 9,559$ participants). Their findings indicated that structural empowerment affects nurses'

psychological states (i.e., psychological empowerment) and, as a result, facilitates the fulfillment of their tasks.

This facilitator role of psychological empowerment can be explained by its intrinsic motivational component. According to Spreitzer (1995), psychological empowerment is defined as the intrinsic motivation that results from the perception that one's work role has impact, meaning, competence, and self-determination. Essentially, psychological empowerment reflects the degree to which employees perceive that their actions can influence the operational outcomes of the department or even the whole organization, their values and needs are aligned with work goals, their skills and abilities enable them to successfully perform work activities, and their organization allows them enough autonomy or control to determine their tasks. In general, psychological empowerment has been associated with levels of energy, implication on the job, perseverance in the face of work challenges, interest in learning, and performance (Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, 1997).

Structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction

Among the job attitudes associated with psychological empowerment, job satisfaction is noteworthy. Several studies have shown that high levels of psychological empowerment have been related to higher job satisfaction (for a review, see Mathew & Nair, 2021). The dimensions of psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, impact, and self-determination) can be considered as cognitive elements close to the job characteristics of Hackman and Oldham (1980), which generate psychological states strongly related to job satisfaction. When employees perceive that they have the autonomy, skills, and knowledge needed to perform the job, and the job has meaning and impact within the organization, they show better performance, which manifests itself in positive emotions, expressed as job satisfaction (Gong, Wu, Huang, Yan & Luo, 2020; Maan, Abid, Butt, Ashfaq & Ahmed, 2020).

Structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and personal initiative

Psychological empowerment has also been found to encourage innovative behavior (Echebiri, Amundsen & Engen, 2020; Matsuo, 2022; Nikpour, 2018; Wikhamn & Selart, 2019). According to Spreitzer (1995), effectiveness and innovative behavior are two of the main consequences of empowerment, since intrinsic motivation greatly contributes to the emergence of innovative behaviors and initiative. When employees have autonomy in their work and impact on the organization, they feel they have fewer constraints when making creative decisions and taking risks in the workplace.

This argument seems to be reflected in the studies by Echebiri, Amundsen, and Engen (2020), Matsuo (2022), Nikpour (2018), and Wikhamn and Selart (2019), whose findings have shown that psychological empowerment was a strong predictor of innovation and creativity in the workplace. Echebiri, Amundsen, and Engen (2020) suggest that innovation requires employees with an internal drive oriented toward creativity, learning, and

development, aspects related to the cognitions present in the psychological state of empowerment. In the same way, Matsuo (2022) states that empowered employees have a greater ability to interpret problems from different perspectives, generate a greater number of possible responses, and carry them out with confidence in achieving success. In other words, psychologically empowered employees would be intrinsically motivated to identify problems, seek and analyze information, and generate new ideas and alternatives. Likewise, it is anticipated that higher levels of psychological empowerment correlate with increased personal initiative in the workplace, characterized by proactive, persistent, and solution-oriented behaviors.

Based on previous studies and the Expanded Workplace Empowerment Model (Laschinger & Finegan, 2001), it is expected that high perceptions of psychological empowerment are related to high perceptions of job satisfaction and increased personal initiative, creativity, and innovation at work. Moreover, it seems that psychological empowerment is the result of being under structural empowerment conditions (Echebiri, Amundsen & Engen, 2020; Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004; Read & Laschinger, 2017), which may, in turn, result in improved well-being and performance (Dahinten, Lee & MacPhee, 2016; Fragkos, Makrykosta & Frangos, 2020; Monje Amor, Abeal Vázquez & Faña, 2020; Zhang, Ye & Li, 2018). In this sense, this study aimed to analyze the mediating role of psychological empowerment between structural empowerment and both job satisfaction and personal initiative in service sector workers (see Fig. 1). Specifically, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Structural empowerment positively relates to psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological empowerment positively relates to job satisfaction (Hypothesis 2a) and personal initiative (Hypothesis 2b).

Hypothesis 3a: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between structural empowerment and job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3b: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between structural empowerment and personal initiative.

Based on the structural empowerment theory, our findings might provide useful information for understanding how empowering HRM practices enhance employees' intrinsic

motivation at work (i.e., psychological empowerment) and are associated with their affective states, attitudes, and behaviors in the service sector (i.e., job satisfaction and personal initiative). Hence, our findings may help to design and implement interventions aimed at empowering the workplace and, in turn, improving performance and service quality in companies (Díaz-Carrión, Navajas-Romero & Casas-Rosal, 2020; Stouten, Rousseau & De Cremer, 2018).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study design, participants, and procedure

We adopted a cross-sectional survey design and convenience sampling technique. For sample-size parameter estimation, we conducted a power analysis to determine the minimum sample size necessary for parameter estimation, using the software *mc_power_med* (Schoemann, Boulton & Short, 2017). In this power analysis to detect a target effect, we introduced the following coefficients: *power* ($1-\beta$) of 0.80, a minimum of 100 participants and a maximum of 800, and increments of the sample calculation of 5 participants. Simulations using the Monte Carlo method were conducted with 5,000 replicates, 20,000 draws per replicate, and an α of 0.05. Considering the values from the relationships of the variables observed in previous studies, the results of the simulations indicated a minimum of 170 participants. In addition, we complemented this analysis with the results of a power analysis to detect a model misspecification based on RMSEA fit (Preacher & Coffman, 2006). We calculated the sample size for RMSEA with an α of 0.05, 39 degrees of freedom, null RMSEA = 0.05, and alt. RMSEA = 0.08, according to the recommendations of MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara (1996), obtaining a minimum sample size of 192 participants.

For data collection we contacted some service companies that had previously requested our consultancy services. We explained the aim, uses, and benefits of the research, and participation in the study was requested. After receiving authorization from companies, the researchers visited the various organizations and administered questionnaires to all employees who expressed their intention to take part. Participants were not compensated for collaborating in the study and provided written informed consent to participate. The questionnaires were administered anonymously and confidentially. Participation was restricted to individuals who had been employed in the same position for at least 12 months. Once the questionnaires had been completed, they were placed in unmarked envelopes, which were then placed in ballot boxes.

The final sample consisted of 439 participants ($M_{age} = 40.72$; $SD_{age} = 12.54$; min = 19 years, max = 61; 52.95% women). Most participants reported having a permanent employment contract (73.41%) and a higher education/university diploma (47.66%). Regarding the type of job (Hofstede, 2001), 25.96% were unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers, and 23.52% were office employees or clerks. The mean length of service in their companies (i.e., job tenure) was 13.31 years ($SD = 9.74$). Most of the participants (67.13%) were working in medium-sized companies (between 50 and 250 workers).

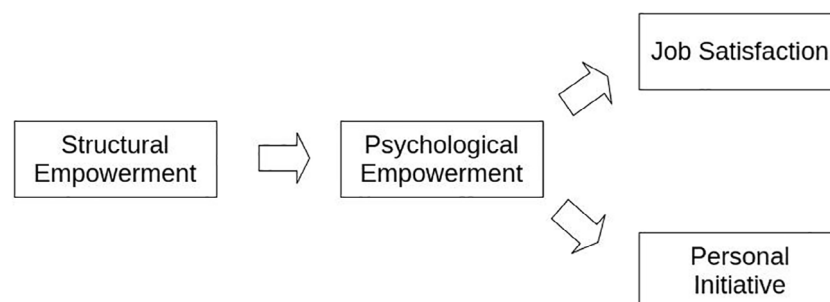


Fig. 1. The study model according to the Expanded Workplace Empowerment Model (Laschinger & Finegan, 2001).

Instruments

We measured the following variables:

Personal and work characteristics. We asked for participants' sex, age, educational level, type of job according to Hofstede's (2001) classification, job tenure, company size, and contract type.

Structural empowerment. We used the Spanish version (Mendoza Sierra, Orgambidez, Borrego, Gonçalves & Santos, 2014) of the *Conditions for Work Effectiveness Questionnaire* (CWEQ-II; Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004), with four subscales (three items each) measuring access to opportunities (e.g., "The chance to gain new skills and knowledge on the job"), information (e.g., "The current state of the company"), support (e.g., "Helpful hints or problem-solving advice"), and resources (e.g., "Time available to accomplish job requirements"). The response options follow a five-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). The omega reliability coefficient (Peters, 2014) was 0.87 (bias-corrected and accelerated confidence intervals or 95% BCA-CI: 0.84–0.89).

Psychological empowerment. We used Spreitzer's (1995) Psychological Empowerment Scale adapted to Spanish (Albar, García-Ramírez, Jiménez & Garrido, 2012). This scale consists of 12 items grouped into four dimensions (three items each): meaning (e.g., "The work I do is important to me"), competence (e.g., "I am confident about my ability to do my job"), self-determination (e.g., "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job"), and impact (e.g., "My impact on what happens in my department is large"). Items were rated on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The omega coefficient reliability coefficient obtained was 0.90 (95% BCA-CI: 0.88–0.92).

Personal initiative. The Spanish version (Lisbona Bañuelos, Palací & Gómez-Bernabéu, 2008) of the six-item version of the Personal Initiative Scale (Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng & Tag, 1997) was adopted. A sample item is "Whenever something goes wrong, I search for a solution immediately." Participants were asked to rate items on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The scale reliability (omega coefficient) in this study was 0.87 (95% BCA-CI: 0.84–0.89).

Job satisfaction. This variable was measured using the affective job satisfaction scale (Fernández-Muñoz & Topa, 2018). The scale consists of four items (e.g., "I like my job more than most people") answered using a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The scale reliability (omega coefficient) obtained was 0.87 (95% BCA-CI: 0.84–0.89).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the following packages of the statistical program R (R Core Team, 2024): *MBESS* for the calculation of the omega reliability coefficient; *psych* for descriptive statistics, correlations analysis (Pearson's r), and exploratory factor analysis; and *lavaan* for structural equation analysis.

The association between structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and both personal initiative and job satisfaction were explored using structural equation modeling (SEM). To test the fit of the model to the data, the traditional chi-square (degrees of freedom), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were tested. As a rule of thumb, CFI and TLI > 0.90 and RMSEA and SRMR < 0.08 are indicative of a reasonable fit of the model to the data (Kline, 2016).

Regarding the SEM analysis, we followed Little and colleagues' recommendation that using parcels in testing structural equation modeling results in more reliable measurement models (Little, Cunningham, Shahar & Widaman, 2002; Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson & Schoemann, 2013). Therefore, we conducted our SEM analysis on a partial disaggregation model (Bagozzi & Edwards, 1998) by creating parcels of items. Structural

empowerment and psychological empowerment were included as latent factors with their above-mentioned subscales as the indicators (i.e., access to opportunities, information, resources, and support for structural empowerment; meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact for psychological empowerment). We created parcels of items for the variables personal initiative and job satisfaction, which were included in the model as latent factors with three and two indicators, respectively. We used a balancing approach or "single-factor analysis" (Landis, Beal & Tesluk, 2000) for creating the parcels. Using the single-factor solution from an exploratory factor analysis, the item with the highest loading is paired with the item that has the lowest loading. The next highest and lowest items are paired in the second parcel, and so on until items are exhausted.

In addition, we followed Kline's (2016) recommendations for mediation analysis; therefore we used the bootstrapping method with maximum likelihood to calculate the confidence intervals for direct, indirect, and total effects. The bootstrapping technique, which is "a computer-based method that combines the cases in a data set in different ways to estimate statistical precision" (Kline, 2016, p. 60), has a higher statistical power compared with other statistical mediation techniques (e.g., the Sobel test). Percentile confidence intervals (95% PC-CI) were calculated based on 10,000 samples. The effect is considered statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) when the calculated interval does not contain 0 (zero).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations

The descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis) and correlations between all study variables are displayed in Table 1. Structural empowerment showed a statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) positive correlation with both personal initiative ($r = 0.21$) and job satisfaction ($r = 0.45$). Psychological empowerment was positively related to both personal initiative at work ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$) and job satisfaction ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, we stated that structural and psychological empowerment have a positive relationship with personal initiative and job satisfaction, and vice versa.

Hypothesis testing

To test the mediation relationship, we conducted SEM analyses using the maximum likelihood method. A model of relationships was proposed in which structural empowerment is the exogenous and predictor variable, psychological empowerment is the endogenous and mediating variable, and personal initiative and job satisfaction are the endogenous and outcome variables. Figure 2 shows the empirical model of the relationship between the variables examined in the study.

The model fit was adequate according to the recommendations of Kline (2016): $\chi^2(83) = 334.2$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.930, TLI = 0.921, RMSEA = 0.078 (90% CI: 0.069–0.087), and SRMR = 0.053. Results revealed that structural empowerment was a significant predictor of psychological empowerment ($B = 0.54$, PC-CI: 0.40–0.66) and job satisfaction ($B = 0.40$, 95% PC-CI: 0.27–0.55) but not of personal initiative ($B = -0.04$, 95% PC-CI: -0.17 to 0.10). Moreover, psychological empowerment was a significant predictor of both personal initiative ($B = 0.53$, 95% PC-CI: 0.36–0.71) and job satisfaction ($B = 0.58$, 95% PC-CI: 0.43–0.71). The model explained 27.6% of the variance of psychological empowerment, 34.2% of personal initiative at work, and 51.1% of job satisfaction.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables (N = 493)

	M	SD	Sk	Kur	1	2	3	4
1. Structural empowerment	3.29	0.81	-0.01	-0.45	-	0.37**	0.21**	0.45**
2. Psychological empowerment	4.02	0.75	-1.14	1.53		-	0.47**	0.51**
3. Personal initiative	4.07	0.72	-0.91	0.91			-	0.54**
4. Job satisfaction	3.42	0.92	-0.11	-0.11				-

Note: All correlation coefficients are significant.
**p < 0.01.

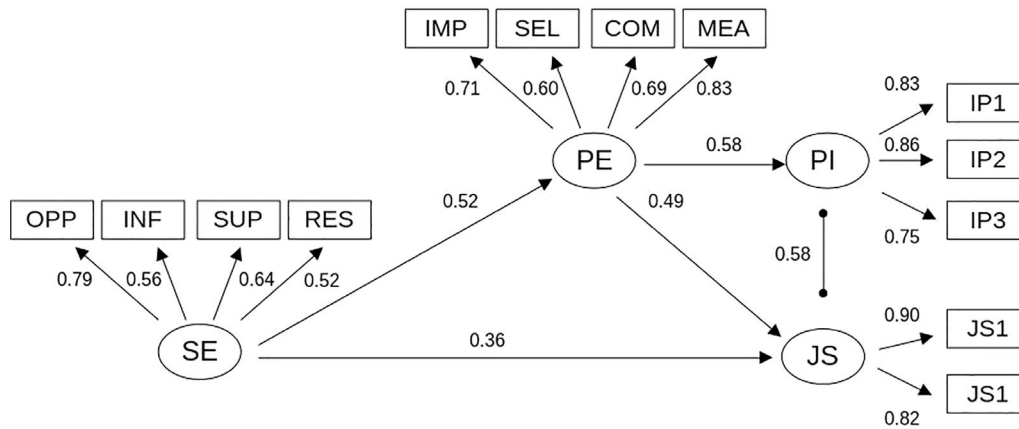


Fig. 2. Final model (N = 493). SE = Structural Empowerment; OPP = Opportunities; INF = Information; SUP = Support; RES = Resources; PE = Psychological Empowerment; IMP = Impact; SEL = Self-Determination; COM = Competence; MEA = Meaning; PI = Personal Initiative; JS = Job Satisfaction.

Concerning the mediation hypotheses (see Table 2), our results indicated that psychological empowerment fully mediated the relationship between structural empowerment and personal initiative. The indirect effect was $B = 0.28$ (95% PC-CI: 0.19–0.39). In the case of job satisfaction, structural empowerment had both a direct ($B = 0.40$, 95% PC-CI: 0.27–0.55) and an indirect ($B = 0.31$, 95% PC-CI: 0.21–0.41) effect on job satisfaction: psychological empowerment partially mediated this relationship. From the total effect, 56.63% was direct and 43.37% was indirect and through psychological empowerment.

DISCUSSION

Considering the relevant consequences of empowerment at work for employees’ attitudes and satisfaction, this study aims to generalize a structural equation model, which assumes that psychological empowerment acts as a mediator between structural empowerment and job satisfaction and personal initiative among a

sample of workers from a variety of service companies. Hence, we extend the application of the structural empowerment model by analyzing the impact of HRM practices that emphasize employee empowerment (e.g., NWW; Peters, Poutsma, Van der Heijden, Bakker & de Bruijn, 2014) on attitudes and creativity at work.

Concerning Hypothesis 1, the results confirmed the strong link between organizational factors with the capacity to empower (structural empowerment) and intrinsic motivation at work (psychological empowerment). Organizational context (access to opportunities, information, resources, and support) seems to largely determine empowerment cognitions. In the same way, previous research has shown that learning opportunities, information about the organization (e.g., quality standards), support from colleagues and supervisors, and available resources (e.g., time) facilitate a strong active job role orientation (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004; Monje Amor, Abeal Vázquez & Faíña, 2020; Zhang, Ye & Li, 2018).

Table 2. Direct, indirect, and total effects of structural empowerment on personal initiative and job satisfaction

Predictor variable (P)	Mediator variable (M)	Result variable (R)	P→M	M→R	Cov→R	Direct effect	Indirect effect	95% PC-CI	Total effect
SE	PE	PI	0.53**	0.53**	-0.04	0.28**	0.19–0.39	0.24**	
SE	PE	JS	0.53**	0.58**	0.40**	0.31**	0.21–0.41	0.71**	

Note: Non-standardized coefficients. Percentile confidence intervals (PC-CI) based on 10,000 resamples. SE = Structural Empowerment; PE = Psychological Empowerment; PI = Personal Initiative; JS = Job Satisfaction.
**p < 0.01.

Our results also confirmed Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 2b: Higher levels of psychological empowerment were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and personal initiative at work. In the case of the relationship between psychological empowerment and job satisfaction, the results are consistent with previous studies that have shown how experiencing autonomy and decision-making at work when performing tasks with meaning and impact results in positive affective states associated with work that can be conceptualized as experiencing job satisfaction (Gong, Wu, Huang, Yan & Luo, 2020; Maan, Abid, Butt, Ashfaq & Ahmed, 2020; Mathew & Nair, 2021). In addition, our results support the idea that cognitions present in psychological empowerment relate to personal initiative in the same way as they do to proactivity, resolution, and creative decision-making at work (Echebiri, Amundsen & Engen, 2020; Matsuo, 2022; Nikpour, 2018; Wikhamn & Selart, 2019). When employees are psychologically empowered, they engage in a multifaceted examination of workplace challenges and barriers and demonstrate the ability to generate a range of potential solutions. In addition, this psychological state gives them a sense of efficacy that compels them to persist in their efforts until they achieve a solution to the problem at hand. Therefore, these results extend previous research on the positive consequences of empowerment on workers' emotional states and proactive attitudes and behaviors.

Our findings suggest that there is a strong link between organizational factors that contribute to empowering employees (e.g., structural and psychological empowerment) and work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction). Specifically, we found partial support for **Hypothesis 3a**: Structural empowerment had both a direct and an indirect effect on job satisfaction. In other words, our data supported a twofold process: a direct process or effect of structural empowerment on satisfaction and an indirect process or effect through psychological empowerment. A direct impact on job satisfaction may be achieved by empowering HRM practices, including those based on information and resources, training and development of professional competencies and skills, and perceived support and help between co-workers and supervisors (Echebiri, Amundsen & Engen, 2020; Fragkos, Makrykosta & Frangos, 2020; Mathew & Nair, 2021). Alternatively, structural empowerment can also have an indirect effect through psychological empowerment. When employees are under structural empowerment conditions, they are more likely to develop positive cognitions about their competence to contribute meaningfully at work and perform well (Dahinten, Lee & MacPhee, 2016; Fragkos, Makrykosta & Frangos, 2020; Gong, Wu, Huang, Yan & Luo, 2020; Maan, Abid, Butt, Ashfaq & Ahmed, 2020; Mathew & Nair, 2021; Read & Laschinger, 2017). In other words, structural empowerment and its associated HRM practices have the potential to create work environments that generate positive psychological states and emotions, which translate into high levels of job satisfaction (Dahinten, Lee & MacPhee, 2016; Fragkos, Makrykosta & Frangos, 2020). Furthermore, these findings support the fact that job satisfaction can be determined in part by intrinsic motivation derived from psychological empowerment but also by organizational aspects such as access to support, information, opportunities, and resources (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004; Mathew & Nair, 2021).

Our findings are consistent with the Expanded Workplace Empowerment Model (Laschinger & Finegan, 2001) concerning

Hypothesis 3b: We found that psychological empowerment fully mediates the impact of structural empowerment on personal initiative. Thus, according to the data, organizational structures that facilitate employees' autonomy and power lead to greater initiative through psychological empowerment (Echebiri, Amundsen & Engen, 2020; Matsuo, 2022; Nikpour, 2018; Wikhamn & Selart, 2019). In this sense, organizational empowering factors facilitate the emergence of positive cognitions related to intrinsic motivation (i.e., increasing employees' perceptions of work meaning and competence) and, therefore, foster employees' initiative and creativity toward achieving goals (Matsuo, 2022).

The direct effect of structural empowerment on satisfaction is not as expected according to the Expanded Workplace Empowerment Model (Laschinger & Finegan, 2001). However, the factors of structural empowerment (learning opportunities, support, information, and resources) are elements related to employees' evaluation of their jobs, i.e., their job satisfaction with learning opportunities, relationships with colleagues, and available resources. In this sense, a direct relationship between structural empowerment and job satisfaction would be expected, as the data have shown.

On the other hand, personal initiative requires the prior existence of a psychological state (Matsuo, 2022) based on the autonomy to solve and confront problems, so it is expected that the relationship between organizational elements and personal initiative is mediated by psychological empowerment, as postulated by the Expanded Model of Workplace Empowerment. This mediating role of psychological empowerment is also considered by Deci and Ryan (2008), who suggest that goals and work context influence work behaviors (e.g., personal initiative) through autonomous motivation (e.g., psychological empowerment).

Limitations and future research

Despite the contributions derived from the generalization of the structural and psychological empowerment to HRM systems and practices in service organizations, some limitations of our study need to be acknowledged. Due to the self-report nature of the data, they are susceptible to various biases, including desirability bias and common method bias. Therefore, future studies on empowerment at work should incorporate a variety of data sources (e.g., self-report questionnaires and interviews with colleagues and supervisors) and longitudinal designs, which will facilitate the triangulation of information and the inferring of cause-and-effect relationships between variables measured at different time points. Finally, it is possible that non-assessed third variables, at both the individual (e.g., personality traits) and group (e.g., group climate for innovation and psychological safety) levels, may play a significant role in the relationship between the main variables of our study, and therefore their incorporation needs to be considered in future research.

Theoretical implications

Despite the limitations mentioned above, our findings indicate that both structural and psychological empowerment are key antecedents of job satisfaction and personal initiative in service organizations. Indeed, these findings point out that the structural

empowerment model (Kanter, 1993; Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk, 2004) is a valid theoretical approach for studying and understanding employees' affective evaluations of work, as well as employees' personal initiative, through intrinsic motivation related to psychological empowerment. In addition, the theory of power in organizations proposes a framework of HRM practices that are grounded within the NWW perspective and are particularly concerned with employee perceptions and organizational performance. Therefore, when organizational contexts provide information, resources, opportunities, and support to employees in service companies, they can psychologically empower them and promote high levels of job satisfaction and innovative behavior. As a result, service organizations are able to provide an excellent level of service to their customers and achieve competitive advantages (Hogreve, Iseke, Derfuss & Eller, 2017).

Practical implications

Translating our findings into practical implications, we suggest that the structural empowerment model offers an adequate approach for developing and implementing HRM practices in service organizations. A training program tailored to the needs of employees (e.g., resolving customer conflicts) provides opportunities for the development of professional skills. It is also possible to facilitate employees' psychological empowerment through strategies such as job crafting or the establishment of formal and informal communication networks. Finally, supervisors should be trained in positive leadership styles (e.g., authentic or transformational leadership), and a supportive team atmosphere should be established to ensure that they can access the support they require.

By focusing on the development of psychological empowerment, organizations can promote autonomy by allowing employees to make decisions within their areas of responsibility. Similarly, employees should be aware that their efforts at work are reflected in the organization's results (i.e., information about customers' opinions about the quality of services). Finally, a positive organizational climate (i.e., the development of an organizational climate based on support among employees) can promote perceptions of efficacy and the ability to cope with any difficulties and/or obstacles at work.

In conclusion, our findings advance knowledge on empowering HRM practices and systems in organizations and provide a starting point for further research on structural empowerment in service companies. We strongly believe in the potential of empowering HRM systems and the benefits that both structural and psychological empowerment have for employees and service organizations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

IRB APPROVAL

This research did not require IRB approval because of the design of the study.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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

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