



## Unraveling the Mechanisms: Work Engagement as a Mediator between Psychological Empowerment and Innovative Work Behavior

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### ABSTRACT

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This study explores the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior among employees in Bangladesh's telecommunication sector. Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, the research addresses a critical gap by examining how psychological empowerment as a job resource translates into innovative outcomes through the motivational pathway of work engagement. Data were collected from a sample of 325 employees using convenience sampling, and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the hypothesized relationships. The results reveal that psychological empowerment significantly predicts both work engagement and innovative work behavior, and that work engagement mediates this relationship significantly. These findings underscore the importance of fostering empowerment and engagement to enhance innovation in dynamic, technology-intensive industries. The study extends the applicability of the JD-R model to a non-Western, emerging market context, offering new empirical evidence from Bangladesh's telecommunication sector. Furthermore, it provides actionable insights for organizational leaders and policymakers, advocating for targeted HR strategies that cultivate both empowerment and engagement to sustain innovative capacity. The research contributes to the broader literature by clarifying the mechanisms that underpin employee-driven innovation in rapidly developing economies

## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the telecommunications sector has emerged as a foundational pillar for economic and digital transformation worldwide. Globally, the telecommunications industry contributed approximately \$1.6 trillion to GDP and employed over 32 million people in 2022, positioning it as a key catalyst for technological innovation and socio-economic progress (Global System for Mobile Communications Association, 2023). In Bangladesh, the sector has experienced similarly impressive growth, with the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC, 2023) reporting over 185 million mobile subscribers and more than 125 million internet users as of December 2023. This robust growth not only underscores the sector's pivotal role in the nation's digitalization drive but also intensifies competitive pressures, prompting telecom firms to prioritize continuous innovation for sustaining growth and relevance in a rapidly evolving market (Amin & Hendrawan, 2023).

Innovative work behavior (IWB), the intentional generation, promotion, and realization of novel ideas within an organizational context, has been widely recognized as a principal driver of organizational performance and adaptability in dynamic industries, such as telecommunications (Behera et al., 2024). Given the sector's fast-paced nature and high demands for customer-centric solutions, telecom operators in Bangladesh are increasingly dependent on employees' innovative behaviors to address emerging challenges and seize new market opportunities (Tania & Begum, 2023). Previous studies suggest that fostering such behaviors requires a supportive internal environment, with psychological empowerment being a critical antecedent (Singh & Sarkar, 2012; Helmy et al., 2019). Psychological empowerment, defined by dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995), cultivates employees' intrinsic motivation and autonomy, thereby equipping them to challenge existing processes and champion creative initiatives (Bin Saeed et al., 2019).

Beyond direct influences, scholars have increasingly recognized that the relationship between psychological empowerment and IWB may be more nuanced, potentially mediated by positive work-related states such as work engagement (Ergun et al., 2025). Work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, has been empirically linked to both psychological empowerment and IWB (Vu et al., 2025). Engaged employees are more likely to leverage their empowered status, channeling energy and focus into innovative endeavors that benefit the organization (Marampa et al., 2025). This mediating mechanism is particularly salient in sectors where the pace of change is relentless and the need for proactive problem-solving is paramount, such as telecommunications.

Despite a growing global literature on innovation, empowerment, and engagement, significant research gaps persist, particularly in developing economies such as Bangladesh. Most extant studies have either focused on the direct effects of psychological empowerment on IWB or explored these

constructs in Western or generalized Asian contexts (Singh & Sarkar, 2012; Helmy et al., 2019). Empirical investigations specifically examining the mediating role of work engagement in the psychological empowerment-IWB nexus within the Bangladeshi telecommunication sector remain scant (Rahman et al., 2022). Given Bangladesh's distinctive socio-cultural and organizational landscape marked by collectivist values, hierarchical structures, and an emerging digital workforce, understanding how psychological empowerment is translated into innovative behavior through engagement is both timely and critical.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to empirically investigate the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior among employees in Bangladesh's telecommunication industry, thereby providing novel insights to both theory and practice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Foundation

This study is primarily grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, which provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the complex interplay between psychological empowerment, work engagement, and innovative work behavior (IWB) within organizational settings. According to the JD-R model, job resources such as psychological empowerment, which encompasses meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, act as critical drivers of work engagement by fulfilling employees' basic psychological needs and fostering intrinsic motivation (Joo et al., 2026). Engaged employees, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, are more likely to expend discretionary effort, think creatively, and initiate novel solutions (Fait et al., 2023; Wularsih & Octafian, 2024). Recent empirical evidence supports the mediating role of work engagement in the empowerment-IWB relationship; for example, Bhatnagar (2012) demonstrates that psychological empowerment enhances engagement, which subsequently translates into higher levels of innovation. In the dynamic context of Bangladesh's telecommunication sector, where innovation is essential for competitive advantage, the JD-R theory robustly explains how psychological empowerment can be channeled through work engagement to foster IWB, providing a focused theoretical foundation for this investigation.

### Psychological Empowerment and Innovative Work Behavior

Psychological empowerment, as conceptualized by Spreitzer (1995), encompasses four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Employees who perceive themselves as having higher psychological empowerment are more likely to take initiative and embrace organizational change (Stanescu et al., 2021). Empirical studies in various sectors, including technology-intensive and service industries, have shown that psychological empowerment significantly enhances IWB, as empowered employees are more intrinsically motivated and confident in proposing and implementing new ideas (Singh & Sarkar, 2019; Kustanto et al., 2020). In the context of Bangladesh's telecommunication sector, where rapid technological change is a

constant, psychological empowerment is likely to be a pivotal antecedent of IWB, leading to the first hypothesis:

**H1:** Psychological empowerment is positively related to innovative work behavior

**Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement**

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) posits that job resources such as psychological empowerment enhance employees' motivational states, particularly work engagement, which is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Gong et al., 2020). Recent literature supports this linkage, indicating that empowered employees experience heightened engagement because they find their work meaningful and feel capable of influencing outcomes (Moura et al., 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced:

**H2:** Psychological empowerment is positively related to work engagement

**Work Engagement and Innovative Work Behavior**

Work engagement itself has been robustly linked to innovative work behavior (Koroglu & Ozmen, 2022). Engaged employees are more likely to go beyond routine tasks, exhibiting proactive behaviors and championing new processes or solutions (De Spiegelare et al., 2015; Rahman et al., 2024; Laia & Widagdo, 2025). In knowledge-intensive sectors such as telecommunications, work engagement is critical in converting individual potential into organizational innovation (Kossyva et al., 2024). This leads to the third hypothesis:

**H3:** Work engagement is positively related to innovative work behavior

**Work Engagement as a Mediator**

Recent research has increasingly highlighted the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between psychological empowerment and IWB. Marampa et al. (2025) and Vu et al. (2025) found that psychological empowerment fosters work engagement, which, in turn, acts as a motivational bridge for innovative behaviors. In the resource-constrained, rapidly evolving Bangladeshi telecommunication sector, this mediating process may be particularly salient, as organizations seek to maximize innovation through internal resources and employee motivation. Thus, the final hypothesis is proposed:

**H4:** Work engagement mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behaviour

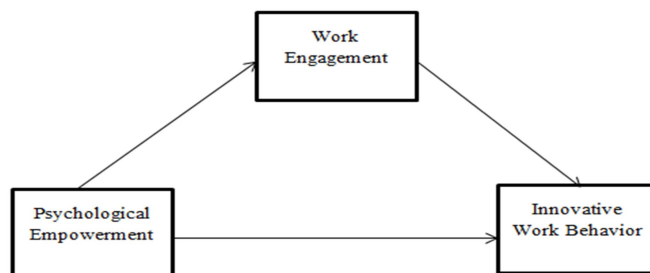


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior among employees in the telecommunication sector of Bangladesh. The choice of a quantitative approach aligns with the study's objective to empirically validate hypothesized relationships and test mediation effects using robust statistical techniques (Hair et al., 2021).

### **Sample and Data Collection**

A convenience sampling technique was employed to recruit participants from major telecommunication organizations operating in Bangladesh, including Grameenphone, Robi Axiata, Banglalink, and Teletalk. This non-probability sampling method was selected due to its practicality in accessing a diverse pool of respondents within a limited timeframe, a common approach in comparable organizational behavior studies (Sarstedt et al., 2022). Data were collected from a total of 325 full-time employees occupying various managerial and non-managerial positions. The inclusion criteria required respondents to have a minimum of one year of tenure to ensure adequate familiarity with the organizational culture and innovation practices.

A structured self-administered questionnaire was distributed both in-person and electronically to maximize participation and minimize non-response bias. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The final sample size ( $n = 325$ ) exceeds the minimum threshold recommended for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), ensuring sufficient statistical power for hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2021).

### **Measures**

Standardized measurement scales with demonstrated reliability and validity were adopted from prior research. Psychological empowerment was measured using the 12-item scale developed by Spreitzer (1995), which covers meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Work engagement was assessed using the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9), developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), which encompasses vigor, dedication, and absorption. Innovative work behavior was measured using a six-item scale developed by Janssen (2000), focusing on idea generation, promotion, and realization. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software, a technique well-suited for complex mediation models and smaller sample sizes (Sarstedt et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2021). Preliminary analyses included assessment of data normality, missing values, and common method bias through Harman's single-factor test. Reliability and validity of constructs were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity (HTMT and Fornell-Larcker criterion). The structural model was tested to assess direct and indirect effects, with bootstrapping procedures (5,000

resamples) employed to determine the significance of mediation effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Recent literature validates this methodological approach for organizational behavior research in emerging market contexts (Rana et al., 2023; Mensah, 2023).

## RESULT

### Demographic Analysis

The demographic profile of respondents reflects the diversity of the telecommunication workforce in Bangladesh. Among the 325 participants, 60% were male and 40% female, representing a balanced gender distribution comparable to sectoral reports (Rahman et al., 2022). The age distribution showed that 18% were aged 21–30 years, 54% were aged 31–40 years, 22% were aged 41–50 years, and 6% were above 50 years, indicating a predominantly young to middle-aged workforce. In terms of job tenure, 34% of respondents had 1–3 years of experience, 41% had 4–7 years, and 25% had more than 7 years, suggesting good organizational familiarity and a suitable context for studying innovation-related constructs. Additionally, 68% held non-managerial positions and 32% held managerial roles, ensuring perspectives across hierarchical levels.

### Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model demonstrated excellent reliability and validity across all constructs. For psychological empowerment, all 12 items exhibited strong outer loadings (0.75–0.87), with a composite reliability (CR) of 0.936 and an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.691, indicating high internal consistency and convergent validity. The nine items measuring work engagement also exhibited robust loadings (0.79 – 0.88), a CR of 0.947, and an AVE of 0.707, further confirming reliability and validity. Similarly, the six items for innovative work behavior reflected strong loadings (0.79 – 0.88), a CR of 0.931, and an AVE of 0.569. All loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, and CR and AVE values were well above the minimum cutoffs of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Hair et al., 2021), establishing that all constructs in the model are measured with high reliability and convergent validity (see Table 1).

Table 1. Measurement Model Assessment

Constructs	Items	Loading	CR	AVE
Psychological Empowerment	PE1	0.83	<b>0.936</b>	<b>0.691</b>
	PE2	0.81		
	PE3	0.86		
	PE4	0.84		
	PE5	0.78		
	PE6	0.82		
	PE7	0.87		
	PE8	0.80		
	PE9	0.79		
	PE10	0.77		
	PE11	0.80		
	PE12	0.75		
Work Engagement	WE1	0.84	<b>0.947</b>	<b>0.707</b>
	WE2	0.86		

	WE3	0.81		
	WE4	0.88		
	WE5	0.83		
	WE6	0.80		
	WE7	0.87		
	WE8	0.79		
	WE9	0.82		
Innovative Work Behavior	IWB1	0.84	<b>0.931</b>	<b>0.569</b>
	IWB2	0.86		
	IWB3	0.88		
	IWB4	0.81		
	IWB5	0.79		
	IWB6	0.83		

Source: PLS Outputs

Discriminant validity was tested using the HTMT criterion. The HTMT values for IWB-PE (0.507), IWB-WE (0.545), and PE-WE (0.328) were all below the 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015), indicating that the constructs are empirically distinct and supporting the validity of the measurement model (see Table 2).

Table 2. HTMT (Discriminant Validity)

Serial No.	Constructs	IWB	PE	WE
1	Innovative Work Behavior			
2	Psychological Empowerment	0.507		
3	Work Engagement	0.545	0.328	

Source: PLS Outputs

Discriminant validity was also assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of AVE for IWB (0.841), PE (0.831), and WE (0.754) exceeded their inter-construct correlations (ranging from 0.305 to 0.460), confirming that each construct is more strongly associated with its indicators than with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker (Discriminant Validity)

Serial No.	Constructs	IWB	PE	WE
1	Innovative Work Behavior	0.841		
2	Psychological Empowerment	0.437	0.831	
3	Work Engagement	0.460	0.305	0.754

Source: PLS Outputs

## Structural Model Assessment

### Path Co-efficient

The structural model results provide strong support for the proposed hypotheses. Table 4 shows that Psychological Empowerment (PE) exerts a significant positive effect on Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) ( $\beta = 0.437$ ,  $t = 10.426$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming H1. This suggests that employees who feel empowered psychologically are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors. Moreover, PE significantly enhances Work Engagement (WE) ( $\beta = 0.305$ ,  $t = 6.261$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H2 and indicating that empowerment fosters higher levels of dedication and vigor at work. In turn, WE significantly predicts IWB ( $\beta = 0.361$ ,  $t = 7.252$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H3, which highlights the mediating role of engagement in linking empowerment to innovation. Collectively, these results underscore the crucial role of empowerment and engagement in promoting innovative behaviors.

Table 4. Path Co-efficient

Hypotheses	Relationships	Beta	S.D.	T value	P values	Decisions
H1	PE -> IWB	0.437	0.042	10.426	0.000	Supported
H2	PE -> WE	0.305	0.049	6.261	0.000	Supported
H3	WE -> IWB	0.361	0.05	7.252	0.000	Supported

Source: PLS Outputs

### Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis revealed that Work Engagement (WE) significantly mediates the relationship between Psychological Empowerment (PE) and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB). The indirect effect of PE on IWB through WE was positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $t = 5.017$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), thereby supporting H4 (see Table 5). This finding suggests that while PE directly fosters employees' innovative behaviors, its impact is also channeled through heightened levels of engagement. In other words, psychologically empowered employees are more energetic, dedicated, and absorbed in their work, which, in turn, translates into greater innovation.

Table 5. Mediation Analysis

Hypotheses	Relationships	Beta	S.D.	T value	P values	Decisions
H4	PE -> WE -> IWB	0.11	0.022	5.017	0.000	Supported

Source: PLS Outputs

## DISCUSSION

The present study sought to investigate the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior (IWB) among employees in Bangladesh's telecommunication sector. This study's findings affirm that work engagement

significantly mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior (IWB) among employees in Bangladesh's telecommunication sector, echoing and extending existing research in this domain. Consistent with Spreitzer's (1995) conceptualization, which posits that psychological empowerment enhances intrinsic motivation, our results align with previous studies indicating that empowered employees are more engaged and, consequently, more likely to display innovative behaviors (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Aryee & Chen, 2006). Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which posits that psychological resources such as empowerment foster work engagement and positive outcomes like IWB, this study substantiates the mediating role of engagement found in prior research (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Moreover, the results provide context-specific justification: in the rapidly evolving and competitive Bangladeshi telecom industry, fostering psychological empowerment and work engagement is critical for stimulating innovation and maintaining organizational competitiveness (Islam & Ahmed, 2018). The mediation observed suggests that while empowerment directly propels innovative behavior, its effect is significantly amplified when channeled through heightened engagement, underscoring the necessity for managerial strategies that simultaneously cultivate empowerment and engagement to maximize innovative outcomes. These findings not only reinforce the universality of empowerment and engagement theories across diverse cultural and industrial contexts but also provide actionable insights for practitioners seeking to foster innovation through targeted human resource practices in Bangladesh's telecommunications sector.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study advances theoretical understanding by empirically substantiating the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior (IWB), framed within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). By confirming psychological empowerment as a pivotal job resource that energizes work engagement, the findings extend the JD-R model's applicability to the South Asian telecommunication context, a sector characterized by rapid change and high demands. The results underscore the motivational process postulated by the JD-R model, revealing that resources such as empowerment are not only directly related to positive work outcomes like IWB but also exert their influence indirectly through enhanced engagement. This highlights work engagement as a dynamic and central psychological state that translates organizational resources into innovative actions. Furthermore, the research offers a nuanced perspective by demonstrating that even in high-pressure, technologically advanced settings, the empowerment-engagement-innovation pathway remains robust, suggesting cross-cultural generalizability of these theoretical assertions. The study thus invites future research to dissect further the mechanisms and boundary conditions under which job resources foster innovation, particularly in rapidly developing economies and digital industries.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings present actionable insights for both organizational leaders and HR practitioners in Bangladesh's telecommunication sector. First, they highlight

that fostering psychological empowerment through increased autonomy, participative decision-making, and opportunities for skill development should be a strategic HR priority, as such resources are foundational for cultivating employee engagement. Second, given the central mediating role of work engagement identified in this study, organizations should proactively design interventions to sustain high levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption among employees. This may include recognition programs, meaningful job assignments, and supportive leadership practices. By attending to both empowerment and engagement, companies can create a work environment that fosters continuous innovation, which is vital for maintaining a competitive advantage in the face of rapid technological shifts and market competition. Moreover, the findings suggest a shift from traditional, top-down innovation initiatives to a more distributed innovation approach, empowering frontline employees as key drivers of change. For policymakers and industry stakeholders, these results advocate for investment in organizational development programs that promote both empowerment and engagement as levers for national digital advancement and sectoral growth.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study sheds important light on the mechanisms underpinning innovative work behavior in Bangladesh's rapidly evolving telecommunication sector by demonstrating that work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovation. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources model, the findings confirm that psychologically empowered employees are more engaged, and this heightened engagement, in turn, drives their capacity and willingness to innovate. These results reinforce the value of investing in empowerment-oriented HR practices and engagement-enhancing interventions to sustain innovation and organizational competitiveness. The research not only extends the theoretical understanding of these constructs within a non-Western, technology-driven context but also provides practical guidance for leaders and policymakers aiming to foster a culture of continuous improvement and creativity. Future studies should explore longitudinal approaches and additional contextual factors to enrich further our understanding of these dynamic relationships in emerging markets.

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