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Empowerment and Engagement as Drivers of Performance in the Textile Industry

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, organizational behavior research has increasingly focused on work engagement as a central psychological state that fosters both employee well-being and organizational performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Within this growing field, the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model has emerged as one of the most influential theoretical frameworks to explain how work-related demands and resources interact to produce either strain or motivation (Demerouti et al., 2001; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). According to this model, when employees possess sufficient personal and job resources to meet their work demands, they experience higher engagement, energy, and performance.

The present study examines the effects of psychological empowerment and work engagement on job performance among employees in the Chilean textile industry. Specifically, it tests a mediation model where work engagement acts as a mediator between empowerment and performance. This framework provides new insights into the motivational mechanisms through which empowered employees perform more effectively.

The research addresses two gaps. First, there is a limited amount of empirical evidence about work engagement in Latin American contexts, where most organizational behavior constructs are still understudied. Second, the textile industry in Chile—mainly composed of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—faces complex challenges, including competitive pressure, precarious labor conditions, and the need to improve human resource practices (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). Understanding how empowerment and engagement influence employee performance in this context offers practical implications for people management and sustainable productivity.

Psychological empowerment refers to a set of cognitive states that reflect an employee's sense of control, competence, and autonomy at work (Spreitzer, 1995). It is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. This construct functions as a personal resource within the JD–R model: it enhances self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and goal internalization, which, in turn, contribute to higher engagement and performance (Deci et al., 1999; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Empowerment also

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fosters affective commitment—the emotional attachment to one's work and organization—which strengthens employees' willingness to invest effort and creativity in their tasks (Spreitzer, 1995).

Engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Unlike temporary emotions such as job satisfaction or happiness, engagement represents a persistent cognitive-affective state. Engaged employees are highly energetic, mentally resilient, enthusiastic about their work, and fully immersed in their activities.

From the JD–R perspective, engagement arises when high job demands are balanced with high job and personal resources (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Personal resources, such as empowerment, optimism, and self-efficacy, help employees mobilize energy and remain motivated even under pressure. Empirical evidence shows that engagement predicts a wide range of positive outcomes, including in-role performance, creativity, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2011).

Job performance represents the set of behaviors and actions that contribute to achieving organizational goals (Koopmans et al., 2013). The construct is typically divided into four dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive behaviors. The present study focuses on task performance—the core technical activities directly related to job duties and organizational output.

High engagement levels have consistently been associated with greater task performance and productivity (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Empowered employees, in particular, tend to perform better because they perceive autonomy, mastery, and purpose in their work, which enhances intrinsic motivation and perseverance. Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Work engagement mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and job performance.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational design, grounded in a positivist epistemological approach that emphasizes empirical verification. The population consisted of employees from Chilean textile SMEs located in the Metropolitan Region. Data were collected between January and September 2019 using a non-probability convenience sampling method. The final sample included 200 respondents (n = 200), all over 18 years old and actively employed in textile manufacturing. Three validated instruments were used:

1. Psychological Empowerment Scale (Spreitzer, 1995), Spanish version by Menon (1999), measuring perceived control, competence, and goal internalization (7 items).
2. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), short Spanish version validated by Juyumaya (2019).
3. Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (Koopmans et al., 2013), Spanish version by Salessi & Omar (2016), measuring in-role performance (13 items).

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS v.23 and PROCESS Macro v.2 16.23 (Hayes, 2013). Reliability analyses confirmed that all scales had Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .80. A simple mediation model was estimated to test the indirect effect of empowerment on performance via engagement, while controlling for demographic variables. Normality assumptions were verified using Pearson's chi-square tests.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses revealed positive and significant associations among all variables ($p < .01$). Specifically, psychological empowerment correlated positively with both work engagement ($r = .25$) and job performance ($r = .40$), while work engagement correlated positively with job performance ($r = .26$). The internal consistency of the measures was satisfactory ($\alpha = .82–.90$).

The mediation analysis confirmed that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and job performance. The indirect effect was significant, with a 95% confidence interval of LLCI = .23; ULCI = .44 ($p < .05$). This indicates that empowerment enhances performance both directly and indirectly by increasing engagement.

DISCUSSION

The results support all proposed hypotheses and confirm the theoretical assumptions of the JD–R model. Psychological empowerment functions as a personal resource that enhances employees' engagement and, consequently, their job performance. When workers feel autonomous, competent, and purposeful, they experience greater vigor, dedication, and absorption in their tasks, which translates into superior performance outcomes (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

This study extends the empirical validation of the JD–R model by incorporating empowerment as a key antecedent of engagement and performance. It also contributes to the limited evidence on work engagement in Latin American contexts, providing cross-cultural insights into how empowerment and engagement interact within emerging economies.

For managers and HR practitioners in the textile industry, the findings suggest several actionable strategies to enhance employee motivation and performance:

- 360° performance evaluations: Providing multi-source feedback encourages learning, self-awareness, and empowerment.
- Development programs: Initiatives such as coaching, mentoring, upskilling, and reskilling strengthen personal resources and engagement.
- Job crafting practices: Allowing employees to redesign aspects of their roles fosters alignment between personal strengths and job requirements.
- Positive organizational culture and communication: Transparent communication and supportive leadership enhance both empowerment and engagement.

This study presents a mediation model demonstrating that work engagement partially explains how psychological empowerment enhances job performance in the Chilean textile industry. Empowered employees—those who perceive meaning, competence, and self-determination—tend to experience higher engagement, which in turn leads to superior task performance. By providing empirical evidence from a Latin American context, the research underscores the strategic importance of promoting empowerment and engagement as integral components of people management in the 21st century. Building organizations that nurture these psychological resources will not only enhance productivity but also foster well-being and sustainable growth within industries that are vital to national development.

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