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Effect of Psychological Empowerment on Innovative Work Behavior Amongst Academics of Public Universities in Uganda

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Abstract:

The study assessed the effect of psychological empowerment dimensions on innovative work behavior (IWB) for public university academics in Uganda. The specific objectives were: (1) to analyze the effect of self-determination on innovative work behavior among academic staff; (2) to determine the effect of competence on innovative work behavior; (3) to investigate the role of meaning as a dimension on innovative work behavior; and (4) to evaluate the contribution of impact on innovative work behavior. The research design was quantitative that used a sample of 357 academic staff from 10 public universities. Results revealed that all the dimensions of psychological empowerment i.e. self-determination, competence, meaning and impact had a significant effect on innovative work behavior. The findings here highlight the critical role psychological empowerment plays in enhancing innovative work behavior among academics in Uganda. Public universities in Uganda are therefore expected to cultivate and nurture self-determination, ensure staff competence, creativity and meaning with impact that can enlist innovative work behavior in order to enhance not only institutional quality and performance but integrate the university efforts in the national development agenda.

Keywords:

Psychological Empowerment, Innovative Work Behavior, Public Universities, Higher Education

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Introduction

The present increasing desire for the country to enlist innovation through inculcating innovative work behavior among academics, industry owners, the business sector and farmers has remained a critical agenda item for not only the ministry of science and technology but others like education, agriculture and industry (National Planning Authority, 2020). This is because the economic and social competitiveness of any country in this globalized world depends on its ability to develop and translate excellent and groundbreaking scientific knowledge into tangible goods or services that can enable it to penetrate regional and global markets.

Academic innovation capacity therefore represents an important competitive advantage because of its importance in enhancing not only the wellbeing of the population but its impetus in enhancing economic growth, wealth creation, business expansion and technological progress (Beckman & Barry, 2007; Dasgipta & Gupta, 2009). This study focused principally on academic staff because of the pivotal role they play as a key resource and source of innovative ideas that can spur the development of new products, new processes and discoveries that are crucial to enhancing the 3 Cs of customer satisfaction, competition, and change (Mpaata, 2010).

However, in spite of the acknowledged role of innovation, higher education in Uganda still faces enormous obstacles that include bureaucratic hurdles, limited professional research competence, proficiency and excessive workloads, which impede academic staff from effectively engaging in innovative practices (Mushemeza, 2016). It is such challenges that have not only limited the capacity of academics to innovate but also diminished their potential for long-term academic growth (Lwanga et al., 2020). Meanwhile, at present, psychological empowerment has emerged as a critical factor in fostering self-efficacy and creativity motivation among employees (Zhang et al., 2023). Universities are expected to function as engines of innovation and provide society and its economic system with the needed entrepreneurial innovation capability while at the same time mobilizing and sharpening the local and global talented youths (Bedford et al., 2018).

While significant financial and human resources have been deployed to develop and implement educational innovations (Kauffeld & Othmer, 2019; Benz-Gydat et al., 2021), the success of these innovations often hinges on factors such as psychological empowerment which are beyond the obvious financial and technical support requirement. The construct has gained global attention as a key driver of employee engagement and creativity (Marampa et al., 2025). Moreover, studies have shown that when employees feel empowered, they are more likely to take initiative, engage in problem-solving, and drive innovation, making psychological empowerment a vital element in fostering change in higher education (Iqbal et al., 2020; Zhou & Chen, 2021). In this context, psychological empowerment may

hold the key to addressing the complexities and challenges associated with implementing educational innovations on a broader scale.

Globally, psychological empowerment is among the constructs that has been given wide coverage, and according to Li et al. (2015), it is an integral concept in organizational behavior that emphasizes employees' sense of self-efficacy, autonomy, and control over their work outcomes. Psychological empowerment therefore signifies enhanced employee engagement, creativity, and motivation, contributing to better performance and organizational success (Coun, et al., 2022). It also improves individual outcomes and also strengthens interpersonal relationships and teamwork within organizations (Qing et al., 2020). Therefore, the requirement to embed psychological empowerment in the university setting can not only enhance employee motivation and well-being but also foster a culture of trust, innovation, and cohesion, ultimately benefiting the academic institution as a whole (Grošelj et al., 2021).

This research is important because according to Nwachukwu et al., (2022), psychological empowerment nurtures a proactive mindset, encouraging staff to contribute new ideas and approaches that drive organizational growth and adaptability; helps to break down traditional barriers, allowing for greater engagement in innovative work practices (Maziriri et al., 2019). It equally enhances individual motivation for the country to thrive in an increasingly competitive and changing environment (Singh & Sarkar, 2019; Odunayo & Ayodeji, 2017). For public universities in Uganda, where academic quality, research output, and community service are pivotal, the adoption of psychological empowerment can help staff adopt innovative behaviors that is crucial to enhancing the development agenda of the country (Namono et al., 2022), the prevailing challenges of underfunding, low research output, and limited academic autonomy notwithstanding (Etomaru et al., 2016), it is important to investigate and identify the significance of psychological empowerment to innovation because it is the foundation on which the above can base.

The main purpose of this study therefore is to investigate the effect of psychological empowerment on innovative work behavior for academic staff in public universities in Uganda. The specific objectives were;

1. To investigate the role of meaning as a dimension on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda.
2. To determine the effect of competence on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda.
3. To analyze the effect of self-determination on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda.
4. To evaluate the contribution of impact on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda.

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Consequently, the following hypotheses were tested.

1. There is a significant effect of meaning on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda.
2. There is a significant effect of competence on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda.
3. There is a significant effect of the self-determination on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda.
4. There is a significant contribution of impact on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda.

The existing research evidence suggests that psychological empowerment enhances employee innovation by fostering a sense of ownership, motivation, and control (Echebiri et al., 2020). Recent studies have also demonstrated the significance of innovative work behavior in other settings globally (Sahadev et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2019), because innovation is considered as a value-added activity that is responsible for enhancing the quality and quantity of existing works, products, processes and services (Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018) and also a unique competitive advantage that professionals must embrace given the knowledge, innovation capability and capacity it drives (Huang, et al., 2022).

Theoretical Background

The basic theoretical framework linking empowerment to innovative work behavior is basically embedded in the social cognitive theory suggested by Bandura (1986). It is put that a person's cognitive state can be modelled by a conducive work environment and his or her own valued behavior. This sets the historical rationale of the extracted Social Cognitive Theory (1986) which argues that individuals' actions are influenced by their beliefs in their ability to effect outcomes. The theory therefore implies that empowered individuals are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors and thus prepare an organized academic setting where creativity and critical thinking are integrated to support one another (Koutroubas & Galanakis, 2022). Psychological empowerment is therefore described using four cognitions that are expected to influence employee intrinsic motivation. They include; meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995). In this analogy of psychological empowerment, meaning represents a fit between a work target or goal and the person's own ideals, beliefs, values and conviction. The second-dimension competence is taken as the person's belief in his own capacity to perform a certain assigned activity with a desirable level of proficiency. The third, self-determination reflects autonomy over and above the initiation and continuation of the work behavior and processes which involves making decisions about how to work, the methods to use, the pace and time to utilise and efforts put in as examples. Impact refers to the degree or latitude with which a person

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performing the work can contribute and influence the strategic, administrative and the general operating outcomes at work (Spreitzer, 1995).

The four dimensions therefore imply that, in an academic setting, psychological empowerment should make professionals feel that they possess a certain degree of autonomy, feel less constrained by rules, behave proactively, have self-leadership and demonstrate self-effect in enacting their work which enables them to concentrate and come up with new ideas processes, and procedures for implementation in order to be innovative (Amabile & Grykiewicz, 1989).

This study was designed and is anchored on the belief that high psychological empowerment will help the academics to take a more proactive approach towards shaping and influencing their work beyond teaching and research (Meng & Sun, 2019). Such empowerment is expected to be possibly related to innovation because having a sense of control over what to do and how to do can easily enhance the individuals' capacity for innovative behavior (Thao et al., 2024). Support for this view has been globally documented such that in Australia, Knight-Turvey (2006) found that empowerment and innovation are positively linked, Ogbonna and Harris (2000) also concluded that innovation capacity and innovation culture are a function of psychological empowerment.

Conceptual Framework

In developing the conceptual framework for this study, the independent variable comprises the psychological empowerment aspects of; (1) self-determination; (2) competence; (3) meaning; and (4) impact. The dependent variable comprises the innovative work behavior as shown in Figure 1.

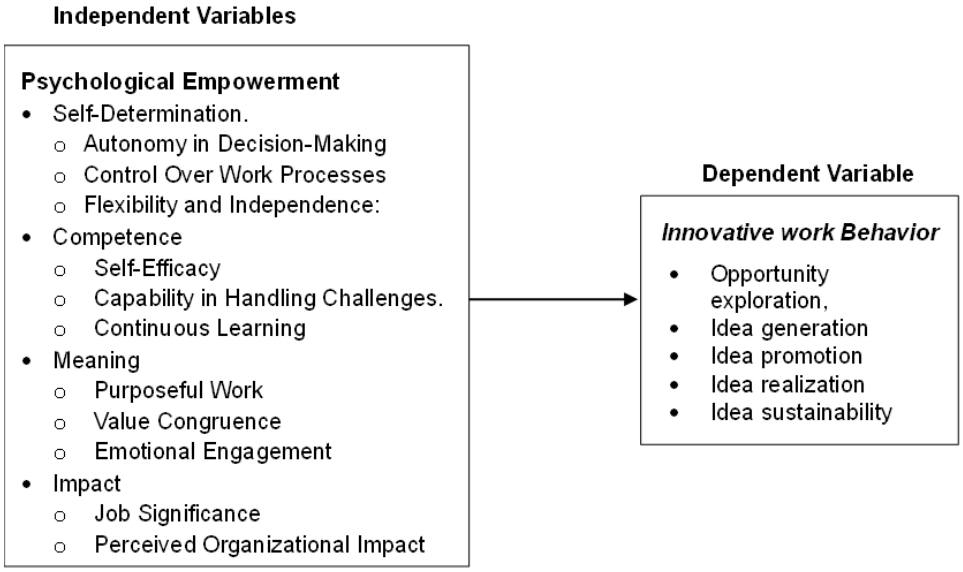

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

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As indicated above, psychological empowerment consists of four (4) dimensions, which are; self-determination, competence, meaning and impact. It is argued that academics' perception of meaningful work influences their innovative work behavior because they are expected to spend extra effort to work on valued outcome from the tasks and duties they have as professionals. Secondly, it is the individual competence that enables them demonstrate higher degrees of proficiency and dexterity at work. Thirdly, self-determination configures the 'what come may' attitude which requires not only psychological preparation but consistent action to explore new opportunities, promote, realise and sustain them as itemised in the dependent variable above. Finally, impact brings out the inner feeling of academic staff that they exhibit when they feel that their work is making a positive difference in others' lives as individuals or communities.

Literature Review

There is overwhelming evidence in modern literature to prove that psychological empowerment has a significant role to play in enhancing innovative work behavior. For example, the study by Aristana, et al. (2024) documents that psychological empowerment fosters innovative work behavior by enhancing motivation, autonomy, and engagement. Using a quantitative approach with data collected from 190 employees in export SMEs in Bali, the researchers document that all four dimensions of psychological empowerment positively affect innovative work behavior. What has not been fully exploited however is how psychological empowerment influences academic innovation and creativity which is the focus of this research. According to the research by Vem et al. (2024), there is a strong relationship between psychological empowerment and academic innovation performance. Similarly, workers who experience psychological empowerment perform better with creativity, commitment and courage (Hassard et al., 2022). Therefore, leadership that unreservedly provides psychological empowerment is most likely to mobilise its staff to emphasize meaning, competence, self-determination and impact that are key components of psychological empowerment (Chompukum & Vanichbuncha, 2025).

Besides, the Cognitive Theory provides that internal beliefs (self-determination), internal motivation (meaning), impact and competence are essential in providing an academic atmosphere that supports innovation (Aghayeva & Wawrzynski, 2023). This means that academics who are psychologically empowered demonstrate competence that has a significant impact on their workplace, behave ethically well, take initiative and have self-leadership and personal drive (Shqerat, 2022).

The study by Liang et al. (2022) confirmed that employees who find their work meaningful show greater commitment and engagement in innovation. Meanwhile, Cropanzano et al. (2017) complemented this view by emphasizing that meaning enhances emotional resilience which allows employees to persist in creative problem-solving despite challenges. Their synthesis supported the earlier view that meaning strengthens the connection between employees and their tasks, fueling creativity and adaptability

(Alkhodary, 2016). Relatedly, Srirahayu et al. (2023) emphasized that competence of employees is reflected in their abilities to interrogate present systems and techniques so as to become innovative in coming up with new methods leading to problem-solving approaches in the new context. In another development, Wan et al., (2022) investigated and confirmed that it is self-efficacy that is linked to greater employee output, confidence, creativity and courage that are key ingredients in generating new ideas.

To support the construct here, Ryan and Deci (2020) argued that self-determination is the cornerstone to intrinsic motivation which enables employees to take initiative in their exploration pursuit. It is for this reason that Ghani et al. (2023) documented that employees who have control over their work are more likely to engage in innovative work behavior. Such employees, according to Bilal et al. (2020), are driven by self-determination, proactiveness and are therefore termed as creative solution pathfinders.

In another development, it is documented that employees who perceive their contributions as valuable engage more in innovative activities (Nikpour, 2018). It is such employees who believe their work makes a difference (Ghani et al. 2023). The study by Albert, et al. (2016) emphasizes the need for employees of high quality in an academic setting who can demonstrate confidence, quality and performance. Their study emphasized the importance of leader-member exchange in influencing modern measures of innovation success in academic settings. Similarly, the study by Fareed, et al. (2023) document that success in a given project is a function of very many attributes important of which are those of psychological empowerment. Similar findings suggest that fostering empowerment with efficient institutional governance structures and autonomy not only drives innovation but also enhances job fulfilment (Amanda et al. 2024).

Most of the academic scholars on innovation agree that creating an atmosphere of interpersonal trust in the organization can enhance organizations' efficiency and innovative performance (Shokley-Zelabak, et al., 2000). The literature review therefore supports the overall hypothesis that academics who perceive greater meaning, greater competence, self-determination and impact exhibit more innovative work behavior (Erturk, 2012). Consequently, according to Walsh et al (2020), creativity indicators is reflected in persons with curiosity, courage, creativity opportunities, self-confidence, stability, persuasion, the desire to be independent person and ability to cope.

Methods and Data

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the effect of psychological empowerment on innovative work behavior for a public university academic staff in Uganda. The target population of this study was 3,396 academics from ten public universities in Uganda. A sample of 357 academic staff was used in the study, of which 308 returned completed and usable questionnaires. The data was analyzed using SPSS 27.0.

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Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose, nature, and potential implications of the research. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. The informed consent obtained from participants was in written form to ensure proper documentation and adherence to ethical standards.

Results

Innovative Work Behavior comprised the dependent variable and it was measured by the extent to which employees propose, promote, and implement new ideas within their organization. The full details of the responses to these items are summarized in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics in Table 1 show that a high proportion of respondents (79.6%) agreed that they share ideas with supervisors to solve work-related problems, and 69.5% affirmed they propose new ideas for development within the university. Similarly, 68.6% of the respondents indicated that they share ideas with colleagues or supervisors about opportunities to improve work methods, and 61.4% reported that they discuss with colleagues how to consolidate newly implemented ideas. On the same note, more than half of the respondents (56.6%) acknowledged awareness of the steps necessary for successful idea implementation, and 55.2% expressed the ability to develop ideas and solutions for creative opportunities in their field. However, a slightly lower percentage (52.1%) believed they could convince others of the importance of an improved idea. Conversely, less than half (51.3%) stated they propose new ideas to key people authorized to allocate resources, and only 44.2% indicated that they promote supervisors' and colleagues' new ideas. A similarly modest proportion (44.0%) agreed that they determine the necessary requirements for realizing a new idea. This therefore implies that although many employees demonstrate a willingness to engage in idea generation and collaboration for innovation, fewer are involved in championing or implementing those ideas, particularly when it involves engaging higher-level decision-makers or identifying required resources.

No.		**Responses**		
		SA &A	**N**	**D & SD**
	Item	**%**	**%**	**%**
1.	I am able to develop ideas and solutions for creative opportunities in my field	55.2	2.5	42.3
2.	I share ideas with colleagues or supervisors about opportunities to develop working methods	68.6	5.0	26.4
3.	I share ideas with supervisors to solve work-related problems	79.6	3.4	17.1
4.	I propose new ideas for development within the university	69.5	5.3	25.2

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No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
		%	%	%
5.	I am able to convince others of the importance of an improved idea	52.1	5.3	42.6
6.	I propose new ideas to people authorized to allocate resources	51.3	4.2	44.5
7.	I promote supervisors' and colleagues' new ideas	44.2	5.3	50.5
8.	I determine the necessary requirements for realizing a new idea	44.0	4.2	51.8
9.	I discuss with colleagues how to consolidate newly implemented ideas	61.4	2.2	36.4
10.	I am aware of steps to ensure successful implementation of a proposed idea	56.6	3.4	40.1

Table 1: Some Responses on Innovative Work Behavior

Analyzing Descriptive Statistics on the Meaning Dimension

Descriptive statistics in Table 2 show that most of the respondents (73.4%) agreed that their work activities are personally meaningful to them, indicating a strong sense of purpose in their roles. Similarly, 73.7% agreed that they are accountable for the outcome of their work, which reflects a high level of personal responsibility and ownership in job performance. Additionally, 77.5% of the respondents agreed that the purpose of their job is aligned with their personal values, suggesting that their work resonates with their individual beliefs and identity. However, only 66.7% of the respondents agreed that the decisions they make at work correspond with their standards and beliefs of the university, while 31.4% disagreed, indicating some disconnect between individual values and institutional practices. Finally, 63.0% of respondents said they care deeply about the tasks they perform at work, although 32.8% disagreed—highlighting that a notable proportion of staff may feel disengaged or less emotionally invested in their daily responsibilities. Overall, the data suggests that while most employees find their work meaningful and aligned with personal values, there remains a portion who experience misalignment or lack of emotional connection to their job tasks.

No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
		%	%	%
1.	My work activities are personally meaningful to me	73.4	1.7	24.9

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2.	The decisions I make at work correspond with my standards and beliefs of the university	66.7	2.0	31.4
3.	I am accountable for the outcome of my work	73.7	1.4	24.9
4.	The purpose of my job is aligned with my personal values	77.5	2.5	19.9
5.	I care deeply about the tasks I perform at work	63.0	4.2	32.8

Table 2: Some responses on the Meaning Dimension

Analyzing the Effect of Meaning as a Dimension of Psychological Empowerment on Innovative Work Behavior of Public University Academic Staff in Uganda

In order to determine the effect of meaning as a dimension of psychological empowerment on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda, a multiple regression analysis was performed, and the results are indicated in table 3.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.798	.192		4.145	.000
	PEM	.191	.054	.239	3.548	.000
	PEC	.184	.054	.210	3.398	.001
	PES	.132	.040	.173	3.320	.001
	PEI	.160	.044	.169	3.639	.000

Table 3: Regression of the four dimensions of Psychological Empowerment on Innovative Work Behavior

a. Dependent Variable: IWB

As indicated in table 3, the regression results support the hypothesis that there is a significant effect of meaning as a dimension of psychological empowerment on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda ($\beta = .191$, $t = 3.548$, $p<0.0001$). The implication here is that meaning is a key psychological driver that can foster creativity, problem-solving, and the generation of new ideas within academic institutions. Enhancing the sense of meaning in academic roles, through supportive leadership, recognition, and alignment with institutional goals, can therefore be an effective strategy for promoting innovation among staff.

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Analyzing Descriptive Statistics on the Competence Dimension

Descriptive statistics in Table 4 show that a majority of the respondents (74.5%) agreed that they are confident in their ability to perform their work, indicating a strong sense of self-efficacy among the workforce. Similarly, 66.9% of the respondents agreed that they can successfully perform all the tasks required in their roles, while 32.0% disagreed, highlighting that most staff feel capable in fulfilling their job demands. Additionally, 64.1% of respondents said they are competent in handling the responsibilities assigned to them, while 33.1% expressed disagreement—suggesting that although confidence is generally high, some staff may feel overwhelmed or underprepared. In terms of skill development, 63.6% of respondents agreed that they periodically receive training to advance their skills, while 30.2% disagreed, pointing to a gap in continuous professional development for some employees. However, only 52.1% of respondents agreed that their work is well-designed to fit their skill level, with 44.9% in disagreement. This reveals a significant concern regarding task alignment, where nearly half of the respondents may be performing roles that do not fully match their qualifications or strengths. Overall, the data suggests that while many employees feel confident and competent, there is a need for better task-skill alignment and more consistent training opportunities.

No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
		%	%	%
1.	I am confident in my ability to perform my work	74.5	00.0	25.5
2.	My work is well-designed to fit my skill level	52.1	3.1	44.9
3.	I periodically receive training to advance my skills	63.6	6.2	30.2
4.	I am competent in handling the responsibilities assigned to me	64.1	2.8	33.1
5.	I can successfully perform all the tasks required in my role	66.9	1.1	32.0

Table 4: Some responses on the Competence Dimension

Analyzing the Effect of Competence as a Dimension of Psychological Empowerment on Innovative Work Behavior of Public University Academic Staff in Uganda

As indicated in table 3, the regression results reveal that competence as a dimension of psychological empowerment has a significant effect on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda (β = .184, t = 3.398, p<0001). This implies that when academic staff in public universities perceive themselves as competent i.e., when they believe they have the skills, knowledge, capability to perform their job tasks effectively, they are more likely to engage in innovative work behavior.

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Analyzing Descriptive Statistics on the Self-Determination Dimension

The analysis of descriptive statistics in Table 5 shows that 81.3% of the respondents agreed that they have great control over their job activities, indicating a high level of perceived autonomy among employees. In addition, 72.0% of the respondents agreed that they have an opportunity to use personal initiative in their work, while only 0.6% were neutral and 27.4% disagreed—showing that most staff feel empowered to take independent action. Furthermore, 63.8% of respondents agreed that they determine ways to improve their job performance, though a notable 29.1% disagreed, suggesting that not all employees feel confident or supported in making improvements on their own. Similarly, 74.5% of the respondents said they are free to choose how to prioritize their work tasks, reflecting a sense of control over their workflow and task management. However, only 57.2% of the respondents agreed that they can make decisions about their work methods without constant approval, while 37.8% disagreed—implying that a significant number of employees still experience restrictions or oversight in how they perform their duties. Overall, the results reflect a generally positive perception of autonomy and meaningfulness in work, though some areas, such as independent decision-making, show room for improvement.

No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
		%	%	%
1.	I have great control over my job activities	81.3	1.7	17.1
2.	I have an opportunity to use personal initiative in my work	72.0	0.6	27.4
3.	I determine the way to improve in my job performance	63.8	7.0	29.1
4.	I am free to choose how to prioritize my work tasks	74.5	0.0	25.5
5.	I can make decisions about my work methods without constant approval	57.2	5.0	37.8

Table 5: Some responses on Self-Determination Dimension

Analyzing the Effect of Self-Determination as a Dimension of Psychological Empowerment on Innovative Work Behavior of Public University Academic Staff in Uganda

As indicated in table 3, the regression results support the hypothesis that there is a significant effect of self-determination as a dimension of psychological empowerment on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda ($\beta = .132$, $t = 3.320$, $p<0.0001$). This implies that self-determination, which reflects the degree to which individuals feel autonomous and free to make choices in their work, plays a critical role in fostering innovation.

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Analyzing Descriptive Statistics on the Impact Dimension

Analysis of the descriptive statistics in Table 6 reveals that the majority of respondents (82.1%) agreed that their opinion counts in the university's decision-making processes, while only 1.1% remained neutral and 16.8% disagreed. A slightly higher proportion (83.7%) of respondents agreed that they have a significant influence on service quality, indicating a strong sense of individual impact among staff, with just 2.0% being neutral and 14.3% in disagreement. Furthermore, 80.1% of the respondents felt that their work contributes to the university's overall goals, suggesting a high level of alignment between individual roles and institutional objectives. However, only 75.3% of participants agreed that they see the results of their work reflected in the organization's progress, while 21.0% disagreed—implying that a notable portion of staff may feel disconnected from the outcomes of their efforts. Another significant finding shows that 82.0% of respondents agreed that their contributions make a difference in the organization. Only 4.8% were neutral and 13.2% disagreed, highlighting a prevailing belief among staff that their input is valued and impactful within the institution. These results collectively suggest that most employees feel engaged, valued, and see themselves as contributors to institutional success.

No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
		%	%	%
1.	My opinion counts in the university decision-making	82.1	1.1	16.8
2.	I have a significant influence on service quality	83.7	2.0	14.3
3.	My work contributes to the company's overall goals	80.1	3.1	16.8
4.	I see the results of my work reflected in the organization's progress	75.3	3.6	21.0
5.	I feel that my contributions make a difference in the organization	82.0	4.8	13.2

Table 6: Some responses on the Impact Dimension

Analyzing the Effect of Impact as a Dimension of Psychological Empowerment on Innovative Work Behavior of Public University Academic Staff in Uganda

As indicated in table 3, the regression results support the hypothesis that there is a significant effect of impact as a dimension of psychological empowerment on innovative work behavior of public university academic staff in Uganda ($\beta = .160$, $t = 3.639$, $p<0.0001$). This implies that when academic staff in public universities perceive that their work has a meaningful impact on their institution or broader society, they are more likely to engage in innovative work behavior.

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Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	101.494	4	25.374	58.260	.000[b]
	Residual	153.304	352	.436		
	Total	254.798	356			

Table 7: Anova Results

a. Dependent Variable: IWB

b. Predictors: (Constant), PEI, PES, PEC, PEM

The results from the ANOVA in Table 7 show that the overall regression model significantly predicts innovative work behavior ($F = 58.260$, $p < 0.0001$). This means that all the dimensions of psychological empowerment jointly have a meaningful influence on innovative work behavior.

Discussion

The study's findings provide empirical support for the hypothesis that psychological empowerment significantly influences innovative work behavior amongst academic staff. This construct hinges on four dimensions that are: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. It is these that can positively influence innovative work behavior and this finding is also confirmed by Helmy, et al. (2019). The findings here empirically show that: 1) a sense of empowerment can make academics in Uganda more motivated to engage in research and innovation programs thereby cultivating innovative work behavior. Academics ought to believe that their work is important to the academic community and society which they are supposed to serve (Singh and Sarkar, 2012): 2) when academics are managed and facilitated, they can sufficiently demonstrate expertise and utilize the skills they have in research, innovation and community engagement thereby deepening their innovative research methods and strategies (Lê & Schmid, 2020): 3) autonomy provided to the academics in teaching, research and student engagement is very key in determining the research directions, methods and schedules that are important for them to concentrate and think about new ideas and how to roll them out: and 4) when academics feel that their research efforts can make a contribution to the discipline that they are delivering and the new programs they come up with to respond to community needs, they are better motivated and energized to pursue creative research directions (Li et al., 2017).

Recent research also clearly points out that the availability of staff with different unique skills enhance institutional innovation capacity (Khan, et al. 2022). The specific skills here include: 1) staff with skills in developing partnerships/projects involving external actors such as other universities, companies, government agencies or civil society groups: 2) staff with knowledge and contacts of funding schemes

for innovation activities: 3) staff with skill to provide support for students and colleagues as well as other external partners in setting up spin-offs and start-ups as part of incubation centers; 4) staff with skill to develop and deliver knowledge linked with entrepreneurial education: and 5) staff with competence in the management and commercialization of innovation activities that can help technology transfer, etc. (Soares & Torkomian, 2021).

In line with the findings of Cropanzano, et al. (2017) as well as Singh and Sarkar (2012) who concluded that the quality of psychological empowerment determines the quality of innovative work behavior generated, this study adds that cultivating innovative work behavior requires psychological empowerment as its foundation. This is also echoed by Malik et al. (2021) who psychological empowerment is a key attribute to autonomy and a prime mover of creativity, imagination and research effort stimulation among academics. The findings here also reenforce the social cognitive theoretical argument in that meaningful academic exchange in the day-to-day work and supervision of academics in Uganda not only demand for physical resources per se but psychological empowerment as well for the academics to engage and concentrate on innovation. Therefore, public universities are challenged to provide research facilities, databases, funds and the necessary academic infrastructure to facilitate the development of research so as to register quality results or output.

Public Universities ought also to lobby government to earmark adequate resources for academics to enhance their psychological empowerment. The findings here imply that this demand cannot be a one-sided affair in that the academics are also expected to use the social exchange theory and the dimensions of social support to reciprocate and demonstrate intellectual curiosity that demand academic research output so as to fulfil the contracts they have with their respective universities. While academics demonstrate competence in classroom teaching and guidance, they need to strengthen cutting-edge research and innovation that has meaningful impact (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Innovative higher education, according to Thurlings, et al. (2015), should be prepared to psychologically empower the academic staff to transfer innovative skills to students not only through innovative teaching but train such academics to competently transfer the creative knowledge they have acquired in the work setting. Sadly, however, innovation in the Ugandan education sector has been reported to be demanding with various researchers reporting inability of universities to carryout research and generate novel work procedures (Kasule et al., 2016). As a result of this inability, the country has been in demand of innovative graduates for the job market and therefore lag behind despite implementation of its mass education strategy (Mpaata & Mpaata, 2018).

Practically, the findings here contribute to the need to ensure that academics are empowered with rewards that motivate innovation and they reciprocate by demonstrating competence, self-determination and impact through new idea generation that are linked to the country's problems (Dehning, et al. (2020).

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This study is also in line with the finding of Iftikhar, et al. (2016) who noted that psychological empowerment requires academics to be leaders who can manage themselves as the most respected policy holders in the country and change agents. Therefore, their behavior is not only admired and respected by the local communities but also cherished the international actors at different stages (Kansiime, 2023). It is universities with competent self-determined and meaningful academics who have the abilities and social interactions that are needed to enlist innovative work behavior (Ibus et al., 2020).

The social exchange theory as employed in this research is not only an important tool for effective empowerment but the research here shows that the primary requirement for this theory to work in Uganda is to cultivate and build psychological empowerment so that the academics are brought to board with meaning, competence, self-determination and impact before they can productively engage in innovation.

Put another way, attitude preparation and positive change become the precursor for recognition of an opportunity for scientific inquiry, productive fund utilization and it is the antenna that supports scientific expertise and generates returns more than the resources invested or required (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). It is also the software for a productive base that generates concentration, supports entrepreneurial activities and configures ideas that can commercialize science and technology with vibrant topologies of incubation that can create and support new industries and academic spin-off companies (Hessels et al. 2020). The survey results by Kozirog, et al. (2022) clearly demonstrate that innovation is already a key priority for universities. However, they also reveal a gap between universities' strategic attention to innovation and their innovation capacity. Linked with this research, the report pinpoints that access to funding, competent staff and co-creation creativity and imagination play a key role in meeting university ambitions.

In Uganda, beyond the specific resource needs, university innovation and innovative work behavior depends largely on framework conditions such as infrastructure, institutional leadership and the general work environment that are prerequisites for empowerment that can help universities to engage with society (Jjagwe et al., 2024). These framework conditions are vital to help institutions fulfil their crucial role as honest brokers, through the development of independent, quality and innovative solutions to current and future challenges (Kruachottikul et al., 2023). This research adds that success in the quest surrounding the innovative eco-system that can bring curiosity-driven research and improve transfer of research results into innovations requires psychological empowerment of the main actors who can help in the continuous upskilling and reskilling of students who come to the university at different times and in different age brackets. Therefore, University innovation should be strongly embedded in the institutional goals and budgeted for by government because resources play a key role in meeting university ambitions in the area of innovation.

The practical implication of this study is specifically for decision makers and practitioners to: 1) help public universities that are already driving the research agenda develop engagements with companies and other stakeholders to build innovative work behavior culture amongst academics: 2) develop sound and appropriate government structures to ensure that innovation processes are embedded within the university strategies: 3) build a relevant eco-system of stakeholders to support university research and avoid the stickiness of new knowledge (Rådberg & Löfsten, 2023): and 4) develop a consensus view on the promotion of innovative mindsets that involve industry as a partner in planting and rewarding the seeds of creative thinking and entrepreneurial networking with different disadvantaged groups and individuals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal that psychological empowerment plays a critical role in cultivating innovative work behavior among academic staff in public universities. While investments in infrastructure and funding are essential, this research underscores that the foundation for institutional innovation lies in empowering academics psychologically. For higher education institutions to thrive in today's dynamic and competitive landscape, academic staff must be enabled to perform their roles creatively and autonomously. Psychological empowerment, which is expressed through meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact serves as a catalyst for generating and implementing novel ideas. The study suggests that recruiting competent academics is only the first step given that institutions must also foster an environment that enhances motivation and builds confidence. Strategic efforts to strengthen self-determination and a sense of purpose among staff are essential to drive innovation that addresses societal challenges. Therefore, university leaders and policymakers are urged to prioritize psychological empowerment as a core element of academic development and institutional growth, advancing new approaches to teaching, research, and community engagement.

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