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Structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and work engagement: A cross-country study

Ariadna Monje Amor [a, *], Despoina Xanthopoulou [b], Nuria Calvo [a], José Pablo Abeal Vázquez [a]

[a] Faculty of Economics and Business, University of A Coruña, Campus de Elviña S/n, 15071, A Coruña, Spain
[b] Faculty of Philosophy, School of Psychology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, University Campus, 54124, Thessaloniki, Greece

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ABSTRACT

In this cross-country study we drew on job demands-resources theory to investigate whether psychological empowerment mediates the positive association between structural empowerment and work engagement and, consequently, task performance and intention to quit. A total of 1033 employees working in the service sector in Spain ($N = 515$) and the United Kingdom ($N = 518$) participated in the study. Multi-group structural equation modeling analyses revealed that psychological empowerment partially mediated the positive relationship between structural empowerment and work engagement, and that work engagement associated positively with task performance and negatively with intention to quit. Invariance analyses suggested that the positive link between psychological empowerment and work engagement was stronger for employees working in the UK than in Spain, providing support for partial structural invariance of the hypothesized model. These findings suggest that psychological empowerment is an underlying mechanism that may explain why structural empowerment relates positively to work engagement with implications for theory (i.e., extend the nomological network of the investigated constructs) and management practice (e.g., emphasize the role of structural empowerment for work design).

1. Introduction

Research on work engagement has burgeoned because engaged employees report better health and higher well-being, while they contribute to organizational effectiveness, performance, sales, and customer satisfaction (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002) defined work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). Vigor refers to increased energy, mental resilience and keenness to dedicate time and effort in one's work. Dedication alludes to meaningful work, pride and zeal. Absorption involves being fully focused and engrossed in one's work so that time flies.

According to job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), job (e.g., autonomy, feedback) and personal (e.g., resilience, optimism) resources are the main antecedents of work engagement (for a meta-analysis, Halbesleben, 2010). However, there are other (similar) factors that may contribute to an engaged workforce. Psychological and structural empowerment can be such factors since organizations are increasingly using empowerment as a management technique to promote employee engagement and performance (Boamah & Laschinger, 2015). Psychological empowerment refers to a state of increased intrinsic task motivation that comprises four cognitive components: sense of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). These cognitions occur within the person and reflect positive experiences derived from the task itself. Though sparse (Bhatnagar, 2012; Macsinga, Sulea, Sârbescu, Fischmann, & Dumitru, 2015; Ugwu, Onyishi, & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2014; Wang & Liu, 2015), literature has demonstrated that psychological empowerment relates positively to work engagement. Structural empowerment refers to the existence of social structures at work that allow individuals to achieve their work goals through access to opportunities, relevant information, support and resources (Kanter, 1977). The role of structural empowerment for work engagement has received far less attention

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: ariadna.monje@udc.es, ariadnamonje@outlook.com (A. Monje Amor).

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than that of psychological empowerment, being mainly explored in healthcare settings (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005; Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Wilk, 2001; Laschinger, Wilk, Cho, & Greco, 2009). Also, the interplay between structural and psychological empowerment in explaining work engagement has been largely neglected (Monje Amor, Abeal Vázquez, & Faíña, 2020).

In the present cross-country study, this gap in the research literature will be addressed. Specifically, we investigate both structural and psychological empowerment as drivers of work engagement and consequently, intention to quit, and task performance. More so, based on JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), this study aims at exploring the extent to which structural empowerment works through psychological empowerment to explain work engagement. The proposed mediating mechanism is tested across employees working in Spain and the UK to study whether there are differences in the hypothesized processes across these two samples. Although these countries share some work features such as high work intensity and supportive social relationships, they differ in the levels of job insecurity (higher in Spain) and skill variety (higher in the UK; Eurofound, 2017). Also, in terms of cultural characteristics, Spain is considered a more collectivistic country than the UK (Hofstede, 2001), suggesting that social bonds are stronger in Spain (Palamida, Papagiannidis, & Xanthopoulou, 2018). Since structural empowerment concerns social structures, while psychological empowerment puts the emphasis on the individual, it is relevant to investigate whether their role for work engagement is similar in countries that vary in terms of social norms.

This study makes the following contributions to the literature. First, it advances the empowerment literature by suggesting that psychological empowerment may explain why structural empowerment makes employees more engaged with their work. Although previous studies have supported the positive associations of both structural (Boamah & Laschinger, 2015) and psychological (Bhatnagar, 2012; Wang & Liu, 2015) empowerment with work engagement, this study adds value by trying to unravel the process through which structural empowerment makes employees more engaged. Also, although previous studies have supported the role of psychological empowerment in explaining why structural empowerment prevents employee burnout (O'Brien, 2011; Zhang, Ye, & Li, 2018), in this study we test whether the same process may facilitate employee motivation. Second, this study expands the nomological network of work engagement by investigating simultaneously structural and psychological empowerment as potential antecedents, while shedding light on the psychological processes through which these two types of empowerment may explicate this phenomenon and its outcomes. Finally, by testing the invariance of the hypothesized processes across Spain and the UK, we investigate their external validity in two countries with different structural and cultural characteristics. This is of theoretical relevance because support for invariance across countries would suggest that the theoretical assumptions hold irrespective of potential work-related and/or cultural differences. In contrast, lack of invariance would highlight differences across countries that would open avenues for future research aiming to better understand these differences.

1.1. Theoretical framework

To comprehend the role of structural and psychological empowerment for work engagement and its outcomes, we will use JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) as the study framework. JD-R theory postulates that the working conditions are mainly responsible for employee well-being and performance. Accordingly, this theory recognizes that job characteristics can be divided into two broad categories: job demands and job resources that may explain employee energy depletion and motivation, respectively. Job demands (e.g., workload, work pressure, job insecurity) are the aspects of the job that require that employees invest energy and hence, have certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Job resources (e.g., social support, quality coaching) are "aspects of the job that may: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development" (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001, p. 501). Job demands initiate a health-impairment process resulting in energy depletion and health problems, whereas job resources may instigate a motivational process leading to work engagement.

Based on the main assumption of self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), JD-R theory suggests that job resources may promote intrinsic motivation by fostering employees' growth, learning and development, and extrinsic motivational by facilitating the fullfilment of work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Also, JD-R theory recognizes that personal resources (i.e., the sense of one's ability to control and influence the work environment positively; e.g., self-efficacy, optimism and self-esteem; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007) play the exact same role as job resources in the motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Namely, availability of personal resources may facilitate goal fulfillment and may promote personal development thus, making employees more engaged. Previous research suggested that job resources relate positively to work engagement because employees feel that they possess higher levels of personal resources when working in resourceful environments (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). In the present study we argue that structural and psychological empowerment share similar qualities with job and personal resources, respectively, and thus, may have similar functions in explaining work engagement and its outcomes.

1.2. Structural and psychological empowerment

Structural empowerment refers to certain social workplace conditions and policies at work (Kanter, 1977) that facilitate access to opportunities, information, support and resources. Opportunities for learning and development include access to challenging work, new skills and knowledge that allow professional growth. The second empowering work condition involves having access to information regarding organizational aims, values, policies and decisions. Support entails getting feedback and help from colleagues, subordinates and management. Resources refer to acquiring temporary help when needed and time indispensable to carry out one's work, which help achieve organizational objectives.

Psychological empowerment, in contrast, is a motivational state involving four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). Meaning indicates the degree to which individuals perceive their work is significant or meaningful. Competence refers to one's ability, skills and capabilities to accomplish their work. Self-determination is an employee's perception of having choice at work and freedom on how they do their job. Impact concerns the perceived influence of one's work on the organization or department. According to Spreitzer (1995), management may play a significant role in enhancing the four dimensions of psychological empowerment via work design in order to promote workforce empowerment.

Structural empowerment concerns social structures that facilitate the employees' work, whereas psychological empowerment refers to the positive experiences that individuals obtain directly from tasks when the cognitions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact are satisfied (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001). Structural empowerment has similarities with the concept of job

resources, since both refer to aspects in the work environment that facilitate goal attainment. The value added in testing structural empowerment is that it may be seen as a higher-order construct that incorporates specific types of job aspects (e.g., information and opportunities for development) that may be relevant for all employees (Kanter, 1977) irrespective of the occupational context they work in. Similarly, despite the fact that both psychological empowerment and personal resources refer to individual qualities that are motivational in nature, the difference between the two concepts is that personal resources are individual characteristics (e.g., optimism, self-efficacy and hope), while psychological empowerment refers to positive individual experiences (e.g., meaning) that derive from the task itself. Therefore, structural and psychological empowerment have certain, unique aspects when compared to job and personal resources which explain the relevance of testing them as drivers of work engagement.

1.3. Structural empowerment and work engagement

Kanter (1977, p. 166) describes power as "the ability to get things done, to mobilize resources". She contends that empowering work conditions (i.e., opportunities, information, support and instrumental resources) influence employee work attitudes and behaviors in achieving organizational goals in meaningful ways. When these social structures are present, employees are more likely to be engaged. For example, Boamah and Laschinger (2015) revealed that structural empowerment -together with psychological capital- were positively associated with work engagement. Further, Laschinger et al. (2009) showed that structural empowerment related to higher effectiveness and work engagement among nurses.

JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) adopts the main assumptions of self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) to explain why resources that form structural empowerment promote work engagement. Accordingly, empowering work conditions may enhance work engagement by stimulating employees' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In contexts where employees have access to development opportunities, support or necessary material to perform their tasks, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated as these fulfil the basic human needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For instance, opportunities for development increase employees' growth and learning, thus fostering job competence. Such work environments may also promote extrinsic motivation since the availability of empowering work conditions may directly facilitate work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Prior empirical evidence (e.g., Laschinger et al., 2001; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2018; Schaufeli, Martínez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009) demonstrated that the factors that form structural empowerment such as performance feedback, opportunities for development, organizational and social support cultivate work engagement. These arguments lead to the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Structural empowerment relates positively to work engagement.

1.4. Psychological empowerment and work engagement

Despite the burgeoning interest in the favorable role of psychological empowerment for work outcomes such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment, only a few studies have examined its relationship with work engagement (Bhatnagar, 2012; Macsinga et al., 2015; Ugwu et al., 2014; Wang & Liu, 2015). Previous research has demonstrated that psychological empowerment partially mediated the positive relationship between professional nursing practice environment and work engagement (Wang & Liu, 2015). Macsinga et al. (2015) highlighted the incremental value of psychological empowerment -along with extraversion and conscientiousness-in explaining work engagement. In the same vein, Bhatnagar (2012) found that psychological empowerment related positively to work engagement that, in turn, associated positively with innovation and negatively with turnover intention.

Based on JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), it can be argued that when employees believe that their work is important (meaning), are able to do their job (competence), have choice (self-determination) and their work has significant influence in their department (impact), they will be more likely to exhibit autonomous motivation resulting in more energy, dedication and absorption in their work. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. Psychological empowerment relates positively to work engagement.

1.5. The mediating role of psychological empowerment

According to Kanter (1977), in order for organizations to be empowering, they must provide access to information about the organization's current state, its values and goals because this gives employees a sense of meaning and purpose (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Similarly, Spreitzer (1995) argued that psychological empowerment is the response to empowering practices and conditions through which employees perceive their work as being meaningful and having impact. In this context, we proposed that structural empowerment may be a precondition for psychological empowerment to occur. Nevertheless, the mediating role of psychological empowerment as a core mechanism linking structural empowerment and work engagement has not been studied so far.

This proposition is in line with JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) which suggests that job resources may reinforce personal resources in explaining work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). According to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), structural empowerment may satisfy the basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness leading to psychological empowerment, which are fundamental for growth, social development and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, feedback and guidance (support dimension) nurtures learning thus, increasing competence. Gagné and Deci (2005) found that employees who have access to relevant information about the company performance, values and policies of the organization (information dimension), they perceive their work as more meaningful when they find value in the information given. Similarly, on-the-job learning (opportunity dimension) makes individuals more independent and autonomous (Sabiston & Laschinger, 1995).

Previous research showed that structural empowerment is an important driver of psychological empowerment (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Wilk, 2004; Purdy, Laschinger, Finegan, Kerr, & Olivera, 2010; Sun, Zhang, Qi, & Chen, 2012). To date, however, this relationship has been mainly explored in healthcare settings. For example, Sun et al. (2012) suggested that perceptions of empowering workplace conditions led to changes in psychological states of empowerment, influencing employees' creativity in Chinese organizations. Purdy et al. (2010) concluded that structural empowerment associated positively with psychological empowerment which, in turn, increased empowered behaviors, job satisfaction and care quality among nurses and patients in Canada. Along these lines, Laschinger et al. (2004) discovered in their longitudinal study among nurses that changes in structural

empowerment were positively associated with psychological empowerment and, ultimately, with job satisfaction.

Given that structural empowerment may be a driver of psychological empowerment, we argue that psychological empowerment may also be the underlying mechanism explaining why structural empowerment associates positively to employee engagement. In this context, previous research showed that psychological empowerment may explain why specific factors in the work environment, that have similar qualities to structural empowerment, relate to engagement. For example, Albrecht and Andreetta (2011) empirically showed that psychological empowerment fully mediated the positive relationship between empowering leadership and work engagement among health service employees. Aryee and Chen (2006) discovered in their study among Chinese employees that psychological empowerment fully mediated the relationship between quality leader-member exchange and higher job satisfaction, lower psychological withdrawal behavior and enhanced task performance. Along these lines, Avolio, Zhu, Koh, and Bhatia (2004) found psychological empowerment to mediate the positive association between transformational leadership and organizational commitment in the healthcare industry in Singapore. Based on this evidence, we postulate that when an organization gives to its employees access to opportunities, information, support and resources, employees experience higher psychological empowerment that, in turn, makes them more engaged. That is due to the fact that employees who are motivated are more likely to reciprocate through higher engagement (Putra, Cho, & Liu, 2015). Thus, the following hypothesis of partial mediation is formulated, since other factors (e.g., personal resources) may also mediate the hypothesized relationship:

Hypothesis 3. Psychological empowerment partially mediates the positive relationship between structural empowerment and work engagement.

1.6. Outcomes of work engagement: intention to quit and task performance

The significance of work engagement resides in its positive role in employee attitudes, behaviors and organizational outcomes (Bakker, 2011). In this study, we focus on two relevant work behaviors: intention to quit and task performance. Intention to quit is important because employee turnover entails high costs for organizations in terms of time, money (e.g., training, recruitment) and losing talented employees (Carmeli & Weisberg, 2006). Work engagement is expected to limit intention to quit and foster employee retention because engaged employees have a positive attitude towards their work and find a meaning in it and thus, leaving their work may be a threat to their work identity (De Lange, De Witte, & Notelaers, 2008). Indeed, empirical evidence has suggested that work engagement relates negatively with turnover intention (Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard, & Bhargava, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Shuck, Twyford, Reio, & Shuck, 2014), turnover (De Lange et al., 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009).

Task performance refers to the outcome of performance with respect to the completion of assigned duties and fulfillment of work responsibilities (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Why does work engagement enhance performance? First, engaged employees may perform better because they experience positive emotions such enthusiasm, interest and optimism (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). These emotions widen their thought-action repertoires and build their personal resources (Fredrickson, 2001) such as vigor, dedication and absorption. Second, engaged employees are more likely to feel confident in fulfilling their work goals, while they are also more likely to make better use of the available resources (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Indeed, prior research demonstrated that work engagement relates positively to both self-rating (Bakker, Demerouti, & Brummelhuis, 2012) and supervisor-rating of task performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). Consequently, in line with previous research, we posit:

Hypothesis 4. Work engagement is negatively related to intention to quit.

Hypothesis 5. Work engagement is positively related to task performance.

1.7. A cross-national comparison between Spain and the UK

An additional aim of the present study is to investigate whether the hypothesized model is invariant across employees from two countries -Spain and the UK- that share similarities but also differ with regard to work characteristics, access to opportunities and cultural values. The last European working conditions survey (Eurofound, 2017) demonstrated that these two countries are similar with regard to working time quality, average weekly working hours, work intensity and perception of supportive social relationships. However, the work environment of employees in Spain is less favorable than that of employees in the UK. More specifically, gender inequality in managerial positions is more pronounced in Spain as well as job insecurity, because of the high proportion of temporary employees. Also, British employees experience higher levels of skill variety, work-life balance, access to training, prospects for career advancement and opportunities for learning and development than Spanish employees. In line with the boosting hypothesis of JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), these differences may imply that the role of structural and consequently, psychological empowerment may be more prominent in explaining work engagement in more challenging work environments (i.e., Spain). The cultural backgrounds of these two countries are also distinct, with Spain being more collectivistic and the UK being more individualistic (Hofstede, 2001). These cultural differences may also imply that structural empowerment (as a social structure) may play a more prominent role in more collectivistic countries, while psychological empowerment (as a personal structure) may play a more prominent role in more individualistic countries. Hence, it is relevant to investigate the external validity of the hypothesized processes to test whether their role for work engagement is similar in countries that vary regarding their levels of environmental characteristics and social norms. Because this is the first study examining the proposed relationships, while the differences in levels of work and cultural characteristics may work in antagonistic ways, we follow an exploratory approach and instead of formulating a specific hypothesis, we propose the following research question:

Research question 1: Is the hypothesized model invariant across countries?

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Data were collected in February–March 2019 through Qualtrics. Potential participants received an email invitation, enquiring completion of the questionnaire and when accepted, the online questionnaire was sent. Individuals were informed about the purpose of the study, and the study procedure. Eligible participants were employees of 18 years or above. The study was conducted in service organizations and two separate samples were examined.

Sample 1 comprised 515 employees working in Spain. Fifty-one

percent of participants were female, their mean age was 40 ($SD = 11.93$), their mean organizational tenure was 10 ($SD = 8.36$), 59.8% worked full time and 14.80% were temporary employees. Participants worked in a wide range of services including technical and professional services (15.10%), commercial services (13.60%), hospitality and tourism (13.20%) and educational services (8.90%). Participants were working in small (42.50%), medium-sized (40.20%) and large organizations (17.30%).

Sample 2 included 518 participants working in the UK. Fifty percent of participants were female, their mean age was 39 ($SD = 13.74$), their mean organizational tenure was 13 ($SD = 11.65$), 43.60% worked full time and 6.80% were temporary employees. They worked in technical and professional services (15.60%), health care or social assistance (14.50%), educational services (10.60%) and hospitality and tourism (9.80%). Participants were employed by small (36.20%), medium-sized (41.30%) and large organizations (22.50%).

Results of one-way analyses of variance indicated that employees working in Spain and in the UK did not differ significantly with regard to age [$F(1,1031) = 0.83$, $p = .36$], type of contract [$F(1,1031) = 2.87$, $p = .09$] and type of industry [$F(1,1031) = 1.87$, $p = .17$]. However, British employees reported higher organizational tenure [$F(1,1031) = 23.39$, $p < .001$] and Spanish employees worked more hours per week on average [$F(1,1031) = 30.92$, $p < .001$]. Thus, the two country samples were relatively comparable regarding demographics.

2.2. Measures

Questionnaires were distributed in the Spanish and English language. When validated Spanish versions of the original scale in English were not available, scales were translated to Spanish from English with the method of back translation. Unless otherwise stated, scale items were rated on a seven-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree.

Structural empowerment was measured using the shortened 12-item scale developed by Laschinger et al. (2001) and its Spanish version that was validated by Jáimez Román and Bretones (2013). This scale includes three items for each of the four dimensions of structural empowerment, namely opportunity (e.g., "I have the chance to gain new skills and knowledge on the job"), information (e.g., "I have information about the goals of the organization"), support (e.g., "I receive helpful hints or problem solving advice") and resources (e.g., "I have time available to do necessary paperwork"). Participants indicated the degree to which these conditions occur in their workplace by responding on a five-point scale with anchors (1) not at all to (5) in great deal. One item from the subscale of resources (i.e., "Time available to accomplish job requirements") was eliminated from the analyses since it had a factor loading lower than 0.60 and a non-significant factor loading across both samples (see also, Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

Psychological empowerment. The 12-item scale of Spreitzer's (1995) and its Spanish adaptation (Albar, García-Ramírez, López Jiménez, & Garrido, 2012) were used to measure the dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Each subscale contains three items. Example items are: "The work that I do is very important to me" (meaning); "I have mastered the skills necessary for my job" (competence); "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job" (self-determination); "I have significant influence over what happens in my department" (impact). One item from the self-determination sub-scale (i.e., "I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job") was removed from the analyses because the factor loading was non-significant across the two samples.

Work engagement was assessed with the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). This scale measures the three dimensions of vigor (e.g., "At my work, I feel bursting with energy"), dedication (e.g., "My job inspires me") and absorption (e.g., "I am immersed in my work"), with three items each.

Intention to quit was assessed with the 5-item scale developed by Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997). An example item is: "I am seriously thinking about quitting my job".

Task performance was measured with five items from the scale by Williams and Anderson (1991). An example item is: "I adequately complete assigned duties".

2.3. Analytical approach

Data screening was conducted, and five multivariate outliers were removed. Analyses were performed with Amos version 25 (Arbuckle, 2017). First, the measurement model was analyzed by means of confirmatory factor analyses in each sample separately. Then, we performed multi-group confirmatory factor analyses to assess measurement invariance across the Spanish and the British samples (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Next, hypotheses were tested with structural equation modeling. The covariance matrix was analyzed with the maximum likelihood estimation method (Brown, 2006). In all analyses, for multi-dimensional constructs, the sub-dimensions were used as indicators of their respective latent variables (Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994; Hair et al., 2010). Intention to quit and task performance items were used as indicators loading on their corresponding factor.

We compared the proposed five-factor measurement model (i.e., structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, work engagement, intention to quit and task performance operationalized by their respective sub-dimensions) with five nested models (i.e., three four-factor models, a three-factor model and a one-factor model) to establish discriminant validity: a) a four-factor model in which structural and psychological empowerment indicators loaded on the same factor, b) a four-factor model in which psychological empowerment and work engagement indicators loaded on the same factor, c) a four-factor model in which structural empowerment and work engagement indicators loaded on the same factor, d) a three-factor model where structural empowerment, psychological empowerment and work engagement loaded on the same factor, and e) a one-factor model where all indicators loaded on a single latent factor.

Next, we tested measurement invariance across the two country samples (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). This is important because cross-country comparisons can only be performed when the underlying constructs mean the same across the samples (Meredith, 1993). We tested configural (i.e., whether the same factor structure is the same across the two samples) and metric (i.e., whether participants respond to the scale items in the same way irrespective of their group membership) invariance. Testing configural invariance involves fitting the unconstrained hypothesized measurement model across groups to test whether the factor structure is invariant (Byrne, 2010). To test for metric invariance, equality constraints were imposed on factor loadings across the different groups.

To test the study hypotheses, multi-group analyses were performed, and three different models were fit to the data. The first model (M1) was a partial mediation model (i.e., the hypothesized model) and it was compared to the full mediation model (M2). The last model (M3) tested the alternative hypothesis that structural empowerment would mediate the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. Bootstrapping was performed using 2000 resamples from the observed sample and 95 bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) to evaluate the

hypothesized indirect effect (Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon, Coxe, & Baraldi, 2012). Indirect effects are significant when CI do not include zero. To test Research Question 1, structural invariance across the two country samples was investigated by means of pairwise parameter comparisons. Therefore, structural paths were constrained to be equal across groups. When critical ratios for differences between parameters exceed the value of |1.96|, parameters vary significantly across the samples.

Several indices were used to assess the model fit, as suggested by Bollen (1989) and Bentler (1990). We used the Chi-square (χ^2) statistic, the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), the Normed Fit Index (NFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI); the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) to assess model fit. Non-significant values of χ^2 indicate good fit. However, this test is very sensitive to sample size (Bollen, 1989). Values of GFI, NFI, TLI and CFI greater or equal to 0.90 indicate good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). RMSEA values around 0.06 are acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999), although a cut-off value of 0.05 is suggested by Browne and Cudeck (1993). A SRMR cut-off value of 0.08 is accepted (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For non-nested models, lower values of AIC were used to determine which model had the best fit (Akaike, 1974). When invariance was tested, the $\Delta\chi^2$ and ΔCFI were used to compare nested models (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). A statistically non-significant value of $\Delta\chi^2$ contends that the measurement model is invariant across groups. An absolute ΔCFI greater than 0.01 indicates that there is a significant change in the model fit and lack of invariance across the samples. Because the $\Delta\chi^2$ is sensitive to sample size (Bollen, 1989), ΔCFI is used as a decisive criterion to determine whether invariance holds.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, average variance extracted (AVE) and internal consistencies among all variables under study for each sample. Values of AVE and Cronbach's alpha of all scales and subscales met the 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and 0.70 (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008; Nunnally, 1978) criteria, respectively. Table 2 provides the correlations among the variables for both samples. All correlations were in the expected direction and most of them were significant at the 0.05 level or lower.

The Harman's single factor test was performed by loading all dimensions on a single factor to check for common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Results showed that the single factor did not explain most of the total variance (46% in Spain and 42% in the UK).

3.2. Measurement model and invariance

All standardized factor loadings of the five-factor measurement model were statistically significant at $p < .001$ and greater than 0.70 on their respective constructs (Kline, 2011). In addition, the standardized residuals were lower than 2.58 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). The five-factor model revealed an acceptable fit to the data in Spain (χ^2 [179] = 733.31; $p < .001$; GFI = 0.88; NFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.93; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.05) and the UK (χ^2 [179] = 814.45; $p < .001$; GFI = 0.87; NFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.91; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.06). Next, results indicated that the five-factor model provided a significantly better fit than all alternative, nested models: the four-factor model a) ($\Delta\chi^2$ [4] = 505.63, $p < .001$ in Spain and $\Delta\chi^2$ [4] = 537.53, $p < .001$ in the UK), the four-factor model b) ($\Delta\chi^2$ [4] = 638.83, $p < .001$ in Spain and $\Delta\chi^2$ [4] = 493.15, $p < .001$ in the UK), the four-factor model c) ($\Delta\chi^2$ [4] = 318.51, $p < .001$ in Spain and $\Delta\chi^2$ [4] = 384.53, $p < .001$ in the UK), the three-factor model d) ($\Delta\chi^2$ [7] = 899.54, $p < .001$ in Spain and $\Delta\chi^2$ [7] = 860.09, $p < .001$ in the UK) and the one-factor model e) ($\Delta\chi^2$ [10] = 4767.46, $p < .001$ in Spain and $\Delta\chi^2$ [10] = 4334.71, $p < .001$ in the UK), supporting the distinctiveness of these factors.

The multi-group configural invariance model comprised five factors, namely structural empowerment and its four sub-dimensions, psychological empowerment and its four sub-dimensions, work engagement and its three sub-dimensions, task performance and intention to quit. The multi-group configural model tests the same model across groups without imposing any

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, average variance extracted (AVE) and Cronbach's alpha for the study variables in the total sample (N = 1033), the Spanish (N = 515), and the British (N = 518) samples.

	Total sample				Spanish sample				British sample			
	M	SD	AVE	α	M	SD	AVE	α	M	SD	AVE	α
Age	40.73	12.87			40.37	11.93			39.09	13.74		
Gender	1.51	0.50			1.51	0.50			1.50	0.49		
Organizational tenure	11.66	10.26			10.13	8.36			13.19	11.65		
Work hours	5.81	1.66			6.10	1.46			5.53	1.79		
Executive position	1.45	0.50			1.49	0.50			1.42	0.49		
Type of contract	1.96	0.41			1.94	0.46			1.98	0.34		
Opportunity	3.80	0.89		.84	3.84	0.88		.81	3.77	0.88		.87
Information	3.69	0.92		.86	3.70	0.94		.87	3.69	0.90		.84
Support	3.67	0.90		.81	3.77	0.86		.80	3.57	0.92		.81
Resources	3.45	1.01		.83	3.59	0.97		.78	3.32	1.03		.87
Structural empowerment	3.65	0.78	.61	.85	3.72	0.77	.64	.87	3.59	0.77	.59	.84
Meaning	5.70	1.08		.92	5.77	1.09		.92	5.65	1.07		.93
Competence	5.94	1.06		.85	6.07	1.07		.86	5.83	1.04		.83
Self-determination	5.68	1.24		.80	5.77	1.20		.81	5.60	1.26		.79
Impact	5.25	1.47		.90	5.55	1.25		.84	4.96	1.60		.92
Psychological empowerment	5.65	1.02	.62	.85	5.79	0.98	.63	.86	5.51	1.03	.62	.83
Vigor	5.06	1.38		.85	5.37	1.21		.79	4.75	1.47		.88
Dedication	5.40	1.35		.89	5.52	1.29		.89	5.28	1.38		.89
Absorption	5.29	1.24		.83	5.43	1.19		.82	5.15	1.26		.84
Work engagement	5.25	1.24	.83	.94	5.44	1.16	.83	.94	5.06	1.29	.83	.93
Intention to quit	3.40	1.97	.79	.95	3.24	1.94	.79	.95	3.56	1.98	.78	.94
Task performance	5.92	1.02	.65	.89	5.99	1.05	.80	.92	5.84	0.98	.60	.86

Table 2
Correlations among the latent variables for the Spanish (N = 515) and the British (N = 518) samples.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Age	-	-.18**	.52**	-.07	-.04	.15**	-.16**	.06	.01	-.22**	.07
2 Gender	-.18**	-	-.15**	-.22**	.14**	.06	.03	-.00	.01	.01	.07
3 Organizational tenure	.62**	-.17**	-	.14**	-.14**	.05	.09*	.13**	.09*	-.13**	.02
4 Work hours	.20**	-.20**	.21**	-	-.26**	.02	.08	.09*	.06	-.01	-.02
5 Executive position	-.10*	.21**	-.19**	-.21**	-	-.06	-.19**	-.28**	-.26**	.01	.01
6 Type of contract	.23**	-.16**	.20**	.19**	-.25**	-	-.06	.15**	.03	-.17**	.07
7 Structural empowerment	.01	-.05	.07	.08	-.27**	.06	-	.55**	.65**	-.12**	.28**
8 Psychological empowerment	.12**	.01	.08	.14**	-.20**	.12**	.61**	-	.67**	-.18**	.52**
9 Work engagement	.09	.01	.07	.05	-.17**	.02	.71**	.64**	-	-.25**	.36**
10 Intention to quit	-.24**	.08	-.23**	-.17**	.10*	-.10*	-.21**	-.20**	-.23**	-	-.08
11 Task performance	.13**	.05	.02	.11*	-.03	.10*	.35**	.68**	.43**	-.21**	-

Note. Correlations for the Spanish/British samples are presented below/above the diagonal. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

equality constraints. This model exhibited an acceptable fit to the data (χ^2 [358] = 1547.75; $p < .001$; GFI = 0.89; NFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.92; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.05), supporting configural invariance. We compared the configural invariance model (i.e., unconstrained model) to the metric invariance model (i.e., where equal factor loadings were set across country samples). Since the metric invariance model fit worse than the configural model ($\Delta\chi^2$ [16] = 27.32, p < .05, |ΔCFI| = 0.001), we inspected which factor loadings needed to be freely estimated to establish partial invariance as suggested by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) and Vandenberg and Lance (2000). The factor loading of self-determination was freely estimated, and a revised metric invariance model was rerun and compared to the configural model. The $\Delta\chi^2$ [15] = 23.24 was non-significant and the ΔCFI value showed that the two models did not vary significantly (|ΔCFI| = 0.001) thus, providing support for partial measurement invariance across the two samples. This means that participants from both samples responded to most of the items in the same way, except for the items of the self-determination sub-scale of psychological empowerment.

3.3. Hypothesis testing

To test the study hypotheses, we performed multi-group analyses and fit the structural partial mediation model (i.e., M1) to the data. We controlled for five demographic variables that significantly correlated with the variables of the proposed model: age, organizational tenure, work hours, executive position and type of contract (see Table 2). When these controls were included in the structural model, only the estimates of two of them (i.e., executive position and age) were significant. Consequently, following the principle of parsimony, in the multi-group analyses we controlled for the effects of executive position and age that were found to correlate with structural empowerment and intention to quit, respectively (see Fig. 1).

M1 fit the data well (χ^2 [436] = 1579.37; $p < .001$; GFI = 0.90; NFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.93; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.07; AIC = 1802.37). M1 was compared to the full mediation model (i.e., M2; χ^2 [438] = 1657.21; $p < .001$; GFI = 0.89; NFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.92; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.08) and an alternative model of reversed sequence of effects (i.e., M3; χ^2 [436] = 1629.17; $p < .001$; GFI = 0.87; NFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.92; CFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.09). On the basis of these results, M2 and M3 provided an adequate fit, but the hypothesized model indicated a superior fit to both M2 [$\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 77.84, $p < .001$] and M3 (AIC = 1861.17). Importantly, results were similar when control variables were excluded from the model. Thus, the study hypotheses were examined on the basis of M1. Fig. 1 depicts the multi-group results with standardized coefficients for the M1.

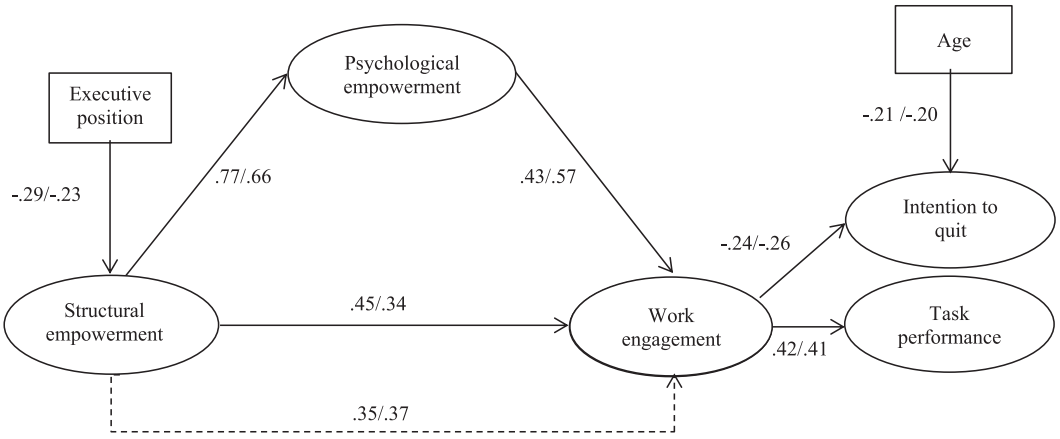
Hypotheses 1 and 2 stated that structural empowerment and psychological empowerment were positively related to work engagement. Both types of empowerment were positively associated with work engagement, providing support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. Also, the path from structural empowerment to psychological empowerment was positive and strong in both samples.

Fig. 1 and Table 3 show that direct and indirect paths were statistically significant in both samples. Bootstrap estimates indicated that the indirect relationship of structural empowerment with work engagement via psychological empowerment was significant in both samples, thus supporting Hypothesis 3. We also found that work engagement was negatively related to intention to quit and positively associated with task performance across the two countries, supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5. Evidence of indirect effects was also found from structural empowerment to intention to quit and task performance via work engagement and from psychological empowerment to intention to quit and task performance via work engagement.

M1 explained 69% of the variance in work engagement in Spain and 70% in the UK, 10% of the variance in intention to quit in the Spanish sample and 11% in the British sample, and the predictors of task performance explained 18% and 17% of its variance, respectively. Finally, structural invariance results showed that the path from psychological empowerment to work engagement was stronger for employees working in the UK ($z = 2.79$, $p < .01$). All other paths were invariant across samples. Thus, structural invariance was partially supported.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the positive relationship between structural empowerment and work engagement among employees working in Spain and the UK. Although prior research has investigated empowerment and work engagement (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005; Laschinger et al., 2001, 2009), this is the first study that integrates both structural and psychological empowerment in a model explaining work engagement. The findings showed that psychological empowerment partially mediated the positive link between structural empowerment and work engagement, that in turn, related to higher task performance and lower intention to quit. Importantly, this hypothesized process was found to be invariant across Spain and the UK, with the only exception being the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement that was stronger for employees working in the UK. In what follows, we discuss the most relevant theoretical and practical implications of the study findings.



Note: All path coefficients for the Spanish/British samples are significant at the .001 level. Dotted line represents the indirect effect.

Fig. 1. Standardized path coefficients of the proposed model.

Table 3
Bootstrap estimates of indirect effects across employees in Spain/UK.

	β	S.E.	Lower CI	Upper CI
PE → WE → ITQ	-.10***/-.15***	.03/.03	-.17/-.22	-.05/-.09
PE → WE → TP	.18***/.24***	.06/.05	.09/.15	.30/.34
SE → PE → WE	.35***/.37***	.08/.07	.20/.26	.50/.52
SE → WE → ITQ	-.19***/-.18***	.04/.04	-.26/-.26	-.11/-.12
SE → WE → TP	.33***/.30***	.05/.04	.24/.22	.43/.39

Notes. SE: structural empowerment, PE: psychological empowerment; WE: work engagement; ITQ: intention to quit; TP: task performance; β: standardized estimate; ***: $p < .001$; S.E.: standard error; CI: 95 bias-corrected confidence interval.

4.1. Theoretical implications

First, the present cross-country study contributes to the empowerment and work engagement literatures by shedding light on the underlying mechanism explaining why structural empowerment makes employees more engaged. The findings demonstrated that psychological empowerment is a potential underlying mechanism. In other words, employees who work in empowering workplaces (i.e., having access to information, opportunities, support and resources) are more likely to stimulate their psychological state of empowerment, thereby they may reciprocate with high levels of engagement. Consequently, employees may complete their tasks successfully and have lower intention to leave. These findings are in line with previous studies (Albrecht & Andreetta, 2011; Cropanzano & Wright, 2001) showing the positive relationship of work engagement with organizational success factors and lower turnover intentions. Also, these findings add value to previous studies supporting the role of psychological empowerment in the negative relationship between structural empowerment and burnout (Zhang et al., 2018) by showing that structural empowerment does not only prevent burnout, but also promotes employee motivation (i.e., work engagement).

Secondly, our findings are consistent with JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), as structural empowerment, similarly to job resources, fulfils basic human needs (i.e., needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness) that psychologically empower employees (i.e., with greater competence or self-determination), making them more energetic, enthusiastic and engrossed in their work. This analysis expands the nomological network of work engagement by unraveling the psychological process that explains how structural empowerment relates to work engagement via psychological empowerment. In this way, our study also extends previous empirical studies supporting the direct link between structural empowerment and work engagement (Boamah & Laschinger, 2015; Laschinger et al., 2009) and between psychological empowerment and work engagement (Bhatnagar, 2012; Macsinga et al., 2015; Wang & Liu, 2015).

Lastly, although full invariance of the hypothesized model was not supported, partial invariance across the two national samples enhances the robustness of the findings. Simply put, the factor loadings and structural paths across the samples did not vary notably, which supports the external validity of the hypothesized model. Accordingly, results suggested that, despite differences in the levels of working conditions and social norms, the structure underlying the proposed model replicated well in Spain and the UK. The fact that the path from psychological empowerment to work engagement was stronger for employees working in the UK might be attributed to cultural differences concerning the dimension of individualism, as the UK is a more individualistic society than Spain, which is more collectivistic (Hofstede, 2001). We argue that in an individualistic context like the British, an internalized state such as psychological empowerment may be more relevant for work engagement. This cross-cultural difference might be further investigated.

4.2. Practical implications

The present study demonstrates the significant role that structural and psychological empowerment can play in creating and sustaining an engaged workforce. Our findings suggest that managers may enhance psychological empowerment via the promotion of structural empowerment. Structural empowerment can be cultivated through work design practices that include access to relevant information to accomplish one's work, availability of opportunities for professional growth and development, effective feedback on performance and clear directions, and allocation of enough time to assigned tasks (Kanter, 1977). To promote psychological empowerment via structural empowerment, managers may also provide employees more autonomy as to how or when to carry out their work, challenge them, set clear goals, sustain teamwork and a supportive atmosphere (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). Open communication strategies such as team briefing or a suggestion box may facilitate effective

information sharing. All these are likely to stimulate structural empowerment and -through psychological empowerment-work engagement. This combination of psychological and structural empowerment supported by management practices will allow organizations to build a unique strategic asset in the industry, difficult to imitate and transfer out of the company, which may support the competitive advantage of the organization (Peteraf, 1993).

In addition to the implications for work design, our findings suggest that when recruiting and selecting employees, managers should search for candidates high in psychological empowerment because they may have a significant advantage in motivation. Finally, the dynamic strategic planning of the professional career of employees according to their acquisition of competences can be also a good manner to align psychological and structural empowerment with the competitive advantage of the company and reduce the intention to quit of talented employees (Calvo, 2011).

4.3. Limitations and directions for future research

The first limitation is the use of single source measures rated by employees. Although constructs that concern internal states (such as psychological empowerment or work engagement) are difficult to be rated by other sources, future research could test the robustness of the study findings by using complementary, more objective measures (e.g., by supervisors or colleagues). Second, causal inferences cannot be drawn due to the cross-sectional design of the present study. Accordingly, future studies should employ longitudinal designs to compare the proposed model with models that account for reversed causation. Another important limitation of the present study is that we did not control for the role of job and personal resources in explaining work engagement. It is important for future studies to investigate the incremental validity of structural and psychological empowerment over and above job and personal resources in explicating work engagement. Finally, the present study focused on the service sector only, restricting generalizability of results. However, the samples included a broad range of services. Scholars should replicate the proposed model in different occupational settings in order to strengthen the robustness of the findings.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the results of this empirical study indicated that structural and psychological empowerment are critical antecedents of work engagement among employees working in Spain and the UK. Work engagement, in turn, was positively related to task performance and lower intention to quit. Additionally, integrating different theoretical perspectives, psychological empowerment partially mediated the positive relationship between structural empowerment and work engagement. These findings suggest the relevance of designing human resource practices that align psychological and structural empowerment with work engagement to support the competitive advantage of the company. Future studies should expand the growing network of relationships among empowerment, work engagement, its predictors and positive outcomes.

Compliance of ethical standard

Data for the questionnaire used are anonymous and participants did not provide any personal information.

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Declaration of competing interest

None.

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