

The Mediating Role of Employee Empowerment between Intrapreneurial Behaviour and Work discretion in Higher Education

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1. Introduction

In today's dynamic and competitive environment, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) encounter challenges comparable to those faced by other sectors of the economy. Yet, they face an even greater risk of losing their competitive standing to institutions that rapidly embrace new technologies and modern approaches to teaching and learning (*Farrukh et al., 2018*). Addressing these challenges requires innovation in both educational practices and research, which in turn demands flexibility and creative, out-of-the-box thinking (*Sharma and Sharma, 2021*). When integrated with an entrepreneurial philosophy and experiential learning approaches, such innovation is capable of transforming the learning standards and contribute to the overall progress and prosperity of nations. In this context, intrapreneurial behaviour (IB) among faculty plays a significant role in driving innovation along with organizational transformation within HEIs.

IB is conceptualized as comprising three core dimensions: innovation, proactiveness, and risk-taking (*Badoiu et al., 2019*). IB reflects employees' inclination to engage in innovative actions and challenge conventional ways of thinking. It embodies a proactive approach toward identifying opportunities and initiating change, rather than merely responding to existing problems. Employees exhibiting IB, tend to take calculated risks, experiment with new ideas, and pursue unconventional solutions to organizational challenges (*Farrukh et al., 2021*). The circumstances that enable intrapreneurship in corporate settings are equally relevant to HEIs, which now face similar challenges associated with dynamic and uncertain environments (*Farrukh et al., 2018; Covin & Slevin, 1991; Zahra, 1991*). To remain competitive, universities need to cultivate a more entrepreneurial and adaptive culture. Such transformation is influenced by the internal environment that supports flexibility, creativity, and initiative among faculty members. Understanding such behaviour is essential, as entrepreneurship-oriented employees represent a vital source of innovation and organizational growth (*Escriba-Carda et al., 2020; De Jong et al., 2015*).

A growing body of literature recognizes that IB is being driven by combination of individual, organisational and environmental factors (*Kumar & Parveen, 2021; Valka et al., 2020; Neessen et al., 2019; Farrukh et al., 2017*).

Among these determinants, organisational determinants have received considerable research attention. However, within this domain, the role of work discretion remains relatively underexplored despite its potential importance in fostering IB. Work discretion, often equated with job autonomy, that refers to the freedom at workplace that an employee has in decision making and organizing their assigned tasks and responsibilities. When employees are granted such latitude and flexibility, they are more likely to engage in innovative, proactive, and risk-taking behaviours (*Neessen et al., 2019; Badoiu et al., 2020*). Moreover, understanding how WD operates to promote IB is crucial. Employees' perception of psychological empowerment (PE) represents one such mechanism, potentially mediating the link between WD and IB that encourage innovation. PE denotes employees' intrinsic motivation derived from their sense of autonomy, competence, and meaningful influence over their work (*Spreitzer, 1995*).

The present study examines how work discretion (WD) affects IB, both directly and through mediation by PE. Additionally, it also aims to bridge the existing research gap by integrating these variables, which have received limited empirical attention in prior studies. Following the literature review and formulation of research hypotheses, and research methodology, which highlights the research model, data collection procedures, and measurement instruments. The subsequent section discusses the empirical results and key findings.

The study is conducted on the population which comprises of faculty members employed in HEIs in India. Indian HEIs face challenges such as rigid administrative structures, limited research productivity, and slow adaptation to technological change, which often hinder innovation and creativity. Promoting IB among faculty is therefore essential to enhance creativity, responsiveness, and overall institutional effectiveness. However, empirical research on IB among faculty in Indian HEIs remains limited highlighting the need for deeper insights into the factors, such as WD and PE, that can stimulate innovative, proactive and risk-taking behaviour among faculty members. Finally, the study closes with key insights and implications for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

The concept of intrapreneurship was first introduced by *Pinchot (1985)*, describing IB that occurs within established organizations. Over time, the phenomenon has been discussed under various related terms, including organizational entrepreneurship, corporate entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial orientation, internal corporate entrepreneurship, corporate venturing, and strategic entrepreneurship (*Dung, 2022*). Broadly, IB represents the entrepreneurial spirit that exists within an organization, wherein individuals identify and pursue opportunities beyond the resources currently under their control (*Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003*). This perspective emphasizes innovation, proactiveness, and opportunity recognition as key features of intrapreneurial activity within existing organizational structures.

2.1 Intrapreneurial behaviour

According to *Gawke et al., (2019)* and *Stull and Singh (2005)*, intrapreneurial behaviour represents a distinctive form of extra-role behaviour wherein individuals deviate from conventional work practices to explore new opportunities such as innovative approaches to enhance products and services with the aim of creating value for the organization. Employees who demonstrate intrapreneurial behaviour anticipate and initiate change, and are often regarded by organizations as key drivers of innovation (*Badoiu et al., 2019*).

In context of HEIs such behaviour is crucial as faculty members contribute to academic innovation, curriculum development, and institutional advancement. By proactively seeking new opportunities in teaching, research, and service, intrapreneurial faculty enhance the adaptability and competitiveness of their institutions (*Engzell et al., 2024*).

2.2. Work Discretion

Work discretion, defined as the degree of autonomy and freedom employees have in performing their tasks (*Hornsby et al., 2002*), is a critical organizational factor fostering IB. Studies highlight that autonomy enhances employees' initiative, creativity, and willingness to innovate (*Rigtering & Weitzel, 2013; Badoiu et al., 2020*). When individuals can make independent decisions and explore new ideas, they are more likely to engage in proactive and risk-taking behaviours (*Neessen et al., 2019; Gerards et al., 2021*).

Rigtering and Weitzel (2013) highlighted that both participatory structures and managerial trust enhance employees' sense of discretion, fostering bottom-up innovation. Likewise, *Badoiu et al. (2020)* found that even with limited resources, work discretion and mutual confidence promote intrapreneurial initiatives. *Neessen et al. (2019)* added that decentralization of authority strengthens employees' control and self-efficacy, leading to greater innovation and opportunity recognition.

In the context of HEIs, faculty work discretion i.e., autonomy in teaching, research, and curriculum design, acts as a crucial enabler of IB. When faculty members experience trust and flexibility, they are more inclined to experiment with new pedagogical methods, pursue innovative research collaborations, and contribute to institutional development (*Chandra & Mathur, 2021*). Such autonomy enhances creativity, ownership, and responsiveness to emerging academic needs, whereas rigid administrative structures often restrict innovation and diminish motivation among faculty.

2.3. Psychological Empowerment (PE)

PE is an intrinsic motivational state that reflects individuals' perception of control, competence, and influence over their work and environment (*Spreitzer, 1995; Thakre & Mathew, 2020*). *Shabir and Muazzam (2024)* describe PE as employees' perception of significance and effectiveness in their roles, which enables them to perform confidently and contribute creatively toward achieving organizational goals.

Empowered individuals are more likely to take initiative, identify opportunities, and drive change within the organization (*Mahmoud et al., 2018; Alghamdi & Badawi, 2023*). When faculty perceive control over their teaching, research, and decision-making, they are more motivated to experiment with new pedagogical methods, develop innovative curricula, and engage in interdisciplinary collaborations.

Empirical evidence suggests that empowered individuals display higher job satisfaction, creativity, and institutional commitment, which collectively enhance academic productivity and organizational innovation (*Calisto & Sarkar, 2022; Köhn et al., 2025*). Therefore, in the context of HEIs, PE serves as a catalyst that transforms faculty confidence and autonomy into innovative and intrapreneurial endeavours.

2.4 Work Discretion, Psychological Empowerment and Intrapreneurial Behaviour

When faculty members are granted the freedom to design courses, manage research agendas, and implement novel instructional strategies, they develop a stronger sense of responsibility and motivation to implement their innovative work behaviour. Empirical evidence shows that job flexibility, significance, and growth opportunities enhance work discretionary effort and creative engagement (*Sharafizad & Redmond, 2019*). Moreover, WD contributes to PE by enhancing perceptions of competence, autonomy, and impact, which, in turn, drive innovation and proactive academic behaviour (*Jácome et al., 2022; Hackman & Oldham, 1976*). However, excessive bureaucracy and limited participative decision-making can diminish both empowerment and creativity by restricting academic freedom. Thus, WD serves as an crucial determinant of IB and an organizational condition that empowers faculty to translate autonomy into meaningful, risk-taking, and institutionally beneficial initiatives.

On the basis of reviewed literature, the following conceptual model is being proposed as shown in *Figure 1* which illustrates the hypothesized relationships, depicting WD as the independent variable influencing IB through the mediating effect of PE.

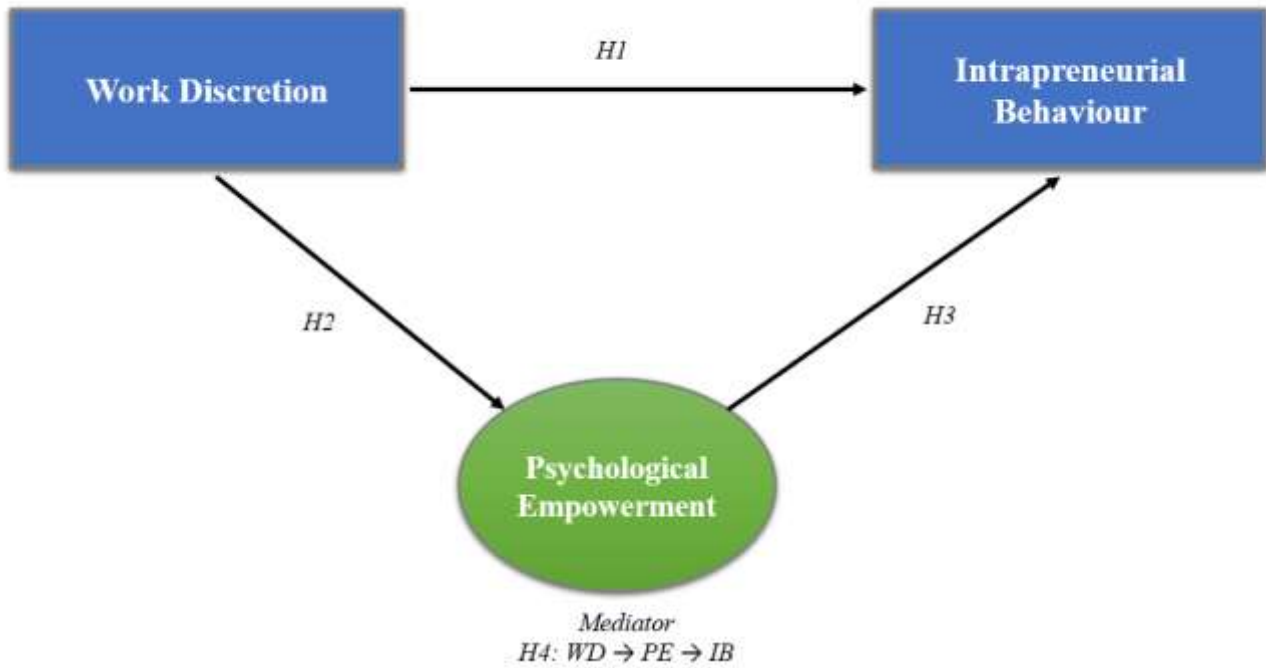


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

3. Research Methodology

This present study employs a survey quantitative method to examine the hypothesized relationship between WD, PE and IB. It was a self-administered online questionnaire which was distributed to faculty members of reputed universities.

Sampling and Data Collection

The respondents targeted for the study comprises of faculty members employed in universities and institutes of higher education in India. A structured questionnaire was administered to collect data. *WD* was measured using the 10-item scale adapted from Corporate Entrepreneurship Assessment Instrument (CEAI) by *Hornsby, et al., (2002)*. The sample items included “*I have significant autonomy in my job*” and “*My university provides to develop and showcase my ability*”. An 18-item scale measured PE, originally developed by *Spreitzer (1995)*. For the present study, the scale was adapted and reduced to 3 items which captured the core essence of construct. The sample items included, “*The work I do is meaningful to me*”, and “*I’m confident about my ability to do my job*”. *Intrapreneurial Behaviour*, which is the dependent variable, was measured adapting the 15 items scale developed by *Stull (2005)*. The sample items included, “*I proactively anticipate future needs, challenges, or changes in my profession*”, “*I understand that there is always a chance that my initiatives may not work out as planned, but I am willing to take that risk*” and “*I feel empowered to initiate and drive change within my department or academic unit*”.

Determination of sample size was done as per the suggestion of *Hair et al., 2012*, which recommends a minimum of 5 respondents per item. Given that the questionnaire used in this study contains 12 items, the minimum required sample size is $12 \times 5 = 60$. The actual sample size was 300 respondents, which exceeds the recommended threshold, ensuring robustness and sufficient statistical power for the analyses conducted. Judgemental sampling technique was employed as it was considered most appropriate technique as it ensures that respondents possess adequate knowledge and experience relevant to the objectives of the study. The data was collected by distributing questionnaire through online to the respondents to ensure wider geographic reach, timely data collection and convenience of participation.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

This study employs an advanced statistical techniques, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and mediation analysis, it was performed with help of SMART-PLS software. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) has gained widespread acceptance in the field of management as well as organizational behaviour and is widely applied in numerous empirical studies (*Ying et al., 2020*). Initially, the measurement model, also known as the outer model, was analysed. Finally, the structural model or the inner model is assessed.

PLS-SEM is implemented in two phases. Measurement model, also known as the outer model is evaluated to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs by examining composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The structural (inner) model is assessed, wherein the proposed hypotheses are tested to determine the strength and significance of the relationships among the study variables.

4.1. Measurement model evaluation

All constructs in this study were modelled as reflective constructs. The measurement model was assessed through an examination of Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, and HTMT as shown in *Table 1*. Individual item reliability was evaluated using factor loadings, while convergent validity was assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) values. The Cronbach's alpha (*Table 1*) values for all the constructs are above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (*Taber et al., 2018*), indicating good internal consistency. The recommended threshold values for factor loadings ≥ 0.708 (*Shevlin et al., 1998*), $CR \geq 0.70$ (*Nunnally, 1978*), and $AVE \geq 0.50$ (*Sahoo, 2019*), were all satisfied, indicating adequate reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model. Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs as presented in *Table 1*, also exceeded the recommended thresholds. *Table 2* presents the outer loadings of individual items, all of which exceeded the acceptable level, demonstrating adequate indicator reliability.

Discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion, which is considered a robust and superior criterion compared to traditional approaches (*Henseler et al., 2015*). The results, presented in *Table 3*, show that all HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.85 (*Henseler et al.,*

2015), confirming discriminant validity among the constructs. Collinearity was evaluated using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and as shown in *Table 4*, all values ranged between 1 and 1.5, which are well below acceptable limit of 3 (*Hair et al., 2019*).

Measures	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
IB	0.927	0.931	0.943	0.734
PE	0.876	0.887	0.929	0.814
WD	0.742	0.759	0.812	0.601

(Table 1: Measurement model evaluation)

Measures	IB	PE	WD
IB1	0.828	-	-
IB2	0.801	-	-
IB3	0.861	-	-
IB4	0.795	-	-
IB5	0.753	-	-
IB6	0.716	-	-
PE_1	-	0.876	-
PE_2	-	0.905	-
PE_3	-	0.925	-
WD_1	-	-	0.813
WD_2	-	-	0.891
WD_3	-	-	0.873

Table 2: Outer Loading (Indicator Reliability)

Relationship	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)
PE → IB	0.783
WD → IB	0.787
WD → PE	0.754

(Table 3: HTMT Criterion)

Relationship	VIF
PE → IB	1.510
WD → IB	1.510
WD → PE	1.000

Table 4: VIF

4.2. Structural Model Evaluation

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the next step involved evaluating the structural model. To assess the significance of the hypothesized relationships, the bootstrapping resampling method with 5,000 subsamples was employed, following the recommendations of *Hair et al. (2017)*. The evaluation included the assessment of collinearity, path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and model fit indices.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) values presented in *Table 5* demonstrate that the model explained 59.5% of the variance in IB and 36.0% of the variance in PE, signifying substantial explanatory power. The R-square value indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables (*Farrukh et al., 2020*).

Measure	R-square	R-square adjusted
IB	0.595	0.592
PE	0.360	0.358

Table 5: Explanatory power (R^2)

The effect size (f^2) results, shown in *Table 6*, indicate strong effects for $WD \rightarrow PE$ (0.564) and $PE \rightarrow IB$ (0.374), and a moderate effect for $WD \rightarrow IB$ (0.221), suggesting that all exogenous constructs made meaningful contributions to the endogenous variables.

Relationship	f-square
$PE \rightarrow IB$	0.374
$WD \rightarrow IB$	0.221
$WD \rightarrow PE$	0.564

Table 6: Explanatory power (F^2)

Moreover, the goodness of fit indices in *Table 7* revealed, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.060, which does not exceed the recommended threshold of 0.08 (*Hair et al., 2022; Kock 2020*).

Fit Index	Estimated model
SRMR	0.060

Table 7: Model Fit

4.3. Hypothesis testing

Following the evaluation of measurement and structural models, the hypothesized relationships were tested using the bootstrapping approach (5,000 subsamples). The results for direct are summarized in *Table 8*. Based on the bootstrapping results, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the hypothesized relationships.

First, work discretion (WD) also shows a positive and significant relationship with IB ($\beta = 0.666, p < 0.001$), thereby confirming H1. Second, WD has a significant positive effect on PE ($\beta = 0.600, p < 0.001$), providing strong support for H2. Furthermore, PE significantly influences IB ($\beta = 0.487, p < 0.001$), providing strong support for H3.

All p-values were below the conventional threshold of 0.05 (*Kock, 2016*), indicating statistically significant relationships, with each t-value well above the critical value of 1.96 (*Zhang et al., 2024*). Overall, these findings

provide strong empirical support for *H1*, *H2*, and *H3*, establishing that WD directly enhances IB and indirectly promotes it through psychological empowerment.

Relationship	Direct Effect	T statistics	P values	Decision
PE → IB	0.487	8.488	0.000	Supported
WD → IB	0.666	17.639	0.000	Supported
WD → PE	0.600	14.212	0.000	Supported

Table 8: Hypothesis Testing

The confidence interval as shown in Table 9 for all the constructs does not include zero, confirming the significance of these relationships (Hazra, 2017). This indicates that WD positively influences both PE and IB, while PE also positively affects IB.

Path	2.5%	97.5%
PE → IB	0.451	0.646
WD → IB	0.232	0.451
WD → PE	0.474	0.672

Table 9: Confidence Intervals for Structural Paths

4.4. Mediation Analysis

To test PE’s mediation effect of WD-IB linkages, we used bootstrapping technique embedded in SMART-PLS software. The bootstrapping procedure is particularly suitable for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) as it is free from the assumptions about the concerning variable distribution and sampling distribution (Farrukh et al., 2020). In this step, significance of indirect effect is tested. Table 9 along with Figure 2 shows the results of mediation analysis.

The indirect effect of WD on IB through PE is significant, as shown by the p-value 0.000 and a high t-value of 7.127. This means that WD increases PE, which in turn increases IB. Since both direct and indirect effect are significant, this indicates *partial mediation*, showing that PE plays an important role but does not fully explain the relationship. The results are consistent with existing literature (Alam et al., 2024; Mahmoud et al., 2022; Farrukh et al., 2021; Farrukh et al., 2019; Rigetering et al., 2013), which shows importance of WD and PE in fostering intrapreneurial behaviour.

Path	Indirect Effect	T statistics	P values	Type of mediation
WD → PE → IB	0.292	7.127	0.000	Partial

Table 10: Mediation testing

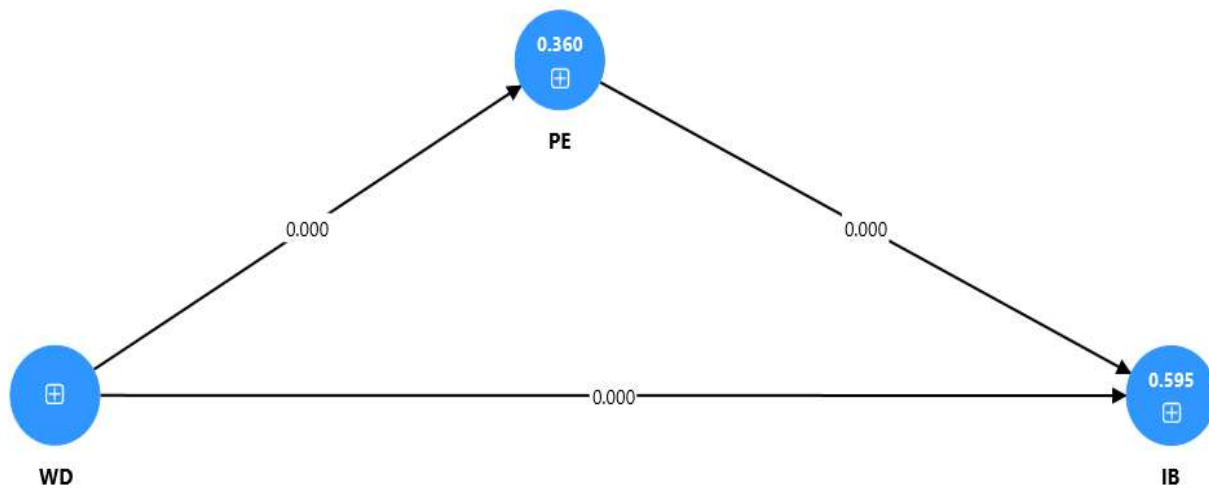


Figure 2: Mediation Analysis

5. Discussion of Findings

The present study investigated the relation between WD, PE and IB, with PE as mediator. The findings support the H1 that states a positive relationship between WD and IB which suggests that work discretion or autonomy in academic roles allows faculty to explore new ideas like introducing interdisciplinary approaches, initiating research collaborations, industry partnerships, or student-driven projects (Hanafy et al., 2025).

The findings also support H2, showing highlights the need of autonomy in influencing psychological empowerment in faculty members. Faculty members who perceive higher level of work discretion tend to feel more empowered in their professional roles. This aligns with Spreitzer’s (1995) conceptualization of psychological empowerment is shaped by conditions and environment of the workplace, wherein greater WD fosters a stronger sense of empowerment among employees (Vu et al., 2025).

H3 is supported, as PE significantly influences IB which implies that empowered individuals are more likely to contribute new ideas and be actively involve in intrapreneurial measures and strategies within HEIs (Marques et al., 2025). Most importantly, H4 is supported, confirming partial mediation between WD and IB, suggesting that WD influences IB both directly and indirectly through PE. This indicates that autonomy becomes more effective when it comes through psychological state where faculty feel confident to act. In such situations, faculty do not just follow assigned roles but initiate new practices and contribute proactively to institutional development.

The study aimed at increase our understanding on how WD plays a significant role in shaping IB of faculty members in HEI settings. When employees are granted the freedom to make decision, organise their work independently, they develop an enhanced sense of meaning in what and how they perform, a stronger belief in their own competence, and a greater feeling of self-determination (Rasheed et al., 2026; Joo et al., 2019) which leads to substantive action that produce tangible impact within their institution.

6. Implications

The present study extends to the existing literature by establishing WD as a significant antecedent of IB in academic context. Furthermore, the mediating role of PE shows the psychological mechanism through which WD leads to IB that adds theoretical depth to intrapreneurship literature. This study also extends intrapreneurship research to academic sector, which still remains largely underexplored in existing literature.

Furthermore, it provides practical implications by highlighting the role of both work-related conditions and psychological factors in shaping faculty behaviour. First, since WD emerged as a strong predictor of IB, HEIs should consider granting faculty member greater autonomy in teaching, research and administrative roles and thus they're more likely to take initiative and engage with innovative activities as shown in the prior studies (*Basri, 2023; Averill et al., 2020*). Discretion in their roles allows to make independent decisions, take responsibility for outcomes and think beyond routine tasks. Second, as psychological empowerment partially mediates this relationship, HEIs should design interventions that aims to enhance faculty members, sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact in their roles (*Alwali, 2024*). This can be accomplished through participative decision-making, recognition-programs, and professional-development initiatives which in turn will strengthen faculty members' belief in their ability to make meaningful contributions to their institutions (*Zhai et al., 2023*).

It also indicates that simply providing autonomy is not sufficient unless faculty feels confident in using it (*Hasanein et al., 2025*). When it is present, faculty are more likely to use the available freedom to implement new ideas, take responsibility for academic and institutional improvements (*McNaughtan et al., 2018*). Thus, the research will contribute HEIs to understand that innovative behaviour among faculty can be strengthened not only by structural changes but also by creating conditions where faculty feel capable of making meaningful contributions. This is reflected in actions such as introducing new teaching methods, developing interdisciplinary content and initiating collaborative academic activities (*Averill & Major, 2020*). Such behaviour highlights that autonomy creates and environment where faculty feel responsible for contributing to institutional growth rather than simply performing routine assigned tasks.

The study also carries meaningful social implications. Fostering IB among faculty in HEIs contributes to societal progress through innovative teachings, research breakthroughs, and knowledge creations. When faculty members feel empowered and autonomous in their roles they're more likely to develop creative solutions to real-world problems. This not only benefits students and their HEIs but also the communities they serve.

7. Directions for future research

Future studies may include a more diverse sample across different types of institutions. The model developed in the present study focused on a limited number of variables. Future studies can incorporate other independent variables or determinants such as, leadership styles, perceived organisational support, leadership styles, creative

self-efficacy, reward mechanism, organisational boundaries, to gain more comprehensive understanding of IB. Furthermore, the future research may examine the link between IB and organizational productivity and performance outcomes. The present study treats IB as an outcome variable, future studies can extend this by analysing its impact on other variables such as job performance, workplace happiness, career growth, and organisational commitment.

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