



Journal for Current Sign

Online ISSN (3006-1504)

Print ISSN (3006-1490)



THE MODERATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT BETWEEN HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORK PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE INNOVATIVE WORK PERFORMANCE

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The Moderating Role of Employee Empowerment between High-Performance Work Practices and Employee Innovative Work Performance

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Abstract

Background: Organizations operating in dynamic and competitive environments increasingly depend on employee innovative work performance to maintain sustainable competitive advantage. This study examined the moderating role of employee empowerment in the relationship between High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) and employee innovative work performance. Drawing upon the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework and social exchange theory, the research proposed that HPWPs positively influence innovative work behavior, and this relationship is strengthened when employees perceive higher levels of empowerment. **Methodology:** This

study adopted a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from 321 employees across various departments and job levels in selected private sugar manufacturing companies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, through stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire was used to measure High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs), employee empowerment, and employee innovative work performance. The study examined five dimensions of HPWPs: recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, training and development, employee involvement, and compensation system. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Pearson correlation and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to examine relationships and test the moderating effect of employee empowerment. **Results:** Results revealed strong positive correlations between HPWPs and employee innovative work performance ($r = .957$, $p < .001$), and between



employee empowerment and both HPWPs ($r = .889$, $p < .001$) and innovative work performance ($r = .731$, $p < .001$). Hierarchical regression confirmed the moderating effect, with the interaction term (HPWPs \times Employee Empowerment) being statistically significant ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < .001$), contributing an additional 4.3% to the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.043$) and yielding a final R^2 of 0.968. **Findings and Conclusion:** The findings demonstrate that while HPWPs serve as a strong foundation for innovation, their effectiveness is significantly amplified in the presence of high employee empowerment. Theoretically, this study extends the AMO framework by highlighting empowerment as a critical boundary condition. Practically, managers should combine structured high-performance HR practices with empowerment-oriented leadership to maximize employee innovative work performance.

Keywords: High-Performance Work Practices, Employee Empowerment, Innovative Work Performance, Moderation, HRM, Pakistan

Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, organizations face intense pressure to sustain performance and remain innovative. Global competition, technologically advanced customers, and rapid digital transformation have compelled firms to search for new ways to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Researchers have emphasized that organizational systems and structures aligned with strategic priorities are essential for achieving superior performance outcomes. Consequently, the measurement of organizational performance has become critical for firms striving to survive in dynamic markets (Abu Bakar, 2024; Aboramadan, 2022).

Historically, capital, technology, and natural resources were considered the primary drivers of competitive advantage. However, contemporary organizations increasingly recognize human resources as the most valuable strategic asset. Firms are now focusing on how to effectively manage employees to create innovation and productivity advantages. High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) have emerged as a strategic human resource mechanism that enhances employee capabilities, commitment, and involvement in organizational processes. These practices typically include compensation and benefits, training and development, employee involvement, performance appraisal, and recruitment and selection, all of which collectively improve productivity and organizational effectiveness (Abualigah et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023).

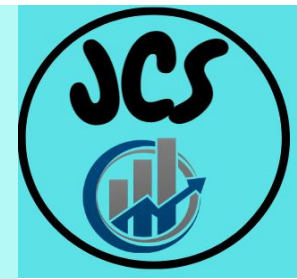
Despite growing interest in HPWPs, a central issue remains unresolved regarding how human resource practices contribute to performance outcomes. Scholars argue that limited understanding exists about the



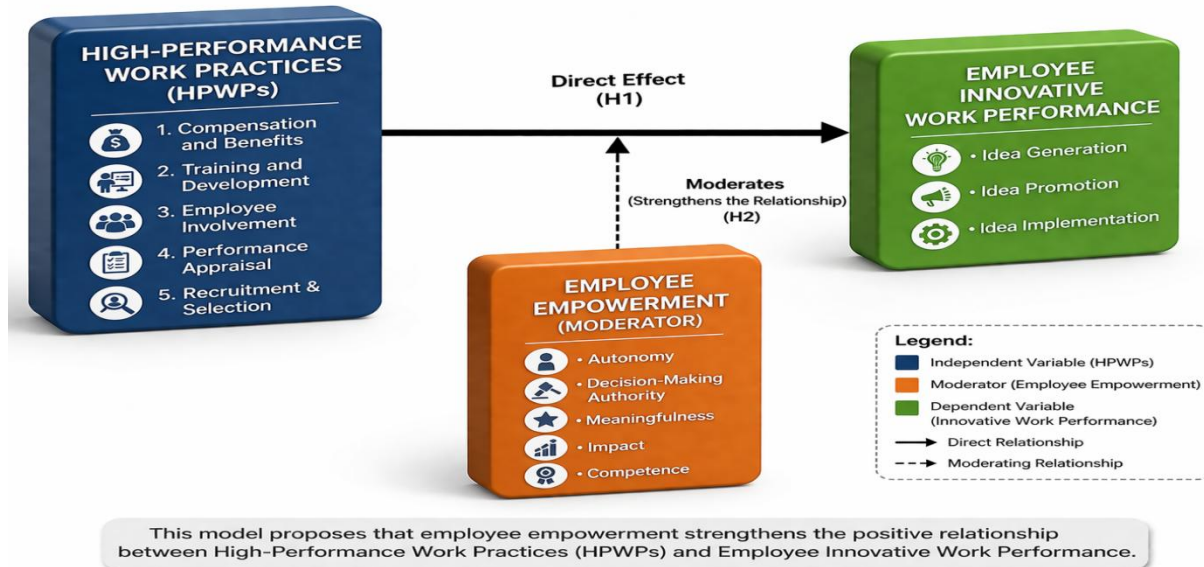
mechanisms through which HR systems influence employee outcomes, particularly innovative work performance. Previous research has largely focused on direct relationships between HR practices and organizational performance, while ignoring contextual factors that may strengthen or weaken this relationship (Aggarwal & Agarwala, 2023; Ashiru et al., 2022). HPWPs are believed to improve performance by enhancing employees' skills and encouraging proactive behaviors; however, their effectiveness often depends on employee perceptions and workplace conditions (Akomea et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2021).

Recent literature suggests that employee-level factors play an essential role in translating HR practices into performance outcomes. Among these factors, employee empowerment has gained attention as a critical condition influencing innovation. Empowerment provides employees with autonomy, authority, and confidence to make decisions, which encourages them to experiment with new ideas and implement creative solutions. When employees perceive empowerment, they are more likely to utilize organizational resources effectively and contribute to innovative work performance (Al Daboub et al., 2024; Al-Abbadi et al., 2021). Therefore, empowerment may strengthen the relationship between HPWPs and employee innovative work performance.

Given this perspective, the present study focuses on examining the moderating role of employee empowerment between High-Performance Work Practices and employee innovative work performance. Understanding this relationship is particularly important in developing economies, where organizations are adopting modern HR practices to enhance competitiveness and productivity. By exploring empowerment as a moderating factor, the study aims to provide deeper insight into how HR practices translate into innovative employee behaviors.



Research Model



Knowledge Gaps

A review of the literature highlights several gaps in understanding the relationship between High-Performance Work Practices and employee innovative work performance. First, researchers note the absence of a unified theoretical framework for conceptualizing HRM systems and their components. Different studies have used varied combinations of HR practices, which makes it difficult to compare findings and develop consistent theoretical conclusions (Alieva & Powell, 2023; Alkhalaf & Al-Tabbaa, 2024; Alothmany et al., 2023). This inconsistency has limited the development of comprehensive models explaining how HPWPs influence innovation outcomes.

Second, although the synergy perspective of HRM systems has gained attention, there is still limited consensus regarding the measurement of employee innovative work performance. Many studies have relied on traditional financial performance indicators, neglecting non-financial outcomes such as creativity, idea generation, and innovation behavior. This creates a gap in understanding how HR practices contribute specifically to innovative work performance (Alwali, 2023; Aparna & Sahney, 2024).

Third, the relationship between HPWPs and innovative work performance remains largely unexplained, often referred to as the “black box” problem. Researchers emphasize that identifying contextual variables can help clarify how HR practices translate into innovation outcomes. However, empirical evidence addressing moderating mechanisms in this



relationship is still limited (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Arshad et al., 2021; Ashiru et al., 2022).

Furthermore, scholars argue that employee-level perspectives have been neglected in HPWP research. Recent studies suggest that empowerment may influence how employees respond to HR practices and whether they engage in innovative behaviors. Empowered employees are more likely to take initiative, share knowledge, and implement new ideas. Despite its theoretical importance, limited research has examined employee empowerment as a moderating variable in the HPWPs-innovative work performance relationship (Aung et al., 2023; Austin & Jones, 2024; Ayanponle et al., 2024). Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by examining employee empowerment as a moderator between High-Performance Work Practices and employee innovative work performance. By focusing on this moderating mechanism, the research aims to contribute to the literature by clarifying the conditions under which HPWPs enhance innovation at the employee level.

Literature Review

High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) and Employee Innovative Work Performance

High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) refer to a bundle of human resource strategies designed to enhance employees' skills, participation, and productivity. These practices commonly include selective hiring, training, performance-based compensation, and employee involvement in decision-making. Recent literature highlights that HPWPs create a supportive environment that encourages employees to generate and implement innovative ideas. When employees receive continuous training and development opportunities, they become more capable of experimenting with new methods and solutions. Empirical research shows that HPWPs significantly influence innovative work performance by improving knowledge sharing and collaboration among employees (Zhang et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2023). Similarly, organizations adopting HPWPs report higher levels of innovation because employees are equipped with resources and skills needed to develop creative solutions (Aboramadan et al., 2022).

Furthermore, HPWPs strengthen employees' psychological attachment and commitment, which encourages them to invest extra effort in innovation-related activities. Studies indicate that employees working under high-performance systems tend to demonstrate proactive behavior and engage in creative problem-solving (Li et al., 2022). Additionally, HPWPs promote open communication and teamwork, which are essential



components of innovative work performance (Anser et al., 2021). Therefore, HPWPs are considered an important organizational mechanism that supports innovation at the individual level.

Employee Empowerment and Innovative Work Performance

Employee empowerment refers to granting employees autonomy, authority, and confidence to make decisions related to their work. Empowered employees are more likely to take initiative and explore new ideas, leading to improved innovative work performance. Research suggests that empowerment enhances employees' sense of competence and ownership, which encourages them to contribute creatively to organizational goals (Afsar & Umrani, 2020). When employees perceive higher levels of empowerment, they feel confident in proposing innovative ideas and implementing new processes.

Moreover, psychological empowerment fosters intrinsic motivation and promotes knowledge utilization. Employees who experience autonomy are more willing to experiment with new approaches and challenge existing procedures. Studies show that empowered employees demonstrate higher levels of innovative behavior because they feel supported in taking calculated risks (Kim & Lee, 2021). Additionally, empowerment improves collaboration and information sharing, which further strengthens innovative work performance (Newman et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). These findings highlight that empowerment plays a significant role in enhancing employee innovation.

Moderating Role of Employee Empowerment

While HPWPs directly influence innovative work performance, recent studies emphasize that empowerment can strengthen this relationship. Employees may not fully utilize organizational resources unless they have autonomy and authority to apply their skills. Research indicates that HR practices are more effective in promoting innovation when employees perceive higher levels of empowerment (Singh et al., 2023). Empowerment enables employees to translate training, participation, and development opportunities into innovative outcomes.

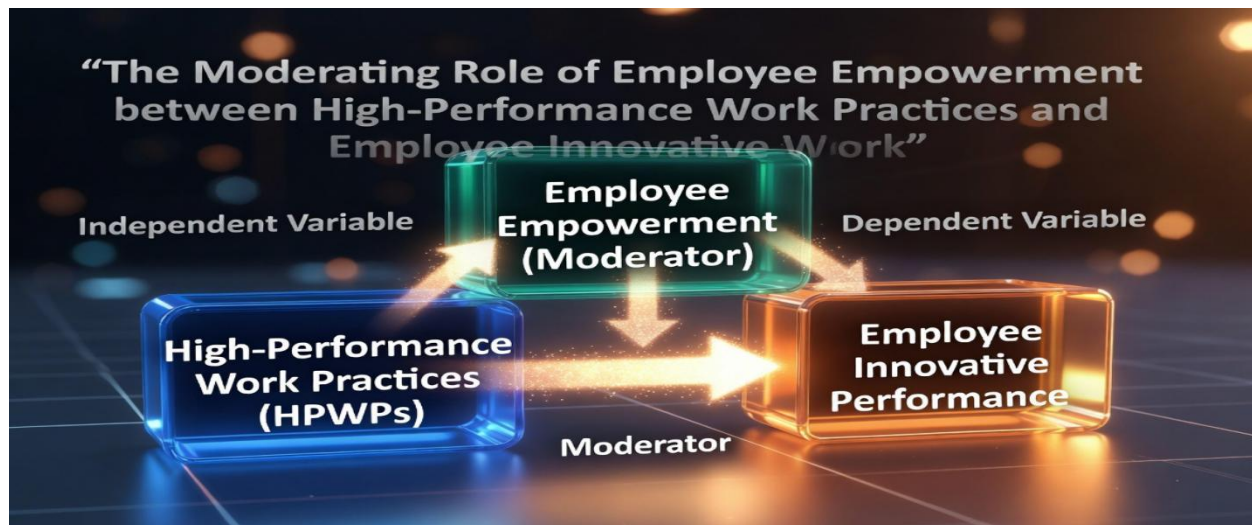
Additionally, empowerment acts as a contextual factor that enhances the effectiveness of HPWPs. When employees are empowered, they are more likely to use available knowledge and resources creatively. Conversely, limited empowerment restricts employees' ability to implement innovative ideas despite supportive HR practices. Studies confirm that empowerment strengthens the positive impact of HPWPs on innovative work performance by encouraging decision-making and initiative-taking behavior (Aboramadan et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, employee



empowerment is expected to moderate the relationship between HPWPs and employee innovative work performance.

Summary of Literature Gap

Existing literature establishes that HPWPs positively influence employee innovative work performance and that empowerment independently enhances innovation. However, limited research has explored the moderating role of employee empowerment in strengthening the relationship between HPWPs and innovative work performance. This study aims to address this gap by examining how empowerment enhances the effectiveness of high-performance work practices in promoting employee innovation.



Research Methodology

This study was grounded in the positivist research paradigm, which assumes that social phenomena can be measured objectively and relationships among variables can be examined using statistical techniques. The positivist approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to test the hypothesized relationships between High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs), employee empowerment, and employee innovative work performance. The research followed a deductive reasoning process, where theoretical assumptions derived from existing literature were empirically tested using quantitative data. This approach enabled the researcher to examine cause-and-effect relationships and generalize findings within similar organizational settings.

The study adopted a positivist epistemology, focusing on clearly defined variables and their measurable relationships. The use of structured questionnaires and statistical analysis supported the assumption that



knowledge can be generated through empirical observation and objective measurement. The research specifically examined how High-Performance Work Practices influence employee innovative work performance and whether employee empowerment moderates this relationship. The objective measurement of variables justified the selection of a quantitative methodology.

The research was conducted in selected private-sector sugar manufacturing companies located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. These organizations were chosen because limited empirical evidence exists regarding the moderating role of employee empowerment between High-Performance Work Practices and innovative work performance within this industrial context. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from employees working at different organizational levels. This design was considered appropriate for examining relationships among variables and testing the proposed hypotheses.

The study examined High-Performance Work Practices as the independent variable, employee empowerment as the moderating variable, and employee innovative work performance as the dependent variable. High-Performance Work Practices included recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, employee involvement, and compensation systems. Employee empowerment reflected employees' autonomy, decision-making authority, and perceived control over their work roles. Employee innovative work performance focused on idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. These variables were measured using structured questionnaire items adapted from previously validated scales.

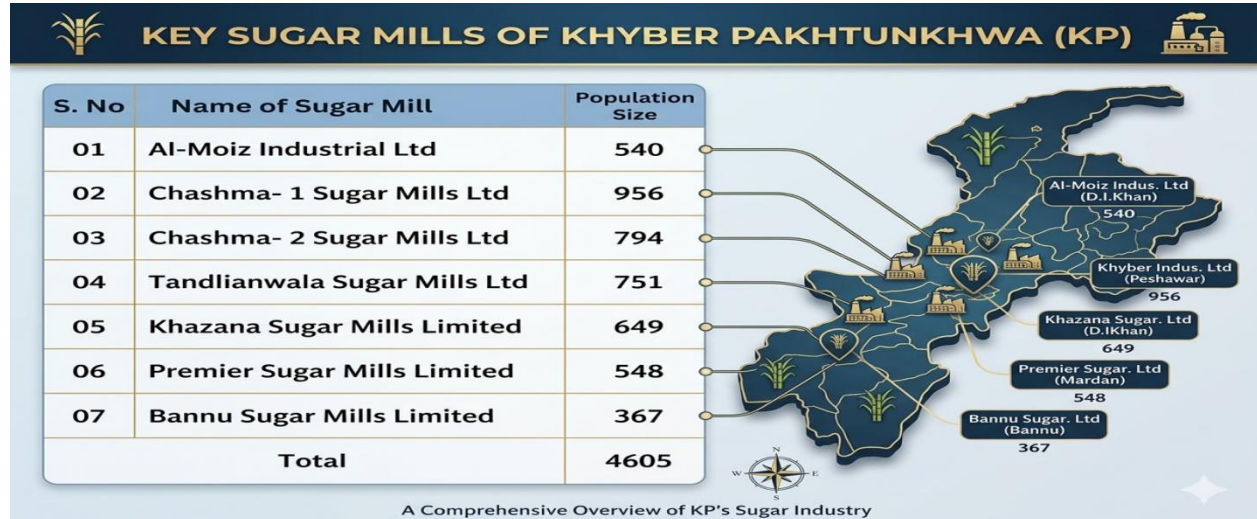
The target population consisted of employees working in private-sector sugar manufacturing companies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation of different employee categories, including administrative staff, supervisors, and operational employees. The population was divided into strata based on job levels, and respondents were randomly selected from each group to enhance representativeness and reduce sampling bias.



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Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. After obtaining permission from management, questionnaires were distributed directly to employees using a drop-off and pick-up method. This approach allowed respondents to complete the questionnaire at their convenience and helped reduce response bias. The study followed a cross-sectional design, as data were collected at a single point in time.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics were applied to test the hypotheses. Correlation analysis examined relationships among variables, while hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test the moderating role of employee empowerment between High-Performance Work Practices and employee innovative work performance. Interaction

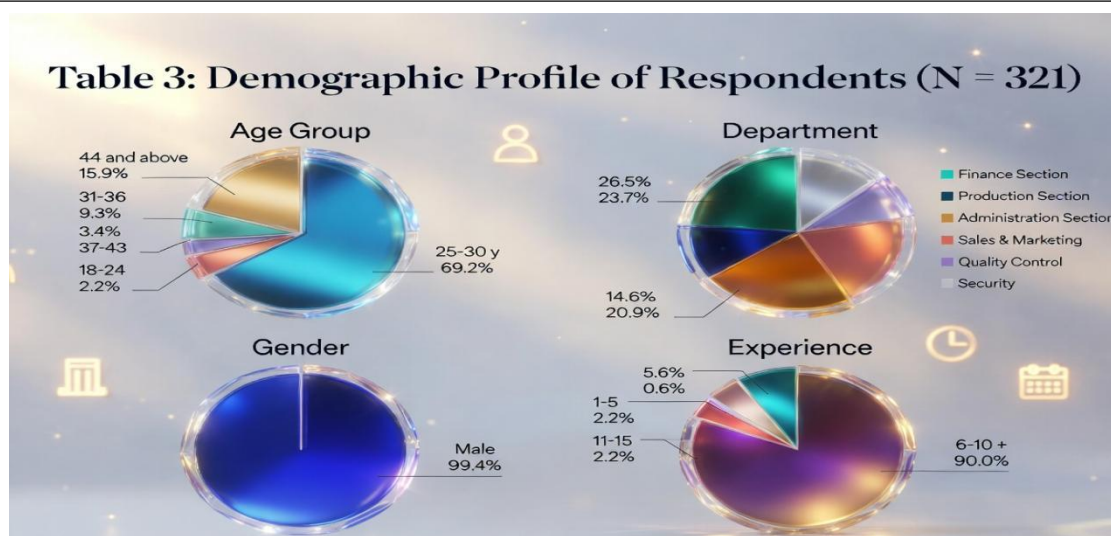


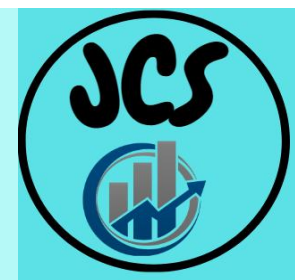
terms were created to assess the moderation effect, and significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level.

Results

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 321)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age Group	18-24	7	2.2%
	25-30	222	69.2%
	31-36	30	9.3%
	37-43	11	3.4%
	44 and above	51	15.9%
Department	Finance Section	85	26.5%
	Administration Section	67	20.9%
	Security Section	20	6.2%
	Production Section	76	23.7%
	Quality Control Section	26	8.1%
Gender	Sales & Marketing Section	47	14.6%
	Male	319	99.4%
Experience	Female	2	0.6%
	1-5 years	18	5.6%
	6-10 years	289	90.0%
	11-15 years	7	2.2%
	16 years and above	7	2.2%





The demographic analysis indicates that the majority of respondents were aged between 25–30 years (69.2%), followed by employees aged 44 years and above (15.9%), suggesting a predominantly young workforce with some experienced senior employees. Regarding departmental representation, the largest proportion of respondents belonged to the Finance Section (26.5%) and Production Section (23.7%), followed by Administration (20.9%), indicating balanced participation across operational and administrative units. The gender distribution shows a highly male-dominated workforce, with 99.4% male and only 0.6% female respondents, reflecting the traditional employment pattern in the sugar industry. In terms of organizational experience, most employees (90.0%) had 6–10 years of experience, indicating a relatively stable and moderately experienced workforce. Overall, the sample represents employees who are primarily young, male, moderately experienced, and distributed across key functional departments of the sugar manufacturing companies.

Table 4: Reliability Analysis of Study Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. Items	of Reliability Level
High-Performance Work Practices	0.915	31	Excellent
Employee Empowerment	0.741	10	Acceptable
Employee Innovative Work Performance	0.818	12	Good

Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales used in the study. The results show that High-Performance Work Practices demonstrated excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.915 across 31 items, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Employee Empowerment showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.741 for 10 items, which falls within the acceptable range, suggesting that the scale reliably measures the construct. Similarly, Employee Innovative Work Performance yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.818 across 12 items, indicating good reliability. Overall, all variables exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, confirming that the measurement instruments used in this study were reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.



Correlational Analysis

H1: There is a significant association between High-Performance Work Practices, Employee Empowerment, and Employee Innovative Work Performance.

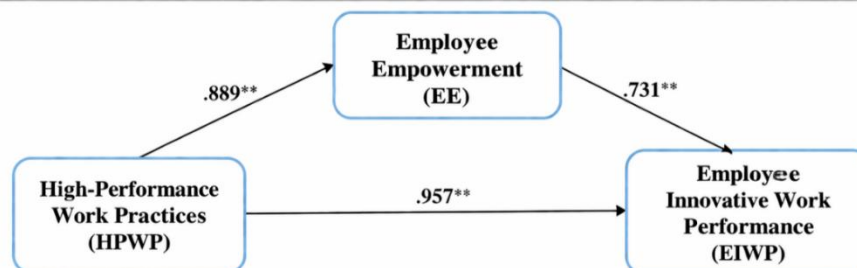
Table 5: Correlations Matrix

Variables	High-Performance Work Practices	Employee Empowerment	Employee Innovative Work Performance
High-Performance Work Practices	1	.889**	.957**
Employee Empowerment	.889**	1	.731**
Employee Innovative Work Performance	.957**	.731**	1

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis shows very strong positive relationships among the three variables. High-Performance Work Practices are strongly associated with Employee Empowerment ($r = .889$, $p < .01$) and Employee Innovative Work Performance ($r = .957$, $p < .01$), indicating that effective HR practices are closely linked to both motivated employees and higher innovation at work. Employee Empowerment also shows a strong positive correlation with Employee Innovative Work Performance ($r = .731$, $p < .01$), suggesting that more motivated employees tend to exhibit higher innovative behaviors. All correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, confirming that the observed relationships are unlikely to be due to chance. These findings support the hypothesis that HPWPs and motivation are positively associated with innovative work performance in the selected sugar manufacturing companies.

H1: There is a significant association between High-Performance Work Practices, Employee Empowerment, and Employee Innovative Work Performance.



**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

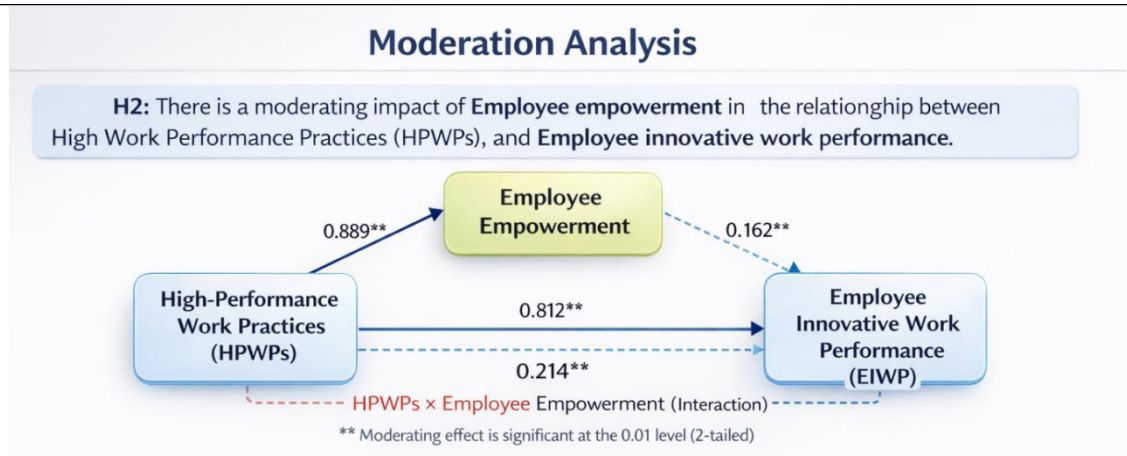


Moderation Analysis

H2: "There is a moderating impact of Employee empowerment in the relationship between High Work Performance Practices (HPWPs), and Employee innovative work performance."

Table 6: *Model Summary*

Model	Predictor Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	R ²	ΔR^2	F Change
1	High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs)	0.812	0.016	0.957	50.75	<.001	0.916	-	2576.12
2	High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) Employee Empowerment	0.689 0.137	0.032 0.032	0.812 0.162	21.53 4.28	<.001 <.001	0.925	0.009	38.45
3	High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) Employee Empowerment HPWPs \times Employee Empowerment (Interaction)	0.667 0.125 0.182	0.031 0.031 0.024	0.785 0.148 0.214	21.52 4.03 7.58	<.001 <.001 <.001	0.968	0.043	57.48





The results of the hierarchical regression analysis support the hypothesized moderating role of employee empowerment. In Model 1, High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) alone explained 91.6% of the variance in employee innovative work performance ($\beta = 0.957$, $p < 0.001$). When employee empowerment was added in Model 2, the explanatory power increased slightly ($R^2 = 0.925$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.009$). In the final Model 3, the interaction term (HPWPs \times Employee Empowerment) was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.001$) and contributed an additional 4.3% to the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.043$), resulting in a total R^2 of 0.968. This indicates that employee empowerment significantly moderates the relationship between High-Performance Work Practices and employee innovative work performance, such that the positive effect of HPWPs on innovative work performance becomes stronger when employees perceive higher levels of empowerment.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis posited a significant positive relationship between High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) and employee innovative work performance. The correlation analysis strongly supported this hypothesis. All observed correlations were statistically significant ($p < .001$), with coefficients indicating strong positive relationships. Specifically, HPWPs showed a very strong correlation with employee innovative work performance ($r = .957$), suggesting that the implementation of comprehensive HR practices such as training, participation, performance appraisal, and compensation substantially enhances employees' ability and willingness to generate, promote, and implement innovative ideas. Employee empowerment also demonstrated strong positive correlations with both HPWPs ($r = .889$) and innovative work performance ($r = .731$). These findings align with the ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) framework and social exchange theory, which posit that HPWPs create a supportive environment that fosters innovation when employees perceive autonomy and control over their work (Li et al., 2025; Miao et al., 2020). The strong associations observed in this study are consistent with prior research indicating that high-performance work systems promote innovative behavior by enhancing employees' skills, psychological empowerment, and sense of ownership (Jiang, 2024; Babar et al., 2025). In the context of Pakistan's sugar industry, where competitive pressures and technological changes demand continuous improvement, these results highlight HPWPs as a critical driver of individual-level innovation.



Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis stated that employee empowerment moderates the relationship between High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) and employee innovative work performance. The hierarchical regression analysis provided robust support for this moderating effect. In the final model, the interaction term (HPWPs \times Employee Empowerment) was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < .001$) and explained an additional 4.3% of the variance in innovative work performance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.043$), resulting in a total R^2 of 0.968. This indicates that the positive influence of HPWPs on innovative work performance is not uniform but becomes significantly stronger when employees experience higher levels of empowerment (autonomy, competence, and impact).

These results extend existing literature by demonstrating that empowerment acts as a boundary condition that amplifies the innovation-enhancing effects of HPWPs. When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to translate the resources and opportunities provided by HPWPs into creative actions and risk-taking behaviors (Li et al., 2025; Akrom, 2025). Conversely, low empowerment may limit the translation of HR practices into innovative outcomes, even in supportive systems. The findings are particularly relevant for developing economy contexts, where empowerment-oriented leadership can maximize the returns on modern HR investments (Jiang, 2024).

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the HRM-innovation literature by empirically validating the moderating role of employee empowerment in the HPWPs-innovative work performance linkage. Organizations seeking to foster innovation should not only adopt high-performance work practices but also cultivate an empowering work environment that grants employees autonomy and decision-making authority. Future research could explore additional boundary conditions or examine these relationships longitudinally to establish causality.

Conclusion

This study examined the moderating role of employee empowerment in the relationship between High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) and employee innovative work performance in Pakistan's private sugar industry. Results confirmed strong direct associations and a significant moderating effect of empowerment. The findings highlight that HPWPs are highly effective in promoting innovation, particularly when combined with an empowering work environment.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the AMO framework and social exchange theory by establishing employee empowerment as a key boundary



condition. Practically, organizations should implement robust HPWPs while simultaneously fostering employee autonomy and decision-making authority to maximize innovative outcomes.

Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design and industry-specific sample. Future research should employ longitudinal approaches and test the model across diverse sectors to enhance generalizability.

In conclusion, integrating High-Performance Work Practices with employee empowerment offers a powerful pathway for organizations to enhance employee innovative work performance and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Recommendations and Limitations

Recommendations

Organizations should adopt comprehensive HPWPs that include training, participation, and performance-based rewards. More importantly, they must create an empowering climate by granting employees greater autonomy and decision-making power. Regular assessment of employee perceptions of HPWPs and empowerment is recommended to strengthen innovation outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences, and the sample was limited to the sugar industry in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Future studies should use longitudinal designs, multi-industry samples, and objective performance measures to validate and extend these findings.

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Journal for Current Sign

Online ISSN (3006-1504)

Print ISSN (3006-1490)



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