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Psychological Empowerment as a Mediating Mechanism between Organizational Trust and Teachers' Academic Work Engagement

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The main aim to test the hypothesis that psychological empowerment mediates the association between organizational trust and work engagement. A Survey design, quantitative research was used. The sample consisted of 240 members of the faculty who were recruited in four universities in Lahore, two of which were public and two were private, using a multi-stage stratified random sampling method in order to represent the various fields and types of institution. Measures of the variables in the study that can be measured using standardized and empirically validated instruments: the Organizational Trust Scale, the Psychological Empowerment Scale, and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. The analysis of data was carried out with the help of descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and Smart PLS was used for the structural and mediation analyses. The results have shown significant positive correlation: organizational trust was expressed to be significantly correlated with psychological empowerment and with work engagement. The mediation analysis suggested that psychological empowerment explained about 39% of the overall effect of the organizational trust in work engagement and therefore, it was a significant partial mediator in the work engagement relationship. These findings highlight the key role empowerment plays in converting the organizational trust into the high-level of engagement, as the results indicate that the members of the faculty who believe their institutions to be trustworthy tend to become more empowered, and consequently, more engaged in the professional process. The research paper is a contribution to the literature on organizational psychology and management of higher education because it shows the inseparability of trust, empowerment, and engagement as well as offers evidence-based research in a South Asian academic setting.

Keywords: organizational trust, psychological empowerment, work engagement, academic faculty, higher education institutions, positive organizational behavior

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INTRODUCTION

The confidence of the employees on their organizations is perceived as a basic factor that determines workplace relationships. The factor of trust may be regarded as the key to collaboration and unity between people. It portrays confidence and involvement without any fear, hesitations or doubts. The Schaufeli et al. (2002) defines trust to be a situation in which one party feels that the other will not take advantage of his weaknesses (Kaczynski, 2003). Similarly, Kramer (1999) and Costa (2003) define it as expecting other people to act and have good intentions in a positive way.

Trust in the organization has a great importance to the institutions and their stakeholders, where the lack of trust can pose a big problem in meeting the institution objectives (Yilmaz, 2004). In the last ten years, there have been radical changes in the field of higher education such as the tuition model, faculty make-up, budget allocation, pedagogy and the increased use of technology. Universities still experience pressure which includes massification, globalization, growing expectations of research being applied practically and the growth of importance of managerial strategies, which has altered academic culture (Engelbrecht, et al., 2021).

The concept of psychological empowerment, rooted in industrial and organizational psychology, refers to the extent to which individuals perceive autonomy, responsibility, choice, and involvement in decision-making within their institutions. Numerous studies have shown that empowerment fosters motivation and enhances performance outcomes. Labour is at once at the very heart of human life, meeting fundamental needs, and a defining aspect of daily life. Productivity and performance are highly correlated with involvement in work. According to Bakker et al. (2008), stated that work engagement is "a positive, fulfilling, work- related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Likewise, Schaufeli et al. (2002) understand engagement as a feeling of proximity, allegiance, and esteem. It is the degree to which an individual integrates occupational status into his/ her own identity (Kananga, 1982, Zargar, et al., 2025). Employees who strongly identify with their job are reliable, effective, willing, and committed to carrying out their duties (Malach-Pines & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001).

Work engagement is recognized as a motivational force that brings about commitment and performance improvement to both employees and organizations. The personal spree to operate in such organizations where they feel more involved in decision making (Jayachandran, Edwin, & Vipin, 2021). This research aims to understand how work values induce young teachers' academic productivity. Faculty are the bars that set the standard of any institution of higher learning whose role is to teach, foster critical thinking, and mold the next generation of leaders (De wit & Altbach,2021).

Higher education institutions' academic and social fabric influenced by their faculty members. However, maintaining their level of engagement at work continues to be difficult, especially in settings where there is a lack of empowerment and organizational trust Organizational trust, defined as workers' confidence in the competence, equity, and integrity of their organizations, is necessary to create a positive work environment (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Psychological empowerment, which

encompasses a sense of competence, autonomy, and meaningful purpose in one's work, is a critical factor influencing motivation and engagement (Spreitzer, 1995).

Although the importance of the concepts is admitted, the correlation between organizational trust and work engagement in the prism of university faculty has not been explored properly. Specifically, not much is known about the possible intermediate contribution of psychological empowerment in this relationship. Past researches have indicated that empowered workers tend to transform the organizational trust into basic participation (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Nevertheless, empirical research on the functioning of these processes between university educators, who have their own set of problems in the form of administrative duties, teaching demands, and different degrees of institutional support, is lacking. This is one of the gaps that should be addressed to come up with strategies that will help improve teacher well being, job satisfaction and overall success of the institution. This paper will seek to investigate the impacts of psychological empowerment on the connection between organizational trust and work engagement.

The research is significant as it provides a recommendation of how such a supportive and challenging work atmosphere can be built among such higher education stakeholders as faculty, administrators and legislators among others. The study also offers valid advice on how to optimize faculty experiences with improvement of the performance of the institution by examining the mediating role of psychological empowerment between the relationship between work engagement and organizational trust. By being well informed about these relations, university administrators can develop policies and procedures that will enable faculty as well as foster trust. This will eventually increase the faculty engagement, job satisfaction and retention. The faculty members can also be empowered realizing the value of trust and empowerment in their work life, and this can be done to promote policies that will improve their performance and the state of their well-being. Legislators can also use these findings to develop programs that empower and build trust towards higher education which will lead to increased teaching and research results, reduction in turnover, and enhanced job satisfaction.

Organizational Trust and Psychological Empowerment

Empowerment is based on trust. The employees feel safer in terms of exercising autonomy, making decisions and sharing ideas when they have trust in their supervisors and organizational policies. A workforce that is psychologically empowered is created by leaders who are considered fair, transparent, and supportive (Laschinger et al., 2004). Psychological empowerment is also regarded as a means to encourage and expand capacity to make the right decision in situations where it is needed. It was said to be effective in providing for the enriched life of the individual, and was highly commended for this. multi-dimensional motivating component (Samawi, 2022).

Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement

Work engagement is highly predicted by psychological empowerment. Engaged employees have more chances of being motivated by the meaning they get in their

work, the belief that they are competent, and that they are in control of the work they do (Spreitzer, 1995; Seibert et al., 2011). Empowerment complements intrinsic motivation and improves the relationship between individual targets and corporate targets. According to Martin (2017), the sense of adaptability of teachers was significantly related to students' perceived autonomy support and their psychological well-being supported each other and both of them affected students' academic achievement. Hence, workplace happiness could be deemed as an essential psychological tool that helps teachers be motivated, committed and effective in teaching.

Organizational Trust and Work Engagement (Direct and Indirect)

Trust not only has a direct effect on work engagement but also an indirect effect on work engagement, by having a psychological empowering effect. Trusted employees are more likely to be empowered and such an empowerment results in an increased engagement (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Confidential relationships lead to emotional safety and psychological engagement in work.

Therefore, the mediating role of psychological empowerment exists between organizational trust and work engagement- establishing a pathway between the trust and the empowerment and engagement.

This is supported by a significant amount of evidence implying that psychological empowerment and work engagement has a strong correlation with organizational trust. Empowerment is based on trust and engagement is also the result of empowerment. This triad is especially relevant to the sphere of academia, in which faculty performance relies mostly on intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and substantial involvement.

A more detailed knowledge of what mechanism underlies these constructs and the relationships between them can enable administrators from a university to not be left powerless but to be proactive in improving faculty's engagement, satisfaction and university performance.

Faculty being the core asset of any university is primarily responsible in ensuring quality of teaching, research and service to the community. They do this under the pressure of quality requirements, pressure of the people on expectations, less governmental support and new technologies. Work engagement, a strong predictor of performance, is therefore necessary among teachers. External mechanisms, such as performance management, contribute with rules and incentives; however, internal motives, for example, psychological empowerment foster faculty members' enthusiasm and commitment. Of the components of empowerment, self-efficacy—belief in one's own competencies—is the most important in determining intrinsic satisfaction. Empowered faculty have a high degree of performance motivation, creativity in teaching and research, and proactive problem solving in facing academic problems through communicating with leaders.

Hypothesis

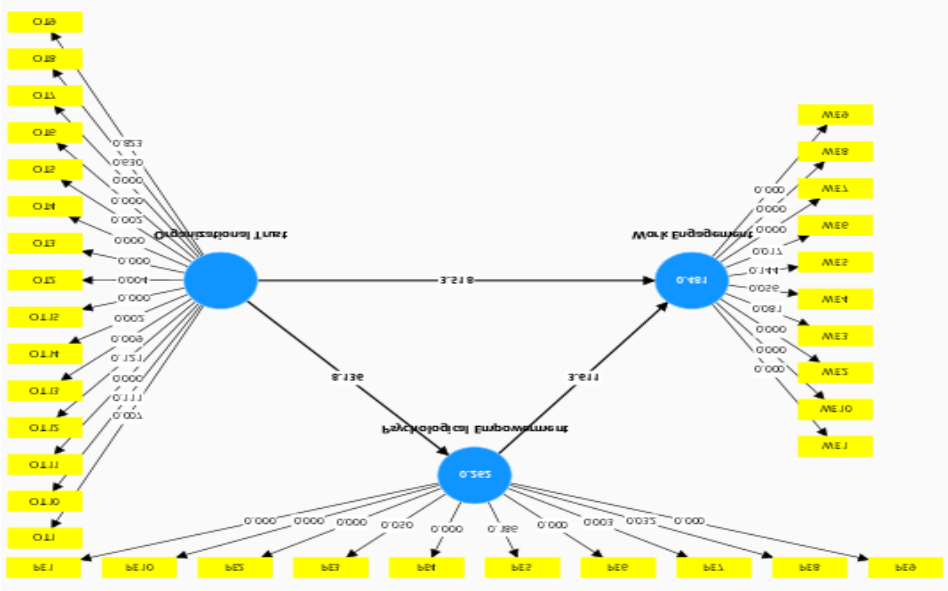
H01 There is no significant relationship between organizational trust (OT) and work engagement (WE) among university faculty

H02 There is no significant relationship between organizational trust (OT) and psychological empowerment (PE) in university faculty.

H03 There is no significant relationship between psychological empowerment (PE) and work engagement (WE) in university faculty.

H04 Psychologicalempowerment (PE) not significantly mediate the relationship between organizational trust and work engagement.

Figure 1
Conceptual framework



METHOD

A quantitative research methodology was employed to examine the mediating role of psychological empowerment between organizational trust and work engagement. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to collect data at a single point in time. Standardized instruments were utilized to ensure reliability and validity, and statistical analysis was applied to test the proposed hypotheses.

This research was done in four Pakistani universities based in Lahore. Two of these institutions were the state sector; Government College University (GCU) Lahore and Government College of Women University (LCWU) and two were the private sector University of Management and Technology (UMT) and Lahore Leads University (LLU). These were universities specially chosen in that they had developed social science faculties as well as the availability of the common departments among the different institutions. The universities had sufficient facilities of access to faculty, administrative authority to data collection and favorable academic research settings.

The target population of the study consists of full-time and long-term contract faculty members working in the Social Sciences at four selected universities, including two from the public sector; Government College University (GCU), Lahore and Lahore College for Women University (LCWU)and two from the private sector; University of Management and Technology(UMT) and Lahore Leads University(LLU). The sample was draw from the common departments across these Universities social sciences faculty, namely Education, Psychology/Applied Psychology, Political Science, International Relations (IR), Sociology, and Mass Communication/Media Studies.

The study employed a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique. In the first stage, two public and two private universities were purposively selected. In the second stage, within each university, six departmental strata were created based on the common disciplines of Education, Psychology/Applied Psychology, Political Science, International Relations (IR), Sociology, and Mass Communication/Media Studies. In the third stage, simple random sampling was carried out within each stratum to select faculty members. The target sample size was 240, with equal allocation for balanced representation and straightforward comparisons. Specifically, 60 faculty members were drawn from each university, with 10 respondents selected from each of the six departments, resulting in a total of 240 across the four universities. To account for nonresponse, approximately 340 faculty members (about 14–15 per stratum) were invited to participate. In cases where a department had fewer than 10 eligible faculty members, all were included, and the shortfall was redistributed proportionally across the remaining departments within the same university.

Validity and reliability tests were performed in order to guarantee accuracy and consistency of measurement. The tools of questionnaires were standardized measures that are in common use in organizational psychology studies. The content validity was determined through the adoption of scales that have been tested in the past in the empirical research. Factor analysis helped determine construct validity to ensure that the underlying was valid. Harman's single-factor test was conducted to determine the possible common method bias (CMB) associated with all of the study variables, which were collected through a self-report questionnaire. An exploratory factor analysis (without rotation) was conducted on all the measurement items. The results showed that the first unrotated factor accounted for 34.7% of the total variance, which is less than the recommended 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). So, the common method bias was not seen as a significant problem in this study.

The internal consistency was checked by testing the reliability with Cronbach alpha and all the scales showed a value greater than the acceptable level of 0.70. Cronbach alpha of three scales, that is, Organizational Trust Scale (OTS), Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES), and Work Engagement Scale (WE) are as follows.

Table 1
Reliability of three scales

Scale	Items	Cronbach Alpha
OTS	15	.887
PES	10	.855
WES	10	.790

Table 2
Relationship between organizational trust (OT), work engagement (WE) and psychological empowerment (PE)

Variables	Organizational Trust	Work Engagement	Psychological Empowerment
Organizational trust	1.00	.620**	.592**
Work Engagement	.620**	1.00	.654**
Psychological Empowerment	.592**	.654**	1.00

The correlation analysis showed that the three variables, which included the organization trust, work engagement, and psychological empowerment, were significantly related to each other and that all correlations have been statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. In particular, organizational trust was also positively correlated with the work engagement ($r = 0.620$, $p < 0.01$), and it was proved that employee engagement in the organization is increased with higher levels of trust. Likewise, the high degree of trust shared by the organization and the psychological empowerment was positively associated with organizational trust ($r = 0.592$, $p < 0.01$) which indicates that in the absence of trust in the organization employees tend to feel more empowered in their jobs. The best relationship was found between work engagement and psychological empowerment ($r = 0.654$, $p < 0.01$), it means that engaged employees are more likely to have greater levels of psychological empowerment and vice versa. As a whole, these findings indicate that there is a self-reinforcing connection between the three constructs, and it is important to promote trust and empowerment to increase employee engagement.

Table 3
Construct reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Organizational Trust	.887	.914	.542
Psychological Empowerment	.855	.892	.508
Work Engagement	.790	.865	.521

Table 4
HTMT ratio for discriminant validity

Constructs	OT	PE	WE
Organizational Trust (OT)	—		
Psychological Empowerment (PE)	.673	—	
Work Engagement (WE)	.721	.748	—

Table 5
Collinearity assessment using VIF

Structural Path	VIF
OT → PE	1.00
OT → WE	1.54
PE → WE	1.54

Table 6
Model fit indices

Model Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
SRMR	.067	< .08
NFI	.912	> .90
RMS Theta	.094	< .12

Reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity were used to evaluate the measurement model. Cronbach's alpha was from .790 to .887, composite reliability was from .865 to .914 and AVE was .508 to .542. The values of HTMT were all below the .85 threshold, which is indicative of discriminant validity. The values of VIF were less than 5.0, signifying no multicollinearity problems. Model fit indices were satisfactory: a SRMR value was .067, NFI value was .912, and RMS Theta value was .094.

H04: Psychological empowerment (PE) mediate the relationship between organizational trust (OT) and work engagement (WE)?

Figure 2
Mediation analysis in smart PLS

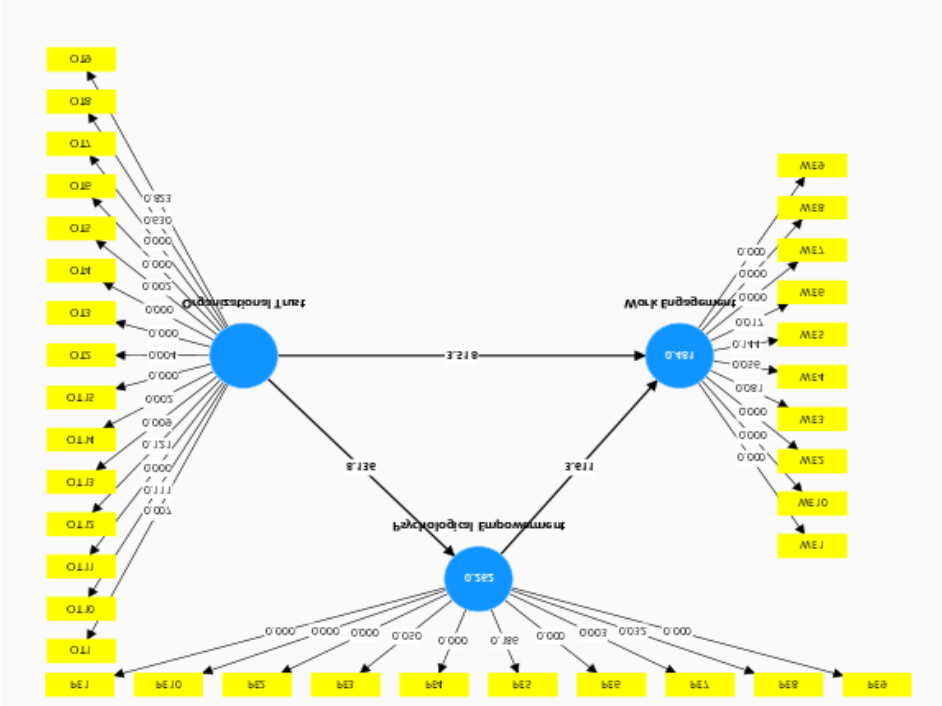


Table 7
Psychological empowerment (PE) mediate the relationship between organizational trust (OT) and work engagement (WE)

Total effect (OT->WE)		Direct effect(OT->WE)		Indirect effect of (OT on WE)				
Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	SD	T value	P value	BI[2.5%;97.5%]
.582	.000	0.394	.000	.225	.075	.2.999	.003	.015-.341

To test the mediation effect between the variables of Organizational Trust (OT) and Work Engagement (WE) via Psychological Empowerment (PE) a mediation analysis was conducted. The results show that there is a significant total effect of Organizational Trust to Work Engagement ($\beta = .582$, $p < .001$). Organizational Trust, however, was still a significant direct predictor of Work Engagement ($\beta = .394$, $p < .001$) when Psychological Empowerment was introduced in the model, thus demonstrating that Organizational Trust is still an important predictor of Work Engagement even after Psychological Empowerment is mediated.

Moreover, the indirect effect of Organizational Trust on Work Engagement via Psychological Empowerment was found to be significant ($\beta = .225$, $SD = .075$, $t = 2.999$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [.015, .341]). The results showed that the mediating effect of Psychological Empowerment is statistically significant because the 95% confidence intervals of Psychological Empowerment do not encompass zero.

The results show partial mediation model which suggests that Organizational Trust has a direct and indirect influence on Work Engagement via the mediation of Psychological Empowerment. The findings indicate that employees who believe that there is more trust within the organization are more likely to experience psychological empowerment, which leads them to be more engaged in their work.

DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis show that organizational trust affects the work engagement and job satisfaction in employees significantly and positively. The findings indicate that when workers view their organizations as being trustworthy (transparency, fairness, and integrity) they tend to have increased chances of demonstrating greater levels of motivation, commitment, and productivity. This is in line with preceding literature that indicate trust as the baseline of good organizational relations and a condition of a sustainable employee engagement (Colquitt et al., 2007; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001).

A major contribution of the study is the understanding that the influence of the trust on leadership with respect to employee state of mind and work results are enormous. Employees who have faith in their leaders stand higher chances of feeling like they belong, and more likely to go farther than the call of duty of their own choice. This is also consistent with the past studies (Burke et al., 2007) in which this led to an improvement in employees' trust of their supervisors, which fostered psychological safety for them and boosted their self-confidence and inventiveness. In addition, it was also found that organization trust is also able to offset turnover intentions, which was

what Robinson (1996) termed as the belief that broken organizations trust undermines commitment and that it provokes withdrawal behavior.

The data also favoured a close mediated interrelationship between organisational trust and team work. The greater the degree of trust that the staff members would have towards one another, the more eager they were to exchange the knowledge and resolve issues together. This validates Costa et al. (2018) who determined that trust is a trigger of teamwork, which causes healthy communication and minimizes interpersonal conflicts. Conversely, atmospheres that are accompanied by the absence of trust are characterized by stress, absence of teamwork and inefficiency. The second finding that should be noted is the fact that organizational trust is a very influential factor in the workplace culture. Fair, accountable and consistent practices foster the perception of fairness and encouragement. Such perceptions increase trust and support the psychological contract between the employees and the organization, which leads to job satisfaction and commitment in the future as Mayer et al. 1995).

Organizational trust was also identified as a strong predictor of institutional mission identification among the employees. Involved employees were tough and adaptable particularly in fast-evolving and knowledge-based settings. This observation agrees with Saks (2006) who argued that trust is an essential pre-condition of engagement since it defines how risk and reward one takes in committing oneself to work is valued by employees. Overall, there are findings that there is organizational trust as a core organizational resource that cuts across interpersonal relations. Trust is a competitive edge because it will develop more collaborators, more satisfied and dedicated ones who do not leave as frequently. Such practices as open communication, fair treatment, and regular decision making and supportive leadership can be utilized in the organization to develop and protect such resource in a manner that can maintain and inspire employees.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the association between Organizational Trust, Psychological empowerment and work engagement of faculty members in Higher education institutions. It was found that organizational trust has a significant and positive effect on work engagement. Furthermore, the impact of organizational trust on faculty engagement was partially mediated by psychological empowerment, suggesting that the positive association between organizational trust and faculty engagement extends beyond direct effects to indirect effects through psychological empowerment, which refers to feeling competent, autonomous, meaningful, and effective in their jobs.

The study adds to the existing literature by identifying psychological empowerment as a pathway by which trust in the organization relates to employee engagement in academic environments. In practice, HEIs need to work on building a trustworthy organizational culture, which is transparent, equitable, and leadership-focused. These can lead to better psychological empowerment of faculty, and ultimately to greater engagement, motivation and commitment to institutional objectives. Further research could examine other mediating and/or moderating factors to gain a deeper understanding of factors contributing to faculty work engagement.

The findings are corroborated by previous studies that emphasize on the leading importance of the organizational context in higher education. Academics are more likely to remain committed and be involved in the development of their institutes if trust is fostered and if those institutions are empowering working environments. On the other hand, when these components are not present, disconnection, lowered performance and a deficient academic atmosphere are a potential outcome. Finally, this research ends by positing the fact that psychological empowerment and organizational trust are interdependent mechanisms that foster faculty engagement. To improve faculty performance, job satisfaction and institutional growth, trust, recognition and academic stimulation, and autonomy must be developed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are the recommendations of this study. These recommendations are based on the finding of this study:

1. Fairness and transparency in policies and decision-making processes, to ensure perceived fairness, might shape faculty trust in an organization setting of the university.

2. Faculty development activities could include efforts to empower individuals, such as autonomy in teaching and research, and participatory decision-making.

3. Institutions to increase motivation and professional dedication can build recognition and rewards systems that acknowledge faculty contributions and accomplishments.

4. Leadership training programs could be established to train empowering and trust-centered leadership styles.

5. Universities can create permissive work atmospheres and open communication lines, to facilitate collaboration and creative initiatives of faculty.

6. Requiring periodic surveys or self-assessments could help universities gauge faculty involvement and identify areas to improve.

7. Developing collaborative forums for interdisciplinary research and open dialogue will increase the level of engagement while minimizing faculty disconnection.

IMPLICATIONS

Results of this research have fundamental implications to the policy of higher education. When formulating policies, policy makers should pay attention to the relative significance of organizational trust and psychological empowerment to make faculty engage and achieve organizational results. The strategies that may promote institutional trust and empowerment would include promoting academic freedom, shared governance, and fair evaluation procedures. Besides these, the allocation of resources can be biased towards support services to the faculties, development of professionals and open promotion mechanisms. Incorporation of these factors into higher education policy models could enable the institutions to enhance faculty satisfaction, retention and institutional effectiveness.

LIMITATIONS

While this study has made contributions, some of these are acknowledged here as limitations. Firstly, this study used a cross-sectional research design that restricts the scope to establish cause-effect relationships between organizational trust, psychological empowerment and work engagement. Longitudinal designs could be used in future studies to more closely examine causal effects over time. Second, the data were obtained from universities within a single city, so the results of this study may not be generalizable to other geographical areas and teaching contexts. Future studies are needed to be conducted with more cities and institutions to improve external validity. Third, all variables were self-reported through questionnaires, and this could result in common method variance and social desirability effects. Confidentiality and anonymity was provided to minimize response bias, but future research is encouraged to use multiple data source and mixed-methods to enhance the robustness of findings.

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