



**UNLOCKING EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY IN HOSPITALITY:
HOW EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP BUILDS PSYCHOLOGICAL
EMPOWERMENT AND JOB ENGAGEMENT IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY
CONTEXT A PLS-SEM ANALYSIS OF SEQUENTIAL MEDIATION MECHANISMS
IN GHANA'S HOTEL INDUSTRY**

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ABSTRACT: Purpose—This study examines how empowering leadership enhances employee creativity through psychological empowerment and job engagement in Ghana's hospitality industry. **Design/methodology/approach** – Survey data from 423 hospitality employees were analyzed using PLS-SEM, testing direct, parallel, and sequential mediation effects with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. **Findings**—Empowering leadership significantly predicted creativity, psychological empowerment, and job engagement. Psychological empowerment and job engagement both independently and sequentially mediated the leadership–creativity relationship. The model explained 67.8% of the variance in employee creativity, with most effects operating indirectly through empowerment and engagement. **Practical implications** – Hospitality organizations should strengthen empowering leadership, foster psychologically empowering work environments, and design engaging jobs to stimulate employee creativity.

Originality/value – The study advances leadership and creativity research by uncovering sequential mediation mechanisms in an under-researched African hospitality context.

KEYWORDS: Empowering leadership; psychological empowerment; job engagement; employee creativity; hospitality industry; Ghana.



INTRODUCTION

The contemporary hospitality industry operates in an increasingly volatile environment characterized by rapid technological change, intensified competition, and evolving customer expectations, necessitating continuous innovation and organizational adaptability (Breier et al., 2021; Gössling et al., 2020). In this context, employee creativity has emerged as a critical strategic resource, enabling service differentiation, enhanced customer experiences, and sustained competitive advantage (Nasifoglu Elidemir et al., 2020; Koseoglu et al., 2020). Organizations that fail to cultivate creativity risk declining performance and reduced market relevance.

Employee creativity refers to the generation of novel and useful ideas related to products, services, processes, or procedures (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). In hospitality settings—where service encounters are dynamic and customer needs are often unpredictable—frontline employees' creative problem-solving plays a decisive role in service recovery, customer satisfaction, and organizational outcomes (Hon & Lui, 2016; Slåtten et al., 2020). Despite its importance, many hospitality organizations struggle to foster creativity, particularly in emerging economies where hierarchical leadership styles, centralized decision-making, and risk-averse cultures may inhibit innovative behaviors (Afsar et al., 2019).

Empowering leadership has gained increasing scholarly attention as a leadership approach conducive to creativity. It emphasizes autonomy, participative decision-making, information sharing, and confidence in employee capabilities (Joo et al., 2023; Cheong et al., 2019). By delegating authority and encouraging self-directed action, empowering leaders create psychological conditions that support intrinsic motivation, risk-taking, and creative engagement (Lee et al., 2018). However, leadership behaviors alone are insufficient to explain creativity; understanding the psychological mechanisms through which empowering leadership translates into creative outcomes remains essential.

Psychological empowerment represents a key explanatory mechanism. Conceptualized as a motivational state comprising meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995a), psychological empowerment reflects employees' subjective experience of control and purpose at work. Prior research suggests that empowered employees exhibit higher creative self-efficacy, reduced fear of failure, and greater cognitive flexibility—conditions essential for creativity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010a). Yet, psychological empowerment may not directly translate into creativity without sustained motivational investment in work roles.

Job engagement—defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002a)—represents such a motivational investment. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, empowerment functions as a job resource that stimulates engagement, which in turn provides the cognitive and emotional energy necessary for creative effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017a). Engaged employees are more likely to persist in idea generation, explore novel solutions, and implement creative initiatives.

Ghana's hospitality industry faces persistent challenges in innovation, including limited service differentiation and reliance on imported service models (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2023a). Leadership practices remain largely hierarchical, reflecting high power distance cultural norms that may constrain employee autonomy and creativity (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Despite these



challenges, empirical research examining leadership–creativity mechanisms in Ghanaian hospitality contexts is scarce.

Three key gaps emerge. First, existing studies largely examine empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, and job engagement in isolation, with limited integration into comprehensive mediation frameworks (Wen, Huang & Teo, S. (2023). Second, empirical research examining leadership and creativity within the hospitality sector in African emerging economies remains markedly limited. The extant literature on leadership and employee creativity is heavily concentrated in Western and Asian contexts (Chen et al., 2011; Gong et al., 2009; Shao et al., 2022; Elkhwesky, *et al.*, 2022), with comparatively little systematic attention devoted to African service industries. Third, the comparative explanatory strength of parallel versus sequential mediation mechanisms in the leadership–creativity nexus remains theoretically and empirically unresolved. While several studies conceptualize mediators such as psychological empowerment and job engagement as operating independently in parallel (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), others imply a causal chain in which one mediator transmits influence to another before affecting creativity (Saks, 2006; Spreitzer, 1995). This study addresses these gaps by examining the direct and indirect effects of empowering leadership on employee creativity through psychological empowerment and job engagement, testing both parallel and sequential mediation pathways using PLS-SEM with data from 423 hospitality employees in Ghana.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the strategic importance of creativity, Ghana's hospitality industry continues to exhibit low levels of service innovation, undermining its competitiveness regionally and internationally (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2023b). Although leadership is widely recognized as a key determinant of employee creativity, empirical evidence explaining how empowering leadership fosters creativity within Ghanaian hospitality organizations is largely absent.

Moreover, existing studies often treat leadership–creativity relationships as black boxes, failing to clarify whether empowering leadership operates through psychological empowerment, job engagement, or their sequential interaction. Given Ghana's high power distance cultural context, the effectiveness of empowering leadership—which emphasizes autonomy and power-sharing—cannot be assumed. Without context-specific evidence, leadership development initiatives risk importing Western models without empirical validation.

This study responds to these challenges by systematically examining the mechanisms through which empowering leadership influences employee creativity in Ghana's hospitality sector.

Research Objectives

Main Objective

To examine the parallel and sequential mediating roles of psychological empowerment and job engagement in the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity in Ghana's hospitality industry.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the direct effect of empowering leadership on employee creativity.



2. To examine the effects of empowering leadership on psychological empowerment and job engagement.
3. To investigate the effect of psychological empowerment on job engagement.
4. To examine the effects of psychological empowerment and job engagement on employee creativity.
5. To test the parallel mediating roles of psychological empowerment and job engagement.
6. To test the sequential mediation pathway from empowering leadership to creativity via psychological empowerment and job engagement.
7. To compare the relative strength of parallel and sequential mediation pathways.

Research Questions

1. Does empowering leadership directly influence employee creativity in Ghanaian hospitality organizations?
2. How does empowering leadership affect psychological empowerment and job engagement?
3. Does psychological empowerment influence job engagement?
4. How do psychological empowerment and job engagement affect employee creativity?
5. Do psychological empowerment and job engagement mediate the leadership–creativity relationship in parallel?
6. Do psychological empowerment and job engagement mediate this relationship sequentially?
7. Which mediation pathway exerts a stronger effect on employee creativity?

Contributions

The study makes four contributions. Theoretically, it advances leadership and creativity research by unpacking the “how” and “why” of empowering leadership through sequential mediation, integrating Self-Determination Theory and the JD-R model. Methodologically, it demonstrates the application of rigorous PLS-SEM in hospitality research. Contextually, it provides rare empirical evidence from Ghana, addressing geographic imbalances in the literature. Practically, findings offer evidence-based guidance for leadership development and HRM practices aimed at enhancing creativity in hospitality organizations.

Organization of the Study

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature and develops hypotheses. Section 3 presents the conceptual framework. Section 4 outlines the methodology. Section 5 reports empirical results. Section 6 discusses findings. Section 7 concludes with implications, limitations, and future research directions.



LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in complementary theoretical perspectives explaining how empowering leadership translates into employee creativity through psychological empowerment and job engagement.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that individuals possess innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the satisfaction of which fosters intrinsic motivation, psychological growth, and optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2017). Leadership behaviors that support these needs encourage autonomous motivation, whereas controlling environments undermine creativity and engagement. Empowering leadership satisfies autonomy through delegation, competence through skill development and confidence expression, and relatedness through supportive leader-follower relationships, thereby stimulating intrinsic motivation manifested as psychological empowerment, engagement, and creative behavior.

The Componential Theory of Creativity argues that creativity emerges from the interaction of domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic task motivation (Amabile, 1983, 2016). Among these components, intrinsic motivation is the most critical determinant, as individuals exhibit higher creativity when driven by interest, enjoyment, and challenge rather than external pressure (Amabile, 1998a). Empowering leadership enhances intrinsic motivation by granting autonomy, fostering confidence, and creating psychologically safe environments. Psychological empowerment and job engagement represent motivational states through which empowering leadership influences creativity.

Together, these frameworks explain how empowering leadership fosters need satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, which are translated into creative outcomes via psychological empowerment and job engagement.

Empowering Leadership

Empowering leadership refers to leadership behaviors that share power with employees by enhancing work meaningfulness, promoting participation in decision-making, expressing confidence in employee capabilities, providing autonomy, and removing bureaucratic constraints (Konczak et al., 2000; Ahearne et al., 2005). Rather than relying on control, empowering leaders enable employees to self-regulate their work and contribute proactively to organizational goals.

In hospitality contexts, empowering leadership is particularly salient. Frequent customer interactions, service variability, and frontline employees' proximity to operational problems require adaptive and creative responses (Hon & Lui, 2016). Employees often possess valuable contextual knowledge that can inform service innovation, yet hierarchical leadership may suppress its utilization. Empirical evidence consistently links empowering leadership to creativity, innovation, and performance across service settings (Cheong et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018).



Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment reflects intrinsic task motivation manifested in four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995b). Meaning refers to the alignment between work roles and personal values; competence reflects confidence in one's ability to perform effectively; self-determination denotes autonomy in initiating and regulating work activities; and impact captures perceived influence over organizational outcomes.

Psychological empowerment facilitates creativity through multiple mechanisms. Meaning fosters persistence and cognitive engagement; competence enhances creative self-efficacy and reduces fear of failure; self-determination provides cognitive freedom to explore novel ideas; and impact motivates creative effort by signaling that contributions matter (Alshahrani et al., 2025, Shalley et al., 2004). Meta-analytic evidence confirms that psychological empowerment is positively associated with creativity and performance (Maynard et al., 2012; Seibert et al., 2011).

Job Engagement

Job engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002b). Vigor reflects energy and persistence, dedication indicates enthusiasm and strong identification with work, and absorption refers to deep concentration and immersion.

From the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) perspective, engagement arises when job resources satisfy psychological needs and activate motivational processes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017b). Engagement enhances creativity by supplying the cognitive and emotional resources necessary for creative effort. Vigor supports sustained idea generation, dedication fuels intrinsic motivation to pursue novelty, and absorption enables deep cognitive processing required for original thinking (Christian et al., 2011). Meta-analytic evidence confirms a robust positive relationship between engagement and creativity ($\rho \approx .34$).

Employee Creativity

Employee creativity refers to the generation of novel and useful ideas concerning products, services, processes, or procedures (Amabile et al., 1996). Creativity requires both originality and usefulness (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). In hospitality, creativity manifests through personalized service delivery, innovative service recovery, operational improvements, and novel guest experiences (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2016). In emerging economies such as Ghana, employee creativity is essential for service differentiation and competitive advantage in increasingly saturated markets.

Hypotheses Development

Empowering Leadership and Employee Creativity

Empowering leadership enhances creativity by granting autonomy, encouraging participative decision-making, expressing confidence, and removing bureaucratic constraints. Autonomy enables experimentation and intrinsic motivation; participation enhances cognitive flexibility; confidence expression strengthens creative self-efficacy; and reduced constraints provide resources for creative work (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Zhang & Zhou, 2014a). Empirical studies



consistently report positive effects of empowering leadership on creativity in service contexts (Zhang & Zhou, 2014b; Afsar et al., 2019).

H1: Empowering leadership positively influences employee creativity.

Empowering Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

Empowering leadership directly shapes psychological empowerment by creating conditions that enhance meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Leaders connect individual roles to organizational goals, delegate authority, provide developmental support, and implement employee input, thereby strengthening empowerment cognitions (Spreitzer, 1995c; Zhang & Bartol, 2010d). Empirical evidence confirms strong associations between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment, including in hospitality settings (Hon & Lui, 2016).

H2: Empowering leadership positively influences psychological empowerment.

Empowering Leadership and Job Engagement

According to JD-R theory, empowering leadership provides job resources—autonomy, participation, support, and development—that satisfy psychological needs and activate engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017c). Empowering leaders enhance vigor through support and meaningful work, dedication through inspirational vision and confidence, and absorption through autonomy and challenging tasks. Prior studies demonstrate that empowering leadership significantly predicts work engagement in service contexts (Tuckey et al., 2012; Li et al., 2016).

H3: Empowering leadership positively influences job engagement.

Psychological Empowerment and Job Engagement

Psychological empowerment functions as a personal resource that promotes engagement by enhancing control, efficacy, and meaningfulness (Hobfoll, 2002). Empowered employees experience higher energy, stronger identification with work, and greater immersion, leading to increased engagement (Maynard et al., 2012). Longitudinal evidence confirms that psychological empowerment predicts subsequent engagement (Quiñones et al., 2013).

H4: Psychological empowerment positively influences job engagement.

Psychological Empowerment and Employee Creativity

Psychological empowerment promotes creativity through intrinsic motivation, creative self-efficacy, and cognitive freedom. Meaning and self-determination enhance intrinsic motivation; competence reflects creative self-efficacy; and impact reduces risk aversion by signaling that creative ideas are valued (Amabile, 1998b; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Empirical evidence confirms positive effects of empowerment on creativity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010e).

H5: Psychological empowerment positively influences employee creativity.



Job Engagement and Employee Creativity

Engaged employees possess the energy, motivation, and persistence required for creative performance. Vigor sustains creative effort, dedication fuels intrinsic motivation, and absorption facilitates deep cognitive processing and associative thinking (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Fredrickson, 2001). Empirical studies demonstrate that engagement predicts creative performance and mediates leadership–creativity relationships (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2013; Orth & Volmer, 2017).

H6: Job engagement positively influences employee creativity.

Parallel Mediation

Integrating SDT and JD-R theory, empowering leadership enhances creativity indirectly through psychological empowerment and job engagement. Empowering leadership satisfies psychological needs, producing empowerment that fuels intrinsic motivation and creativity. Simultaneously, empowering leadership provides job resources that trigger engagement, generating energy and motivation for creative behavior.

H7: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity.

H8: Job engagement mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity.

Sequential Mediation

Beyond parallel pathways, theory supports a sequential process. The Conservation of Resources theory suggests that initial resource gains enable further resource investment (Hobfoll, 2002). Empowering leadership first builds psychological empowerment (a personal resource), which then facilitates job engagement (a motivational resource), ultimately leading to creativity. SDT further implies a temporal sequence from need satisfaction to intrinsic motivation to creative behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Empirical evidence supports empowerment–engagement sequencing (Quiñones et al., 2013).

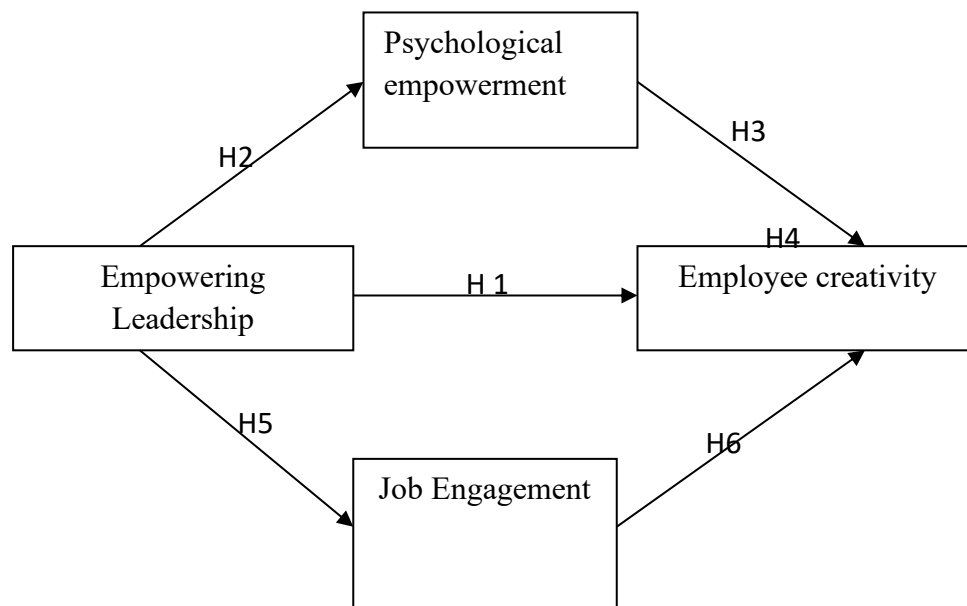
H9: Psychological empowerment and job engagement sequentially mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework, proposing direct, parallel, and sequential pathways through which empowering leadership influences employee creativity.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Parallel and Sequential Mediation Model



Author's Construct (2026)

Note. EL = Empowering Leadership; PE = Psychological Empowerment; JE = Job Engagement; EC = Employee Creativity. Dotted line = direct effect; solid lines = mediation pathways (parallel and sequential).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Philosophical Positioning

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design grounded in a positivist epistemological orientation, emphasizing objective measurement, hypothesis testing, and statistical generalization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An explanatory research approach was employed to examine theoretically derived relationships among empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, job engagement, and employee creativity. The cross-sectional design enabled efficient data collection from a large and geographically dispersed sample within Ghana's hospitality industry and provided sufficient statistical power for testing complex parallel and sequential mediation models. However, consistent with methodological conventions, causal inferences are interpreted cautiously due to single time-point measurement (Rindfleisch et al., 2008; Saunders et al., 2019).



Population and Sampling

The target population comprised full-time employees in Ghana's hospitality industry, including hotels (3–5 stars), restaurants, and tourism service providers located in the Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions. These regions account for approximately 65% of registered hospitality establishments and the highest tourist inflows in Ghana (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2023c).

A multi-stage stratified cluster sampling strategy was employed to ensure representativeness. First, the Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions were purposively selected due to hospitality concentration. Second, establishments were stratified by type (hotels, restaurants, tourism services) and size (small, medium, large). Third, establishments were selected using probability proportional to size. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select employees from personnel lists within participating establishments.

Sample size adequacy was assessed using multiple criteria. PLS-SEM guidelines recommend a minimum sample size of ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at an endogenous construct (Hair et al., 2019). G*Power analysis further indicated a minimum of 138 respondents to detect small-to-medium effects ($f^2 = .10$) at $\alpha = .05$ with 80% power. Given the complexity of sequential mediation, anticipated non-response, and data screening exclusions, a target sample of 500 was set.

Questionnaires were distributed to 538 employees across 47 establishments. A total of 451 responses were received (83.8% response rate). After excluding incomplete responses and failed attention checks, 423 usable questionnaires remained, exceeding minimum requirements and providing robust statistical power.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 present the demographic characteristics of respondents comprised 51.3% males and 48.7% females. Most respondents were aged between 26 and 35 years (45.4%), held at least a bachelor's degree (52.7%), and had organizational tenure between one and three years (38.3%). Frontline service employees constituted 42.8% of the sample, followed by skilled specialists (31.4%) and supervisors/coordinators (25.8%). Participants were drawn from hotels (39.2%), restaurants (35.5%), and tourism services (25.4%), with 61.2% located in Greater Accra and 38.8% in the Ashanti Region.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents ($N = 423$)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	217	51.3
Female	206	48.7
Age		
18-25 years	96	22.7
26-35 years	192	45.4
36-45 years	102	24.1
Above 45 years	33	7.8



Education Level		
Diploma/HND	105	24.8
Bachelor's Degree	223	52.7
Master's Degree	81	19.1
Doctoral/Professional	14	3.3
Organizational Tenure		
Less than 1 year	79	18.7
1-3 years	162	38.3
4-6 years	112	26.5
7-10 years	52	12.3
More than 10 years	18	4.3
Job Role		
Frontline Service Staff	181	42.8
Skilled Specialist	133	31.4
Supervisor/Coordinator	109	25.8
Establishment Type		
Hotel	166	39.2
Restaurant	150	35.5
Tourism Services	107	25.4
Region		
Greater Accra	259	61.2
Ashanti	164	38.8

Field Data (2025)

Measurement Instruments

All constructs were measured using established and validated scales adapted to the Ghanaian hospitality context through expert review and pilot testing. Responses were captured on seven-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

Empowering leadership was measured using a 12-item scale adapted from Ahearne et al. (2005) and Zhang and Bartol (2010f), capturing work meaningfulness, participative decision-making, confidence expression, autonomy, and role modeling. Psychological empowerment was measured using Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item scale assessing meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Job engagement was measured using the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9), assessing vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Employee creativity was measured using a 13-item scale adapted from Zhou and George (2001). All scales demonstrated strong reliability in prior hospitality research ($\alpha > .85$).

Data Collection Procedures and Ethics

Data were collected over a 12-week period (August–October 2024) following ethical approval from the Accra Technical University Institutional Review Board (Approval No: ATU-IRB-



2024-112). Establishments granted access after receiving official requests detailing research objectives, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Surveys were administered using three modes to accommodate varying levels of technological access: online questionnaires via Qualtrics (48%), paper-based surveys administered during staff meetings (44%), and tablet-assisted self-administration during workplace visits (8%). Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. No individual incentives were provided to avoid coercion; however, participating establishments received aggregated feedback reports.

The study complied with ethical standards and Ghana's Data Protection Act (2012). Identifying information was collected separately from survey responses and permanently deleted after data collection. All data were securely stored on encrypted, password-protected devices.

Common Method Bias and Data Analysis

Given the use of self-report, cross-sectional data, procedural and statistical remedies were implemented to address common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Procedurally, anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized to reduce social desirability bias. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test indicated that no single factor accounted for the majority of variance (31.2%), suggesting common method variance (CMV) was unlikely. Additionally, full collinearity variance inflation factors ranged from 1.85 to 2.93, below the critical threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015). **Collinearity:** All variance inflation factors (VIFs), values < 3.3 (range: 2.034-3.047), confirming no collinearity bias.

Data screening and descriptive analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS 29. Structural equation modeling was performed using SmartPLS 4.0. PLS-SEM was selected due to its robustness to non-normal data, suitability for complex models with multiple mediators, prediction-oriented focus, and appropriateness for emerging economy research contexts (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2021).

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Data Screening: Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test indicated missing completely at random ($\chi^2 = 512.34$, $df = 548$, $p = .892$). Cases with >15% missing ($n = 23$) and attention check failures ($n = 5$) were excluded, yielding $n = 423$. Remaining missing values (<2.1% per variable) were mean imputed. Mahalanobis distance identified 7 multivariate outliers ($p < .001$); retained as legitimate responses with minimal results impact.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations: Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, and correlations. Variables demonstrated adequate variation ($SD = 0.94$ - 1.28). Skewness (-1.17 to -0.42) and kurtosis (-0.61 to 1.93) indicated some non-normality, justifying PLS-SEM. Correlations ranged from .498 to .714 ($p < .01$), supporting hypothesized relationships while below .90, suggesting no multicollinearity concerns.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. EL	4.87	1.14				
2. PE	5.21	1.02	.687**			
3. JE	5.03	1.08	.634**	.714**		
4. EC	4.92	1.16	.671**	.623**	.658**	

Note. EL = Empowering Leadership; PE = Psychological Empowerment; JE = Job Engagement; EC = Employee Creativity. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model demonstrated robust psychometric properties (Table 3). All indicator loadings exceeded .708 except two items (.683, .697), retained given theoretical importance and exceeding .60 threshold. Loadings ranged from .683 to .923. Cronbach's alpha (.894-.947) and composite reliability (.921-.959) substantially exceeded .70, confirming excellent internal consistency. AVE values (.667-.787) exceeded .50, demonstrating adequate convergent validity. VIF values (1.934-3.087) remained below 3.3, confirming no multicollinearity.

Table 3: Measurement Model Assessment: Item Loadings, Reliability, and Validity

Construct/Items	Loading	VIF	α	CR	AVE
Empowering Leadership (EL)			0.937	0.946	0.672
EL1: Helps understand objectives-goals link	0.834	2.756			
EL2: Explains overall purpose of work	0.827	2.698			
EL3: Explains how my job fits bigger picture	0.819	2.634			
EL4: Solicits my opinion on decisions	0.845	2.823			
EL5: Listens to my suggestions	0.838	2.789			
EL6: Makes decisions together with me	0.812	2.651			
EL7: Expresses confidence in my ability	0.829	2.734			
EL8: Believes I can handle challenging tasks	0.823	2.687			
EL9: Allows me to make important decisions	0.816	2.623			
EL10: Permits me to use my own judgment	0.807	2.587			
EL11: Leads by example	0.798	2.534			
EL12: Practices what they preach	0.806	2.598			
Psychological Empowerment (PE)			0.924	0.937	0.682
PE1: My work is meaningful to me	0.857	2.923			
PE2: My job activities are personally meaningful	0.848	2.867			
PE3: The work I do is meaningful to me	0.834	2.789			
PE4: I am confident about my ability	0.841	2.834			
PE5: I am self-assured about my capabilities	0.829	2.756			
PE6: I have mastered necessary skills	0.819	2.687			
PE7: I have significant autonomy	0.846	2.856			
PE8: I can decide how to do my work	0.837	2.798			
PE9: I have considerable independence	0.823	2.723			
PE10: My impact on department is large	0.827	2.745			
PE11: I have significant influence	0.816	2.667			
PE12: I have control over what happens	0.808	2.612			



Job Engagement (JE)			0.912	0.929	0.667
JE1: At work, I feel bursting with energy	0.843	2.834			
JE2: I feel strong and vigorous	0.834	2.779			
JE3: When I wake up, I feel like going to work	0.819	2.687			
JE4: I am enthusiastic about my job	0.856	2.912			
JE5: My job inspires me	0.847	2.856			
JE6: I am proud of the work I do	0.838	2.798			
JE7: I feel happy when working intensely	0.829	2.745			
JE8: I am immersed in my work	0.823	2.712			
JE9: I get carried away when working	0.683	1.934			
Employee Creativity (EC)			0.947	0.953	0.636
EC1: I suggest new ways to achieve goals	0.823	2.712			
EC2: I come up with new and practical ideas	0.847	2.856			
EC3: I search out new technologies/processes	0.834	2.779			
EC4: I suggest new ways to increase quality	0.829	2.745			
EC5: I am a good source of creative ideas	0.816	2.667			
EC6: I am not afraid to take risks	0.697	2.123			
EC7: I promote and champion ideas	0.808	2.598			
EC8: I exhibit creativity on job	0.842	2.834			
EC9: I develop adequate plans for implementation	0.827	2.734			
EC10: I often have new and innovative ideas	0.838	2.798			
EC11: I come up with creative solutions	0.851	2.878			
EC12: I often have fresh approach to problems	0.843	2.834			
EC13: I suggest new ways of performing tasks	0.834	2.779			

Note. All loadings significant at $p < .001$. α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted; VIF = Variance inflation factor. Thresholds: loadings $> .708$, $\alpha > .70$, CR $> .70$, AVE $> .50$, VIF < 3.3 .

Discriminant Validity: Table 4 presents Fornell-Larcker criterion. Square roots of AVE (diagonal, bold) ranged from .817 to .887, exceeding all inter-construct correlations, satisfying the criterion.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	EL	PE	JE	EC
EL	0.820			
PE	0.687	0.826		
JE	0.634	0.714	0.817	
EC	0.671	0.623	0.658	0.798

Note. Diagonal (bold) = $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$. Off-diagonal = inter-construct correlations.

Table 5 presents HTMT ratios, ranging from .547 to .798, all below .85, confirming discriminant validity.

**Table 5: Discriminant Validity: HTMT Ratio**

Construct	EL	PE	JE	EC
EL				
PE	0.732			
JE	0.687	0.781		
EC	0.714	0.672	0.703	

Note. All HTMT values < .85.

Structural Model Assessment

Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing.

Table 6 presents structural results. Hypothesis 1 proposed that empowering leadership significantly positively influenced employee creativity ($\beta = .187$, $t = 4.923$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. Hypothesis 2 proposed that Empowering leadership significantly positively influenced psychological empowerment ($\beta = .671$, $t = 22.834$, $p < .001$), supporting H2. Hypothesis 3 proposed that Empowering leadership significantly positively influenced job engagement ($\beta = .456$, $t = 12.567$, $p < .001$), supporting H3.

Psychological empowerment significantly positively influenced job engagement ($\beta = .398$, $t = 10.234$, $p < .001$), supporting H4. Psychological empowerment significantly positively influenced employee creativity ($\beta = .243$, $t = 6.734$, $p < .001$), supporting H5. Job engagement significantly positively influenced employee creativity ($\beta = .312$, $t = 8.456$, $p < .001$), supporting H6.

Table 6: Structural Model Results: Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	t -value	p -value	CI [LL, UL]	Decision
H1	EL $\rightarrow$ EC	0.187	4.923	<.001	[0.112, 0.262]	Supported
H2	EL $\rightarrow$ PE	0.671	22.834	<.001	[0.614, 0.728]	Supported
H3	EL $\rightarrow$ JE	0.456	12.567	<.001	[0.385, 0.527]	Supported
H4	PE $\rightarrow$ JE	0.398	10.234	<.001	[0.322, 0.474]	Supported
H5	PE $\rightarrow$ EC	0.243	6.734	<.001	[0.172, 0.314]	Supported
H6	JE $\rightarrow$ EC	0.312	8.456	<.001	[0.239, 0.385]	Supported

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; CI = 95% bias-corrected confidence interval based on 5,000 bootstrap samples; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; EL = Empowering Leadership; PE = Psychological Empowerment; JE = Job Engagement; EC = Employee Creativity.

Indirect Effects (Mediation)

Mediation Analysis.

Hypotheses 7 and 8 examined the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationships between empowering leadership and employee creativity. Following the procedures outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008) and implemented in SmartPLS 4.0, we



tested the indirect effects using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Hypothesis 7 proposed that psychological empowerment as presented in Table 7 presents mediation analysis. The study found that psychological empowerment significantly mediated the EL-EC relationship (indirect effect = .163, $t = 6.542$, $p < .001$), supporting H7. Job engagement significantly mediated the EL-EC relationship (indirect effect = .142, $t = 7.123$, $p < .001$), supporting H8. Sequential mediation through EL $\rightarrow$ PE $\rightarrow$ JE $\rightarrow$ EC was significant (indirect effect = .084, $t = 5.867$, $p < .001$), supporting H9.

The total indirect effect was .389 ($p < .001$). Total effect (direct + indirect) was .576 ($p < .001$). VAF = 67.5%, indicating 67.5% of empowering leadership's creativity influence operates through mediators.

Table 7: Specific Indirect Effects: Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	β	t -value	p -value	CI [LL, UL]	VAF	Decision
H7	EL $\rightarrow$ PE $\rightarrow$ EC	0.163	6.542	<.001	[0.114, 0.212]	28.3%	Supported
H8	EL $\rightarrow$ JE $\rightarrow$ EC	0.142	7.123	<.001	[0.103, 0.181]	24.7%	Supported
H9	EL $\rightarrow$ PE $\rightarrow$ JE $\rightarrow$ EC	0.084	5.867	<.001	[0.056, 0.112]	14.6%	Supported
	Total Indirect	0.389	14.234	<.001	[0.335, 0.443]	67.5%	
	Total Effect	0.576	18.923	<.001	[0.516, 0.636]		

Note. β = standardized indirect effect; CI = 95% bias-corrected confidence interval; VAF = Variance Accounted For (indirect/total $\times$ 100%).

Model Explanatory Power: Table 8 presents R^2 , adjusted R^2 , f^2 , Q^2 . Empowering leadership explained substantial variance in psychological empowerment ($R^2 = .450$), job engagement ($R^2 = .583$), and employee creativity ($R^2 = .678$, adjusted $R^2 = .675$). Combined mediators showed medium to large effects on creativity: PE ($f^2 = .097$), JE ($f^2 = .159$), EL direct ($f^2 = .057$). Q^2 values confirmed predictive relevance: PE ($Q^2 = .289$), JE ($Q^2 = .412$), EC ($Q^2 = .523$).

Table 8: Model Assessment Indices: Explanatory Power and Predictive Relevance

Endogenous Variable	R^2	Adj. R^2	f^2 (EL)	f^2 (PE)	f^2 (JE)	Q^2
Psychological Empowerment	0.450	0.449	0.818 ^L	—	—	0.289
Job Engagement	0.583	0.581	0.339	0.257	—	0.412
Employee Creativity	0.678	0.675	0.057 ^s	0.097 ^M	0.159 ^M	0.523

Note. f^2 effect size: ^s = small (.02), ^M = medium (.15), ^L = large (.35); Q^2 = predictive relevance (blindfolding, omission distance = 7).



DISCUSSION

This study examined how empowering leadership enhances employee creativity through psychological empowerment and job engagement in Ghana's hospitality industry. Overall, the findings provide strong support for all hypothesized relationships and make meaningful contributions to leadership, creativity, and hospitality management scholarship.

Empowering Leadership and Employee Creativity

Empowering leadership exerted a significant positive direct effect on employee creativity ($\beta = .187, p < .001$), supporting H1 and aligning with predictions from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Amabile & Pratt, 2016). This result is consistent with prior meta-analytic evidence linking empowering leadership to creativity (Cheong et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018). In Ghana's hospitality context, empowering leaders promote creativity by delegating service-related authority, encouraging employee input, expressing confidence in creative abilities, and reducing bureaucratic constraints—practices that enable frontline employees to respond innovatively to customer needs and service challenges.

Psychological Empowerment as a Mediator

Empowering leadership strongly predicted psychological empowerment ($\beta = .671, p < .001$), which in turn significantly enhanced creativity ($\beta = .243, p < .001$). The significant indirect effect ($\beta = .163, p < .001$) supports H2, H5, and H7 and confirms that empowering leadership practices translate directly into employees' perceptions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). This finding extends Self-Determination Theory by showing that empowering leadership satisfies core psychological needs, which foster intrinsic motivation and creativity. In Ghana's traditionally hierarchical hospitality context, these effects are particularly salient, as empowerment represents a meaningful shift toward autonomy and employee voice.

Job Engagement as a Mediator

Empowering leadership also significantly increased job engagement, which had the strongest effect on creativity among the mediators. The indirect effect via engagement supports H3, H6, and H8 and is consistent with Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Engaged employees characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption possess the energy, persistence, and cognitive focus required for sustained creative effort. In the emotionally demanding hospitality environment, engagement is especially critical for maintaining creative service delivery despite high customer interaction and emotional labor demands.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

For Ghanaian hospitality practitioners, the findings highlight empowering leadership as a critical lever for enhancing employee creativity. Organizations should invest in leadership development programs that build empowering competencies, including articulating meaningful visions that link individual roles to organizational goals, encouraging participative decision-making, expressing confidence in employees' creative capabilities, delegating authority, and



reducing unnecessary bureaucratic constraints. Given Ghana's traditionally hierarchical management culture, leadership training should explicitly address mindset shifts toward power-sharing and employee voice.

Organizations should also create structural and job-related conditions that foster psychological empowerment by ensuring meaningful work through clear mission communication, developing employee competence via continuous training, granting autonomy in service delivery and customer interaction, and reinforcing impact by implementing employee suggestions. In addition, hospitality firms should implement engagement-enhancing practices by promoting vigor through manageable workloads and adequate staffing, dedication through recognition and career development, and absorption through challenging and meaningful tasks. Practically, organizations should prioritize establishing empowering leadership and psychological empowerment as foundations before expecting sustained engagement and creativity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that empowering leadership enhances employee creativity directly and indirectly through psychological empowerment and job engagement, explaining a substantial proportion of creativity variance. By clarifying the psychological pathways through which leadership unlocks creativity, the findings advance leadership and creativity theory and provide actionable guidance for Ghana's hospitality sector. As competition intensifies, fostering empowerment and engagement offers a sustainable pathway to service innovation and competitive advantage in Ghana's growing tourism economy.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to examine temporal dynamics, reciprocal relationships, and intervention effects. Reliance on self-rated creativity may introduce bias; future studies should incorporate supervisor, peer, and objective creativity measures. Generalizability is constrained by the focus on two Ghanaian regions and the hospitality sector; future research should expand across regions, countries, and industries to test cultural and sectoral boundary conditions.

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