

PRIMARY RESEARCH

Reinforcing empowerment: Mediating effects on task performance and the moderating role of self-efficacy in Benin West Africa

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Keywords

Psychological empowerment
Task-based job performance
Job self-efficacy
Positive reinforcement
Negative reinforcement

Abstract

Through the mediating effects of positive and negative reinforcement, this study examines how psychological empowerment affects task-based job performance using the COR and JD-R theories. It also investigates how employment self-efficacy functions as a moderator in these interactions. Information was gathered from 298 employees in banking sector in Benin, West Africa. Bootstrapping techniques and structural equation modelling were used to test the hypotheses. The findings show a strong correlation between psychological empowerment and both positive and negative reinforcement. Additionally, both positive and negative reinforcement mediate the relationship between psychological empowerment and task-based job performance. Additionally, job self-efficacy has a moderating effect on the relationship between performance and reinforcement. These findings demonstrate the importance of psychological factors for both individuals and organizations, such as psychological empowerment and motivational factors like positive and negative reinforcement. According to the survey, establishing a lasting relationship between an employee and the company requires employees to feel emotionally invested and empowered.

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INTRODUCTION

Psychological empowerment comprises the perception of personal power, a tendency to take responsibility, and an awareness of the sociopolitical context (Zhai et al., 2023). Psychological empowerment is a cognitive state that incorporates goal alignment, perceptions of competence, and feelings of control. A widely accepted definition of psychological empowerment is that it is a motivational construct comprising four cognitive dimensions: impact, competence, meaningfulness, and self-determination (Hameli et al., 2025). Xue et al. (2024) extend this concept to include a combination of factors related to the organizational context, psychological states, and behaviors that yield psychological empowerment. Soleimani et al. (2023) argue that a person must first experience a sense of empowerment influenced by the organizational context in order to enact empowerment through behavior.

Research has shown that psychological empowerment is a predictor of different organization-based behaviors, such as innovation behavior, organizational citizenship behavior (Helalat et al., 2023), positive outcomes such as job performance, and employee attitudes such as commitment (Zhai et al., 2023) and job satisfaction (Xue et al., 2024). The understanding of the effects of psychological empowerment on employee outcomes and organizational outcomes has grown significantly within the literature, however exploring the generalizability of the beneficial effects across different contexts, industries, culture and profession has not been fully examined (Hameli et al., 2025). In addition, studies are also being conducted on when and how empowerment leads to positive organization outcomes (Al Otaibi et al., 2023). Psychological empowerment has generally increased in recent years (Helalat et al., 2023). When there is strong organizational support, employee empowerment en-

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hances extra role behaviors like taking initiative. Scholars continue to emphasize the need for additional research to identify potential mechanisms through which empowered employees achieve goals at work, despite the growing evidence of various organizational constructs that may influence the effect of psychological empowerment on organizational outcomes (Al Otaibi et al., 2023).

Compared with concepts such as competence, mental health, self-esteem, and self-efficacy is a narrower and contextually specific construct (Hameli et al., 2025). Individuals can have low self-efficacy in one area and high self-efficacy in another area at the same time. According to Ochoa Pacheco et al. (2023), self-efficacy is individual's assessment of their ability to cope with future barriers. Self-efficacy also determines the amount of effort expended, the difficulty of self-imposed goals, and the level of persistence in overcoming obstacles. Akmalia et al. (2023), for example, constructed a self-efficacy scale distinguishing between social self-efficacy and general self-efficacy. While social self-efficacy encompasses efficacy beliefs across social contexts, general self-efficacy refers beliefs in relation to behavior without reference to a specific domain. General self-efficacy, according to Cayupe et al. (2023), provides a broad and relatively stable sense of personal capability regarding approaching and coping with adversity in everyday situations. Psychological empowerment has been shown to contribute to self-efficacy beliefs of employees (Gouëdard et al., 2023; Haney et al., 2023) and their affective attachment to the organization (Meyvanali et al., 2025).

In today's rapidly evolving financial services context, especially in emerging markets, organizational success is closely linked to the psychological state and resulting performance of its employees (Stanikzai & Mittal, 2025). The banking sector in West Africa, with increasing competition and pressures to adopt technology, requires employees who are not only competent but also invested and motivated. An employee who is psychologically empowered will be expected to enact positive change within the workplace and exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Soleimani et al., 2023). However, the exact processes by which psychological empowerment connects to task-based job performance, especially across cultural and economic contexts like Benin, have received limited empirical attention (Zhai et al., 2023).

When it comes to behavior management, employee motivation, and task-based job performance, reinforcement techniques are crucial. Rewarding desired behaviors to promote their recurrence is known as positive reinforcement (Layton et al., 2025). By eliminating or avoiding an unpleasant signal, Negative Reinforcement (NR) increases behaviour (Balcerowska et al., 2023).

Negative reinforcement is frequently disregarded in favor of positive reinforcement despite its importance (Balcerowska et al., 2023). Third, research on the effects of positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement on the performance of employees at the managerial and operational levels as well as task-based job performance in the banking sector is lacking in prior literature. For example, Lambert et al. (2024), emphasize the need for more focused studies on the effects of reinforcement strategies on different facets of task-based job performance.

This study aims to address this gap in the existing literature by investigating the moderating effect of job self-efficacy and the mediating role of positive and negative reinforcement in the relationship between task-based job performance and psychological empowerment. The study used two theoretical frameworks, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, to investigate these relationships. The JD-R model not only predicts outcomes for the employer or organization but also describes the relationship between job demands and resources. Specifically, the model defines job demands as organizational, social, psychological, or physical aspects of a job which require effort and costs the worker psychologically (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). On the other hand, workplace resources are all aspects of the job, which assist the worker in achieving their work goals and reducing the job demands and associated psychological cost of the work environment. Depending on the balance of job demands and resources, the JD-R theory can predict favorable or adverse outcomes. Similarly, COR Theory suggests that people are motivated to use their existing resources to attain additional resources, which may lead to a resource gain spiral. According to COR, a resource is anything that the individual perceives as enabling them to be successful in their objectives. According to Westman et al. (2004), psychological empowerment is a personal resource that enables workers to have fulfilling work experiences, carry out tasks independently, and have confidence in their ability to accomplish goals at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). These psychological tools may boost workers' self-efficacy beliefs, encouraging them to adopt positive attitudes like emotional attachments to the company, which could result in improved performance and other favorable consequences. This study adds to the existing literature by furthering the understanding of how psychological empowerment impacts task-based job performance through dual reinforcement strategies. While recent global studies have demonstrated those general connections between psychological empowerment and organizational outcomes (Barrow et al., 2025; Hameli et al., 2025; Layton et al., 2025), this study is unique in several ways. First, the authors are not aware of a previous study that has looked at a simulta-

neous full-fledged model of dual mediating effects of positive and negative reinforcement and a dual moderating effect of job self-efficacy in the context of performance. Second, job self-efficacy is highly relevant in the novel realities of the banking work environment (Hameli et al., 2025) that are interacting with other variables to not only affect common workers, but also determine how they attach effectively to the organization as an employee.

The rest of this paper is arranged in the following manner. In section 2, we outline the theoretical framework and past literature used in the development of the hypotheses. Section 3 outlines the materials and methods as well as the data collection and analysis. The results of the study are shown in section 4. Section 5 discusses the findings. The limitations and strengths are provided in section 6. Sections 7 and 8 present the implications for practice and final remarks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PAST LITERATURE

Psychological Empowerment with Positive and Negative Reinforcement

In the fields of social science and management, the idea of empowerment has been extensively researched (Juyumaya, 2022). The most well-known typology pertaining to this variable is the contrast made by Helalat et al. (2023) between the structural and psychological perspectives. Several studies have also associated psychological empowerment with work engagement (Soleimani et al., 2023; Zhai et al., 2023), quality of service (Helalat et al., 2023), organizational citizenship behavior (Al Otaibi et al., 2023), safety behavior, proactive behaviors such as taking charge (Soleimani et al., 2023), innovative behavior, job-crafting, and proactivity (Helalat et al., 2023). Psychological empowerment at the individual level refers to a person's capacity to feel accountable and in control of their own life. At the organizational level, it is the chance/opportunity for staff members to operate more effectively and take on innovative challenges in their daily tasks and job (Soleimani et al., 2023). The growth of an individual's functioning at the individual, group, and organizational levels is positively impacted by the activation of their resources, enabling long-term gains (Zhai et al., 2023). Positive Reinforcement (PR) is defined as, applying a pleasant stimulus (for example: Verbal praise, a bonus, or public acknowledgment) immediately after a desired behavior to increase the likelihood that the effort will be repeated (Layton et al., 2025). Schieltz et al. (2020), argue that psychological empowerment serves to fulfill an employee's intrinsic drive for mastery and impact; hence, when the organization utilizes a positive reinforcement strategy, the empowered employee considers this PR to be an authentic and timely validation of the effective-

ness of their autonomous behaviors and competencies, not just an external attempt to control them. Empirically, several studies have demonstrated an association between employee's proactive psychological resources to their perception of organizational support and reward systems, a large portion of which manifest in a form of positive reinforcement (Balcerowska et al., 2023). Put another way, an empowered banking employee in Benin who possesses a strong sense of self-determination (a component of PE) when provided with a timely reward or compliment by management is more likely to see these actions as an authentic signal of their initiative and success, rather than a mere transactional exchange. This sense of validation enhances the internal psychological connection between effort and reward and increases the likelihood of empowering behavior in the future (Barrow et al., 2025; Lambert et al., 2024).

H1: Psychological empowerment has direct relationship with positive reinforcement.

Negative Reinforcement (NR) is equally impactful and consists of strengthening a particular behavior through the subsequent removal of an aversive or undesirable condition (Barrow et al., 2025). The link between Psychological Empowerment (PE) and NR focuses on the empowered employee who takes an active approach to organizing their work environment. Employees who report high levels of PE (e.g., those with strong self-determination and impact) are not simply passive consumers of the organization's conditions. Instead, they engage in efforts to take control and/or remove sources of stress, ambiguity, or conflict with management. The process of successfully removing the aversive condition such as completing a stressful task is to eliminate pressure from an impending deadline, or following an error-correcting process to reduce micromanagement, is likely a powerful reinforcement effect validating their initial decision to act autonomously (Balcerowska et al., 2023). Within the constraining and at times bureaucratic context of the Beninese banking environment, one detrimental consequence can be the potential error, a compliance regime, or simply the anticipation of micromanaged oversight from management grounded in a low-trust framework. Stated differently, a competent and self-determined employee (PE) is already intrinsically motivated to act as if they could be trusted. Relevant literature examining job design and autonomy indicates that if employees are given the ability to reduce the work task (removing complexity, which serves as a negative stimulus), it ties directly to work engagement through employee commitment to those successful and simplified behaviors (Haney et al., 2023). For the employee with PE in a banking context, the anticipation of a successful audit report or resolving a customer problem to avoid managerial oversight/disciplinary outcomes means that the em-

employee has removed the negative consequence of managerial scrutiny. The very act of successfully mitigating the managerial consequence reinforces the sense of feeling competent and self-determined and completes the full cycle of a relationship between the employee's state of feeling empowered and the resulting experience of negative reinforcement (Balcerowska et al., 2023; Schieltz et al., 2020).

H2: Psychological empowerment has direct relationship with negative reinforcement.

Mediating Role of Reinforcement

While psychological empowerment fosters task-based job performance, an exploration of how the psychological state is transformed into observable behavior is essential (Zhai et al., 2023). PE provides the internal motivation and belief in the person's ability to perform, which is augmented by positive reinforcement, which provides the organizational feedback loop needed to maintain motivation, and direct efforts towards high value tasks (Layton et al., 2025). Under the mediation model, PE leads to the employee actively engaging in the search for tasks and successfully completing tasks (first path), which, in turn, leads to PR (second path). The PR either financial or social acts as a strong and immediate stimulus that validates the specific task performance, which increases the likelihood the effective behavior will repeat. The PR is, therefore, the mediator that connects the upstream motivation source (PE) to the downstream behavior (performance), creating the PE-Performance link through an attractive outcome to successful action (Haney et al., 2023; Schieltz et al., 2020). For banking workers in Benin, whose work is highly transactional (e.g., loan processing, compliance checks), often characterized by detailed, client-facing, and high-risk task performance (often in a repetitive manner), PR is very important. Research on justice, and reward systems, suggest that when employees view rewards (PR) as fair and connected to their effort and success, the motivating qualities of autonomy and competence (PE components) are enhanced (Lambert et al., 2024). Autonomous and competent PE enables employee to take initiative on difficult tasks; if positive feedback comes in a timely manner, the PE-based initiative is more likely to continue. If a performance bonus (a PR) is given, that specific task-based behavior and productivity is further emphasized (and rewarded), and thus performance improves. PR is important as it is not a consequence of performance, it is the mechanism that ensures the virtuous cycle initiated by psychological empowerment continues (Barrow et al., 2025).

H3: Positive reinforcement has mediating relationship among psychological empowerment and task-based job performance. Like positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement is also pro-

posed to be an important behavioral channel through which psychological empowerment leads to actual variable performance on the job that is task-based. PE cultivates a mindset where employees feel they are accountable for the outcome, and they possess the self-efficacy (competency, impact) to actively navigate the situation with all its complexities. This proactive behavior that stems from feelings of empowerment is then directly aimed at limiting or eliminating aversive conditions in the workplace, such as potential errors, bottlenecks in a process or excessive managerial control, all of which could be hidden stressors in banking, particularly with the extreme detail focus employees must maintain with their work (Balcerowska et al., 2023). When an employee engages in a complex task and successfully completes the task, thereby avoiding removing that negative consequence (such as not having a transaction error that causes a formal investigation), the successful task performance then is reinforced by the removal of that aversive threat (NR) (Lambert et al., 2024). This then enhances the high-performance behavior and increases the likelihood that it will happen again in the future. Studies in avoidance learning and motivation have demonstrated that relief from an aversive situation serves as a strong motivator to stay engaged in an activity, and this is particularly true when individuals believe they can manipulate their situation (Balcerowska et al., 2023; Schieltz et al., 2020). An employee, in an empowered state of agency (having perception of autonomy and competence), initiates the required action expecting to achieve an acceptable outcome for the task. In this regard, NR serves as a mediator between the empowered state of the employee actions and the outcome of the NR as the immediate behavioral consequence and maintainer of high performance evident in the employee's empowered state (Barrow et al., 2025; Haney et al., 2023).

H4: Negative reinforcement has mediating relationship among psychological empowerment and task-based job performance.

Moderating Role of Job Self-Efficacy

According to Akmalia et al. (2023), self-efficacy is defined as "people's judgement of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances." Therefore, it can be described as the belief in one's ability to apply abilities to achieve objectives (Jentsch et al., 2023). According to Haney et al. (2023), self-efficacy is a dynamic concept that is subject to change. Some recent studies have found a favorable correlation between psychological empowerment and self-efficacy, despite the paucity of research on the subject (Adamovic et al., 2023). Job Self-Efficacy (JSE) is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to engage in the behaviors necessary to achieve a specific performance out-

come and is predicted to greatly influence the effect of external motivators (PR) on performance. JSE shapes the cognitive filter of an employee's perceptions of feedback and rewards (Ochoa Pacheco et al., 2023). Specifically, for employees with high JSE (e.g., praise for doing a banking job well, a bonus, etc.), PR is perceived as an authentic validation of their ability and proficiency (an internal attribution) and this self-validation reinforces and strengthens the employee's belief systems, motivating them to create future goals and persist in effort when engaging in increasingly complex work. Expectancy theory literature suggests that when expectancy beliefs (JSE) are heightened, the anticipated value and instrumentality of rewards (PRs) are also enhanced resulting in a stronger positive effect on task performance (Akmalia et al., 2023). An employee who exhibits high Job Self-Efficacy (JSE) is more prone to interpret Positive Reinforcement (PR) from a supervisor as a clear reaffirmation of their proficient performance of a challenging procedure and build confidence to intervene with the next high-value client or complicated regulatory submission (Haney et al., 2023). On the other hand, an employee with low JSE may view the same PR as either a function of chance or a transitory award, leading to no moderation or very short-lived materialization of augmented performance. Hence, high job self-efficacy is not simply performance enhancing, but importantly also additive to the motivational impact of JSE as moderator, hence enhancing the connection of PR and Performance beyond its own capacity (Hameli et al., 2025; Lambert et al., 2024).

H5: Job self-efficacy has moderating impact on positive reinforcement and task-based job performance.

Previous studies Cayupe et al. (2023), Haney et al. (2023) and Ochoa Pacheco et al. (2023) have provided ample evidence of the predictive influence of self-efficacy on performance. Specifically, Jentsch et al. (2023) demonstrated that self-efficacy predicts task-based job performance but not overall job performance. When faced with challenges, people who have a greater sense of self-efficacy are more tenacious (Cayupe et al., 2023). According to the literature currently in publication, employees' performance is influenced by their efforts and level of confidence (Gouédard et al., 2023). JSE influences an employee's perceived capability to successfully engage in the avoidance behaviors that are inherent in NR. For employees with high JSE, successfully performing a procedure that eliminates a potential danger (i.e., preventing a financial loss or avoiding a significant regulatory infraction) serves as a dramatic mastery experience

(Adamovic et al., 2023). The successful avoidance is perceived as clear evidence of their operational control and competence, strengthening the relationship between NR and Performance because the employee internally attributes it to the high level of skill. Employees face a constant negative stimulus due to regulatory risk, potential error, and rigor in the quality control process. The literature on coping strategies and efficacy beliefs suggests that persons with high JSE display greater resilience and are more active in choosing tactics for effectively dealing with stress (Adamovic et al., 2023; Akmalia et al., 2023). If an employee with high JSE is successful using task-based performance strategies to remove the stress of an impending assessment (NR), they receive internal reinforcement that goes beyond simply avoiding a bad outcome. The reinforcement they receive results from deploying their expertise to perform a technical task (Balcerowska et al., 2023). This will result in a large and durable increase in future task performance. In contrast, the employee with low JSE may simply attribute their previous success to luck or external influences even if they benefit from the NR (Barrow et al., 2025; Haney et al., 2023). In fact, the NR becomes less meaningful after the success. JSE, thus, works like a cognitive multiplier, enhancing the power of NR to promote lasting high performance.

H6: Job self-efficacy has moderating impact on negative reinforcement and task-based job performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Sample

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design as a method of examining associations among variables at a single point in time. Given that it was not possible to access the full roster of employees across all institutions, a convenience sampling procedure was used to collect data from a subset of participants employed at major commercial banks in Benin, West Africa. Data were collected by a trained research team over five-months (July to September 2025) through on-site surveys. The team entered into collaborative agreements with the human resources departments of five banks, which allowed the research team to initiate and conduct personal, face-to-face, on-site sessions to administer the surveys. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. All potential participants were appropriately informed about the study, and they were assured their responses would be kept confidential. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants Prior to participation.

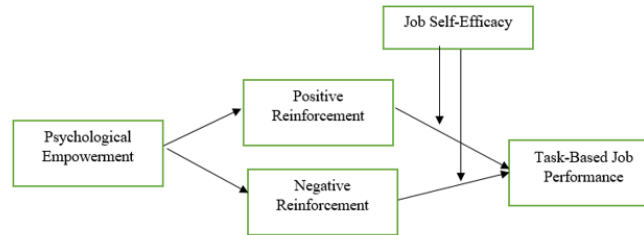


FIGURE 1. Conceptual model

Data Collection and Final Sample

Surveys were administered to 500 participants within the participating banks. The individualized, in-person process was successful, with an impressive response rate of 75%, yielding a total of 375 completed surveys. After the first screening of the responses, 72 surveys were rejected to potential serious data quality problems, like having excessive missing data across essential scales, or blatant inconsistency in the first round of responses. This resulted in a total of 303 usable responses. The exploratory analysis of the data set that had been cleaned revealed 5 observations that were multivariate outliers based on statistical influencing. These observations were formally rejected to avoid influencing the structural equation modeling. The final number of observations for data analysis was 298.

Participant Demographics

298 banking employees formed our final sample, which had a varied set of demographic characteristics representative of the Beninese financial sector. The mean age of respondents was 35.1 years ($SD = 4.88$). The gender distribution was balanced, as 55.0% were male and 45.0% were female. In terms of marital status, most employees indicated being married (61.7%), while 38.3% reported they were single. Educational levels were also high, which is typical of this sector; specifically, 65.1% had a bachelor's degree, 18.8% had a master's degree, and 16.1% did not complete tertiary education. Regarding their functional

specialization, most participants were working in finance, accounting and risk (45.6%), and business administration/client management (41.3%), and (13.1%) were in some other type of administrative or technical profession. Finally, 75.5% of employees were in core business areas (retail banking, corporate lending and digital services), while 24.5% were in support areas (human resources, compliance and audit).

Measures

The measurement scales were based on previously validated measures described in the literature. All constructs were rated on 5-item Likert scales (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), unless otherwise noted. Psychological empowerment was measured on a 9-item scale. Job self-efficacy was measured separately on a 6-item scale adapted to the working context. The two reinforcement mechanisms, positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement, were also each measured on a 6-item scale based on organizational behavior studies of reward and avoidance mechanisms. The positive reinforcement measure referred to the employee's belief that timely, desirable outcomes followed from high performance. The negative reinforcement measure evaluated the degree to which successful completion of tasks involved removing or avoiding negative stimuli at work. Finally, task-based job performance was measured on a 4-item adapted scale.

TABLE 1. Measurement items

Variables	Items	Source
Psychological Empowerment	PE1-PE9	(Juyumaya, 2022)
Job Self-Efficacy	JSE1-JSE6	(Ochoa Pacheco et al., 2023)
Positive Reinforcement	PR1-PR6	(Pomerleau et al., 2003)
Negative Reinforcement	NR1-NR6	(Pomerleau et al., 2003)
Task-Based Job Performance	TBJP1-TBJP4	(Juyumaya, 2022)

TABLE 2. Evaluation of measurement model

Variables	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Psychological Empowerment	PE1	0.815	0.926	0.938	0.629
	PE2	0.79			
	PE3	0.745			
	PE4	0.779			
	PE5	0.784			
	PE6	0.808			
	PE7	0.83			
	PE8	0.721			
	PE9	0.857			
Positive Reinforcement	PR1	0.753	0.849	0.889	0.577
	PR2	0.811			
	PR3	0.862			
	PR4	0.757			
	PR5	0.804			
	PR6	0.727			
Negative Reinforcement	NR1	0.802	0.879	0.909	0.625
	NR2	0.864			
	NR3	0.848			
	NR4	0.77			
	NR5	0.71			
	NR6	0.735			
Job Self-Efficacy	JSE1	0.772	0.912	0.931	0.692
	JSE2	0.862			
	JSE3	0.885			
	JSE4	0.809			
	JSE5	0.829			
	JSE6	0.833			
Task-Based Job Performance	TBJP1	0.824	0.789	0.864	0.615
	TBJP2	0.792			
	TBJP3	0.779			
	TBJP4	0.834			

RESULTS

The analysis of path modelling data was done with the PLS technique and Smart PLS 3 programs (Hair et al., 2024). The PLS approach has a notable advantage over covariance-based structural equation modelling when the sample size is relatively small, the assumptions about the distributional fit are less restrictive, and the distribution of latent variables drawn from the underlying population is largely unknown. More specifically, the suggested minimum sample size is 10 times the highest number of structural paths in the inner path model that are directed toward an individual construct (Hair et al., 2024). Consequently, the sample from this study meets PLS's minimum criteria. Fornell and Larcker's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) criterion is used to assess each scale's convergent validity.

As seen in Table 2, the AVE value of each latent variable is greater than 0.50, indicating all scales fulfilled this criterion (Hair et al., 2024). Also, the factor loadings of each item onto its corresponding construct were greater than 0.739 ($p < 0.01$) and exceeded the cut-off value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2024). In contrast, the factor loadings onto unrelated constructs were all less than 0.40. Hence, the results indicate adequate convergent validity. Validity and reliability were evaluated for the constructs of the model in the measurement model. As can be seen in Table 2, all constructs had both the CR and Cronbach's alpha coefficients above the acceptable level of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2024). At the $I < 0.01$ level, all the t-values connected to these loadings showed statistical significance. Items with lower factor loadings that interfered with the model fit were then methodically

eliminated. The measures' convergent validity and composite reliability were next examined. Every scale produced a composite dependability value that was higher than 0.70. Additionally, the latent constructs' Average Extracted Variance (AVE) was greater than 0.50.

The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations between constructs was evaluated to determine discriminant validity, as

the HTMT ratio between constructs should be value less than 0.85 to satisfy the criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The HTMT ratios produced using Fornell and Larcker's approach, presented in Table 3, satisfied the criteria. Moreover, as required, the correlation value for the same construct was greater than the square root of the recovered Average Variance (AVE).

TABLE 3. Discriminant validity

	1	2	3	4	5
Job Self-Efficacy	0.832				
Negative Reinforcement	0.828	0.790			
Psychological Empowerment	0.786	0.707	0.793		
Positive Reinforcement	0.679	0.748	0.659	0.760	
Task-Based Job Performance	0.549	0.615	0.505	0.730	0.784

PLS was used to estimate the model's path connections (standardized coefficients) (Hair et al., 2024). To assess the structural model and specifically the statistical significance of each parameter estimate, the bootstrapping process was used. Following guidelines, the results validated modest R^2 values for all organizational components (R -square = 0.500 for negative reinforcement, R -square = 0.434 for positive reinforcement, and R -square = 0.544 for task-based job performance). Since the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) are well below the five-point threshold recommended in the social sciences literature, there are no significant multi-collinearity issues between the independent variables. In terms of the model fit indices, the suggested model has a reasonable model fit with an SRMR of 0.085 and

an NFI of 0.657.

In the following stage of the study, the structural model was thoroughly examined using a bootstrapping technique. 5,000 resamples were used to test the proposed model's relevance (Hair et al., 2024). The results, as displayed in Figure 2, demonstrate that the data strongly support the study's hypotheses. Additionally, the standard beta, standard error, and t-values were calculated using these. The structural model was analyzed using the bootstrap process in PLS-SEM to evaluate the proposed linkages (H1 to H6). Our approach, which we shall summarize below and in Table 4 and figure 2, consistent support overall.

TABLE 4. Hypothesis testing results

	Relationships	β	T Values	p Values
H1	Psychological Empowerment -> Positive Reinforcement	-0.659	19.163	0.000
H2	Psychological Empowerment -> Negative Reinforcement	-0.707	20.260	0.000
H3	Psychological Empowerment -> Positive Reinforcement -> Task-Based Job Performance	-0.351	9.122	0.000
H4	Psychological Empowerment -> Negative Reinforcement -> Task-Based Job Performance	-0.194	2.827	0.005
H5	Job Self-Efficacy * Positive Reinforcement -> Task-Based Job Performance	0.150	3.431	0.001
H6	Job Self-Efficacy * Negative Reinforcement -> Task-Based Job Performance	-0.138	2.924	0.004

The structural model assessment verified the relevance of all six predicted relationships. The H1 and H2 tested direct effects carried a significant yet negative relationship between psychological empowerment and both positive reinforcement ($\beta = -0.659, p < 0.001$), and negative reinforcement ($\beta = -0.707, p < 0.001$). This statistically significant finding runs somewhat counter to the predicted positive direction, as higher PE is associated with decreased perceived reinforcements when compared to those with lower PE in the Beninese banking context. Moving to the mediation hypotheses, findings revealed PR (H3: $\beta = -0.351, p < 0.001$) and NR (H4: $\beta = -0.194, p = 0.005$) retained a significant mediation effect, transmitting the

(negative) effect of PE onto task-based job performance. Finally, support was also found for the moderating effect of job self-efficacy. In H5, a significant positive moderating effect of JSE on the relationship between PR and task-based job performance emerged ($\beta = 0.150, p = 0.001$) where higher self-efficacy activates PR to lead to higher job performance. In contrast, H6 showed a significant negative moderating effect of JSE on the association between NR and task-based job performance ($\beta = -0.138, p = 0.004$), representing a nuanced interaction in which increased self-efficacy appears to diminish the performance gain from simply avoiding negative stimuli.

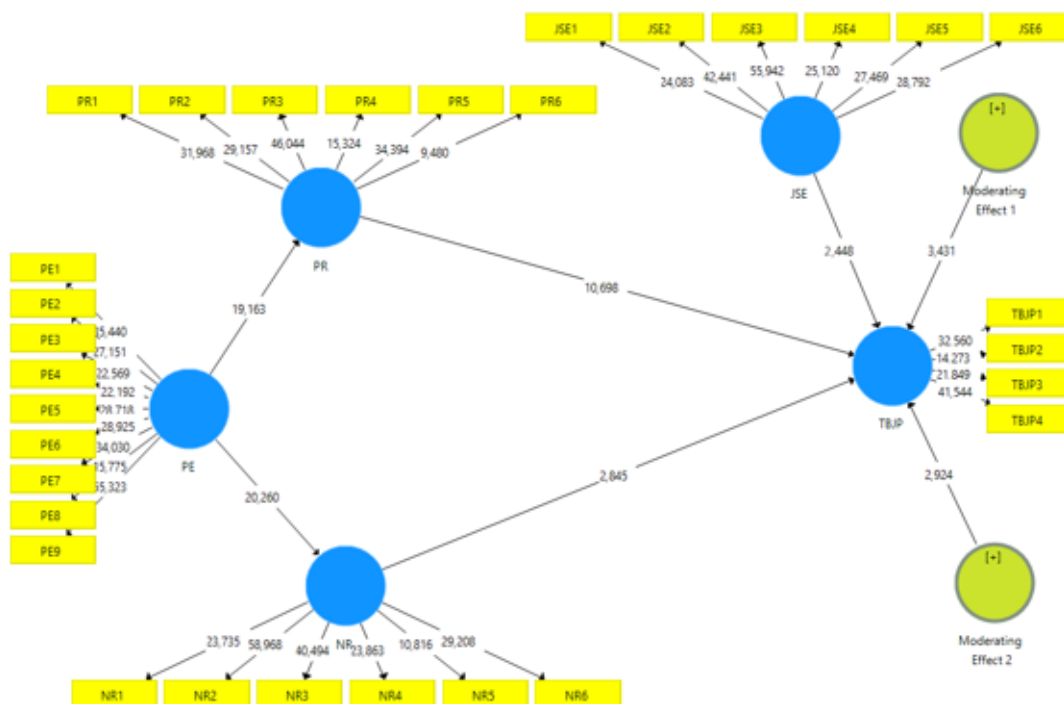


FIGURE 2. Assessment of hypothesis

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this research was to explore the direct, mediating, and moderating influences of psychological empowerment, positive reinforcement, and job self-efficacy on task-based job performance in the Beninese banking sector. The outcomes provide several important contributions to the literature and practice, particularly exposing complex relationships that contradict traditional organizational behavior expectations.

Discussion of H1: Psychological Empowerment and Positive Reinforcement

In contrast to the theoretical expectation and the assertion of H1, the results demonstrated a highly significant negative association between psychological empowerment and positive

reinforcement ($p < 0.001$). This strong negative association is an important finding, as it suggests that as Beninese banking employees experience greater self-determination, meaning, and impact (high PE) (Soleimani et al., 2023), their perceived use or reliance on traditional Organizational Rewards (PR) decreased significantly. This finding is consistent with Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014) which argues that extrinsic rewards can reduce intrinsic motivation. Employees who are highly empowered and driven by an internal sense of fulfillment, may view typical forms of PR (e.g., standard bonuses, generic praise) as controlling, or not contingent on their unique high-level, autonomous contributions, and lessen or devalue the level of reinforcement indicated. In a collectivist or higher power distance culture,

empowered individuals may also be acting outside of standard reward boundaries, thus decreasing formally accepted positive reinforcement.

Discussion H2: Psychological Empowerment and Negative Reinforcement

The hypothesis predicting a positive association between psychological empowerment and negative reinforcement was also accepted and yielded a highly statistically significant negative association ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that highly empowered employees in the Beninese banking sector experience fewer circumstances in which completing a work task ends in the avoidance of an aversive stimulus. This finding corroborates a proactive model of coping (Hameli et al., 2025; Zhai et al., 2023) and shows that empowered individuals probably experience lower rates of negative reinforcement for lack of disengagement-related avoidance behaviors (competence-based) since empowered individuals are highly competent and likely engage in preventative behavior to establish processes and controls to mitigate error, bottlenecks, and potential manager scrutiny before aversive stimuli are even triggered. Stated differently, empowered employees do not need negative reinforcement for engagement as they have proactively eliminated the aversive stimulant from their environment, creating a lower perception of rates, or event frequency, of the reinforcement.

Discussion of H3: Mediation of Positive Reinforcement

H3 confirmed that positive reinforcement serves as a significant mediator of the relationship between psychological empowerment and task-based job performance ($p < 0.001$); however, it transmits the unexpected negative effect found in H1. This indicates that when psychological empowerment leads to a weak perception of the reinforcement system, the employee will be likely to exhibit lower task performance. Barrow et al. (2025) and Layton et al. (2025) recognized talented employees require contingent rewards structure to support the feedback loop that emerges when empowered employees receive non-contingent rewards. Autonomous high effort (driven by psychological empowerment) will not always reinforcement mechanisms when the perception is that non-contingent rewards (the organization PR system) is not aligned with the autonomous mindset reflected in employee output. The demotivation generated from this perceived gap will impede task performance over time.

Discussion of H4: Mediating Role of Negative Reinforcement

Mediation hypothesis H4 was also supported ($p = 0.005$), illustrating that negative reinforcement mediates the negative influence of PE on task-based job performance. Since high levels of

PE decreased the perception of NR (H2), the mediation results suggest that for highly empowered employees, the reduced reliance on avoidance-based motivator negatively influences task performance. Without imminent threats or deadlines to shorten the duration of avoidance, the negative reinforcement motivational "push" is lost. Balcerowska et al. (2023) and Haney et al. (2023) acknowledged that the absence of salient positive or negative consequences in the environment will lead to behaviors drift, and suggests even highly empowered individuals need some external contingency to maximize their performance focus.

Discussion of H5: The Moderating Influence of Job Self-Efficacy on Positive Reinforcement

The results provide strong support for H5, suggesting a significant positive moderating effect of job self-efficacy on the relationship between positive reinforcement and task-based job performance ($p = 0.001$). This finding has high consistency with (Cayupe et al., 2023; Haney et al., 2023; Ochoa Pacheco et al., 2023). Individuals with high job Self-Efficacy (JSE) are more likely to internalize positive reinforcement as a function of their skills and abilities rather than luck or situational circumstances. This self-affirmation serves to further strengthen everyone's efficacy beliefs, therefore maximizing the potential motivation of the PR on their future work efforts and resulting in an even greater performance outcome. Job self-efficacy serves as a critical cognitive filter that releases any potential performance gains associated with positive reinforcement systems.

Discussion of H6: The Moderating Role of Job Self-Efficacy on Negative Reinforcement

H6 demonstrated a statistically significant negative moderating effect of job self-efficacy on the negative reinforcement-task-based job performance relationship ($p = 0.004$). It indicates that even with high JSE, a positive developmental concept concerning individuals' motivation and engagement in job-related avoidance strategies can be damaging to their performance when they settle into approaches that cannot help them as high-efficacy people. JD-R theory notes that high efficacy will predominantly motivate via mastery goals and approach-oriented goals (where they are pursuing the positive direction) (Akmalia et al., 2023; Cayupe et al., 2023). When high efficacy uses the avoidance goals (not getting away from the negative - NR), they become distracted from the high-level mastery position (to the simple compliance), thus lowering the high level of task performance that was observable. High JSE appears that the NR approach is not an effective level of performance or high performance, or just as likely, a negative controlling performance.

Limitations and Strength

When interpreting the important findings, it is important to keep a few methodological limitations in mind. First, the cross-sectional research design means researchers are unable to make definitive claims regarding causality. Instead of a causal relationship, the relationships observed are correlational. Although mediation and moderation models provide theoretical rationale, longitudinal study would be used to validate the temporal sequence in which empowerment preceded changes in reinforcement perceptions. Second, while convenience sampling within the banking sector in Benin was appropriate for the project, the results cannot reliably be generalized to all employees within the region or to other work settings in Benin. Lastly, as with much of the data, all data were collected through self-reports, suggesting there is potential for common method bias, in which observed correlations are inflated because of the source of the measurement and not the actual theoretical relationship. Researchers used statistical controls to account for common methods biases, however future research should employ multi-source data (for example manager ratings for performance) to fully establish these results.

Although these issues exist, the study has significant strengths and valuable contributions. In terms of methodology, the study examined a comparatively large and carefully vetted sample size of (298) observations from a highly specialized industry where compliance is paramount. This should naturally increase statistical power and reliability of the structural equation models. Most importantly, the research fills an important geographic and contextual gap in the literature by addressing Benin, West Africa. By conducting an analysis in the context of the banking sector of a neglected and under-researched economy in sub-Saharan Africa, the study provides important empirical evidence of how global constructs of psychological empowerment and behavioral reinforcement manifest within a non-Western cultural and institutional organizational context. The study advances the cross-cultural organizational behavior literature and provides a unique boundary condition for theory.

Implications for Practical and Theory

The implications of the Beninese banking sector findings require a major redirection of managerial direction of reinforcement. The surprising negative relationship between psychological empowerment and both types of reinforcement (H1, H2) suggests that employees with high PE are primarily motivated by intrinsic sources, and their performance is obstructed when they perceive organizational PR systems as standard or non-contingent on autonomous, high-value behaviors. In practice, this implies

that banks should develop highly refined, tailored performance feedback systems with the explicit intent to tie rewards directly to the effectiveness and impact of employee-initiated behaviors. Management also must purposefully utilize job self-efficacy; high JSE notably enhances the influence of PR on behavior, but also greatly weakens the motivational influences of avoidance-oriented goals. Thus, in practice, employees with high JSE need to be managed through approach-oriented goals (e.g., maximizing client acquisition) than avoidance goals (e.g., minimizing fiction issues), thus allowing capabilities to be directed towards mastery and positive outcomes.

The research makes important theoretical contributions by introducing a significant contextual boundary condition to two leading motivation theories. By showing that psychological empowerment may be negatively related to perceived organizational reinforcement in the unique West African banking context, the study challenges the Western-centric theory that empowerment (PE) always enhances extrinsic reward receipt. This implies that in cultures with a high level of power distance or strong collectivist values, high PE suggests the employee has successfully psychologically detached from formal, bureaucratic controls. Furthermore, the finding that JSE negatively moderates negative reinforcement very clearly refines our understanding of self-efficacy by demonstrating that for those with very high efficacy levels, being forced into an avoidance motivation frame (i.e., the reinforcement of the removal of a threat) is self-defeating, shifting them away from mastery-oriented motivation towards mere compliance, and supports advanced constructs within COR and JD-R Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The study offers a detailed and rich conceptual framework to understand the complex interrelationship between psychological states, behavioral mechanisms, and task performance in the Beninese banking industry. Although confirming the significant mediating effects of Positive Reinforcement and negative reinforcement, and the moderating role of job self-efficacy, the central finding indicates that the uncontrolled, non-contingent implementation of reinforcement practices can detract, or inhibit, rather than facilitate empowered employee's task performance. The findings require scholars to attend to the specific contextual considerations that can reverse classical motivational dynamics, supporting the development of a reinforcement system that evolves strategically within the psychological and motivational maturity of the contemporary, self-efficacious employee.

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