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Job Autonomy and Innovative Work Behavior in Nepalese Service Industry: Mediating Role of Creative Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

This study investigates the mediating effect of creative self-efficacy in the relationship between job autonomy and innovative work behavior within the Nepalese service sector. A quantitative approach was used, and the data were collected purposively from 409 employees in the diverse Nepalese service sector. The data were analyzed using PLS-SEM in R software to examine the structural paths. Findings reveal that job autonomy positively influences innovative work behavior, with creative self-efficacy partially mediating the relationship. The results contribute to organizational behavior literature by highlighting psychological mechanisms underlying innovative work behavior in hierarchical contexts. Practical implications include fostering creative self-efficacy through training and structured autonomy to drive organizational innovation. Thus, the study emphasizes that strengthening both autonomy and creative self-efficacy is essential for enhancing employee innovation in service-sector organizations.

Keywords: Creative self-efficacy, innovative work behavior, job autonomy, service sector

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Introduction

Innovation has become a crucial strategic priority for service organizations, where value creation, competitiveness, and innovation explicitly depend on employees' capacity to generate and implement novel ideas in real time (Grubel & Walker, 2019). Innovations in service sectors originate from the frontline employees rather than formal research and development units, emphasizing the pivotal role of innovativeness in individual work behavior (Santos-Vijande et al., 2016). In addition, employee-driven innovation is more pronounced in developing economies, where service delivery is highly customization-oriented and interactive (Anderson et al., 2014).

While many organizations are attempting to enhance Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) by increasing employee autonomy, the effectiveness of this approach varies significantly across institutional contexts and is significantly influenced by employees' psychological readiness to act (Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023; Kharel & Niraula, 2024). Innovation, on the other hand, is a context-dependent phenomenon; its very nature has been influenced by the context in place and the problem concerned (Salem et al., 2023). Similarly, IWB is generally discretionary, voluntary, and often dependent on employee initiatives. Yet, in the hierarchical South Asian service organization, where autonomy, creativity, agility, and risk-taking are often discouraged, comprehending what motivates employees to engage in innovative behavior remains a pressing concern and significant managerial priority.

Salem et al. (2023) and Ajmal et al. (2025) emphasize that several factors influence (knowledge sharing (Wang, 2025), transformational leadership (Rafique et al., 2022), organizational justice (Kurniawan et al., 2021), and work culture (Sarwar et al., 2020). Among the various antecedents of IWB, job autonomy (JA) has been significantly established as a vital predictor because it provides task, contextual, and criteria freedom needed for creativity and experimentation (Oh & Sabharwal, 2025; Lee, 2025). In contrast the Ma and Deeprasert (2024) demonstrated that the strength and quality of the autonomy-innovation relationship is highly context-dependent and significantly varies across management systems, national cultures, and organizational structures. Thus, due to collectivistic and hierarchical work environments in South Asia can weaken the positive impact of autonomy on innovation due to lower psychological readiness, limited confidence, and fear of mistakes in personal creativity (Gelaidan et al., 2024).

Recent studies (Chiang et al., 2022; Chen, 2024; Gelaidan et al., 2024) on IWB have highlighted that creative self-efficacy (CSE) is a crucial psychological enabler, transforms autonomy into innovative performance. Based on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1977), CSE influences how individuals see autonomy, whether they see discretion as a risk or an opportunity, and how confidently they solve problems creatively. According to recent studies in the Asian service sector (Chiang et al., 2022; Chen, 2024), individuals with greater CSE are more likely to convert JA into innovative behaviors. However, empirical evidence from Nepal remains scarce.

Studies have revealed that the service sector, i.e., banking, education, telecommunication, hospitality, retail, and so on, in Nepal is expanding rapidly and is contributing 52.2% to the national GDP (Reanda Biz Serve, 2024). Despite this growth, the majority of organizational structures in Nepal are still centralized, hierarchical, and focused on compliance (Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023). These situations may limit employees' autonomy and undermine their psychological empowerment, posing crucial questions concerning how and when job autonomy promotes IWB. The majority of the studies by Nepalese Scholars have been documented on leadership or job satisfaction, but have not investigated the psychological mechanism linking autonomy and employee innovation. Past studies support the association between JA and IWB (Spiegelaere et al., 2016; Shakil et al., 2023; Nathaniel & Dewi, 2024; Lee, 2025). The findings from the Western context may also not be generalized to the Nepalese context, where organizational structures tend to be more hierarchical and collectivist (Gautam et al., 2005)

Consequently, two empirical gaps exist: insufficient empirical evidence on whether JA influences IWB in the South Asian context, and the mediating role of CSE in the JA and IWB relationship has not been examined. To address these gaps, this study aims to:

- Examine the relationship between JA and IWB in the Nepalese service sector.
- Examine the mediating role of CSE in the relationship between JA and IWB in the Nepalese service sector.

This study contributes to the literature by extending SCT to a hierarchical South Asian context and by emphasizing the psychological pathway through which JA stimulates IWB. It also provides evidence for practitioners that fostering IWB requires both structural autonomy and CSE among employees.

Literature Review

Job Autonomy

The multiple work design models have shown, JA has long been acknowledged as a key motivator and crucial factor in shaping performance. Among the five essential job components outlined in Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics model, it stands out as an important aspect that impacts the sense of accountability for work outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). JA has been conceptualized by different scholars (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020).

Hackman and Oldham (1976), in their definition of job autonomy, describe two primary dimensions: job schedules (having autonomy to schedule the work) and work procedures (having autonomy to choose the method). Similarly, Breaugh (1985) offered three dimensions: (a) work method autonomy: the degree of discretion/choice individuals have regarding the procedures (methods) they utilize in going about their work; (b) work schedule autonomy: the extent to which employee feel they can control the scheduling, sequencing, or timing of their work activities; (c) work criteria autonomy: the degree to which employee can modify

or choose the criteria for evaluating their performance (Breaugh, 1985). De Jonge (1995) proposed various dimensions, including the method of working, the pace of work, processes, scheduling, work criteria, work goals, the workspace, work evaluation, working hours, type of work, and volume of work.

JA has evolved significantly from its classical origins within the Job Characteristics Model (JCM; Hackman & Oldham, 1976) to contemporary perspectives emphasizing psychological capital and psychological resource theories. Modern scholarship conceptualizes JA as a crucial psychological resource that enhances employees' self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope by enabling agility and IWB. Recent empirical evidence (Chen, 2024; Lee, 2025) reinforces that autonomy provides not only structural freedom but also the psychological capabilities required for innovation and creativity.

A large number of studies have documented the positive impact of JA, including job satisfaction (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016), job performance (Saragih, 2011), employee creativity (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017), and employee creative deviance (Liu et al., 2021). Collectively, this study indicates that JA can serve as a powerful tool for organizations to improve work outcomes like job satisfaction, job performance, and employee creativity.

Innovative Work Behavior

According to De Jong and Den Hartog (2010), IWB is the term used to describe employees' intentional actions to create, promote, and execute innovative ideas that enhance work procedures, goods, or services. The conventional three-stage model, i.e., idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization, remains essential to the construct, but the current literature contents that IWB is far from being more dynamic, iterative, and context-dependent than previous linear conceptualizations suggest. Likewise, recent studies by Akhtar and Ali (2023) and Venketsamy and Lew (2024) highlighted that IWB integrates motivational, sociopolitical, and cognitive elements, necessitating not only creativity but also impacts teamwork and resilience for overcoming organizational constraints.

When viewed from the employees' perspective, IWB is shaped by the knowledge, abilities, and specialism of individual workers, which together entail one's employees' competencies (Stoffers et al., 2018). Furthermore, contemporary work in occupational psychology entails that IWB is explicitly depends on contextual factors such as learning climate, leadership style, autonomy, and psychological safety, factors that empower employees to take interpersonal and operational risks inherent in innovation.

Geographically, IWB research is largely concentrated in Western countries, particularly in the Netherlands and Germany, but the recent evidence shows a growing shift towards Asia and developing economies, including China, South Korea, Indonesia, and India (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Kim & Park, 2023; Oh & Sabharwal, 2025). Similarly, studies on IWB are no longer confined to the manufacturing or technology sector, but are shifting towards service and knowledge-based industries (AlEssa & Durugbo, 2022; Chen, 2024; Lee, 2025), indicating that IWB has become a crucial behavioral asset across diverse industrial and cultural settings.

Creative Self-Efficacy

Tierney and Farmer (2002) established the concept of CSE, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to generate innovative outcomes. Grounded on Bandura's (1986) broader self-efficacy theory, CSE entails a domain-specific confidence that influences how individuals handle new tasks, face uncertainty, and engage in experimentation. Similarly, Hsu et al. (2011) and Beghetto and Karwowski (2017) highlighted that employee CSE possesses stronger cognitive and motivational resources, fostering employees to apply their efforts, regulate creative process, and manage contingent pressure associated with innovative work.

CSE is also viewed as a developmental capability influenced by skill acquisition, mastery experience, and exposure to creative tasks (Puozzo & Audrin, 2021). Current studies demonstrated that socio-cultural dimensions of CSE, such as autonomy, psychological safety, and supportive leadership, collectively empower employees to engage creatively (Chen, 2024; Hwang & Wu, 2025).

Empirically, CSE has been examined across multiple organizational and occupational contexts, including corporate and R&D settings (Tierney & Farmer, 2011; He et al., 2020), the service sector (Garg & Dhar, 2017; Chen, 2024), education settings (Hwang & Wu, 2025), entrepreneurship (Newman et al., 2018), and the public sector (Oh & Sabharwal, 2025). Across these domains, CSE has been established as a psychological mechanism through which workplace conditions convert into innovation-related outcomes. Recent conceptual and structural models (He et al., 2020; Hwang & Wu, 2025; Akpur, 2025) have positioned CSE as a mediator or moderator between workplace factors and innovation outcomes.

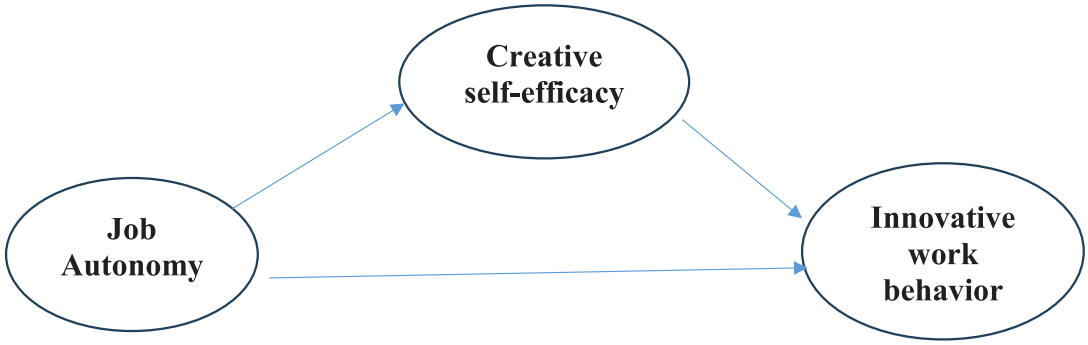
Research Model and Hypotheses

The research model is based on SCT (Bandura, 1977), Self-Determination Theory (STT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), and the JCM (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Collectively, this framework demonstrates how JA impacts IWB and employee CSE. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) entails that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities, framed as creative self-efficacy, shape how they interpret the work environment and translate these into behavior outcomes. Within the lens, JA serves as a crucial contextual enabler that fosters employees' perceived control and confidence in their creative competencies.

Similarly, SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) further highlights that autonomy fulfils a fundamental psychological need, fostering intrinsic motivation and self-regulation. These motivational processes are the crucial drivers of creativity and innovative behaviors. Likewise, the JCM (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) posited that greater discretion and control over work promote internal motivation, meaningful engagement, and responsibility.

Figure 1

Research Model



Job Autonomy and Innovative Work Behavior: Orth and Volmer (2017), Dixit and Upadhyay (2021), and Hassi et al. (2022) revealed that JA is a crucial factor in defining IWB. Similarly, Zhang and Khan (2024) revealed that employees with high JA tend to be more self-sufficient and less reliant on external control, leading to more innovative work behaviors. Empirical research in Knowledge-intensive and IT sectors across industries reinforces this linkage, suggesting that higher autonomy psychologically motivates employees to explore new methods and creative solutions (Zhang & Khan, 2024; Dara, 2023).

The positive association between JA and IWB is further supported by SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), emphasizing that autonomy fulfills the psychological needs of employees and fosters employees to perceive with greater control and ownership of the work, reinforcing the IWB-like idea generation, experimentation, and implementation.

Classical perspectives highlight that greater freedom in the workplace empowers individuals to foster novel ideas and act agilely, thereby promoting IWB (Dixit & Upadhyay, 2021). In contrast, Gebert et al. (2017) revealed that excessive autonomy leads to coordination difficulty and a reduction in efficiency, whereas Garg and Dhar (2017) argued that JA significantly relates to IWB, when there is sufficient autonomy provided; a lower degree of autonomy leads to a weak association. These divergent findings are validated by the Nepalese context, where the organizations are characterized by hierarchical structure and centralized decision making (Gautam, 2019; Shrestha & Rai, 2023), raising an important question of whether the positive autonomy Nepalese context. However, Dixit and Upadhyay (2021) revealed a positive association between JA and IWB within a collectivistic and hierarchical environment. Based on the following insight, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Job autonomy is positively related to innovative work behavior.

Creative Self-efficacy and Innovative Work Behavior: CSE has been widely established as a fundamental psychological resource (Herbiyanti et al., 2024) to empower employees to participate in IWB. It empowers individuals with greater confidence and agility to generate, refine, and implement creative ideas, especially in the satiation category characterized by

volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity environments (Namono et al., 2022; Herbiyanti et al., 2024). Likewise, CSE has been explicitly linked with various positive organizational outcomes such as creative performance (Tierney & Farmer, 2011), creativity (Namono et al., 2022), and job performance (Iqbal & Khan, 2023), emphasizing its importance in modern organizational behavior studies.

Likewise, empirical studies (Chen, 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Gelaidan et al., 2024) consistently highlight a positive relationship between CSE and IWB, demonstrating that individuals with a higher level of CSE are more likely to engage in behaviors that challenge the status quo and drive organizational innovation (Sarwoko, 2020). Likewise, in a creative industry setting as well as in a higher education institution (Namono et al., 2022; Herbiyanti et al., 2024), CSE significantly predicted IWB, suggesting that individual creative potential leads to higher creative insights and actional outcomes that benefit organizational growth.

Creative self-efficacy as a Mediator: Contemporary empirical evidence supports the mediating role of CSE in converting contextual resources such as autonomy into IWB (Salem et al., 2023; Nathaniel & Dewi, 2024; Alkhawaldeh et al., 2024). For instance, Chinese internet firms highlighted that JA significantly impacts IWB through CSE, after controlling for mindfulness as a moderator variable. Studies in manufacturing and the education sector (Chen, 2024; Alkhawaldeh et al., 2024) revealed that JA at work positively correlates with CSE, which in turn leads to greater IWB and improved performance. In addition, Chen (2024) emphasized that CSE not only shapes employees' creative confidence but also serves as a psychological mechanism that translates JA into innovative outcomes.

According to SCT (Bandura, 1977), self-efficacy develops through mastery experiences. JA aligns closely with such experiences as it allows individuals to experiment, take initiative, and achieve independent success (Dixit & Upadhyay, 2021). These experiences strengthen CSE by enabling employees to build confidence in their creative abilities through repeated problem-solving and innovation (Tierney & Farmer, 2011). Employees with high CSE are more likely to perceive complex challenges as opportunities rather than threats (Sarwoko, 2020) and consequently engage more actively in innovative behaviors. Thus, CSE serves as a key psychological mechanism through which JA translates into IWB. Based on the following insight, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Creative self-efficacy mediates the relationship between job autonomy and innovative work behavior.

Research Methods

This study employs a quantitative methodology with an explanatory research design. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that quantitative research is particularly well-suited for examining relationships between variables. Strategically, the Kathmandu Valley, comprising Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur, was chosen as a study area because it serves as Nepal's economic and service-industry hub, where organizations have actively implemented innovative work practices and modern management approaches (Basnet et al., 2023; Bhattarai et al., 2023).

Applying Cochran's (1997) criteria for sample size determination, the required sample size estimated for the study was 384. Due to a lack of a sampling frame, a non-probability, purposive sampling technique was used. A non-probability sampling technique is suitable when the population is not well defined and known (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study focused on full-time employees working in the diverse service sectors in Kathmandu Valley, namely banking, e-commerce, education, health care, legal services, Media and Entertainment, NGO, telecommunications and information technology, and tourism and hospitality.

Considering the average response rate in the organizational study survey, a total of 640 questionnaires were distributed (384/.60) to full-time employees across the service sector through online (i.e., WhatsApp, Viber, and email) and physical media. The researcher personally contacted the HR representatives and company management to obtain the details of the potential participants; thus, these individuals were requested to participate in the study. The data was collected between December 2024 and February 2025. Out of these, 409 responses were received, yielding a good response rate of approximately 64%. The survey questionnaire was divided into two parts, i.e., demographic information (gender, age group, marital status, education level, years of experience, type of organization) and research variable (JA, IWB, and CSE). As an ethical precaution, participants were assured before the questionnaire's distribution that their responses would be handled confidentially and that no information would be shared with third parties.

Similarly, data analysis was carried out using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in R software via the cSEM package. Subhaktiyas (2024) highlighted that PLS-SEM has been widely used in social science research in order to examine the complex relationship.

Measures

All the scale items were adopted from the prior well-established studies, extensively applied in organizational behavior research. The scale items applied were original in English form without any change, adaptation, or translation.

JA was measured with a nine-item scale developed by Breaugh (1985), anchored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach's alpha reliability for the scale was .80. Similarly, three items developed by Tierney and Farmer (2002) were used to measure CSE. Cronbach's alpha reliability for the scale was .87, and measured on a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree). Further, IWB was measured using a nine-item scale developed by Janssen (2000). Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was .95. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always).

Result and Analysis

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents**.** It revealed a balanced representation of male and female respondents, younger and mid–career professionals within the age category of 25 – 44 years (63.81%), the majority of married respondents (55.99%),

notably holding a master's degree (41.81%), working experience concentrated among respondents with 6 to 10 years (i.e., 37.65%), and significantly representing tourism and hospitality sector (20.05%).

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex		
Female	206	50.37
Male	203	49.63
Age (Years)		
18-24	81	19.8
25-34	129	31.54
35-44	132	32.27
45-54	58	14.18
Above 55	9	2.2
Marital Status		
Married	229	55.99
Single	180	44.01
Education Level		
Secondary Education Examination(SEE)	19	4.65
Plus 2	49	11.98
Bachelor's	141	34.47
Master's	171	41.81
MPhil and other	29	7.09
Years of experience		
Less than 1 year	48	11.74
1-5 Years	111	27.14
6-10 Years	154	37.65
11-15 Years	60	14.67
Above 15 Years	36	8.8
Type of Organization		
Tourism and Hospitality	82	20.05
Education and Training	77	18.83
Banking and Financial	73	17.85
E-commerce	58	14.18
Telecommunication and IT	58	14.18
Health Care and Medical	52	12.71
Media and Entertainment and others	9	2.19

Preliminary Data Analysis

Before proceeding to the measurement model, some preliminary conditions, such as Common Method Bias (CMB) and Model Fit, are evaluated.

Based on the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003), statistical measures (i.e., Harman's single-factor test) were considered to address the CMB-related issues. Harman's single-factor test revealed that a single factor contributed 44% of the variance, which is below the threshold criteria of 50%, indicating the absence of CMB in the dataset (see Table 2).

The model fit, in PLS-SEM, is essential for demonstrating the credibility and robustness of the findings. Unlike CB-SEM, PLS-SEM is not based on the global goodness-of-fit indices such as CFI, TLI, or RMSEA; it prioritizes prediction over covariance-based model fit. The overall model fit was evaluated by using Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), where an SRMR value below .08 indicates a good fit, and the Normed Fit Index (NFI) near 1 is better (Henseler et al., 2016). The findings revealed that the SRMR value was .05 and the NFI score was .86, both fulfilling the threshold criteria.

Table 2

CMB and Model Fit Assessment

Harman's Single Factor Test	**PA1**
SS Loadings	9.22
Proportion Variance	.44
Model Fit	
Chi_square	717.26
Chi_square_df	3.86
NFI	.86
SRMR	.05

Measurement Model Assessment

The proposed research model was reflective in nature. The outer model was evaluated based on item reliability, internal consistency, construct, convergent, and discriminant validity (DV). According to Hulland (1999), indicators with outer loadings greater than .70 should be retained, while those below .40 should be eliminated. Hair et al. (2021) further notes that items with loadings between .40 and .70 should be considered for removal only if their exclusion increases Cronbach's alpha or Average Variance Explained (AVE) values.

Table 4 shows that most of the standardized outer loadings exceed the threshold of .70, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. Internal consistency was established as Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs were above the acceptable

level of .70, confirming the consistency within the indicators (Hair et al., 2021). Similarly, AVE values exceeded the suggested cut-off of .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), demonstrating adequate convergent validity of the measurement model. (See Table 3)

Table 3

Evaluation of the Outer Model

Constructs	Item & Codings	Outer Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Autonomy	JA1	.73	.56	.92	.92
	JA2	.82			
	JA3	.79			
	JA4	.75			
	JA5	.76			
	JA6	.69			
	JA7	.70			
	JA8	.75			
	JA9	.73			
Creative self-efficacy	CSE1	.78	.56	.79	.79
	CSE2	.76			
	CSE3	.70			
Innovative Work Behavior	IWB1	.78	.51	.90	.90
	IWB2	.77			
	IWB3	.75			
	IWB4	.64			
	IWB5	.62			
	IWB6	.65			
	IWB7	.69			
	IWB8	.72			
	IWB9	.76			

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant Validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015). This criterion evaluates the extent to which constructs are distinct from one another by comparing the average correlations across constructs. An HTMT value below .85 indicates adequate discriminant validity. As shown in Table 4, all HTMT values ranged between .68 and .77, which are below the recommended threshold, confirming that each construct is empirically distinct, thus discriminant validity is established.

Table 4

HTMT Values

	JA	CSE	IWB
JA			
CSE	.77		
IWB	.68	.73	

Structural Model

Following the analysis of the measurement model, the structural model was analyzed by using a bootstrapping technique with a resample of 5000. This model was primarily examined to test the structural relationship. Initially, three assessments were conducted, namely, Collinearity Analysis, Coefficient of Determination (R^2), and PLS-Predict, followed by the testing of the hypotheses.

According to Hair et al. (2021), a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value above 5 indicates a high likelihood of collinearity concerns, a value between 3 and 5 suggests some probability of collinearity, and a value below 3 reflects an ideal state. The VIF values for the predictor variables JA and CSE were 2.47 each, indicating the absence of multicollinearity issues in the model.

Chin (1998) suggested thresholds of .67 (substantial), .33 (moderate), and .19 (weak) for R^2 values. The findings revealed that R^2 values for CSE were .59 and IWB were .58, indicating moderate explanatory power of the predictor variables.

Table 5

Collinearity Statistics and Coefficient of Determination

Constructs	VIF	R^2	Adjusted R^2
JA	2.47		
CSE	2.47	.59	.59
IWB		.58	.57

Analysis of the Predictive Power of the Model: PLS-Predict

PLS-Predict was used to assess the model's predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. The Q^2 (cross-validated redundancy) value indicates predictive accuracy, with values greater than zero demonstrating predictive relevance (Shmueli et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2021). Hence, positive Q^2 values confirm that the model possesses adequate predictive power. (see Table 6).

A comparison between PLS-predicted MAE and the linear model benchmark MAE further refines the evaluation. The difference between target MAE and benchmark MAE (a-b) revealed that for all the indicated differences were negative, indicating that the models demonstrate lower or equal prediction error relative to the linear benchmark.

Table 6

Prediction Summary

	Q^2 Predict	MAE Target (a)	MAE Benchmark (b)	(a-b)
CSE1	.35	.96	.98	-.02
CSE2	.30	.97	1.02	-.05
CSE3	.26	1.01	1.06	-.05
IWB1	.23	1.01	1.07	-.06
IWB2	.25	1.12	1.13	-.01
IWB3	.23	1.06	1.11	-.05
IWB4	.17	1.01	1.11	-.01
IWB5	.15	1.14	1.20	-.06
IWB6	.18	1.15	1.22	-.07
IWB7	.22	1.17	1.22	-.05
IWB8	.22	1.19	1.24	-.05
IWB9	.30	1.08	1.09	-.01

Hypotheses Testing

Table 7 shows that JA significantly impacts IWB *(β = .67, p < .001)*, thus supporting H1. Similarly, the structural path of JA on CSE was also supported *(β = .77, p < .001)*, as well as the relationship between CSE and IWB was also supported *(β = .51, p < .000)*. Furthermore, the mediating effect of CSE on JA and IWB was significant *(p = .000, p < .05*, thus supporting H2.

Table 7

Direct Effect and Indirect Effect

Structural Path	β	Std. error	*t-stat.*	*p-value*	CI_percentile 95%
H1: JA →IWB	.67	.03	20.59	.000	[.62; .75]
JA→CSE	.77	.03	21.71	.000	[.70; .84]
CSE→ IWB	.51	.09	5.30	.000	[.34; .70]
H2: JA→CSE→IWB	.39	.08	4.76	.000	[.25; .57]

Discussions

This study examined the relationship between JA and IWB among the full-time employees working in the Nepalese Service sector and highlighted that CSE functions as a psychological mechanism linking this relationship. Both direct and indirect relationships were statistically significant, demonstrating that JA not only fosters innovation but is more effective when employees explicitly believe in their creative capabilities.

Consistent with the findings of prior studies (Dixit & Upadhyay, 2021; Zhang & Khan, 2024; Lee, 2025), the findings confirm that employees having greater autonomy in their task execution empower employees to explore novel initiatives, solutions, and agile working behaviors in a volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity world. In addition, the findings reinforce the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), emphasizing that JA promotes ownership and organizational citizenship behavior, empowering employees to apply freedom in how they perform their job, which is an important enabler of innovation and creativity. In service organizations such as tourism and hospitality, banking, IT-enabled services, and education explicitly demand agile working behavior, and when employees are granted discretion to adjust processes, customize service delivery, and address workplace challenges creatively, such behaviors significantly develop IWB. Further, the findings challenge Western perspectives on the autonomy-innovation relationship, stating that collectivist culture, hierarchical structures, and centralized decision-making limit employees' discretion and IWB.

Similarly, the mediating role of CSE in the relationship between JA and IWB was supported, demonstrating that CSE works as a psychological catalyst that converts discretion into innovative outcomes. This aligns with several current innovation and work behavior literatures, highlighting the role of individual cognitive appraisals and contextual resources in promoting innovative behavior. Reinforcing Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977), JA provides discretion for employees to experiment, learn from past experiences, and sharpen their creative capabilities, which in turn promotes internal creative confidence to initiate and implement innovative ideas. In contrast, it challenges the Western perspectives that even when the autonomy is limited or structured (Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023), if the employee themselves has internal confidence for creative outcomes, they can meaningfully enhance IWB.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings revealed that JA can serve both as a psychological trigger and structural resources. The significant relationship between JA and IWB emphasizes JA as a core job characteristic fostering innovation and growth. In addition, an empowering work environment promotes intrinsic motivation and CSE, which are crucial enablers of innovative behavior. These findings highlight the necessity of structured autonomy within organizations, ensuring that employees have both the freedom to innovate and the confidence in their creative capabilities to do so effectively. In the Nepalese service industry, where organization is changing significantly, and innovation is vital but often void by hierarchical practices, autonomy can act as a crucial lever to foster CSE and IWB.

Theoretically, the findings of the study extend the relationship between JA and IWB through the mediating role of CSE within the Nepalese service sector, characterized by evolving knowledge work and hierarchical norms. The study strengthens the mediating role of CSE, establishing that individual capabilities and capabilities are pivotal for transforming autonomy into innovative behaviors. This study highlights a cognitive-motivational pathway, providing a testable model of future research.

The service organization operating in Nepal, these findings highlight that investing in skill development, promoting autonomy and empowerment, and inculcating a climate that strengthens creative confidence can improve innovative behavior substantially. Managers and policy makers should acknowledge JA as a strategic resource that opens employees' creative potentials and promotes organizational innovation capacity. Similarly, CSE can be developed through structured learning programs, success-sharing platforms, and problem-solving workshops, enabling employees to enhance their confidence in their ability to generate and implement innovative ideas. Furthermore, leaders should foster a psychologically secure work environment that minimizes the fear of failure and encourages employees to express unconventional ideas.

Limitations and Further Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not free from limitations. To begin with, the study is cross-sectional, which limits the ability to establish causality between the variables. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to better understand the causal relationship. Additionally, while the study focuses on creative self-efficacy as a mediator, other psychological and organizational factors, such as psychological safety or organizational culture, may also play a role in the relationship between job autonomy and innovative work behavior. Future research could explore additional mediators, such as psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, or perceived organizational support, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive innovation.

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