



How Job Resources Drive Work Engagement Through Self-Expansion in the Workplace?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating role of workplace self-expansion in the relationship between job resources (i.e., autonomy, feedback, and social support) and work engagement within Malaysia's Services sector. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources theory, which highlights the motivational pathways linking job resources to work engagement, this research integrates self-expansion theory to examine whether workplace self-expansion serves as a key mechanism facilitating work engagement. A quantitative, cross-sectional approach was employed, with survey data collected from 150 employees in the Klang Valley. The data were analysed using partial least squares-structural equation modelling. The findings confirm that autonomy and social support have a significant positive relationship with work engagement, with workplace self-expansion partially mediating this link. However, feedback was unexpectedly non-significant in influencing work engagement, and workplace self-expansion did not mediate this relationship. This study contributes to the literature by elucidating the interplay between job resources, self-expansion, and work engagement, offering new insights into how workplace self-expansion enhances employee motivation and organisational effectiveness. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed, particularly regarding the integration of workplace self-expansion into human resource strategies to improve employee well-being and engagement. Future research should extend this investigation to diverse organisational contexts to further validate the role of self-expansion in the workplace.

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Keywords: Job resource-demands theory; Job resources; Self-expansion theory; Work engagement; Workplace self-expansion

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INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian economy is driven by five major sectors: Services, Manufacturing, Mining and Quarrying, Construction, and Agriculture. Among these, the Services sector remains the dominant contributor, consistently accounting for over 50% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) and employing approximately 52% of the total workforce (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024c). As the backbone of economic growth, the sector is highly dependent on human capital, making sustained work engagement essential for productivity, service quality, and customer satisfaction. However, the demanding nature of the sector presents considerable challenges for employees, including long working hours, high job demands, and emotional labour, which can negatively affect well-being and job performance (Gulsen and Ozmen, 2020; Sharma and Singh, 2021). The International Labour Organization (2022) classifies excessive working hours as exceeding 48 hours per week, a threshold frequently surpassed in the Services sector. Additionally, the emotional intensity of service-oriented roles, particularly those involving direct customer interaction, often leads to emotional exhaustion and disengagement (Cheng et al., 2020; Robbins and Judge, 2019). Given these conditions, maintaining high levels of work engagement is critical not only for employee well-being and organisational performance but also for sustaining a competitive advantage within the Services sector.

Work engagement is widely recognised as a key driver of organisational effectiveness, fostering employee commitment, discretionary effort, and productivity (Boonsiritomachai and Sud-On, 2022; Soares and Mosquera, 2019). Engaged employees contribute to enhanced customer satisfaction, superior service quality, business sustainability, and lower turnover intentions (Jin et al., 2021; Lim and Wang, 2025). Despite its importance, recent empirical evidence indicates a global decline in work engagement. According to Kincentric (2022), global work engagement scores peaked at 69% in 2020 but declined to 62% in 2022, reversing prior gains. Malaysia reflects a similar trend, with work engagement decreasing from 70% in 2019 to 67% in 2022, placing it below regional peers such as India, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand (Business Today, 2023). A recent study by Qualtrics (2024) further underscores this disparity, revealing that Malaysia's work engagement score (67%) is significantly lower than India (89%) and lags behind Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam (73%–86%). These findings highlight the urgent need for strategies to enhance work engagement within the Malaysian context.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory has been widely used to examine the relationship between job characteristics and employee well-being, particularly in the context of work engagement and burnout (Bakker et al., 2023). While the positive influence of job resources (e.g., autonomy, feedback and social support) on work engagement is well established, much of the existing research in Malaysia has focused on the healthcare and education sectors (Othman et al., 2021; Tahir and Hussein, 2018). Consequently, there is a significant gap in understanding how job resources function within Malaysia's wholesale and retail trade, food and beverage, and accommodation industries, three Services subsectors that collectively account for the highest revenue generation and employ the largest workforce in the services sector (DOSM, 2024b, 2024c).

Although the link between job resources and work engagement has been extensively explored, limited research has investigated the psychological mechanisms through which job resources enhance work engagement (Albrecht et al., 2021; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Rai and Chawla, 2022). Addressing this gap, recent studies have introduced workplace self-expansion as a promising construct (Jurek and Besta, 2021). Rooted in self-expansion theory, workplace self-expansion reflects employees' experiences of personal and professional growth through opportunities provided by their work environment (Aron et al., 2013; Gray et al., 2020; McIntyre et al., 2014). While self-expansion theory has traditionally been examined in the context of romantic relationships, it is increasingly gaining traction in organisational research, offering insights into how job resources facilitate personal development and enhance work engagement (Jurek and Besta, 2021). By integrating workplace self-expansion into the JD-R framework, this study provides a novel perspective on the motivational mechanisms underpinning work engagement.

This study aims to: (i) examine the direct effects of job resources (i.e., autonomy, feedback, and social support) on work engagement, and (ii) investigate the mediating role of workplace self-expansion in the relationship between job resources and work engagement within Malaysia's wholesale and retail trade, food and beverage, and accommodation sectors. By addressing these objectives, this study extends the JD-R and self-expansion theories, contributing to both theoretical discourse and practical human resource strategies for enhancing work engagement and employee well-being. The next section presents a comprehensive literature

review, discussing the JD-R theory, self-expansion theory, work engagement, job resources, and workplace self-expansion before developing the study's hypotheses.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Job Demands-Resources Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory provides a well-established framework for understanding employee well-being and performance in organisational settings (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). This theory classifies work characteristics into two broad categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands, such as workload and role ambiguity, require sustained physical, emotional, or cognitive effort, and excessive demands can lead to stress and burnout (Bakker et al., 2023). In contrast, job resources, including autonomy, feedback, and social support, serve as protective factors that mitigate job strain, enhance motivation, and promote work engagement (Bakker et al., 2023).

A core aspect of the JD-R theory is its dual-pathway model, which explains the contrasting effects of job demands and job resources on employee outcomes. The health impairment pathway describes how prolonged exposure to excessive job demands depletes employees' energy, ultimately leading to exhaustion and disengagement. Meanwhile, the motivational pathway highlights how job resources stimulate employee motivation, fostering engagement, commitment, and organisational well-being (Bakker et al., 2023). The motivational process is particularly relevant to this study, as job resources are conceptualised as key enablers of work engagement by providing meaningful work experiences and reducing turnover intentions.

The JD-R theory has been widely applied across various industries, including healthcare, education, and corporate environments, underscoring its robustness in explaining workplace dynamics (Bakker et al., 2023). However, despite its extensive validation, the theory does not fully explain the psychological mechanisms through which job resources drive engagement (Albrecht et al., 2021; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Rai and Chawla, 2022). While numerous studies have examined the direct influence of job resources on engagement, limited research has investigated the underlying cognitive and emotional mechanisms that mediate this relationship. Addressing this gap, this study integrates self-expansion theory into the JD-R framework to provide a novel perspective on how job resources enhance work engagement through the process of workplace self-expansion.

Self-Expansion Theory

Self-expansion theory suggests that individuals are inherently motivated to expand their self-concept by acquiring new skills, perspectives, and identities (Aron and Aron, 1996). This psychological need for self-expansion drives people to seek opportunities that foster personal growth, well-being, and fulfilment, often through engaging relationships or novel experiences (McIntyre et al., 2014). Traditionally, self-expansion theory has been applied in the context of personal relationships, particularly romantic partnerships, where individuals gain new perspectives and develop their self-identity through their significant others.

More recently, researchers have extended self-expansion theory to various domains, including health, consumer behaviour, and social identity. Studies have shown that self-expansion enhances individuals' likelihood of achieving health goals (Xu, 2020), strengthens brand attachment (De Kerviler and Rodriguez, 2019), and fosters participation in collective action (Besta et al., 2018, 2023). In the organisational context, Jurek and Besta (2021) introduced the concept of workplace self-expansion (WSE), which refers to employees' perception of professional growth, learning, and skill development as a result of their work environment. Workplace self-expansion occurs when employees gain new knowledge, experience professional challenges, and develop competencies that contribute to their self-concept. Given its potential to enhance workplace motivation, this study adopts self-expansion theory to examine how job resources facilitate workplace self-expansion and, in turn, foster work engagement.

Work Engagement

The concept of engagement introduced by Kahn (1990), is defined as the degree to which employees invest their physical, emotional, and cognitive resources into their roles. Schaufeli et al. (2002) later refined the

definition, describing WE as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to energy and resilience at work, dedication reflects a sense of pride and meaningfulness in tasks, and absorption denotes deep focus and immersion in work activities (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Work engagement is widely recognized as a critical driver of organizational success. It has been associated with numerous positive outcomes, including enhanced performance (Al Badi et al., 2023), innovation (Koroglu and Ozmen, 2022), organizational commitment (Boonsiritomachai and Sud-On, 2022), and customer satisfaction (Han et al., 2022). Given the well-documented benefits of highly engaged employees, extensive research has focused on identifying the factors that drive WE. Key predictors include job resources, personal resources, and job demands, which have been consistently studied within the JD-R framework.

Job resources, such as leadership styles, have received significant attention in the WE literature. Among leadership styles, transformational leadership has been extensively explored and consistently linked to positive WE outcomes. Empirical studies, such as those by Bosak et al. (2021), Juyumaya and Torres (2023) and Wojtczuk-Turek (2022), affirm the critical role of transformational leadership in fostering WE. Personal resources, defined as individuals' positive self-evaluations of their ability to manage and influence their environment effectively (Bakker et al., 2023), have also been recognized as crucial contributors to WE. Personal resources such as resilience, self-efficacy, optimism and proactivity have been identified as drivers of WE (Bakker et al., 2023; Mazzetti et al., 2023).

Conversely, job demands primarily lead to burnout, as posited by the JD-R theory (Bakker et al., 2023). Although the JD-R theory does not explicitly state that job demands reduce WE, Maslach et al. (2001) argued that WE is the positive antithesis of burnout. This suggests that job demands, while positively associated with burnout, are inversely related to WE. The health impairment process triggered by excessive job demands is, therefore, expected to diminish WE. Supporting this assertion, Zhang et al. (2020) found that perceived job stress and workload negatively influenced the WE of nurses in Wuhan, China. Similarly, Oliveira and Najnude (2023) reported that abusive leadership adversely affected the WE of Brazilian workers across various economic sectors. Additionally, Lim et al. (2024b) demonstrated that job demands, such as work-family conflict, significantly reduced the WE of employees in Services sector companies in Malaysia. Despite the influence of job demands and personal resources, job resources remain the most critical predictor of WE. Bakker et al. (2023) underscore that job resources, such as autonomy, feedback, and social support, play a central role in activating the motivational pathway, enhancing WE. The subsequent sections delve deeper into the role of job resources in shaping WE.

Job Resource

Job resources, as defined by Demerouti et al. (2001) refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of a job that support employees in achieving their goals, managing work demands, and fostering personal growth. These resources exert both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational influences on WE, as conceptualised in the JD-R theory (Bakker et al., 2023; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Extrinsically, job resources provide essential tools, information, and support necessary for effective task completion (Hakanen et al., 2006). Intrinsically, they facilitate learning and development, enabling employees to derive purpose and satisfaction from their work (Fernet et al., 2012).

Within the Services sector, key job resources such as autonomy (AU), feedback (FB), and social support (SS) play a critical role in fostering WE (Klingbyle and Chung-Yan, 2023; Lim and Wang, 2025). Given the demanding nature of this sector, characterised by frequent customer interactions and stressors such as unreasonable demands and disrespectful behaviour, these resources are particularly essential (Ahmed et al., 2021). Autonomy empowers employees to make decisions and address customer needs effectively (Klingbyle and Chung-Yan, 2023). FB provides employees with insights for performance improvement and skill enhancement (Mullins et al., 2020). SS, whether from supervisors or colleagues, offers both emotional and instrumental assistance, enabling employees to navigate challenging work environments (Kossek et al., 2011). While AU, FB, and SS have been shown to positively influence WE across Malaysia's Services sector, including education (Othman et al., 2021) and healthcare (Tahir and Hussein, 2018), their impact within the wholesale and retail, food and beverage services, and accommodation subsectors remains unclear (Lim and

Wang, 2025). Accordingly, this study aims to provide empirical insights into the role of these job resources in fostering WE within these specific subsectors in Malaysia.

Van Dorssen-Boog et al. (2020) argued that greater AU, which allows employees to define their own work methods and exercise control over their tasks, enhances intrinsic motivation by fostering a sense of joy and meaningfulness in their work. Their study of 337 healthcare employees in the Netherlands demonstrated a positive relationship between AU and WE. Similarly, Lee et al. (2019) highlighted the critical role of FB in promoting WE among employees in Malaysian private organisations. Leader-provided feedback helped employees accomplish work goals, fostering extrinsic motivation and improving engagement levels. Social support, another crucial job resource, has also been strongly associated with WE. Lim and Wang (2025) found that SS positively related to WE among Malaysian Services sector employee. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of job resources in fostering motivation and improving WE. Based on the theoretical framework and supporting empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Job resources positively influence WE among Services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

H1a: AU positively influences WE among Services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

H1b: FB positively influences WE among Services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

H1c: SS positively influences WE among Services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Psychological Mechanisms Between Job Resource and Work Engagement

The positive influence of job resources on WE are well-established (e.g., Han et al., 2020; Radic et al., 2020; Salamon et al., 2022). However, recent research has explored psychological mechanisms that mediate this relationship. One critical mechanism is work meaningfulness, defined as employees' perception of their job as significant and valuable (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Employees who find their work meaningful are more intrinsically motivated to complete tasks (Meng et al., 2022). Albrecht et al. (2021) demonstrated that meaningful work mediates the relationship between job resources and WE across industries, highlighting its role in enhancing engagement. Another important mechanism is psychological empowerment, which reflects employees' perceptions of self-efficacy and their connection to their work roles (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995). Psychologically empowered employees experience greater motivation and fulfilment, leading to higher engagement (Gong et al., 2020). Blaique et al. (2023) found that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between organizational learning and WE among employees in the Middle East, further underscoring its relevance.

Despite these advancements, there remain gaps in understanding how job resources drive WE through psychological mechanisms. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) and Rai and Chawla (2022) have emphasized the need for further research into these processes. Albrecht et al. (2021) also highlighted the lack of insight into mediators linking job resources to WE. A recent study by Jurek and Besta (2021) proposed WSE as a novel mechanism through which WE occur. The authors argued that by fulfilling employees' intrinsic needs, WSE fosters greater engagement. This emerging concept offers a fresh perspective on how job resources influence WE and warrants further exploration. The following review WSE.

Workplace Self-Expansion

Workplace self-expansion refers to the process by which individuals perceive growth, development and an enhancement of their skills, abilities, and identities through their work experiences. This concept is rooted in the broader psychological theory of self-expansion, which suggests that people are motivated to enhance their sense of self by acquiring new knowledge, experiences and relationships as explained by Aron et al. (2013) and Gray et al. (2020). Research on self-expansion has been conducted in both relational and non-relational contexts (Nikolinakou et al., 2021). Much of the research on self-expansion has focused on relational contexts, particularly romantic relationships, where individuals gain personal growth through close connections (Aron and Aron, 1996). For instance, Lewandowski and Ackerman (2006) studied how the need for self-expansion within romantic relationships could predict the likelihood of infidelity. Similarly, VanderDrift et al. (2011)

found that individuals in relationships with low self-expansion tend to show greater interest in alternative partners, as they lack the motivation to remain committed. These studies suggest that limited self-expansion within a relationship can lead individuals to seek growth outside of it, even in culturally diverse situations.

More recently, the concept of self-expansion has been applied beyond romantic relationships. For example, Dansereau et al. (2013) used self-expansion theory to explore how leaders and followers develop relationships and influence one another. Xu et al. (2017) demonstrated that self-expansion during a weight loss program significantly improved adherence, physical activity, and weight loss outcomes among participants. Additionally, McIntyre et al. (2023) found that higher levels of self-expansion were associated with reduced depressive symptoms, even after accounting for demographic and risk factors, suggesting that self-expansion positively affects mental health.

In an organizational context, Jurek and Besta (2021) examined the influence of job characteristics, including compensation and benefits, job tasks, career development, and employee relationships, on WE, found that WSE mediates the relationship between those job resources and WE. While their study provides an initial foundation for understanding the role of WSE in enhancing WE, research on self-expansion within workplace settings remains scarce. Given the critical importance of WE for organizational performance and the existing gap in understanding the psychological mechanisms driving WE, this study seeks to explore the mediating role of WSE in the relationship between job resources (i.e., AU, FB and SS) and WE.

Autonomy, defined as the degree of control employees have over their tasks, fosters self-expansion by enabling individuals to explore new approaches, solve problems independently, and align work with personal goals (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Autonomy enhances meaningful work experiences, broadens skills, and strengthens self-efficacy, all of which contribute to workplace self-expansion (Martela et al., 2021). Studies demonstrate that AU boosts confidence, self-efficacy, and engagement. For example, Lange and Kayser (2022) found that decision-making freedom enhanced self-efficacy among remote workers in Germany. Similarly, Martela et al. (2021) associated AU with meaningful work, while Mehta (2021) observed a positive relationship between AU and WE in India's IT sector. Feedback plays a crucial role in self-expansion by offering constructive insights into performance and areas for improvement (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). It strengthens self-efficacy by helping employees align their goals with organizational expectations and develop skills through iterative learning (Bandura, 1977). Research supports the link between FB, self-expansion, and engagement. Prilop et al. (2021) found that positive FB enhanced self-efficacy among pre-service teachers in Germany. Similarly, Lee et al. (2019) reported that performance FB improved WE in Malaysian organizations by motivating employees to meet work goals. SS, which includes guidance and empathy from colleagues and supervisors, promotes WSE by fostering positive relationships and providing resources for personal growth (Mead and MacNeil, 2006). Supportive interactions help employees gain new perspectives and expand their professional identity (Jurek and Besta, 2021). Research highlights the impact of social support on self-expansion and WE. For example, Cao and Chen (2021) found that social support positively influenced WE among nurses in China, while Jurek and Besta (2021) demonstrated that positive relationships with colleagues contributed to self-expansion and engagement.

H2: WSE mediates the relationship between job resources and WE among services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

H2a: WSE mediates the relationship between AU and WE among Services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

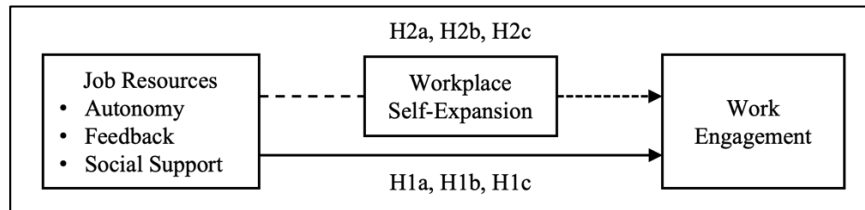
H2b: WSE mediates the relationship between FB and WE among Services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

H2c: WSE mediates the relationship between SS and WE among Services sector employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored in the JD-R theory, which posits that job resources trigger a motivational process that enhances WE (Bakker et al., 2023). Accordingly, the first hypothesis (H1) suggests that job resources, AU (H1a), FB (H1b), and SS (H1c), positively influence WE. These relationships are represented in the conceptual framework by solid lines directly connecting job resources to WE. Complementing this, the self-expansion theory posits that individuals are inherently motivated to enhance

their self-concept by acquiring new skills, perspectives, and experiences (Aron et al., 2013; Aron and Aron, 1996; McIntyre et al., 2014). This study argues that employees experience WSE when exposed to job characteristics that foster personal growth, learning, and the development of new abilities. Based on this premise, the third hypothesis (H2) proposes that WSE mediates the relationship between job resources: AU (H2a); FB (H2b); and SS (H2c), and WE. These hypothesized direct relationships are depicted with solid lines, while the dotted lines illustrate the indirect pathways linking job resources to WE through WSE as shown in Figure 1.



Source: Authors (2025)

Figure 1 Proposed conceptual framework

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants and Data Collection

This study examines the influence of job resources (i.e., autonomy, feedback, and social support), on WE and the mediating role of WSE between the two. A quantitative research design was selected because it is suitable for identifying factors affecting outcomes, evaluating interventions, and understanding predictors (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). Following the postpositivist paradigm, the study builds on established theories, specifically the JD-R theory, and tests their relationships using survey data to either confirm or challenge these theoretical assumptions (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). Therefore, the quantitative approach aligns with the study's objectives and theoretical framework. Due to the absence of a comprehensive list (sampling frame) of the target population, a non-probability sampling methods are recommended (Saunders et al., 2023). This study uses Purposive sampling which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2023).

The participants in this study were employees from the Services subsector, wholesale and retail, food and beverage, and accommodation, in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, with at least six months of work experience. These Services subsector are significant contributors to the Services sector, generating 76% of the overall revenue and employing over 66.1% of individuals in the sector in Malaysia (DOSM, 2024a). Klang Valley alone contributed over half of the Services sector revenue (DOSM, 2024a). The six-month work tenure criterion aligns with typical probation periods, allowing employees sufficient time to adjust to their roles and organizational culture (Jojo and Ismail, 2025), providing a reasonable baseline for assessing WSE and WE. The list of participating companies was sourced from the Malaysia Retailers Association (MRA), Malaysia Retail Chain Association (MRCA), and the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) as it represents a broad range of organizations covering the wholesale and retail, food and beverage and accommodation sector in Malaysia. Study such as by Lim et al. (2024a) have referred to these bodies to represents the food and beverage, accommodation, and wholesale and retail sector in Malaysia. Survey invitations were distributed via email, providing participants with the option to complete either a paper-based or online questionnaire. Both formats included detailed information about the study, emphasizing that participation was entirely voluntary and that respondents could withdraw at any time without consequence. The questionnaires assured participants that no personally identifiable information, beyond demographic data, would be collected, and that responses would be analysed in aggregate. Confidentiality of all responses was strictly maintained, accessible only to the research team.

The sample size was determined using G*Power software version 3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2009), which required a minimum of 129 samples for four predictors. To account for an expected response rate of 35% in business and management research (Saunders et al., 2023), 370 questionnaires were distributed. Of the 186

responses received, 150 were deemed valid for analysis, resulting in a response rate of 40.5%, which exceeded the minimum requirement. The 150 respondents in this study include 64% males. Most participants are aged 31–40 years (42%), predominantly Malay (75.3%), and 80.7% are married. The majority work in retail and wholesale (54%), followed by food and beverage (25.3%) and accommodation (20.7%). Most have 6–10 years of experience (44%), with 44.7% in non-executive roles, 29.3% as executives, and 21.3% as first-line managers. Regarding education, 46.7% hold a diploma, 26.7% a bachelor's degree, and 14.7% an STPM qualification. Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the respondents' demographics.

Table 1 Respondents' Demographic Profiles

Characteristics	Information	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	94	64.0
	Female	56	36.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>
Age	21 – 30	40	26.7
	31 – 40	63	42.0
	41 – 50	35	23.3
	More than 50	12	8.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>
Race	Malay	113	75.3
	Chinese	23	15.3
	Indian	10	6.7
	Others	4	2.7
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>
Marital Status	Single	21	14.0
	Married	121	80.70
	Divorced / Separated	6	4.0
	Widowed	2	1.3
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>
Services Subsector	Retail and Wholesale	81	54.0
	Food and Beverage	38	25.3
	Accommodation	31	20.7
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>
Number of children	0	30	20.0
	1	44	29.3
	2	35	23.3
	3	26	17.3
	4	12	8.0
	5 or more	3	2.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>
Length of services	More than 6 months but less than 1 year	12	8.0
	1 – 5 years	54	36.3
	6 – 10 years	66	44.0
	> 10 years	18	12.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>
Position	Non-executive	67	44.7
	Executive	44	29.3
	First-line manager	32	21.3
	Middle-line manager	7	4.7
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>
Academic Qualification	Master's degree	3	2.0
	Bachelor's degree	40	26.7
	Diploma	70	46.7
	STPM or equivalent	22	14.7
	SPM or equivalent	10	6.7
	PMR or equivalent	0	0
	Certificate	5	3.3
	<i>Total</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Author (2025)

Questionnaire and Measurements

The survey was administered in both English and Malay (the national language of the data collection site) to ensure respondent comprehension. According to Allen and Seaman (2007), Likert scales should ideally contain at least five response categories, with a broader range preferred when possible. To maintain consistency, all constructs in this study were measured using a seven-point Likert scale.

Work engagement was assessed using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). This 17-item scale captures three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Previous studies, such as Tomietto et al. (2019), have reported high reliability for the UWES, with a Cronbach's alpha exceeding 0.70. Items were rated on a scale from 1 (*Never*) to 7 (*Always*).

Job resources, AU, FB, and SS, were measured using items partially adapted from the Job Demands-Resources Scale (JDRS) by Jackson and Rothmann (2005). AU was measured using six items, including *"Can you participate in decisions about the nature of your work?"* FB was assessed with eight items, such as *"Do you know exactly what your direct supervisor thinks of your performance?"* Meanwhile, SS was measured using three items, including *"Can you count on your colleagues when you come across difficulties in your work?"* Previous studies have reported high reliability scores for these constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.90 for autonomy, 0.70 for feedback, and 0.90 for social support (Jackson and Beyers, 2021; Lim and Wang, 2025). Consistent with Lim and Wang (2025), this study also partially adopts items from the JDRS that are directly relevant to its objectives. All items were rated on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 7 (*Always*).

Workplace self-expansion was measured using the Workplace Self-Expansion Questionnaire (WSEQ) developed by McIntyre et al. (2014). This 14-item scale includes statements such as *"How much does working at your job result in your having new experiences?"* and *"How much do you see your job as a way to expand your own capabilities?"* The scale has demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96 (McIntyre et al., 2014). Responses were rated on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*Very little*) to 7 (*Very much*).

Preliminary analysis

Influential outliers. Although partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) does not assume a specific data distribution, influential outliers can still distort results (Hair et al., 2022). To address this, the dataset was examined for influential outliers, data points that significantly deviate from others and could bias regression estimates (Hair et al., 2022; Pallant, 2016). Cook's distance (Cook, 1977) was employed to detect such cases, as it identifies observations with a disproportionate impact on regression results (The Pennsylvania State University, 2018). A Cook's distance value exceeding 0.5 indicates a potentially influential case, while values above 1 suggest a highly influential observation (The Pennsylvania State University, 2018). Using SPSS version 29, Cook's distance values ranged from 0.00 to 0.094, well below the 0.5 threshold, indicating no significant outlier influence in the dataset.

Common Method Variance Assessment. Common method variance (CMV) arises when the data collection method influences responses more than the constructs being measured, potentially biasing results (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To assess CMV, Harman's single-factor test was conducted using SPSS version 29. The results showed that a single factor accounted for 45.79% of the variance, below the 50% threshold, suggesting that CMV was not a major concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Further assessment using full collinearity variance inflation factor (FCVIF) analysis, as recommended by Kock and Lynn (2012), confirmed the absence of serious CMV issues. The FCVIF values for AU (2.787), FB (1.965), SS (1.497), vigor (1.547), dedication (2.424), absorption (1.795), and WSE (2.508) remained below the 3.33 threshold (Kock, 2015). With CMV ruled out, PLS-SEM was performed on a sample of 150 participants using SmartPLS version 4.1.1.1 (Ringle et al., 2024).

RESULTS

Assessment of Measurement Model

The reflective measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2022). Indicator reliability was determined by factor loadings, with a threshold of 0.708, indicating that constructs explain more than 50% of the variance in their indicators. Items with loadings below 0.708 but above the mandatory deletion threshold of 0.4 were retained if the construct's average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.5. Three items (i.e., AB4 [0.657], AB6 [0.646], and DE [0.598]) were retained as their loadings exceeded 0.4 and the AVE values surpassed 0.5. Internal consistency was supported by composite reliability (CR) values ranging from 0.837 to 0.955 and Cronbach's alpha scores between 0.829 and 0.955. Convergent validity was confirmed, as all AVE values exceeded the 0.5 threshold. A summary of indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity is presented in Table 2. HTMT values below the recommended 0.85 threshold, confirming construct distinctiveness (Henseler et al., 2015). These results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 2 Item loading, composite reliability, and average variance extracted

Latent Variable	Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Absorption	AB1	0.795	0.829	0.837	0.541
	AB2	0.789			
	AB3	0.788			
	AB4	0.657			
	AB5	0.721			
	AB6	0.646			
Dedication	DE1	0.797	0.842	0.862	0.619
	DE2	0.790			
	DE3	0.851			
	DE4	0.867			
	DE5	0.598			
Vigor	VI1	0.805	0.879	0.882	0.622
	VI2	0.820			
	VI3	0.811			
	VI4	0.763			
	VI5	0.755			
	VI6	0.777			
Autonomy	AU1	0.846	0.903	0.909	0.675
	AU2	0.868			
	AU3	0.798			
	AU4	0.858			
	AU5	0.766			
	AU6	0.788			
Feedback	FB1	0.820	0.926	0.933	0.659
	FB2	0.729			
	FB3	0.716			
	FB4	0.856			
	FB5	0.828			
	FB6	0.822			
	FB7	0.849			
	FB8	0.864			
Social support	SS1	0.915	0.880	0.884	0.806
	SS2	0.908			
	SS3	0.869			
Workplace self-expansion	WSE1	0.790	0.955	0.955	0.630
	WSE2	0.784			
	WSE3	0.827			
	WSE4	0.775			
	WSE5	0.842			
	WSE6	0.854			
	WSE7	0.808			
	WSE8	0.792			
	WSE9	0.718			
	WSE10	0.837			
	WSE11	0.834			
	WSE12	0.727			
	WSE13	0.739			
	WSE14	0.771			

Notes: CR (composite reliability); AVE (average variance extracted)

Table 3 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio Criterion

	AB	AU	DE	FB	SS	VI	WSE
AB							
AU	0.792						
DE	0.791	0.760					
FB	0.671	0.746	0.709				
SS	0.805	0.798	0.769	0.684			
VI	0.839	0.707	0.688	0.543	0.782		
WSE	0.724	0.776	0.784	0.650	0.745	0.729	

Notes: AB (absorption), AU (autonomy), DE (dedication), FB (feedback), SS (social support), VI (vigor), WSE (workplace self-expansion). HTMT criterion < 0.850.

Higher-Order Construct (HOC) Analysis. This study focused on the overall effect of job resources, autonomy (AU), feedback (FB), and social support (SS), on work engagement (WE), rather than their influence on individual WE dimensions (i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption). Consequently, WE was treated as a single higher-order construct (HOC). Adopting this approach enhances parsimony and reduces model complexity (Hair et al., 2021). Following Lim et al. (2024b), WE was specified as a reflective-formative construct. The HOC was assessed using the two-stage approach (Sarstedt et al., 2019). In the first stage, the lower-order constructs (LOCs) were evaluated using the reflective measurement model, as presented earlier. In the second stage, the HOC was assessed using the formative measurement model, focusing on

convergent validity, collinearity, indicator outer weights, and significance. Convergent validity was determined using a single global item, as recommended by Cheah et al. (2018). Following Lim and Wang (2024), and Lim et al. (2024a), The global item for WE read: “Overall, I feel energetic, dedicated, and immersed in my job.” Redundancy analysis yielded a path coefficient of 0.815 for WE (Table 4), exceeding the 0.708 threshold (Hair et al., 2022), thus confirming convergent validity. Collinearity was assessed using variance inflation factor (VIF) values, which ranged from 1.933 to 2.568, remaining well below the 5.0 threshold (Hair et al., 2022), indicating no significant collinearity issues. Finally, indicator weights and significance were tested via bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples (Cheah et al., 2018). As shown in Table 4, all WE dimensions (i.e., absorption, dedication and vigor) significantly contributed to WE ($p < 0.05$), confirming their importance in forming the construct.

Table 4 Assessment of Higher Order Construct

HOC	LOC	CV	Outer VIF	Outer Weight	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Work engagement	Absorption	0.815	2.568	0.302	0.087	2.383	0.009
	Dedication		1.933	0.477	0.078	4.343	0.000
	Vigor		2.220	0.355	0.083	7.037	0.000

Notes: HOC (higher order construct); LOC (lower order construct); CV (convergent validity).

Assessment of Structural Model

Following Hair et al. (2022), the structural model was evaluated for collinearity, predictive power and construct relationships. Collinearity assessment, based on variance inflation factor (VIF) values below the 5.00 threshold, indicated no significant concerns (range: 2.106–2.962). The model’s explanatory power was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), where WE had an R^2 of 0.739, reflecting moderate explanatory power. Effect sizes (f^2) were assessed using

Chin’s (1998, 2010) criterion, where f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 represent weak, medium and strong effects, respectively. The result in Table 5 shows that AU ($f^2 = 0.056$) and FB ($f^2 = 0.020$) had trivial effects, while SS ($f^2 = 0.184$) had a medium effect on WE. Predictive relevance, assessed via Q^2 values using the blindfolding method, confirmed the model’s predictive validity ($Q^2 = 0.563$ for WE) (Chin, 1998).

Hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and significance was interpreted based on a one-tailed test ($t > 1.645$, $p < 0.05$), as the hypotheses were directional (i.e., AU, FB and SS were hypothesised to positively influence WE). The results supported H1a (AU $\rightarrow$ WE: $\beta = 0.209$, $t = 2.892$, $p = 0.020$) and H1c (SS $\rightarrow$ WE: $\beta = 0.342$, $t = 4.598$, $p < 0.001$), while H1b (FB $\rightarrow$ WE: $\beta = 0.104$, $t = 1.562$, $p = 0.059$) was not supported. A summary is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Results of Structural Path Model

Path Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	Confidence Interval	t-value	p-value	VIF	f^2	R^2	Q^2
H1a) AU $\rightarrow$ WE	0.209	0.072	(0.081, 0.367)	2.892	0.002	2.962	0.056	0.739	0.563
H1b) FB $\rightarrow$ WE	0.104	0.067	(-0.029, 0.236)	1.562	0.059	2.106	0.020		
H1c) SS $\rightarrow$ WE	0.342	0.074	(0.193, 0.485)	4.598	0.000	2.432	0.184		

Notes: AU (autonomy); FB (feedback); SS (social support); WE (work engagement); WSE (workplace self-expansion).

Assessment of mediation effects. This study examined the mediating role of WSE in the relationships between AU, FB and SS and WE (H2a, H2b and H2c). Mediation was assessed using a two-tailed test, where a statistically significant indirect effect was determined by $t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$ as recommended by Memon et al. (2018), Preacher and Hayes (2004) and Zhao et al. (2010). Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples and a 95% confidence interval revealed significant mediation effects. WSE mediated the relationships between AU and WE ($\beta = 0.127$, $t = 3.110$, $p < 0.050$) and between SS and WE ($\beta = 0.097$, $t = 2.692$, $p < 0.050$). The confidence intervals for these paths did not include zero, confirming the significance of mediation effects (Hair et al., 2022), thus supporting H2a and H2c. However, WSE did not mediate the relationship between FB and WE ($\beta = 0.050$, $t = 1.520$, $p = 0.129$), which do not support H2b.

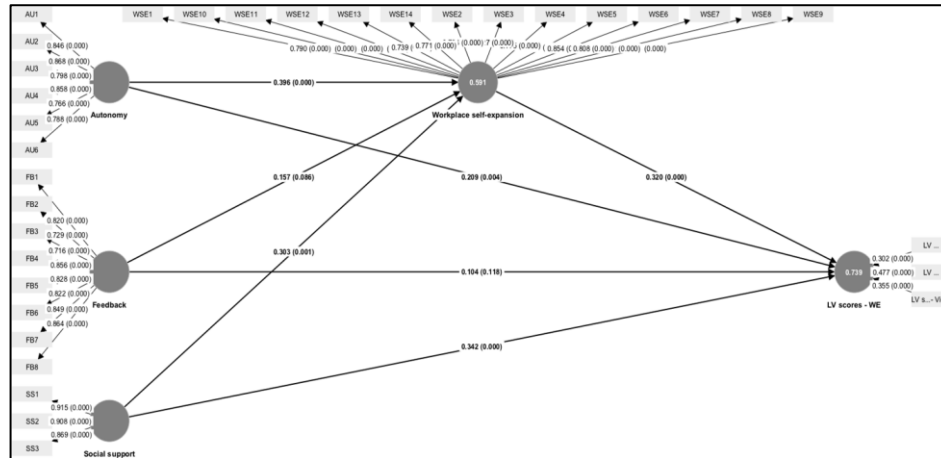
Following Hair et al. (2022), the mediation type was determined using Zhao et al.’s (2010) model. WSE partially mediated the relationships involving AU and SS, as both direct (see Table 5) and indirect effects (see Table 6) were significant. Given that both effects were positive, WSE served as a complementary mediator in these relationships. Conversely, WSE did not mediate the relationship between FB and WE, as both the direct ($\beta = 0.104$, $t = 1.562$, $p = 0.059$) and indirect effects ($\beta = 0.050$, $t = 1.520$, $p = 0.064$) were non-significant,

confirming the absence of mediation (Hair et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2010). The overall path analysis result is depicted in Figure 2.

Table 6 Assessment of Mediating Effect

Path relationship	Indirect Effect	Std. Error	Confidence interval	t-value	p-value
H2a) AU → WSE → WE	0.127	0.041	(0.053, 0.211)	3.110	0.002
H2b) FB → WSE → WE	0.050	0.033	(0.003, 0.132)	1.520	0.129
H2c) SS → WSE → WE	0.097	0.036	(0.032, 0.172)	2.692	0.007

Notes: AU (autonomy); FB (feedback); SS (social support); WE (work engagement); WSE (workplace self-expansion).



Source: Generated and extracted from SmartPLS software version 4.1.1.1

Figure 2 Path Analysis Result

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the influence of job resources (i.e., AU, FB and SS) on WE in the Malaysian Services sector. The results indicate that SS has the most significant positive effect on WE, suggesting that employees who perceive their colleagues as supportive and maintain strong workplace relationships report higher levels of engagement. This positive connection is similar with those studies by Cao and Chen (2021) and Wang et al. (2021). Similarly, AU also positively impacts WE; individuals who have greater decision-making authority in their roles experience enhanced engagement. These findings align with prior studies, such as those by Lim and Wang (2025) and Tensay and Singh (2020) which highlight the role of job resources in fostering WE.

However, FB did not achieve statistical significance at the 0.05 margin of error. This finding contradicts previous studies (Arokiasamy et al., 2022; Xue et al., 2024) which consistently demonstrates a strong relationship between feedback and WE. A possible explanation for this unexpected result is that not all feedback is perceived as constructive or beneficial. Employees may receive feedback that is vague, overly critical, or lacking actionable insights, which fails to foster engagement. As noted by Kemp (2024), only one in four employees strongly agree they receive valuable feedback from colleagues, highlighting the importance of meaningful feedback in driving engagement. Additionally, given the fast-paced nature of the Services sector, employees may prioritise immediate job demands over reflective learning processes, thereby diminishing the motivational effects of feedback. Another plausible reason is that the effectiveness of feedback depends on its source, frequency and delivery method. If employees do not view their supervisors as credible or supportive, feedback may not translate into enhanced engagement. Future research should explore the qualitative aspects of feedback to determine whether the content, delivery style and perceived fairness influence its impact on engagement.

Notably, WSE emerged as a partial mediator in the relationship between job resources (H2a: AU and H2c; SS) and WE. Both AU ($\beta = 0.097$, $p < 0.050$) and SS ($\beta = 0.127$, $p < 0.050$) exhibited significant indirect effects on WE through WSE, reinforcing the self-expansion theory (Aron and Aron, 1996). This theory posits that individuals are inherently motivated to expand their sense of self through novel, challenging and enriching experiences. In this study, job resources acted as catalysts for self-expansion, providing

opportunities for growth, learning and connection, thereby enhancing WE. These findings partially align with Jurek and Besta (2021), who emphasised the transformative role of self-expansion in driving engagement and motivation in the workplace.

Conversely, WSE did not mediate the relationship between FB and WE ($\beta = 0.050$, $p = 0.064$). This finding contradicts self-expansion theory, which posits that environment that fosters development, growth and knowledge acquisition (such as feedback as a positive job resource) should enhance ones' perception of self-expansion. Specifically, feedback is expected to improve self-efficacy by providing new perspectives and learning opportunities. However, the results suggest that feedback alone may not be sufficient to trigger WSE. A possible explanation for this result is that feedback, while valuable, does not always generate a sense of personal growth or expanded self-concept. Employees may perceive feedback as corrective rather than developmental, limiting its ability to contribute to self-expansion. Developmental feedback, which is informal and ongoing, fosters open dialogues and empowers employees to set and achieve long-term career goals (Trisca, 2025). Additionally, if feedback is task-specific rather than growth-oriented, it may fail to instil a sense of personal transformation that fosters engagement. Developmental feedback focuses on the growth and progress of the recipient and is critical for the individual's advancement and long-term organizational health (Slaughter, 2024).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications. This study advances the JD-R theory by unveiling the psychological mechanisms through which job resources enhance WE. By integrating self-expansion theory, the study offers a novel theoretical perspective, demonstrating that job resources contribute to employee work engagement via WSE. Traditionally, self-expansion theory has been applied primarily within relational contexts; however, this research extends its applicability to organisational settings, highlighting its relevance in understanding employee motivation and workplace dynamics. Furthermore, the findings address longstanding calls from scholars (e.g., Albrecht et al., 2021; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Rai and Chawla, 2022) to examine motivational pathways within the JD-R framework. By empirically validating WSE as a mediator, this study bridges theoretical gaps, offering a psychological explanation for how job resources foster engagement beyond traditional extrinsic motivators. The results underscore that autonomy and social support are critical enablers of WSE, reinforcing the argument that engagement is not solely a function of resources but also of employees' perceived opportunities for personal growth and self-expansion. Conversely, the insignificant mediating effect of feedback suggests that its role in fostering self-expansion and engagement may depend on qualitative factors, such as its framing, source and perceived utility. Future research should explore the nature of developmental feedback in enhancing self-expansion and engagement within different organisational contexts.

Practical Implications. The findings provide actionable insights for managers and organisations aiming to enhance work engagement by leveraging job resources and fostering self-expansion opportunities. First, empowering employees with greater autonomy in their roles can enhance engagement by strengthening their sense of control, ownership and self-efficacy. Services sector managers, for example, can provide frontline employees with greater discretion in decision-making when addressing customer needs, thereby increasing their commitment and proactive engagement. Second, constructive feedback mechanisms must be refined. While feedback is conventionally seen as an engagement driver, its lack of significant mediation through WSE suggests that not all feedback contributes to self-expansion. Managers should ensure that feedback is developmental rather than purely evaluative, providing clear, actionable guidance that helps employees expand their capabilities. Regular one-on-one coaching sessions, structured performance discussions and peer mentoring can enhance the perceived value of feedback, making it a more potent tool for engagement. Third, fostering a socially supportive workplace environment is paramount. Employees who feel valued and supported by peers and supervisors are more likely to experience heightened engagement. Organisations can facilitate this by implementing peer recognition programmes, mentorship initiatives and team-based collaboration platforms that enhance interpersonal support and camaraderie. Finally, investing in self-expansion opportunities is essential for sustained engagement. Organisations should provide training programmes, cross-functional projects, job rotations and challenging assignments that broaden employees' skill sets and perspectives. Aligning individual career development with organisational growth strategies creates a mutually beneficial environment, where employees perceive their work as a continuous avenue for

self-growth, thereby enhancing their engagement and long-term commitment to the organisation. By integrating these strategies, organisations can move beyond traditional resource-based approaches to engagement and foster a growth-oriented work environment that empowers employees, enhances motivation and sustains organisational performance in an increasingly dynamic work landscape.

Limitations and Future Directions

Like any study, this research has several limitations that may influence its findings. First, it focused on three subsectors (i.e., wholesale and retail, food and beverage, and accommodation) within Klang Valley, limiting the generalisability of the results. Future research should encompass a broader range of subsectors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of WE across the Services sector. Second, the sample was drawn from a small number of participating organisations, potentially limiting its representativeness. Data collection was restricted to Klang Valley due to time and access constraints. Future studies should extend data collection to a more diverse range of organisations across Malaysia, including the Northern, Southern and Eastern regions of Peninsular Malaysia, as well as Sabah and Sarawak. Third, while this study examined the role of job resources in WE, future research should explore additional resources that may contribute to engagement via WSE. Additionally, incorporating job demands into the model would offer a more holistic perspective on employee engagement. Given the Services sector's demanding nature (i.e., characterised by long working hours, emotional labour and high customer interaction), employees must balance work and family commitments, requiring significant energy and commitment. Future studies should therefore investigate how job demands, such as work-family conflict, influence WE and whether they diminish WSE. Future studies should investigate the nature and framing of feedback to determine whether developmental, supportive feedback is more likely to facilitate self-expansion and engagement compared to evaluative or performance-focused feedback.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of job resources (i.e., autonomy, feedback and social support) on work engagement in Malaysia's services sector, drawing on the JD-R theory. It also examined the mediating role of workplace self-expansion, grounded in self-expansion theory. The findings revealed that autonomy and social significantly enhance work engagement, both directly and indirectly through workplace self-expansion, underscoring the psychological mechanism by which these resources foster engagement. In contrast, feedback did not show a significant direct effect on work engagement, nor was its relationship mediated by workplace self-expansion. These results contribute to the theoretical advancement of both JD-R and self-expansion theories by clarifying the pathways through which specific job resources promote engagement. Practically, the study highlights the importance of cultivating autonomy and social support as key levers for enhancing employee engagement. Future research should consider other sectors, explore additional resources and incorporate job demands such as work-family conflict for a more comprehensive model of WE.

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