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Unlocking cultural SME innovation: A configurational approach to manager empowerment

Potenciando la innovación en las PYMEs culturales: Un enfoque configuracional para el empoderamiento directivo

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Abstract
Cultural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and cultural tourism share a symbiotic relationship, with each depending on the vitality of the other. Yet the core cultural sector has traditionally struggled with digitalization and innovation. Because vibrant cultural tourism relies on active, innovative cultural enterprises as key stakeholders, understanding how to foster innovation within these firms is crucial. Although cultural tourism can empower such enterprises, the mechanisms linking managers' empowerment to their innovative work behavior (IWB) remain insufficiently understood. This study investigates how psychological, social, political, and digital empowerment combine to shape IWB among managers of cultural SMEs. Data were collected from 202 Spanish managers through a survey and analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). The findings reveal complex configurational pathways leading to high IWB. Psychological, social, and digital empowerment consistently appeared in effective configurations, typically working in combination, suggesting that no single dimension alone is sufficient to drive IWB. By contrast, political empowerment was often absent or negatively related in pathways that produced high IWB, indicating potential constraining effects in this context. Overall, fostering IWB in cultural SMEs requires nuanced, multi-dimensional empowerment strategies that move beyond single-factor approaches and acknowledge the complex, interactive, and sometimes paradoxical roles that different forms of empowerment play in supporting managerial innovation.

Keywords: cultural tourism; SMEs; empowerment; cultural managers; innovative work behavior
JEL Classification: L10; M10; Z30

Resumen
Las pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYMEs) culturales y el turismo cultural comparten una relación simbiótica, en la que cada uno depende de la vitalidad del otro. Sin embargo, el sector cultural tradicionalmente ha tenido dificultades con la digitalización y la innovación. Dado que un turismo cultural vibrante depende de empresas culturales activas e innovadoras como actores clave, comprender cómo fomentar la innovación en estas empresas es crucial. Aunque el turismo cultural puede empoderar a dichas empresas, los mecanismos que vinculan el empoderamiento de los directivos con su comportamiento de trabajo innovador (IWB, por sus siglas en inglés) siguen sin comprenderse suficientemente. Este estudio investiga cómo el empoderamiento psicológico, social, político y digital se combinan para configurar el IWB de los directivos de las PYMEs culturales. Se recogieron datos de 202 directivos españoles mediante una encuesta y se analizaron mediante análisis factorial confirmatorio (CFA) y análisis cualitativo comparativo de conjuntos difusos (fsQCA). Los resultados revelan vías configuracionales complejas que conducen a un IWB alto. El empoderamiento psicológico, social y digital apareció sistemáticamente en las configuraciones efectivas, generalmente trabajando en combinación, lo que sugiere que ninguna dimensión por sí sola es suficiente para impulsar el IWB. Por el contrario, el empoderamiento político a menudo estuvo ausente o mostró una relación negativa en las vías que produjeron un IWB alto, lo que indica posibles efectos restrictivos en este contexto. En general, fomentar el IWB en las PYMEs culturales requiere estrategias de empoderamiento matizadas y multidimensionales que vayan más allá de los enfoques unifactoriales y reconozcan los roles complejos, interactivos y a veces paradójicos que juegan las diferentes formas de empoderamiento en el apoyo a la innovación directiva.

Palabras clave: turismo cultural; PYMEs; empoderamiento; directivos culturales; comportamiento de trabajo innovador
Clasificación JEL: L10; M10; Z30

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1. Introduction

Cultural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in core creative sectors—such as the visual arts, heritage, and the performing arts—form the backbone of cultural tourism ecosystems. Following Throsby's (2008a) concentric circles model of cultural production, these enterprises are distinguished from peripheral creative industries by their primary focus on creating cultural value rather than on commodified adaptation. Their central role in cultural value chains makes them essential for maintaining artistic authenticity while simultaneously supporting local economies.

Core cultural activities constitute a vital form of social infrastructure, generating value far beyond economic measures. This value is articulated through the concept of cultural citizenship (Dick, 2006), which positions participation in the arts and heritage as a driver of:

- cross-cultural understanding,
- collective identity formation,
- value transformation,
- community cohesion, and
- civic engagement.

These theoretical foundations find empirical support in a Council of Europe study (List et al., 2017), which shows how institutional cultural participation creates inclusive spaces for diverse populations. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of this social function. As KEA European Affairs (2020) demonstrates, communities with robust cultural ecosystems display greater social resilience during crises, validating Dick's (2006) framework that theorizes culture's stabilizing role. Taken together, these studies reveal that core cultural activities operate in a dual capacity: they bond communities through shared meaning-making while also buffering societal disruptions—a combination indispensable for sustainable development.

Despite their centrality and cultural significance, core cultural enterprises face persistent challenges. Cultural SMEs often struggle to innovate compared to SMEs in other sectors (Ericsson et al., 2024). They also face difficulties adapting to and capitalizing on digital transformation. Few in-depth studies have examined these challenges within core cultural industries. Research on museums, for instance, shows that although digital technologies are now widespread, organizational and technical barriers—including deficits in skills, knowledge, and financial resources—create systemic problems. Museum professionals therefore strive to keep pace with technological change despite limited resources and the risk of obsolescence or technological abandonment (Nikolaou, 2024). These findings align with broader SME research indicating that competitive success depends on the combined strength of innovation, technological capability, and quality management, and that managers' ability to integrate these elements is a key driver of performance (Molina-Sánchez et al., 2022). The limited value creation and fragility of this fundamental sector underscore the importance of identifying the factors that influence its performance.

To address these challenges, it is essential to understand the role of innovative work behavior (IWB) among cultural SME managers. IWB functions as the micro-level engine of organizational innovation and is a multi-stage process (Huegel & Kreutzer, 2020; Pajuoja et al., 2025) encompassing idea generation (developing novel solutions), idea promotion (building support and mobilizing resources), and idea realization (transforming ideas into practical applications) (Janssen, 2000). Although these stages are often highly intercorrelated (Huegel & Kreutzer, 2020; Mustafa et al., 2024), together they represent managers' overall innovative engagement. For cultural SME managers, cultivating and enacting IWB is central to navigating sector-specific challenges, adapting to digital transformation, and ensuring organizational success and survival (Chongvisal, 2020; Viitala et al., 2023). Their ability to generate, promote, and implement new ideas directly influences the enterprise's capacity to remain relevant and to create value from cultural assets.

Given the importance of managerial IWB for cultural firms, understanding its drivers is crucial. Empowerment provides a valuable theoretical lens, encompassing processes that enable individuals and organizations to exercise control over their environment and development. While psychological empowerment has been widely studied in relation to IWB, research in tourism and related fields has also highlighted the relevance of social, political, and, more recently, digital empowerment. These dimensions significantly shape managers' decisions and actions. Yet much of the existing research examines them in isolation or assumes direct, linear effects, leaving important gaps in knowledge about how they combine and interact to influence IWB. Specifically, it remains unclear whether certain types of empowerment are more critical than others or whether they must occur in combination in the context of cultural SME managers. This limited understanding of the configurational complexity of empowerment's influence on IWB constrains the development of targeted strategies to foster innovation in the cultural sector.

To address this gap, this study asks: *How do specific configurations of psychological, social, political, and digital empowerment combine to influence innovative work behavior among core cultural SME managers?* To answer this question, we employ a three-step method. First, we conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to

validate the measurement model. Second, we use necessary condition analysis (NCA) to identify potential prerequisites for innovation. Third, we apply fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) to uncover complex, potentially nonlinear combinations of empowerment factors associated with high innovative performance. This configurational approach reflects the real-world complexity of managerial empowerment, in which multiple pathways can lead to successful outcomes and different dimensions of empowerment may interact in unexpected ways.

The article is structured as follows. First, we establish the theoretical foundations of IWB and the four dimensions of empowerment in cultural SME contexts. We then present the methodology, including the sample of Spanish cultural SME managers, the measurement instruments, and the sequential analytical approach. The results section reports the measurement model validation and configurational patterns identified through fsQCA. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to existing literature, highlighting theoretical contributions to empowerment research and practical implications for cultural-sector stakeholders. Finally, the conclusion addresses the study's limitations and outlines directions for future research, particularly on the dynamic interplay between different forms of empowerment in cultural industries.

2. Theory and research hypothesis framework

2.1 Innovative work behavior

Innovative work behavior (IWB) has emerged as a critical driver of organizational adaptability and long-term success, particularly for SMEs operating in dynamic environments (Chongvisal, 2020; Huegel & Kreutzer, 2020; Viitala et al., 2023). Janssen (2000) defined IWB as the "intentional creation, introduction, and application of new ideas within a work role, group, or organization, in order to benefit role performance, the group, or the organization" (p. 288), emphasizing its purposeful and benefit-oriented nature. Building on this, De Jong and Den Hartog (2010) described IWB as encompassing all individual actions aimed at generating, introducing, and applying ideas, processes, products, or procedures that are new to the relevant unit and intended to benefit it. Together, these definitions highlight IWB as spanning the full innovation cycle, from ideation to implementation (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Janssen, 2000). Cultivating IWB is essential for cultural SME managers facing sector-specific challenges such as rapid technological change and evolving audience expectations.

Several characteristics distinguish IWB from related concepts. First, IWB is discretionary and voluntary. Extending beyond formally prescribed job tasks, it is often considered "extra-role behavior" not explicitly recognized by formal reward systems (Huegel & Kreutzer, 2020; Janssen, 2000). Although organizations depend on it, IWB typically arises from individual initiative (Janssen, 2000). Second, IWB is a complex, multi-stage process involving distinct—though often overlapping and nonsequential—activities (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Huegel & Kreutzer, 2020; Janssen, 2000). Individuals may engage in multiple activities simultaneously (Janssen, 2000; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Third, IWB is related to but broader than creativity. Whereas creativity centers on the generation of novel and useful ideas (Amabile, 1996), IWB also includes the promotion and implementation of such ideas (Huegel & Kreutzer, 2020; Mustafa et al., 2024). Finally, IWB differs from general proactive work behavior or personal initiative, as it explicitly incorporates idea generation—an element less central in models of personal initiative, which tend to emphasize implementation (Mustafa et al., 2024). In all cases, IWB is benefit-oriented, seeking to improve outcomes for the individual, group, or organization (Chongvisal, 2020; Janssen, 2000).

The multi-stage nature of IWB has led researchers to conceptualize it in terms of distinct dimensions (Janssen, 2000). Building on these stages, De Jong and Den Hartog (2010) proposed a widely cited four-dimensional model: (a) opportunity exploration (identifying areas for innovation), (b) idea generation, (c) idea championing (gaining support and resources), and (d) idea application or implementation (transforming ideas into practice). Recognizing these phases provides valuable analytical depth, as different antecedents may influence each stage differently (Pajuoja et al., 2025; Viitala et al., 2023). However, empirical studies often report high intercorrelations among these dimensions (Huegel & Kreutzer, 2020; Mustafa et al., 2024). Consequently, many researchers, including the present authors, treat IWB as a unified construct that reflects managers' overall propensity to develop and apply new ideas within their organizational roles. This unified construct captures cultural SME managers' capacity to drive innovation by translating creative concepts into tangible outcomes within their specific operational contexts.

Based on this understanding, we hypothesize that psychological, social, political, and digital empowerment influence managers' overall IWB.

2.2 Effects of manager empowerment

Empowerment is a process that enables individuals and organizations to exercise control over their environment and development (Narayan-Parker, 2002; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Managers' self-perceptions of empowerment are particularly important, as they directly influence attitudes and actions (Nicholas et al.,

2009; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2017). In this way, empowerment plays a central role in shaping organizational initiatives and fostering innovative work behavior (IWB), especially within cultural SMEs (Del Giudice et al., 2017).

This study adapts established frameworks (Mendoza-Ramos & Prideaux, 2018; Scheyvens, 1999) to examine four empowerment dimensions relevant to cultural SME managers: psychological, social, political, and digital.

2.2.1 Psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment is rooted in managers' sense of attachment to their organization and its cultural context or heritage. It encompasses confidence in their ability to contribute effectively to organizational goals and willingness to embody and share the organization's culture through their work (Adebayo & Butcher, 2023; Olya et al., 2019; Scheyvens, 1999). It also reflects managers' psychological connection to their organization and the value they assign to its cultural resources (Alazaizeh et al., 2016; Liburd & Becken, 2017).

Studies in the hospitality sector demonstrate that psychological empowerment significantly enhances IWB (Tager et al., 2023). Empowering middle managers, in particular, has been shown to strengthen personal initiative, a key driver of IWB (Mustafa et al., 2023). In healthcare contexts, psychological empowerment functions as a mediator: when job autonomy and task variety are high, it fosters proactive behavior, which in turn promotes IWB (Pierre et al., 2024).

2.2.2 Social empowerment

Social empowerment refers to the extent to which managers feel emotionally connected to their organization and its cultural environment. It encompasses feelings of belonging, pride in organizational heritage, and commitment to preserving and sharing local culture (Su et al., 2019). It also involves a willingness to contribute to the vitality of the community's cultural identity through professional activities (Byrd, 2007; Duarte Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017).

When managers form strong emotional bonds with their organization's cultural identity, they are more intrinsically motivated to pursue innovative solutions that safeguard and enhance its mission. Research indicates that workplace belonging is positively associated with IWB, with intrapreneurial intention mediating the relationship. Similarly, relational capital has been found to mediate the link between servant leadership and IWB in manager–employee dyads in the IT sector (Khan et al., 2024). Strong social connections therefore enhance innovation capacity.

2.2.3 Political empowerment

Political empowerment reflects managers' perceptions of the fairness, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement mechanisms and governance structures in their operating environment (Byrd, 2007). It includes perceptions of how governance and decision-making are conducted in the cultural tourism sector and the extent to which managers feel they have meaningful opportunities to participate in important decisions (Lee, 2013; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Political empowerment often requires overcoming barriers such as limited institutional collaboration or narrow stakeholder perspectives (Hatipoglu et al., 2016). At its core, it entails having a voice and the ability to influence outcomes relevant to the enterprise (Nicholas et al., 2009).

Empirical studies suggest that political empowerment—often examined through concepts such as employee voice and participative decision-making—can enhance IWB by providing legitimacy, authority, and information essential for innovation. For example, political skill has been shown to foster IWB, mediated by role-breadth self-efficacy (Clarke & Higgs, 2020). Similarly, the political skill of B2B sales teams can function as a dynamic capability when it supports organizational co-creation routines and an innovation-oriented culture (Castillo-Alarcón & Valenzuela-Fernández, 2024).

However, the impact of political empowerment on managerial IWB in cultural SMEs appears nuanced and potentially paradoxical. While power-sharing may stimulate innovation among subordinates, direct evidence of its positive influence on managers' IWB remains limited. Yu et al. (2019), for instance, identify a curvilinear effect in which excessive political engagement hinders innovation. Extensive government ties may impose administrative burdens that divert resources from R&D and innovation. Other research indicates that political empowerment, when coupled with bureaucratic complexity or governance inefficiencies, can reduce agility and slow decision-making, thereby stifling innovation (Deschryvere et al., 2020; Dolmans et al., 2023; Ghosh, 2022). In addition, politically uncertain or conflict-ridden environments may shift managerial attention away from innovation and toward stress, unethical behavior, or organizational conflict (Ni, 2020; Sun et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2025). Finally, heavy reliance on formal political influence may undermine operational autonomy, which is critical for innovation in dynamic sectors (Bennett et al., 2022; Kuang & Abd Rani, 2025; Perera &

Samarakoon, 2021; Tuominen & Martinsuo, 2024). Thus, while political capital can serve as an enabler, its effects are highly contingent on governance structures and organizational context.

2.2.4 Digital empowerment

Digital empowerment extends traditional empowerment frameworks by enhancing managers' capacity to address challenges, improve performance, and foster innovation through digital tools and platforms (Lingling & Ye, 2023). Information and communication technologies (ICTs) support information management, monitoring and forecasting, partnerships, and stakeholder communication (Ali & J. Frew, 2014; Chiabai et al., 2013; Leong et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2024). Effective use of such tools significantly improves innovation performance—a capability that is especially critical in today's digital economy.

For instance, digitalization in financial management can expand SMEs' access to both formal and informal funding, often crucial for implementing innovation in resource-constrained settings (Flaminiano & Francisco, 2021). Yet the benefits of digital empowerment are not universal. Cassaro et al. (2024) demonstrate that the positive relationship between digital transformation and innovation depends on contextual factors such as firm size and digital maturity. Digital empowerment therefore yields the greatest impact when paired with organizational readiness and appropriate capabilities.

2.3 Configurational approach to empowerment

Drawing on complexity theory, this study adopts a configurational approach to understanding empowerment in cultural tourism SMEs (Rosenhead et al., 2019). Although the dimensions of empowerment—psychological, social, political, and digital—are defined separately for analytical clarity, they rarely operate in isolation in the complex realities faced by cultural SME managers. Complexity theory holds that organizational outcomes emerge from the interplay of multiple factors, necessitating methods that move beyond analyses of isolated variables.

Neo-configurational theory further suggests that organizational results are shaped by the interaction of causal factors, producing distinct pathways to outcomes (Swiatczak, 2021). This perspective aligns with research showing that organizational dimensions such as culture do not function independently but instead operate in combination to drive effectiveness (Puppatz et al., 2025). Such evidence underscores the importance of treating empowerment dimensions as interconnected elements within complex organizational systems.

A configurational approach identifies factor combinations that enable or inhibit outcomes, emphasizing that configurations—not individual attributes—are critical (Pavlov & Micheli, 2023). This perspective is particularly important for understanding empowerment's nonlinear and multifaceted nature. For example, digital empowerment may enhance a manager's ability to leverage social capital (social empowerment) or to participate more effectively in governance processes (political empowerment). Likewise, strong psychological empowerment, expressed as confidence and belonging, may be a prerequisite for managers to capitalize on opportunities afforded by digital or political empowerment. Accordingly, this study argues that it is not the presence or absence of any single dimension but rather the specific configuration of high or low levels across dimensions that fosters—or constrains—innovative work behavior (IWB).

Proposition 1: Specific configurations of psychological, social, political, and digital empowerment are associated with high IWB among cultural SME managers, whereas other configurations correspond with its absence. No single empowerment dimension alone is likely to generate consistently high IWB.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Data collection

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design using self-administered questionnaires to collect data from managers of core cultural SMEs in Spain. The design provided a snapshot of empowerment configurations and their association with innovative work behavior (IWB). However, because it does not capture processes over time, the cross-sectional nature limits causal inference. Future research using longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches would help explore the temporal development of these relationships and strengthen causal claims.

Purposive sampling was used to target this specialized population, an approach well suited to difficult-to-access professional groups in the cultural sector. Managers were selected because they are central to these enterprises, playing a pivotal role in navigating competitive challenges (Peñarroya-Farell et al., 2023; Schiuma, 2017) and making strategic decisions about business models. To accommodate varied organizational structures, "manager" was operationally defined as any individual with strategic decision-making authority, regardless of job title.

The target population comprised managers whose primary enterprise activity was located in the core cultural sector, as defined by Throsby (2008b) and classified under the following NACE Rev. 2 codes:

- Creative, arts, and entertainment activities (NACE 90)
- Libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural activities (NACE 91)

Potential participating firms were identified using the *Sistema de Análisis de Balances Ibéricos* database, a comprehensive source of Iberian company financial information (Informa D&B, 2024). Data were collected between June 27 and July 23, 2024, through an anonymous online questionnaire distributed via personalized email invitations. The survey included a clear explanation of its purpose and structure, enabling participants to provide informed responses on empowerment and IWB in cultural tourism contexts. Ethical protocols were rigorously followed, including explicit informed consent from all participants and full confidentiality of the data.

Of the 1,000 questionnaires distributed, 202 complete and usable responses were obtained, yielding a response rate of 20.2%.

Table 1. Demographic profile of cultural SME managers (N = 202)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	138	68.3
	Female	64	31.7
CNAE sector	90 – Creative, arts, and entertainment activities	163	80.7
	91 – Libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural activities	39	19.3
Education	Primary education	4	2.0
	Compulsory secondary education	6	3.0
	Bachelor's degree	23	11.4
	Vocational training	28	13.9
	University/Master's degree	141	69.8

Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

3.2 Measurements

All constructs in this study were measured using multi-item scales adapted from previously validated research. To ensure contextual relevance, each instrument was tailored for managers in Spanish cultural SMEs by revising item wording to reflect both the cultural context and the managerial perspective. Unless otherwise noted, items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

- **Innovative work behavior (IWB).** IWB was assessed with a six-item scale adapted from Janssen (2000) and Nasaj and Badi (2021). This instrument was selected for its established validity in capturing the multidimensional nature of innovation, including idea generation (e.g., IWB-1: *"I create new ideas for difficult issues"*), idea promotion (e.g., IWB-3: *"I mobilize support for innovative ideas"*), and idea realization (e.g., IWB-5: *"I transform innovative ideas into useful applications"*). This operationalization is particularly suited to cultural SMEs, whose innovation is often non-technological and centers on novel content or community engagement strategies that managers must actively champion.
- **Psychological, social, and political empowerment.** These constructs were measured using items adapted from widely applied and validated scales in the tourism literature (Elshaer et al., 2021; Fong & Lo, 2015; Lee, 2013).
    - *Psychological empowerment* captured intrinsic motivation and pride (e.g., PSYEMP-1: *"Cultural tourism makes me proud to be part of the local community"*).
    - *Social empowerment* assessed community cohesion (e.g., SOEMP-2: *"Cultural tourism fosters a sense of 'community spirit' in me"*).
    - *Political empowerment* reflected perceived influence on cultural development (e.g., POLEMP-2: *"I feel my vote makes a difference in how cultural tourism develops"*). This framing is especially appropriate for capturing empowerment factors relevant to managers operating in local cultural ecosystems.
- **Digital empowerment.** Digital empowerment was measured using a scale adapted from Lingling and Ye (2023), which has demonstrated strong reliability and validity. The items emphasize managers' perceived competence and autonomy (e.g., DIGEMP-2: *"How confident are you that you will implement your digital skills effectively?"*) rather than merely the use of digital tools. For resource-constrained cultural SMEs, this focus on self-efficacy provides a particularly relevant measure of digital empowerment.

Control variables included managers' age, gender, and education level, as well as the size of the budget under their responsibility.

3.3 Data analysis methods

Although the literature consistently suggested positive associations between empowerment dimensions and innovative work behavior (IWB; Del Giudice et al., 2017), existing theoretical frameworks did not explicitly assume linear causality. Instead, they left open the possibility of more complex interactions.

Empirical observations supported this perspective. Preliminary scatterplot analyses of the relationships among empowerment dimensions and IWB—as well as among the empowerment dimensions themselves—revealed nonlinear patterns (see Appendix B). Conventional linear regression was insufficient in this context because it assumed additive effects (no interactions), constant marginal returns, and symmetrical relationships.

To address these limitations, this study employed the following methods:

- **Necessary condition analysis (NCA)** (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012) to identify whether any empowerment dimension constituted a critical prerequisite for high IWB.
- **Fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA)** (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012) to detect causal asymmetry, configurational effects, and equifinal solutions.

This methodological approach was consistent with both theoretical expectations and empirical observations and provided the analytical tools needed to examine empowerment's relationship to IWB in cultural SMEs.

3.3.1 Measurement model validation

Before conducting the configurational analysis, we validated the measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in JASP (JASP Team, 2024). The CFA assessed the psychometric properties of the scales, including construct validity (convergent and discriminant validity) and reliability (internal consistency) for IWB and the four empowerment dimensions (psychological, social, political, and digital). Standard model fit indices and reliability coefficients were evaluated (see Section 4.1).

3.3.2 Calibration procedure

Calibration involved assigning cases to set memberships. Prior to calibration, three thresholds were defined—fully in, crossover, and fully out (Fiss, 2011)—so that calibrated membership scores ranged from 0 to 1. Because the construct distributions deviated from normality, we applied the direct calibration method, using percentile anchors in line with methodological recommendations for skewed data (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). The 85th percentile was set as the threshold for full membership, the 15th percentile as the threshold for full non-membership, and the 50th percentile (median) as the crossover point. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics for all calibrated indicators and their corresponding anchor values.

4. Results

4.1 Construct validity

Table 2 presents the CFA results. The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory fit, with RMSEA = .058 (< .08), CFI = .970 (> .90), IFI = .970 (> .90), and TLI = .964 (> .90) (Byrne, 2013; Hair et al., 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct ranged from .666 to .812, indicating adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). Cronbach's alpha values for all measures exceeded .70, demonstrating good internal consistency (De Vaus, 2013; Hair et al., 2010).

Taken together, these results confirmed the reliability and construct validity of the study measures and provided a solid foundation for subsequent fsQCA.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability results

Construct / Item	Cronbach's α	CFA loading	AVE
Innovative work behavior (iwbC)	.913		.666
IWB5		.87	
IWB6		.86	
IWB4		.84	
IWB3		.80	
IWB2		.69	
IWB1		.72	
Psychological empowerment (psyempC)	.908		.769
PSYEMP3		.86	
PSYEMP2		.90	

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability results

Construct / Item	Cronbach's α	CFA loading	AVE
PSYEMP1		.87	
Social empowerment (soempC)	.878		.723
SOEMP3		.69	
SOEMP2		.92	
SOEMP1		.94	
Political empowerment (polempC)	.944		.812
POLEMP4		.83	
POLEMP1		.95	
POLEMP3		.89	
POLEMP2		.93	
Digital empowerment (digempC)	.907		.764
DIGEMP3		.89	
DIGEMP2		.86	
DIGEMP1		.87	

Note. RMSEA = .058 (root mean square error of approximation); CFI = .970 (comparative fit index); IFI = .970 (incremental fit index); TLI = .964 (Tucker–Lewis index). AVE = average variance extracted

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for study constructs (N = 202)

Statistic	iwbC	psyempC	seempC	polempC	digempC
Mean	5.582	5.992	5.630	2.787	5.807
Std. error of mean	0.081	0.093	0.104	0.119	0.093
Std. deviation	1.155	1.323	1.471	1.698	1.319
Skewness	–1.056	–1.458	–0.944	0.721	–1.704
Std. error of skewness	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.171
Kurtosis	1.179	1.620	0.037	–0.517	3.150
Std. error of kurtosis	0.341	0.341	0.341	0.341	0.341
15th percentile	4.333	4.667	4.000	1.000	4.667
50th percentile (median)	5.833	6.667	6.000	2.500	6.000
85th percentile	6.667	7.000	7.000	4.750	7.000

Note. iwbC = innovative work behavior; psyempC = psychological empowerment; seempC = social empowerment; polempC = political empowerment; digempC = digital empowerment

Table 4. Pearson's correlations among study variables (N = 202)

Variable	iwbC	psyempC	seempC	polempC	digempC
iwbC	—				
psyempC	.385***	—			
seempC	.365***	.857***	—		
polempC	.241***	.418***	.418***	—	
digempC	.231***	.218**	.125	.213**	—

Note. iwbC = innovative work behavior; psyempC = psychological empowerment; seempC = social empowerment; polempC = political empowerment; digempC = digital empowerment. **p < .001. *p < .01. p < .05

4.2 Results of necessary condition analysis

Following data calibration, we conducted NCA to examine whether the presence or absence of any single dimension of empowerment was individually necessary for achieving high or low innovative work behavior (IWB). A condition is considered necessary if it is always present when the outcome occurs, with a consistency score close to 1. The literature typically adopts a benchmark of ≥ .90 for necessity (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Ragin, 2008).

As shown in Table 5, none of the conditions reached this threshold. Thus, no single factor can be considered necessary for the outcome. These results suggest that the interplay of factors, rather than the deterministic effect of any one factor, produces the outcome and that multiple strategies may coexist in generating high or low levels of IWB.

Table 5. Necessary condition analysis (NCA) for innovative work behavior (IWB)

Condition	Consistency	Coverage	Condition	Consistency	Coverage
psyempC1	.647	.695	~psyempC1	.698	.650
seempC1	.652	.710	~seempC1	.717	.659
polempC1	.657	.623	~polempC1	.576	.612
digempC1	.674	.730	~digempC1	.734	.679

Note. "~" = absence of the condition. Necessary conditions were calculated using fsQCA 3.0 software.

4.3 Results of fsQCA

4.3.1 Sufficiency condition analysis

Sufficiency condition analysis examines whether combinations of conditions explain the outcome variable (Ragin, 2008). We conducted the analysis using fsQCA software (Version 3.0), applying a consistency threshold of .80 and a minimum case frequency threshold of 2 (Fiss, 2011). The minimum proportional reduction in inconsistency (PRI) was set at .50 (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Mattke et al., 2022).

Based on these parameters, all identified paths were retained (see Table 6).

Table 6. Configuration paths for high and low values of innovative work behavior (IWB)

	High values of IWB			**Low values of IWB**	
	Configurations			**Configurations**	
	1	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**
psyempC1	●		●	⊗	
seempC1		●	●	⊗	⊗
polempC1	⊗	⊗			●
digempC1	●	●	●	⊗	⊗
Consistency	0.857	0.856	0.840	0.789	0.826
Raw Coverage	0.299	0.290	0.427	0.511	0.351
Unique Coverage	0.040	0.030	0.168	0.182	0.022
Overall Solution Consistency	0.818			0.784	
Overall Solution Coverage	0.497			0.532	
Consistency Cutoff	0.831			0.812	
Frequency Cutoff	3			3	

Note. ● = causal condition present; ⊗ = causal condition absent; blank space = "don't care" condition (Fiss, 2011). Sufficiency conditions were calculated using fsQCA 3.0 software

4.3.2 Sensitivity analysis

To determine the parameters for fsQCA, we drew on theoretical frameworks and current best practices (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012; Schrijvers et al., 2024). Because models should remain stable across threshold changes, the results were not expected to vary substantially. To ensure robustness, we conducted sensitivity analyses by varying consistency and PRI values. We also tested the effect of adjusting the frequency cutoff and found no change up to a value of 3. As the alternative models produced solutions that were subsets of those from the original model, the findings were deemed robust. For transparency, the full truth tables from the fsQCA are provided in Appendix C.

4.3.3 Description of results

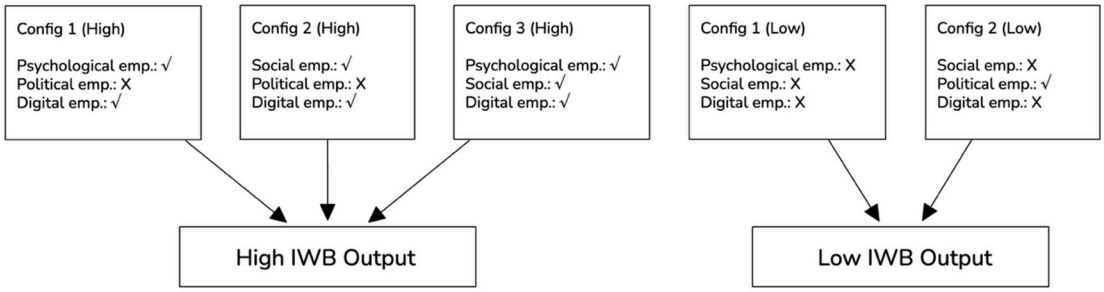
The fsQCA identified three distinct configurations associated with high innovative work behavior (IWB) (Figure 1). The overall solution consistency was .818, indicating that these configurations reliably explained the outcome. The overall solution coverage was .497, showing that the three pathways collectively accounted for approximately 49.7% of membership in high IWB within the sample.

The first configuration combined high psychological empowerment and high digital empowerment with the absence of high political empowerment. The second combined high social empowerment and high digital empowerment, again in the absence of high political empowerment. The third highlighted a different pathway, in which high psychological, social, and digital empowerment were jointly present.

A key finding across all three pathways was the consistent absence of high political empowerment. At the

same time, psychological, social, and digital empowerment emerged as strongly interrelated, underscoring their importance in combination for fostering high IWB.

Figure 1. Visual representation of the main configurational paths



The analysis also identified two configurations associated with low innovative work behavior (IWB). The overall solution consistency was .784, and the overall solution coverage was .532, indicating that these two pathways explained approximately 53.2% of membership in low IWB.

In the first configuration, low psychological, low social, and low digital empowerment were sufficient to hinder IWB. The second configuration combined low psychological empowerment and low digital empowerment with high political empowerment. This finding suggests that high political empowerment, when coupled with weak psychological and digital empowerment, may contribute to reduced IWB.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Theoretical contribution

This study advances theory by offering a configurational perspective on how multi-dimensional managerial empowerment translates into innovative work behavior (IWB) in cultural SMEs. It highlights equifinality—the synergistic effects of psychological, social, and digital empowerment—while also revealing the unexpectedly complex role of political empowerment. In doing so, it provides a richer and more context-sensitive theoretical account than prior analyses.

First, the findings challenge linear perspectives on the drivers of IWB by demonstrating the configurational complexity of the empowerment–IWB relationship. Moving beyond studies that examine empowerment dimensions in isolation or assume additive effects, this study employed fsQCA to show that high IWB arises not from single factors but from specific combinations of psychological, social, political, and digital empowerment. The identification of three equifinal pathways underscores that managers can achieve innovativeness through different empowerment profiles, highlighting the inadequacy of single-factor explanations. These results align with and extend configurational theories of management (Pavlov & Micheli, 2023), demonstrating their value for understanding micro-level behavioral outcomes such as IWB.

Second, the study illuminates the complex and potentially paradoxical role of political empowerment. Although political connections theoretically provide legitimacy and decision-making access, the empirical evidence showed that high-IWB configurations consistently excluded high political empowerment. Notably, it was absent in two of the three pathways to high IWB and present in one of the two pathways to low IWB. For managers who prioritize cultural authenticity and distinctive cultural tourism experiences, formal political involvement may act as a constraint. Bureaucratic procedures and slow political processes can hinder the agility required for innovation. This tension is compounded by the sector's emphasis on cultural preservation, which may conflict with the rapid adaptation necessary for digital or market-driven innovation. Furthermore, overreliance on formal political processes may reduce the operational autonomy essential for innovation. In the cultural SMEs examined here, political empowerment thus appeared limiting, functioning as a boundary condition that constrained the dynamism required for innovation.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature on innovation in cultural SMEs and cultural tourism by focusing on managers of core cultural firms (Throsby, 2008b), which face unique innovation challenges. By linking multi-dimensional empowerment directly to managers' IWB, the study helps fill a gap in understanding the micro-foundations of innovation capability in this sector. The results deepen theoretical insight into why some cultural managers are more innovative than others, shifting attention from firm-level characteristics to individual-level empowerment configurations.

At the same time, the study's focus on Spanish core cultural SMEs limits the direct generalizability of its findings due to the geographic and sector-specific context. Cross-cultural comparisons would be valuable for

examining generalizability, particularly in countries actively developing sustainable cultural tourism. The interplay between digital adoption and cultural authenticity presents distinctive challenges for cultural SMEs, challenges that may not be replicated in non-cultural sectors. While the core principles of managerial empowerment may apply broadly, their specific manifestations and effects are likely to vary across national economic contexts and policy frameworks.

5.2 Managerial contribution

This study offers significant practical guidance for managers of core cultural SMEs. A key insight is that fostering innovative work behavior (IWB) requires nuanced, context-aware strategies that recognize the complex interplay among different forms of empowerment. High IWB consistently emerged from specific combinations of psychological, social, and digital empowerment, underscoring their synergistic nature. Managerial development programs and support initiatives should therefore address these dimensions holistically.

To strengthen psychological empowerment, cultural SMEs can build managers' confidence and intrinsic connection to cultural value by organizing peer-to-peer learning circles on heritage interpretation, establishing internal recognition awards, and creating impact showcases where managers demonstrate how their work contributes to the broader mission. Social empowerment can be enhanced by encouraging cross-sectoral partnerships—for example, collaborations with technology firms on digital solutions or with universities on research projects—as well as active participation in European cultural networks and collaborative initiatives. Digital empowerment requires going beyond basic IT literacy to focus on the strategic use of digital tools for market engagement, operational efficiency, and stakeholder communication. Practical measures include establishing dedicated innovation labs to evaluate and pilot emerging technologies and offering targeted, skills-based professional development tailored to managers rather than relying solely on generalized staff training. Addressing deficits in social and digital empowerment is especially critical, as these were linked to low IWB in the findings.

Complementary initiatives from policymakers and support organizations are also vital for creating an enabling ecosystem. One of this study's most complex insights concerns political empowerment: simply expanding managers' formal influence within existing structures may not stimulate IWB and may even constrain it. Policymakers should instead prioritize operational autonomy, efficient communication channels, and genuinely inclusive participation mechanisms. Beyond formal governance roles, interventions could establish frameworks for shared decision-making that give managers meaningful input into strategic priorities. Initiatives such as innovation challenges with cross-sectoral collaboration components can further motivate managers to develop novel solutions through competition and shared learning. Regulators and policymakers must therefore reflect carefully on governance design to ensure that it empowers rather than restricts cultural managers.

Finally, broader policy measures can reinforce managerial empowerment and address sectoral vulnerabilities. Facilitating access to financing tailored to the intangible assets and project-based nature of cultural SMEs is critical and could involve creative venture funds or tax incentives for cultural R&D. Policymakers can also strengthen networks and collaboration by creating neutral platforms for knowledge exchange, establishing cross-border digital innovation centers with specialized consulting services, and supporting skills-based training developed in partnership with industry leaders. Crucially, these initiatives should remain flexible enough to accommodate national and regional particularities, enabling managers to feel genuinely empowered to innovate.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations, which also suggest directions for future research. First, the use of cross-sectional data limited our ability to establish causal relationships. Although fsQCA enabled the analysis of causal complexity and the identification of conditions associated with outcomes, it could not capture dynamic processes as they unfold over time. Longitudinal designs are therefore needed to trace how changes in managers' empowerment profiles shape their IWB trajectories and how these relationships evolve.

Second, the study's focus on managers of core cultural SMEs in Spain provided targeted insights but restricted generalizability. The findings may not extend to other subsectors of the cultural and creative industries or to firms operating under different national and institutional conditions. Comparative research across industries, firm sizes, and countries would help to test the boundary conditions of the empowerment configurations identified here.

Third, the study concentrated exclusively on managers. While managers are central drivers of innovation, future research should also examine empowerment and IWB among non-managerial employees in cultural SMEs. Investigating how managerial empowerment influences the broader organizational climate for innovation would provide valuable insights for multi-level analysis.

Building on these limitations, several avenues for future inquiry emerge. A mixed-methods approach that combines fsQCA with in-depth qualitative case studies could offer richer explanations of how and why certain configurations produce high or low IWB. Future studies might also develop more sophisticated frameworks for diagnosing optimal empowerment strategies based on organizational context, industry characteristics, and innovation requirements. Finally, longitudinal research could explore the long-term effects of different empowerment configurations and generate tools for monitoring and adjusting initiatives through continuous outcomes assessment.

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendix A Measurement items

Table A1. Measurement items

Item	Question	Rating Scale
Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)		
IWB-1	I create new ideas for difficult issues.	1–7
IWB-2	I generate original solutions for problems.	1–7
IWB-3	I mobilize support for innovative ideas.	1–7
IWB-4	I make important organizational members enthusiastic about innovative ideas.	1–7
IWB-5	I transform innovative ideas into useful applications.	1–7
IWB-6	I systematically introduce innovative ideas into the work environment.	1–7
Psychological Empowerment (PSYEMP)		
PSYEMP-1	Cultural tourism makes me proud to be part of the local community.	1–7
PSYEMP-2	Cultural tourism makes me feel special because people travel to see my county's unique features.	1–7
PSYEMP-3	Cultural tourism makes me want to tell others about our cultural offerings.	1–7
Social Empowerment (SOEMP)		
SOEMP-1	Cultural tourism makes me feel more connected to the local community.	1–7
SOEMP-2	Cultural tourism fosters a sense of "community spirit" in me.	1–7
SOEMP-3	Cultural tourism provides ways for me to get involved in the local community.	1–7
Political Empowerment (POLEMP)		
POLEMP-1	I feel I have access to the decision-making process about cultural tourism in the local community.	1–7
POLEMP-2	I feel my vote makes a difference in how cultural tourism develops in the local community.	1–7
POLEMP-3	I feel I have paths to share my concerns about cultural tourism development in the local community.	1–7
POLEMP-4	I feel I have pathways to share my concerns about cultural tourism development in the local community.	1–7
Digital Empowerment (DIGEMP)		
DIGEMP-1	To what extent do you consider yourself digitally competitive in managing all your affairs and responsibilities?	1–7
DIGEMP-2	How confident are you that you will implement your digital skills and capabilities effectively in your business's production, sales, or service processes?	1–7
DIGEMP-3	Do you believe your digital competences empower you to achieve your business goals in a more practical, feasible, tangible manner?	1–7
Control Variables		
CONTROL-1	Age	—
CONTROL-2	Gender: man / woman / non-binary / other	—
CONTROL-3	Education: compulsory secondary education / vocational training / higher education	—
CONTROL-4	Managed budget: none / < €5,000 / €5,000–50,000 / > €50,000	—

Appendix B Correlation scatterplots

Figure B. Correlation scatterplots

Figure B1 Scatterplot of iwbC and psyempC

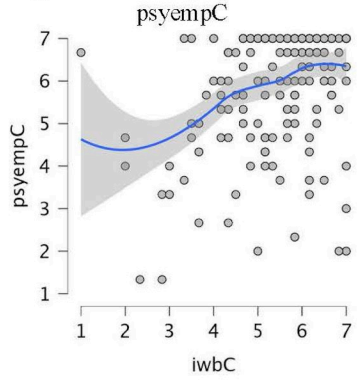


Figure B2 Scatterplot of iwbC and seempC

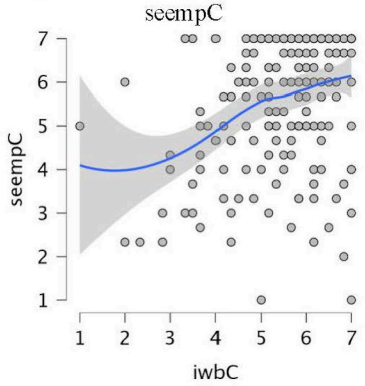


Figure B3 Scatterplot of iwbC and polempC

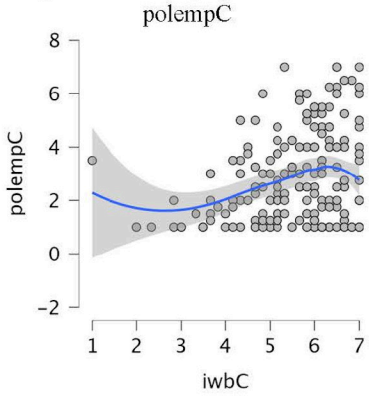


Figure B4 Scatterplot of iwbC and digempC

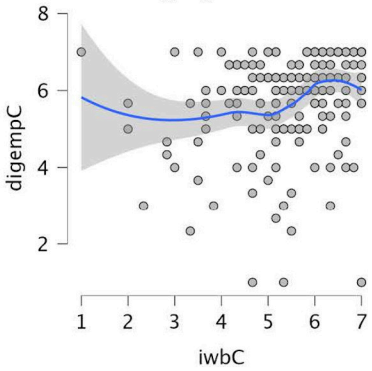


Figure B5 Scatterplot of psyempC and seempC

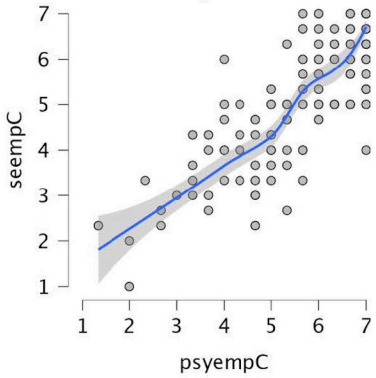


Figure B6 Scatterplot of psyempC and polempC

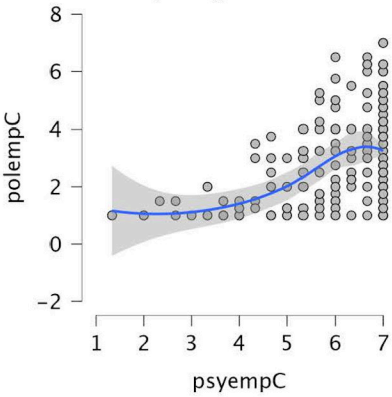


Figure B7 Scatterplot of psyempC and digempC

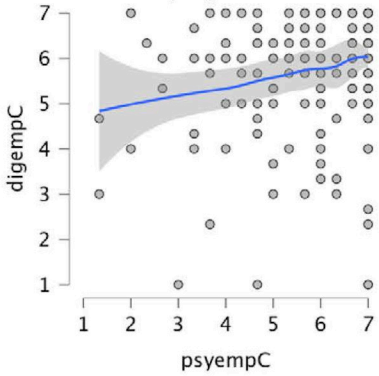


Figure B8 Scatterplot of seempC and polempC

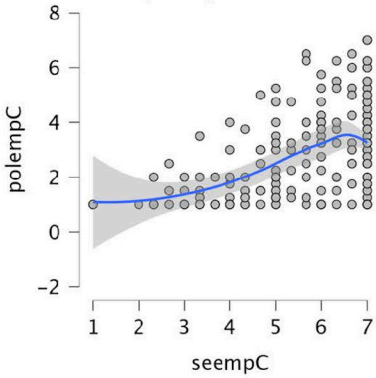


Figure B9 Scatterplot of seempC and digempC

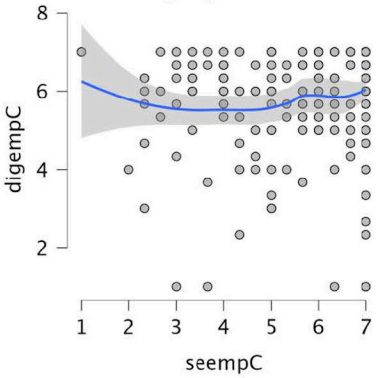
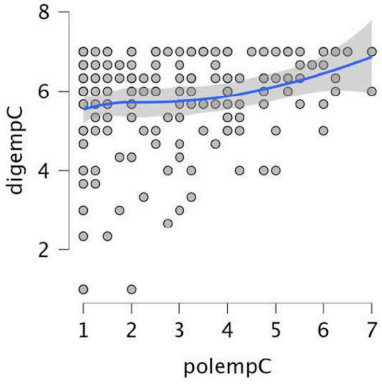


Figure B10 Scatterplot of polempC and digempC



Appendix C Truth tables for high and low values of innovative work behavior (IWB)

Table C1. Truth table for high values of IWB

digempC1	polempC1	psyempC1	seempC1	Cases (n)	iwbC1	Raw consistency	PRI consistency	SYM consistency
1	0	1	1	16	1	.882	.789	.795
1	1	1	1	22	1	.860	.779	.792
1	0	1	0	5	1	.849	.680	.680
1	0	0	1	3	1	.831	.609	.614
0	1	1	1	20	0	.749	.599	.624
1	0	0	0	12	0	.784	.569	.569
0	0	1	1	4	0	.771	.532	.532
0	1	0	1	4	0	.792	.480	.495
1	1	0	0	10	0	.743	.465	.471
0	1	1	0	3	0	.768	.419	.432
0	1	0	0	15	0	.598	.288	.288
0	0	0	0	28	0	.541	.262	.273

Note. 1 = condition present; 0 = condition absent; ~ = negated outcome. Raw consistency = degree to which a configuration is a subset of the outcome. PRI consistency = proportional reduction in inconsistency. SYM consistency = symmetric consistency. Truth tables were generated using fsQCA 3.0

Table C2. Truth table for low values of IWB

seempC1	psyempC1	polempC1	digempC1	Cases (n)	~iwbC1	Raw consistency	PRI consistency	SYM consistency
0	0	1	0	15	1	.837	.712	.712
0	0	0	0	28	1	.812	.697	.727
0	1	1	0	3	1	.820	.550	.568
0	0	1	1	10	0	.771	.523	.529
0	0	0	1	12	0	.714	.430	.431
0	1	0	1	5	0	.679	.320	.320
1	0	1	0	4	0	.796	.490	.505
1	1	0	0	4	0	.740	.468	.468
1	0	0	1	3	0	.733	.382	.386
1	1	1	0	20	0	.600	.361	.376
1	1	1	1	22	0	.498	.205	.208
1	1	0	1	16	0	.553	.204	.205

Note. 1 = condition present; 0 = condition absent; ~ = negated outcome. Raw consistency = degree to which a configuration is a subset of the outcome. PRI consistency = proportional reduction in inconsistency. SYM consistency = symmetric consistency. Truth tables were generated using fsQCA 3.0