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"Unveiling Research Trends And Intellectual Structure Of Strategic Employee Experience And Innovative Work Behavior: A Bibliometric Science Mapping Study"

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Abstract

This article aims to map research trends and intellectual structures on strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior (IWB), which have been developing rapidly but remain theoretically and thematically fragmented. Using bibliometric performance analysis and science mapping approaches, this study analyzed 364 English-language articles published between 2021 and 2025 and indexed in Scopus and Google Scholar. Data were collected through systematic keyword searches related to strategic employee experience and IWB, selected using the PRISMA protocol, and analyzed using VOSviewer to generate network, overlay, density, and co-author collaboration visualizations. The findings indicate that both concepts are closely connected to the themes of digitalization, sustainability, human capital, leadership, knowledge management, and innovation. However, an explicit link between strategic employee experience as an enabler and IWB as a behavioral output has not yet become a primary conceptual pathway. Cluster analysis identified twelve thematic groups integrating issues such as AI, metaverse, green innovation, ESG, digital transformation, and the circular economy, while a map of author collaborations revealed the dominance of a few research communities and the weakness of collaborative bridges across clusters and countries. The theoretical implications emphasize the need for integration of Social Exchange Theory, JD-R Theory, Resource-Based View, and Social Cognitive Theory in explaining the mechanism of employee experience–IWB in the digital and sustainability context,

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while the practical implications underline the importance of strategic employee experience design as an investment to strengthen individual and organizational innovation capacity.

Keywords: strategic employee experience; innovative work behavior; bibliometric analysis; science mapping; human resource management.

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly competitive and dynamic organizational landscape has driven human resource management practices to shift from an administrative approach to a strategic approach oriented toward long-term value creation(Qin et al., 2023). One concept that has developed rapidly in the last decade is the strategic employee experience, a series of integrated interactions strategically designed to generate positive perceptions, emotions, and values in employees throughout their organizational journey(Malik et al., 2022). This concept is no longer understood simply as work comfort or psychological well-being, but rather as an organizational strategy to increase engagement, commitment, and people-based competitiveness. In parallel, innovative work behavior has emerged as a determining factor for organizational success, given that innovation is no longer solely the domain of research and development but also depends on the ability of each individual to generate, promote, and realize new ideas that are valuable to the organization. The phenomenon of accelerating digital transformation, global talent competition, and pressure to increase organizational agility and efficiency have reinforced the urgency of these two concepts as drivers of human resource-based competitive advantage(Lenart-Gansiniec et al., 2023).

Although both are emerging as important research topics, the relationship between strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior remains a significant area of academic exploration. Previous research highlights how positive employee experiences contribute to work engagement, satisfaction, talent retention, and individual performance, but the specific relationship with innovative behavior remains relatively rare(Ebrahim et al., 2023). Several studies have shown that organizations that provide meaningful work experiences tend to facilitate innovation through psychological empowerment, a sense of security in trying new things, and the perception that their ideas are valued(Yıldız et al., 2017). However, other studies have found inconsistent results when different industry contexts, organizational cultures, and workforce characteristics are involved, thus hindering comprehensive theoretical conclusions. Differences in methodological and theoretical approaches have left the understanding of the conceptual

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pathway between employee experience and innovative behavior incompletely established.

With the growing interest in these two fields, the number of scientific publications has also surged in recent years. However, this growth in research quantity does not automatically result in an adequate knowledge mapping. Conventional literature reviews tend to be limited to narrative approaches that cannot systematically describe the knowledge structure, intellectual network, evolution of themes, and emerging pathways that shape the direction of research in these fields. Most previous studies have focused more on theoretical analysis or empirical relationships between the two variables, thus neglecting a comprehensive mapping of scientific trends. There has been no recent bibliometric study that specifically investigates how strategic employee experience has developed as a research domain, how it intersects with innovative work behavior studies, who the most influential researchers and institutions are, the journals and countries with the highest contributions, and the dominant and emerging research themes.

The absence of comprehensive mapping creates a significant research gap because without understanding the structure of knowledge and the evolution of research, researchers risk repeating similar studies, missing emerging research opportunities, or overlooking topics with high potential for theoretical and practical contributions. Furthermore, the lack of bibliometric studies hinders researchers' ability to identify the most influential theoretical foundations, potential theoretical integration between domains, and fragmented conceptual areas. In this context, bibliometric studies serve not only as publication mapping but also as a strategic instrument for mapping thematic evolution, collaboration trends, and emerging knowledge pathways within the literature(Kastrin & Hristovski, 2021). The science mapping approach provides visualization of citation networks, conceptual structures, and intellectual connections, enabling the formation of a more systematic and focused research agenda(Chen et al., 2023).

Based on these theoretical and empirical urgencies, this study proposes a novel approach in the form of a comprehensive scientific mapping using bibliometric performance analysis and a science mapping approach to explain research trends and the intellectual structures that shape the relationship between strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior. The results of this study are expected to provide academic contributions in the form of identifying key intellectual foundations, influential authors, collaboration networks, journals and countries with the largest contributions, and the dynamics of the evolution of research themes over time.

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Furthermore, this study is expected to highlight emerging themes and future research avenues as relevant future research directions both theoretically and practically.

In line with these objectives, this study is designed to answer the following research questions: how have scientific publication trends on strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior developed over the past two decades, what are the intellectual structures and academic citation networks formed within these research domains, and what themes dominate and which emerge as new topics in the future. Through a bibliometric approach based on performance analysis and science mapping, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the scientific landscape of these two concepts, while simultaneously opening up opportunities for more strategic theoretical integration and further research (Liu et al., 2025). Therefore, this study is expected to not only contribute to the human resource management literature but also serve as an important reference for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in designing employee experience management strategies to encourage innovative behavior within organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sub 1 Conception and Theoretical Evolution of Strategic Employee Experience in Modern Human Resource Management

The development of human resource management has demonstrated a paradigmatic shift from an administrative orientation to a strategic approach that positions employees as a source of long-term competitive advantage(Kess-Momoh et al., 2024). In this context, strategic employee experience has emerged as a key concept in the HRM literature, describing the totality of perceptions, emotions, and meanings employees derive from multifaceted interactions with organizations throughout their employment journey(Król & Karczewska, 2024). This concept has evolved from initial ideas about job satisfaction and organizational commitment to a more holistic understanding, where employee experience is influenced not only by HR management practices but also by organizational culture, job design, digital technology, and social interactions in the workplace(Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022). Previous research emphasizes that employee experience has a strategic orientation aimed at creating value by increasing employee engagement, productivity, loyalty, and talent retention. The most frequently used theoretical frameworks to explain employee experience include Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Self-Determination Theory,

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focusing on how organizations provide relevant resources and support to enhance employee experience.

Nevertheless, the development of research on strategic employee experience demonstrates the characteristics of a highly developed yet fragmented scientific field(Lipka, 2023; Yang & Zhang, 2025). Several studies integrate employee experience with digital technology through the application of digital HRM and human-technology interaction, while others examine the role of leadership, work climate, and organizational design as determinants of employee experience. This fragmentation creates a conceptual gap because there is no theoretical model that fully explains the mechanisms of employee experience as an organizational strategy. Furthermore, most studies still focus on conceptualizing employee experience in the context of well-being and engagement, while the contribution of employee experience to innovative performance and organizational sustainability remains largely unexplored. In this context, a bibliometric literature review is necessary to identify the theoretical dynamics, key intellectual foundations, and central research themes that shape the development of strategic employee experience in the academic realm.

Sub 2 — Conceptualization of Innovative Work Behavior and Its Driving Factors in an Organizational Context

Innovative work behavior(IWB) has become a dominant topic in the study of organizational behavior due to its potential to create competitive advantage through individual-based creativity and innovation(Contreras et al., 2017). IWB refers to a range of employee activities that include idea generation, idea promotion, and implementation that benefit the organization(Jankelová et al., 2024). Since its introduction in the industrial psychology literature, the concept has been expanded to encompass multilevel determinants encompassing individual, social, and organizational factors. Numerous studies have shown that individual competence, intrinsic motivation, organizational learning, leadership support, and innovation climate are key determinants of IWB. Transformational leadership and psychological empowerment are often cited as important catalysts that enable employees to feel secure and energized to innovate(Ebrahim et al., 2023). Central theoretical frameworks used to explain IWB include the Componential Theory of Creativity, Social Cognitive Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory, which highlight how resource support and the work environment influence innovative behavior.

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However, despite the abundance of empirical research on the drivers of IWB, the literature is limited in its understanding of the mechanisms and conceptual trajectories that lead employees to sustainably innovate. Previous research often shows inconsistencies, particularly regarding the impact of organizational factors. For example, some studies find that organizational support encourages innovative behavior, while others show that organizational support is not always effective e if it is not accompanied by psychological empowerment or role clarity. Furthermore, some studies ignore the context of digital transformation, which has changed the dynamics of work interactions, communication processes, and the role of technology in supporting or hindering individual innovation. These conceptual barriers highlight the need for a systematic literature mapping to identify patterns of relationships between themes, influential researchers, and thematic development directions that can provide deeper insights into future IWB studies.

Sub 3 — Theoretical and Empirical Relationship between Strategic Employee Experience and Innovative Work Behavior

The relationship between strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior is attracting increasing academic attention due to its contribution to human resource-based competitive advantage(de Villiers et al., 2021). Theoretically, the relationship between the two can be explained through the concept of organizational values, where positive employee experiences enable the creation of psychological and social conditions that encourage the courage to propose and realize new ideas. From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, positive employee experiences build reciprocal relationships based on trust and appreciation, which ultimately motivate employees to demonstrate extra-role behaviors, including innovation(Patil et al., 2023). Meanwhile, within the framework of Job Demands–Resources Theory, employee experiences rich in resources can increase energy and motivation to innovate(Chen et al., 2026). Empirical evidence supports the notion that employees who experience meaningful and organizationally supported work interactions exhibit higher levels of IWB. Recent studies highlight the role of aspects such as psychological safety, meaningful work, and a supportive climate as important mediators in the relationship between the two concepts.

However, the literature still reveals significant theoretical and empirical gaps. First, the relationship between employee experience and IWB has not been consistently explained across industry contexts, work cultures, and workforce generations. Second, some studies conceptualize employee experience as a set of HRM practices, while others view it as the subjective experience of employees, making it difficult to achieve a uniform

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definition. Third, the role of digital technology, hybrid work, and increasingly boundaryless work systems has not been fully integrated into discussions on employee experience and innovation. This misalignment indicates the need for bibliometric mapping to identify which theoretical foundations are most dominant, how theory integration is evolving, and what themes serve as the main intellectual routes connecting the two research fields. Thus, a bibliometric mapping approach is needed.

METHOD

The use of a bibliometric approach has become increasingly dominant in mapping the development of human resource management science because it can objectively and systematically reveal the intellectual structure, research trends, and the dynamics of relationships between concepts within a particular discipline (Nair et al., 2025). This study adopts this approach to analyze the scientific landscape related to strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, which over the past five years has shown significant growth both in academic discourse and in applications in modern organizational practice. The application of bibliometrics is considered appropriate because it can capture patterns of scientific collaboration, the evolution of themes, and the emergence of new research fields through quantification of publication data, thus providing methodological and theoretical contributions for researchers and practitioners. Recent studies have shown that bibliometric science mapping is the most reliable method for understanding intellectual relationships in the fields of organizational behavior and human resource management(Mensah et al., 2026). Thus, this approach provides a strong foundation for research to address academic needs in comprehensively mapping the development of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior.

a. 4.1. Research Approach

This study applies a bibliometric approach with a focus on science mapping to explore publication trends, research theme clustering, and intellectual structure in the field of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior. This approach was chosen because it has the ability to identify long-term knowledge developments based on a broad collection of scientific publications, allows for a quantitative study of academic contributions to a field, while also displaying the network of relationships between authors, keywords, and citations. Given the high diversity of perspectives in the study of employee experience and innovative employee behavior, the bibliometric method is considered most relevant to produce a holistic picture of conceptual evolution and future research directions(Nair et al., 2025).

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b. 4.2. Data Sources and Types

The research data consisted of 364 scientific articles obtained from two reputable databases: Scopus and Google Scholar. The publication period analyzed spanned 2021 to 2025, considering that the last five years have demonstrated an intensification of academic discussions on transforming employee experience and driving innovation at the individual level within organizations. The articles used were English-language publications to ensure global comparability and consistency of academic terminology. The selection of these two databases was based on Scopus's reputation as the world's largest citation index and Google Scholar's reputation as an inclusive academic database, thus minimizing source representation bias.

c. 4.3. Data Collection Process

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search using the keywords "strategic employee experience" and "innovative work behavior," both separately and in combination with Boolean logic to improve the accuracy of the search results. All metadata, including title, abstract, author names, year of publication, keywords, and publication sources, was extracted in spreadsheet format for further analysis. This process was carried out to ensure that all collected data could be integrated into bibliometric analysis tools without losing important information.

d. 4.4. Data Selection Process

Publication selection was conducted based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol to ensure transparency and accountability in the screening process. The selection phase included initial database identification, duplication checks, title and abstract screening, and content suitability assessment to ensure that only articles explicitly examining strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior were included in the final analysis. The PRISMA approach minimized the risk of selection bias and maintained the integrity of publication data throughout the extraction process.

e. 4.5. Data Analysis and Interpretation Process

The analysis phase was conducted using VOSviewer software to produce bibliometric network visualizations that include network visualizations, theme evolution maps (overlay visualizations), research density maps (density visualizations), and co-author collaboration visualizations. The visualization results were then interpreted to identify dominant themes, the emergence of new topics, citation patterns, and relationships between research groups and institutions. VOSviewer was chosen for its ability to handle large amounts of data and produce accurate and easily interpretable

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visual mapping, thus supporting efforts to uncover the intellectual structure and flow of scientific development in the domains of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cluster Analysis

Table 1. Cluster Analysis Results

Cluster	Number of Items	Item (Keyword)
Cluster 1	13 Items	CEO activism, innovative work behavior, knowledge-oriented leadership, metaverse, mixed methods, purchase intention, service robots, social cognitive theory, social impact, stakeholder theory, sustainability reporting, technology adoption, wellbeing
Cluster 2	11 Items	circular economy, cluster analysis, competency, competitive advantage, digitization, information technology, institutional pressures, knowledge management, organizational learning, organizational performance, sustainability
Cluster 3	10 Items	difference-in-difference, digital economy, diversity, entrepreneurial orientation, green transformation, identity, inclusion, performance, six sigma, social network analysis
Cluster 4	10 Items	covid-19, higher education, leadership competence, nature-based solutions, nonmarket value, public perceptions, students, sustainable development, vuca, willingness to pay
Cluster 5	9 Items	Adoption, ambidexterity, artificial intelligence, challenges, chatgpt, hrm, management, public sector, systematic literature review
Cluster 6	8 Items	business model innovation, digitalization, e-commerce, internationalization, leadership, servitization, sme, social media marketing
Cluster 7	8 Items	bibliometrics, business performance, hospitality, human capital, innovation, social capital, social exchange theory, total factor productivity
Cluster 8	7 Items	classification, data-driven innovation, disruptive innovation, dynamic capabilities, machine learning, SMS, resource-based view

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Cluster 9	7 Items	artificial intelligence (ai), csr, customer engagement, customer experience, esg, green finance, satisfaction
Cluster 10	6 Items	climate change, covid-19 pandemic, fintech, green innovation, Indonesia, sustainable development
Cluster 11	5 Items	change management, digital transformation, product innovation, structural equation modeling, talent management
Cluster 12	4 Items	decision making, review, strategic management, system dynamics

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Table 1, which presents the results of the cluster analysis, provides a key entry point for understanding how research on strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior connects to the broader ecosystem of concepts in contemporary management and organizations. The twelve clusters that emerge not only map frequently occurring keywords but also indicate an intellectual structure that spans from the micro-individual dimension to the macro-institutional and sustainability dimensions. This aligns with the article's title, which emphasizes "research trends and intellectual structure," so Table 1 serves as a concrete representation of that intellectual structure. Here, research on employee experience and innovative behavior does not stand alone but is embedded within a network of themes encompassing digital technology, sustainability, leadership, business innovation, green transformation, and social dynamics (Siahaan et al., 2025).

A closer look reveals that several clusters demonstrate a direct connection to theoretical frameworks commonly used in the literature on HRM and organizational behavior. The presence of keywords such as social cognitive theory, stakeholder theory, social exchange theory, and resource-based view indicates that the theoretical foundations supporting the discourse on strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior are multidimensional(Raghu & D Souza, 2024). Social Exchange Theory, for example, is relevant for explaining how positive employee experiences shape reciprocal relationships that drive innovative behavior(Hanafi et al., 2025). Resource-Based View relates to how human capital and employee experience are positioned as strategic resources for competitive advantage. Meanwhile, Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the role of individual agency, self-efficacy, and social learning in driving innovative behavior(Venkatesh et al., 2003). The presence of these theories across various clusters confirms that the relationship between employee experience and innovative behavior cannot be understood through a single perspective, but rather through the integration of several theories.

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Table 1 also powerfully illustrates the research gap previously stated in the introduction. Clusters such as those containing metaverse, service robots, artificial intelligence, chatGPT, digital transformation, and machine learning demonstrate that the research ecosystem has moved rapidly to keep pace with digital transformation and technological disruption. However, their explicit link to strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior remains relatively implicit. This means that while technology, AI, and digitalization are important keywor ds, few studies have systematically integrated the dimensions of employee experience in the context of digital work with the output of innovative behavior. This confirms the research gap: the knowledge structure exists, but the conceptual and empirical bridges between the domains of technology, employee experience, and IWB have not been fully mapped.

From a novelty perspective, Table 1 demonstrates that this study not only identifies a direct relationship between strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior but also positions both within a broader conceptual landscape. For example, the cluster containing human capital, social capital, business performance, and bibliometrics indicates that there is attention to how human and relational capital contribute to business performance and how this is analyzed bibliometrically. This aligns with the article's goal of not only mapping publication trends but also explaining the intellectual structures that underpin the development of the concept(Córdova-Buiza et al., 2025)s. Thus, Table 1 provides academic legitimacy to the claim that this field is not isolated but rather integrated with larger themes such as sustainability, the circular economy, the digital economy, and green innovation.

Furthermore, the presence of keywords such as covid-19, vuca, sustainable development, climate change, green finance, and ESG in several clusters demonstrates that research on employee experience and innovative behavior cannot be separated from the context of a turbulent external environment. This is consistent with research issues that highlight the dynamics of an increasingly competitive and uncertain organizational landscape. In this context, strategic employee experience can be understood as an organizational adaptive mechanism to create psychological stability and work meaning amidst uncertainty, while innovative work behavior is an active employee response to help the organization adapt and transform(Fahlevi et al., 2022). Table 1 shows that the literature is beginning to focus on integrating sustainability issues, the global crisis, and green transformation, but again, their specific connections to employee experience and IWB have not been fully explained in previous studies. This is where the role of this bibliometric study becomes novel and strategic.

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This table also contributes to the article's objective of identifying emerging themes and future research avenues. Clusters related to MSMEs, business model innovation, servitization, social media marketing, and e-commerce indicate that the application of the concepts of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior has shifted not only to large organizations but also to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and digital platform-based businesses. This opens up opportunities for further research to examine how employee experiences in the context of digital MSMEs or platform-based firms shape innovative behavior in situations of limited resources but high innovation pressure(Tuyet et al., 2025). Therefore, Table 1 is not simply a technical result of VOSviewer, but serves as an argumentative basis that the body of knowledge in this field is moving towards a stronger integration between strategic HRM, digital technology, and the sustainability agenda.

Network Visualization

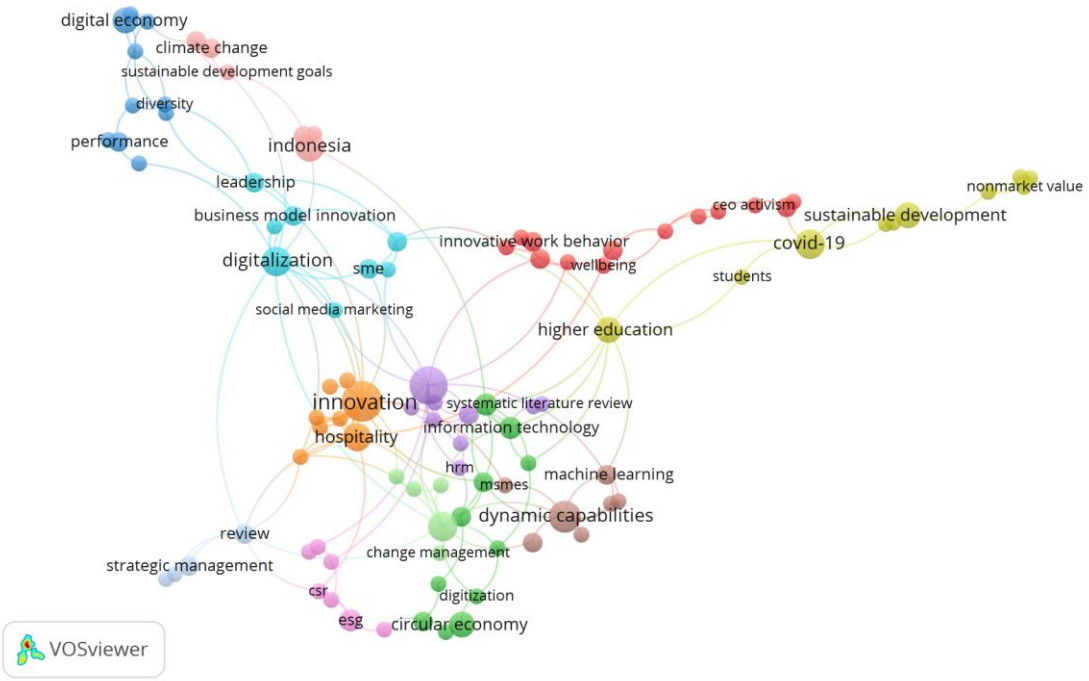


Figure 1. Network Visualization
Source: Data processed, 2025

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Figure 1, which displays a network visualization representing the co-occurrence relationships between keywords, demonstrates how con cepts relevant to strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior are interconnected within a knowledge network. In the context of this article, Figure 1 serves as visual evidence that research on employee experience and innovative behavior does not develop linearly, but through a network of concepts that form intellectual clusters(Raghu & D Souza, 2024). Network visualization allows readers to see the structure of an "ecosystem" of ideas, namely how core keywords such as innovation, human capital, social capital, digitalization, AI, sustainability, and leadership are interconnected and form conceptual pathways that connect the individual, organizational, and external environmental levels(Raghu & D Souza, 2024).

From a research problem perspective, this network explicitly demonstrates that while strategic employee experience does not always appear as the largest node, it exists within and among nodes related to HRM, talent management, leadership, wellbeing, and organizational performance. This suggests that employee experience is often positioned as part of a broader discourse on human capital and talent management, rather than as a truly stand-alone research domain(Yang & Zhang, 2025). This is where the research gap highlighted by this study lies: there has been no systematic mapping that positions strategic employee experience as a strategic node connecting HRM practices, employee psychological states, and behavioral outputs such as innovative work behavior. Network visualization suggests a relationship, but there has been no consistent theoretical and empirical articulation explaining the causal pathway.

Figure 1 also shows how innovative work behavior is intertwined with keywords such as leadership, social exchange theory, knowledge management, digital transformation, and organizational learning. This aligns with the literature, which emphasizes that IWB relies heavily on the support of social and organizational contexts, as well as learning mechanisms. However, when drawn to the title and purpose of the article, it appears that the relationship between nodes representing employee experience and nodes representing IWB has not yet become a "main path" in the network, but rather emerges through intermediaries such as psychological constructs, leadership styles, and digitalization. A critical reading of Figure 1 leads to the conclusion that structurally, the literature has created the conditions for conceptual integration between the two fields, but has not yet consolidated it into an established body of knowledge. This reinforces the article's claim of novelty, namely providing a science mapping that explicitly highlights the

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intellectual pathways connecting strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, network visualization also shows that key theories are not randomly distributed, but rather form subnetworks that connect specific keyword clusters. Social exchange theory, for example, is likely connected to keywords such as human capital, hospitality, business performance, and innovation, suggesting that the reciprocal relationship between organizations and employees is understood in terms of employee contributions to performance and innovation(Wu & Lv, 2024). Resource-based view and dynamic capabilities appear associated with keywords such as business model innovation, digitalization, and competitive advantage, indicating that innovation is positioned as a manifestation of an organization's ability to manage and orchestrate resources. This network visualization thus serves as a conceptual map confirming that the theoretical foundation in this field is multi-level and layered, but has not yet explicitly centered employee experience as a strategic variable linking resources, work context, and innovative behavior.

From the perspective of research objectives, Figure 1 helps answer the question of how intellectual structures and academic citation networks are formed in the domains of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior. Although this figure is based on keyword relationships, the co-occurrence patterns generally parallel citation patterns, as authors using similar keywords tend to refer to adjacent literature. Thus, network visualization can be interpreted as a proxy for active knowledge clusters and research communities. This is important because it directs researchers to potential collaborations, key theoretical references, and subfields that need further exploration.

Network visualization also contributes to the study's findings by highlighting areas of high and low connectivity. Areas with high connectivity represent established themes, such as the relationship between innovation, performance, and competitiveness. Conversely, relatively connected nodes that are not yet central to the network—such as the metaverse, service robots, chatGPT, or green finance—represent emerging themes that are just beginning to be integrated into mainstream discourse. When linked to strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, this suggests research opportunities to explore how employee experience and innovative behavior are shaped in a digitalized work environment driven by financial and environmental sustainability agendas.

Critically, Figure 1 shows that although the literature is already in a phase of “thematic convergence” around digitalization, sustainability, and human capital, there is

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still no aggregate focus on strategic employee experience configurations as a key enabler of innovative behavior. This means that the knowledge network is already rich, but still requires strengthening in the form of an integrative conceptual model and cross-context empirical studies. This is where this bibliometric study adds value, as it not only describes the network but also utilizes network visualization to identify conceptual gaps, potential theory integrations, and promising research directions.

Overlay Visualization

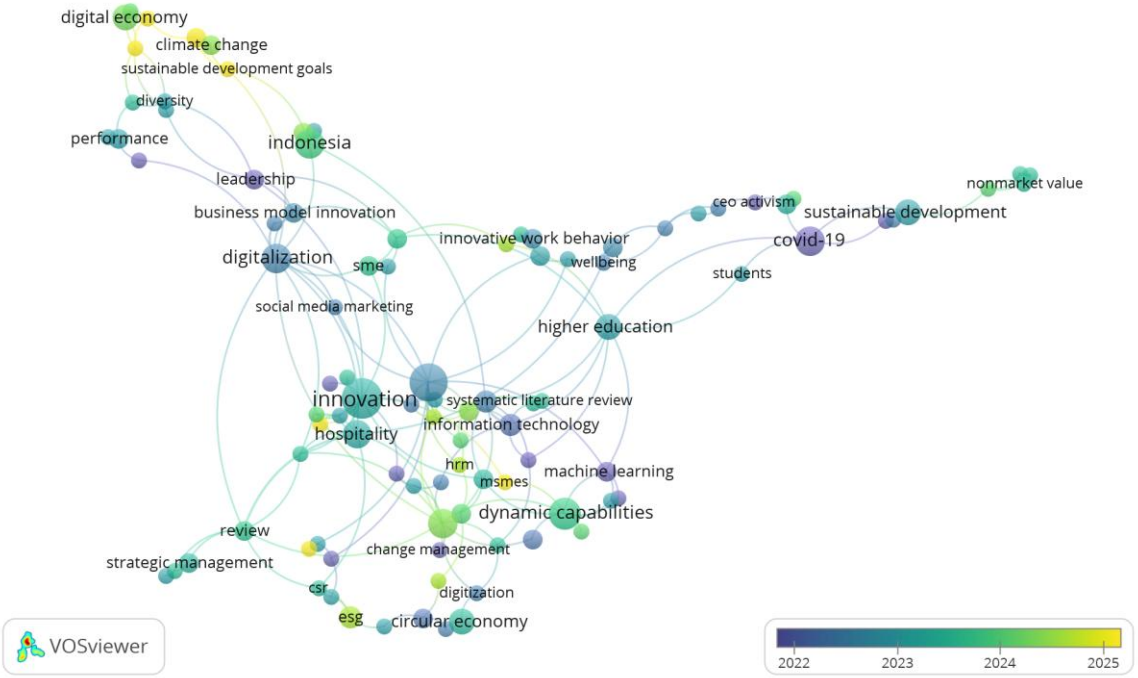


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization
Source: Data processed, 2025

Figure 2, which displays an overlay visualization, provides a temporal dimension to the keyword network previously mapped through network visualization. While network visualization reveals static structures and relationships, overlay visualization adds information about when certain themes began to emerge and how research focus evolved over the 2021–2025 period. In the context of this article, overlay visualization is crucial for answering research questions regarding the development of scientific publication

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trends on strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, as well as for identifying dominant themes and emerging new research areas.

Conceptually, overlay visualizations typically highlight newer keywords with a specific color (e.g., yellow or bright green), and older keywords with a darker color. Thus, we can interpret digital transformation-related terms such as metaverse, artificial intelligence, chatGPT, machine learning, digital transformation, fintech, and data-driven innovation as likely emerging “young nodes,” signaling a shift in research focus toward integrating advanced technologies into organizational and HR practices. Meanwhile, more traditional terms like innovation, performance, leadership, human capital, and organizational learning tend to represent themes that have long been foundational. Within this framework, overlay visualizations demonstrate that studies of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior have shifted from a traditional orientation—emphasizing leadership, organizational culture, and learning—toward a new landscape imbued with digitalization, automation, and sustainability.

When linked to the research problem, overlay visualization helps demonstrate that the surge in research on employee experience and innovative behavior in the past five years has been shaped by two key forces: digital transformation and sustainability pressures. The emergence of keywords such as COVID-19, VUCA, climate change, sustainable development, ESG, green innovation, and green finance in the more recent period indicates that organizations are no longer solely pursuing financial performance but must also adapt to global crises and environmental demands(Mukhtar et al., 2023). In this context, strategic employee experience becomes increasingly crucial as organizations must design work experiences that maintain employee engagement, mental health, and innovative capacity amidst uncertainty. Overlay visualization shows how these new themes are beginning to intersect with the discourse on innovation and performance, although they have not yet fully crystallized into a theoretical framework that systematically connects all variables(Elsamani et al., 2023).

In terms of the research gap, overlay visualizations demonstrate the temporal and substantive lag between the growing literature on advanced technologies and their integration with strategic employee experience. AI, chatGPT, and the metaverse may have garnered attention as technologies transforming how organizations operate and interact with customers, but their implications for employee experience and innovative behavior are only just beginning to be explored. This means that the literature is still in its infancy in examining how human-machine interactions, process automation, and platform-based work shape employees' perceptions, emotions, and meanings of work,

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which in turn influence their willingness to generate and implement innovative ideas(Wang & Lin, 2025). Overlay visualizations thus serve as visual evidence that this field is rich with future research opportunities, particularly at nodes that are just beginning to emerge in the temporal map.

Theoretically, the overlay visualization also demonstrates the dynamics of theory use. In the early period, Social Exchange Theory, Resource-Based View, and Componential Theory of Creativity may have dominated, while theories related to technology and complex systems, such as system dynamics or the theory of dynamic capabilities, may have emerged in the later period. This is consistent with the shift in research focus from simply explaining the relationship between individual factors and innovative behavior to a more systemic understanding of how organizations build dynamic capabilities through managing employee experiences and utilizing digital technologies. In the context of the research objective of identifying intellectual structure, the overlay visualization demonstrates that this structure is not static but evolving, with the integration of new theories and themes gradually enriching the discourse.

From a novelty perspective, interpreting Figure 2 demonstrates that this study's contribution lies in its ability to reveal not only what has been researched, but also when and in what context these themes emerged. Thus, this study goes beyond simply capturing the state of the literature, but rather constructs an evolutionary narrative of how the fields of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior have evolved and adapted to changes in the external environment. This is particularly useful for researchers seeking to position their studies within current research streams, for example, by linking employee experience in the hybrid work era, the use of AI in HRM, or the influence of ESG policies on individual innovation.

Overlay visualization also contributes to the article's findings by clarifying dominant and emerging themes relevant as future research avenues. Dominant themes may center on the relationship between innovation, performance, human capital, and leadership, while emerging themes are more related to the digital economy, green transformation, fintech, and data-driven innovation. In the context of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, this opens up research opportunities to explore how work experiences in digitalized and sustainability-oriented organizations can be designed to stimulate innovative behavior that not only benefits the organization but also has positive social and environmental impacts(He et al., 2024). In other words, overlay visualization provides a visual empirical basis for formulating a future research agenda that is both theoretically and practically relevant.

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Density Visualization

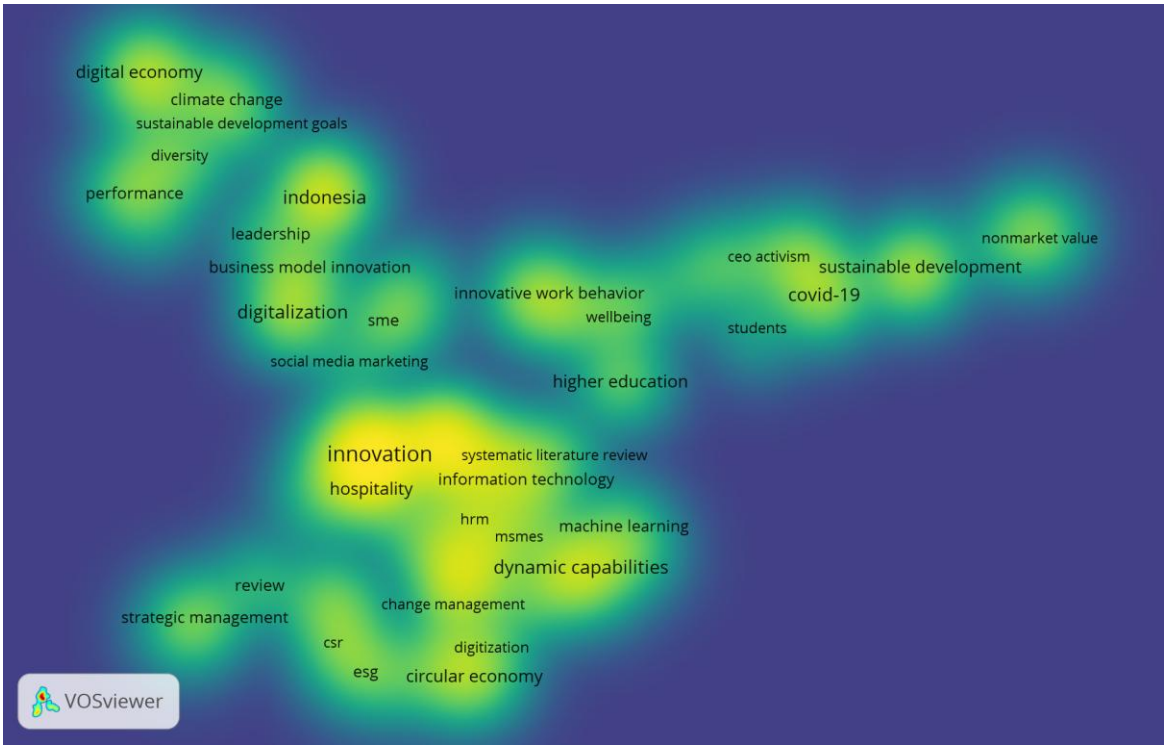


Figure 3. Density Visualization
Source: Data processed, 2025

Figure 3, which displays density visualization, provides a different perspective on the structure of knowledge by highlighting the "density" of research activity around specific keywords. While network visualization depicts the relationships between nodes, and overlay visualization adds a temporal dimension, density visualization highlights the most intensively investigated areas in the literature. In a density map, lighter areas indicate a high concentration of keywords and their frequency of occurrence, while darker areas indicate themes that have received relatively less attention. In the context of this article, density visualization is crucial for identifying the "center of gravity" of the literature surrounding strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, while also uncovering areas that remain underexplored.

When linked to the article title, Figure 3 helps explain the "research trends" and "intellectual structure" sections simultaneously. Areas with high density are likely to be

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located around keywords such as innovation, performance, human capital, organizational learning, leadership, sustainability, and digitalization. This indicates that the literature has long and intensively linked innovation to organizational performance, human capital, and leadership, and is beginning to integrate sustainability and digital transformation agendas. However, a critical interpretation of the density visualization indicates that strategic employee experience may not yet be a major center of density, but rather is in an area of moderate or even growing density. This is consistent with the research gap identified in the introduction, namely that strategic employee experience has not yet been sufficiently consolidated as a distinct research domain, let alone as a formal link to innovative work behavior.

From a research perspective, density visualization shows that while innovative work behavior has been part of a dense cluster of innovation and performance themes, its explicit connection to employee experience has only recently begun to be identified. In other words, research on IWB is relatively mature from the perspective of traditional determinants such as leadership, innovation climate, and organizational support, but its integration with the concept of strategic employee experience as a systemically designed experience throughout the employee journey has not yet provided a comparable “density footprint.” This means that structurally, there is significant, but underutilized, potential to make employee experience a strategic variable explicitly positioned within comprehensive IWB models.

Density visualization also helps emphasize the novelty of this research. By mapping both highly dense and relatively under-researched areas, this study demonstrates that there remains ample conceptual space at the intersection of advanced technology, sustainability, and employee experience. For example, areas related to artificial intelligence, the metaverse, service robots, and chatGPT may be starting to show increasing density, but have not yet reached the level of density of classic themes of innovation and performance. This can be interpreted as indicating that the literature is only in the early stages of exploring the implications of these technologies for how employees work, interact, and experience organizations. In this context, strategic employee experience in the digital and automation era opens up significant research opportunities, for example, regarding how technology-based work experience design can encourage or hinder innovative behavior(Opland et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, density visualization also implies that certain theories are denser than others. Social exchange theory, the resource-based view, and innovation theories are likely to be conceptual hotspots, while theories focusing on

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subjective experience, the meaning of work, and positive psychology may still exhibit lower density. This reinforces the argument that the integration between resource-based strategic approaches and experience-based psychological approaches has not yet been fully realized in the literature. Yet, in the context of strategic employee experience, such integration is crucial for explaining how strategic HRM system design translates into positive psychological experiences that foster innovative behavior(Halim et al., 2024). Density visualization thus demonstrates that the integration of these theories is a promising intellectual path to future development.

From a research objective perspective, Figure 3 directly contributes to identifying dominant and emerging themes. Dominant themes appear in high-density areas—often related to innovation, performance, sustainability, and digitalization—while emerging themes emerge as medium-density areas that show increasing trends. For researchers and practitioners, this information is invaluable in deciding where to position their contributions: whether to deepen established areas by adding new dimensions such as employee experience, or to explore emerging areas such as the AI–employee experience–IWB interaction. For policymakers and organizational practitioners, the density visualization highlights that if they want to be at the forefront of HRM practices and innovation, they need to move beyond simply managing performance and talent to designing strategic employee experiences relevant to digital transformation and sustainability agendas.

Overall, the interpretation of Figure 3 reinforces the article's central narrative that this bibliometric study not only maps what already exists but also highlights the vast untapped potential at the intersection of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior. The density visualization provides visual evidence that while the field is already rich with discourses on innovation, performance, and technology, more focused theoretical and empirical efforts are needed to establish employee experience as a recognized strategic node in the modern HRM knowledge structure(Yang & Zhang, 2025).

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Co-author Collaboration Network

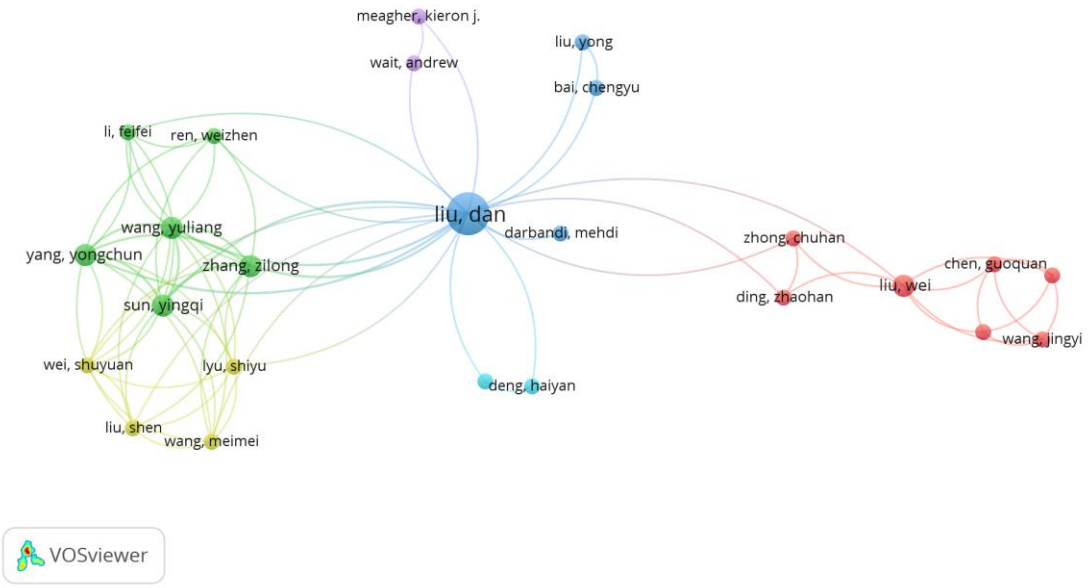


Figure 4. Co-author Collaboration Network
Source: Data processed, 2025

Figure 4, which displays the co-author collaboration network, provides an important perspective on how the structure of scientific collaboration is formed in the field of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, while also reflecting the dynamics of knowledge production that underlie the title of the article "Unveiling Research Trends and Intellectual Structure of Strategic Employee Experience and Innovative Work Behavior: A Bibliometric Science Mapping Study." Substantively, the author collaboration network is not just a map of social relations between academics, but also a reflection of the distribution of intellectual power, centers of scientific influence, and the flow of ideas that shape the development of theory and empirical findings in this field. When linked to the research problem that highlights the absence of systematic mapping of the structure of knowledge and relationships between researchers in the domain of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, Figure 4 provides visual evidence that this

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research landscape is supported by a number of collaboration clusters with varying levels of density and connectedness.

In general, a co-author collaboration network indicates the presence of several groups of authors forming relatively strong collaborative clusters with a high level of internal connectivity, but not always intensively connected between clusters. This phenomenon reflects the rapidly growing but still fragmented nature of the literature, as explained in the introduction and literature review. In the context of the research gap, this condition indicates that the discourse on strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior is still often developed within relatively separate "epistemic communities," whether based on institutional affiliation, country, or specific thematic focus. For example, one collaborative cluster might focus on the relationship between employee experience and digital HRM in the context of technology-based organizations, while another cluster emphasizes the study of IWB supported by transformational leadership theory in the public sector or higher education. This lack of collaborative bridges between groups explains why the conceptual integration between strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior is not yet as strong as the potential depicted in the keyword maps in the previous figures.

From a novelty perspective, Figure 4 demonstrates the unique contribution of this article because, for the first time, the collaborative network of authors in this field is explicitly mapped using a bibliometric science mapping approach. To date, most studies only identify key authors or the most productive countries based on publication counts without revealing how they are interconnected in knowledge production. Visualizing the co-author network shifts the focus from “who is most productive” to “who builds the most strategic intellectual networks and how these networks influence the evolution of research themes.” This is important because in modern science, theoretical and methodological innovations often emerge from cross-disciplinary, cross-national, and cross-institutional collaborations. Therefore, this collaboration mapping aligns with the research objective of uncovering the intellectual structure of the domain of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior more holistically.

From a theoretical perspective, co-author collaboration networks can be interpreted through the lens of social network theory and the concept of social capital. Researchers in central positions with numerous co-authorship connections potentially exert a high degree of influence on the direction of theory and methodology development, as they serve as hubs connecting diverse ideas and approaches. Strong connections among authors may reflect the formation of a particular school of thought, for example, a

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group that heavily utilizes Social Exchange Theory to explain the relationship between employee experience and extra-role behavior, or another group that utilizes the Resource-Based View and dynamic capabilities to position employee experience and IWB within the framework of organizational competitive advantage(Desta et al., 2022). In other words, this structure of scholarly collaboration is not a neutral phenomenon, but rather indirectly shapes and reinforces the dominance of certain theories in the literature. On the other hand, authors in peripheral positions with few collaborative connections may represent alternative perspectives or specific local contexts, which are sources of novelty but are often poorly integrated into mainstream global discourse.

Regarding the research problem of limited theoretical integration between strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, Figure 4 shows that one root cause can be traced to the cluster-based structure of scientific collaboration. Strong collaboration within clusters but weak collaboration between clusters can potentially maintain topic and theory segmentation. For example, a group of authors focused on digital transformation and employee experience may not collaborate intensively with a group focused on the psychological determinants of IWB, resulting in a partial conceptual integration between digital employee experience and individual innovation in organizations(Yusop et al., 2024). In this context, the findings from the co-author collaboration network provide the basis for arguing that theoretical and conceptual integration efforts require intervention at the collaborative network level, not just at the literature analysis level.

From the perspective of article writing objectives, Figure 4 plays a crucial role in answering research questions regarding who the key actors are and how collaboration patterns shape the intellectual structure of this field. Identifying author clusters, levels of connectivity, and authors who act as bridges between clusters provides strategic information for other researchers seeking to enter this domain. They can identify cited authors and research groups, potential collaboration partners, and observe how specific collaboration networks correlate with specific research themes such as sustainability, green innovation, digital HRM, or psychological safety. This visualization also reinforces the finding that despite an increase in the quantity of publications from 2021 to 2025, the distribution of knowledge generated remains concentrated in a select few clusters, opening up opportunities for new researchers from underrepresented countries or institutions to fill geographic and thematic gaps.

Critically, the co-author collaboration network also reveals a structural dimension often overlooked in theoretical discussions: the dominance of certain countries or

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institutions in knowledge production. Although Figure 4 does not explicitly name countries, a dense network pattern around a few large nodes typically indicates a strong contribution from countries with established research traditions. This has implications for the generalizability of findings in the areas of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior, as many conceptual models and empirical evidence may be based on the context of developed countries or specific industrial sectors. Thus, the co-author network suggests the need to expand collaboration to developing and middle-income countries, such as Indonesia, which also appears as a context in this study, to ensure that theories and findings on employee experience and IWB are not context-biased.

Ultimately, Figure 4 makes a significant contribution to the article's findings by demonstrating that the intellectual structure of the field of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior is determined not only by the themes and theories under study, but also by the architecture of scholarly collaboration that underpins it(Arshad et al., 2024). This collaboration map demonstrates that fostering stronger conceptual integration, enriching the theoretical foundation, and generating more relevant findings across contexts requires a more inclusive, cross-cluster, and cross-disciplinary collaboration network. Thus, the co-author collaboration network serves not only as a visual description but also as a basis for critical reflection on how the scholarly community can collectively build a more coordinated and impactful future research agenda for developing strategic employee experience as a key driver of innovative work behavior in modern organizations.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that the research landscape on strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior is in a phase of rapid growth, with an intellectual structure that is beginning to consolidate but remains fragmented. Through bibliometric performance analysis and science mapping of 364 articles from 2021–2025, it was found that these two concepts are closely linked to the broad themes of digitalization, sustainability, human capital, leadership, and innovation. However, an explicit link between strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior has not yet become mainstream discourse. Network, overlay, and density visualizations reveal that IWB has become part of an established innovation and performance cluster, while strategic employee experience has only recently moved from a focus on well-being to a position as a strategic resource, but has not yet been consistently positioned as a key

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enabler of individual innovation(Raksakhwamdee et al., 2025). Cluster and co-author network analyses reveal the dominance of certain research communities and countries, with strong collaboration within clusters but relatively weak between clusters, resulting in limited theoretical integration across fields and contexts. Theoretically, this study confirms the relevance of Social Exchange Theory, Resource-Based View, Social Cognitive Theory, and JD-R Theory as the main foundation, while also showing opportunities for integration with the framework of digital transformation, sustainability, and dynamic capabilities. Overall, this study contributes to the disclosure of the research gap that the conceptual and empirical bridge between strategic employee experience, advanced technology, and innovative work behavior is still not comprehensively mapped, and offers a scientific map that can be the basis for developing a more focused, cross-disciplinary, and contextual research agenda in the realm of modern human resource management.

SUGGESTION

Based on the mapping results, future research is recommended to more explicitly position strategic employee experience as a strategic variable linking HRM practices, digital work contexts, and innovative work behaviors, rather than simply as a derivative of employee satisfaction or engagement(Andrés-Reina et al., 2024). The development of an integrative theoretical model that combines Social Exchange Theory, JD-R Theory, Componential Theory of Creativity, and the Resource-Based View is needed to explain the mechanisms by which employee experience design throughout the work journey creates psychological and social conditions that encourage sustainable IWB amidst digital transformation and sustainability demands(Bieńkowska et al., 2025). Empirical research across countries, sectors, and generations of employees is also important to test the generalizability of findings that have so far been dominated by specific contexts, while also accommodating the phenomena of hybrid work, platform-based work, and the use of AI in HRM practices. In terms of scientific collaboration, researchers need to build cross-cluster and cross-disciplinary networks, involving the fields of information technology, sustainability, and public policy so that understanding of employee experience and IWB is not trapped in thematic silos. Practitioners and policymakers are advised to utilize these bibliometric findings as a reference for designing HRM interventions that are not only oriented towards efficiency and retention, but consciously manage employee experience as a strategic investment to strengthen individual and organizational innovation capacity, especially in the context of VUCA, global crises, and increasing ESG pressures.

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Limitations

This study has several limitations that need to be critically acknowledged. First, the data coverage is limited to the period 2021–2025 and uses only English-language articles from Scopus and Google Scholar, so the potential contributions of research in other languages or indexed in different databases may not be fully accommodated. This temporal limitation makes the mapped intellectual structure closely reflect the current phase of the literature's development, but it does not capture the long-term evolutionary processes before 2021 that may have served as the historical foundation for the conception of strategic employee experience and innovative work behavior. Second, the use of bibliometric analysis and visualization with VOSviewer focuses on metadata, keywords, and citation patterns, so the depth of the theoretical and methodological content of each article is not analyzed in detail; consequently, interpretation of thematic relationships and intellectual routes relies heavily on the consistency of the authors' keywording. Third, the contextual nature of social sciences means that some identified clusters and collaboration patterns may be biased toward countries and institutions with high publication capacity, thus underrepresenting the context of developing countries or the informal sector. These limitations open up space for further studies that combine bibliometrics with in-depth systematic literature reviews or mixed methods approaches to test and enrich the findings of this mapping in a more substantial and contextual way.

Implications

Theoretically, the findings of this study imply the need for strategic repositioning of employee experience from merely a “soft” issue related to comfort and well-being to a strategic construct integrated in individual-based innovation models(Yang & Zhang, 2025). The cluster map and research density indicate that the integration of the Social Exchange Theory, JD-R, and Resource-Based View frameworks with the digital transformation and sustainability perspectives will enrich the explanation of how organizations convert employee experience into innovative capabilities that are difficult to imitate. Practically, the results of this study provide a reference for HRM practitioners to design an employee journey that consciously manages crucial moments of the work experience—from recruitment, onboarding, development, to exit—as leverage points for the formation of psychological safety, meaningful work, and empowerment that are proven to be related to IWB(Yuwanda et al., 2023). The mapping of co-authors and influential countries/institutions provides a basis for policymakers and research institutions to encourage cross-country and cross-disciplinary collaboration, especially

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involving the context of developing countries that are still underrepresented so that employee experience and IWB models are not context-biased. The methodological implications of this study confirm the relevance of bibliometric science mapping as a strategic tool for the scientific community to avoid research duplication, identify emerging themes such as the AI–employee experience–innovation nexus, and develop a medium-term research agenda that is more in sync with the dynamics of organizations and labor markets in the digital era full of uncertainty.

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