


The Current Trends and Gaps in Employee Innovation Literature (A Bibliometric Study)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received September, 2025 Revised September, 2025 Accepted September, 2025</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Employee Innovation; Innovative Work Behavior; Employee Creativity; Bibliometric Analysis</p>	<p>Employee innovation has become an increasingly critical topic in organizational and management studies, as firms rely on the creative and proactive behaviors of their workforce to remain competitive in dynamic environments. Despite growing scholarly attention, the literature on employee innovation remains fragmented across constructs such as innovative work behavior, employee creativity, and employee-driven innovation. This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in Scopus between 2000 and 2025 to systematically map the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and collaboration networks in this field. Using performance analysis and science mapping techniques with VOSviewer, the study identifies leadership, human resource management, and innovation performance as dominant research anchors, while recent trends highlight the emergence of inclusive leadership, sustainability, and psychological enablers such as self-efficacy. The collaboration networks reveal China and the United States as central hubs, with increasing contributions from Asian and European countries. The findings underscore both the maturity of core themes and the presence of underexplored areas, including employee-driven innovation and digital transformation contexts. This study contributes by clarifying research fragmentation, proposing the integration of dispersed strands into more holistic theoretical frameworks, and offering practical insights for organizations seeking to foster inclusive, sustainable, and innovation-driven work environments.</p> <p><i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.</i></p> <div></div>

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<p>1. INTRODUCTION</p> <p>Innovation is widely recognized as a key driver of competitive advantage and organizational survival in turbulent environments. As firms increasingly depend on human capital and knowledge-based resources, employee innovation has drawn strong attention from both scholars and practitioners. Employee innovation links the</p>	<p>micro-level creativity of staff with macro-level organizational renewal, serving as a bridge between idea generation and institutional change. Over the past two decades, research into employee creativity, innovative work behavior, and related constructs has proliferated. For example, [1] conducted a bibliometric analysis on the employee creativity literature to map keywords, co-</p>
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citation networks, and evolutionary trends, highlighting that research on the connotation, dimensions, and behavior of employee creativity is still evolving. Similarly, [2] offered a broader bibliometric perspective on “innovative behavior” in organizational settings, illustrating shifting thematic emphases and the growth of empirical studies in recent decades. These works show that employee innovation is not a static concept but one subject to continuous refinement and expansion.

At the same time, more general bibliometric reviews of organizational innovation underline the plurality and complexity of innovation phenomena. [3], for instance, mapped innovation research at individual, team, and organizational levels, pointing to fragmentation across domains and an opportunity for integrative lenses. In the same vein, [3], [4] examined how creativity and innovation intersect in organizations, exposing tensions and convergences in different disciplinary traditions. Such broad reviews indicate that, while innovation is a well-studied concept, the specific literature on employee innovation remains dispersed, especially concerning boundaries, scopes, and methodological trends. Moreover, recent work has started to zero in on the dynamic evolution of employee innovation themes. For example, [5] traced the evolution of employee creativity and innovation research through bibliometric and content analysis, signaling emerging hotspots such as digital contexts, psychological safety, and multilevel mediators. Likewise, the field of innovative work behavior (IWB) has been subject to bibliometric scrutiny: [6] examined publication trends, journal outlets, and authorship dynamics from 2013 to 2023. These evolving patterns underscore that employee innovation is becoming increasingly contextualized, multidisciplinary, and methodologically complex.

Despite this growth, the literature still exhibits fragmentation across keyword usage, theoretical perspectives, and methodological rigor. The diversity of labels (e.g. “employee creativity,” “innovative work behavior,” “individual innovation”) suggests conceptual

ambiguity, while the empirical focus tends to cluster on antecedents rather than outcomes or process dynamics. In addition, gaps remain in cross-cultural studies, longitudinal designs, and integration with emerging domains (such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence, or remote work). Hence, a systematic bibliometric mapping of the evolving landscape can reveal more holistically the contours, trajectories, and gaps in the employee innovation literature.

Although a number of bibliometric reviews have focused on subsets of innovation-related domains (e.g. employee creativity, innovative behavior, organizational innovation), there is still no comprehensive bibliometric investigation that explicitly centers on employee innovation as an umbrella concept. As a result, the field lacks a coherent depiction of how research on employee-level innovation has evolved, which subthemes dominate, how methodological practices have developed, and where substantive gaps persist. Without this mapping, scholars may duplicate work, overlook rising areas, or fail to integrate disparate strands of inquiry into a unified research agenda. The objective of this study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the employee innovation literature to identify the current trends, intellectual structure, and gaps in the field.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a bibliometric research design to systematically map the landscape of employee innovation literature. Bibliometric methods are widely used to analyze large volumes of scientific publications, offering insights into productivity, impact, and intellectual structures of research domains [7]. Unlike narrative reviews, bibliometrics provides a quantitative approach that identifies patterns in publication growth, authorship, collaborations, and thematic clusters over time. Such an approach is particularly suitable for studying employee innovation, a field characterized by multidisciplinary contributions and dispersed theoretical

management, job satisfaction, and innovative work behavior. This grouping indicates a strong research stream that views employee innovation through HRM practices, workplace satisfaction, and knowledge sharing processes. Studies in this cluster often explore how HR systems, rewards, and empowerment strategies facilitate innovative behavior. The connection with competition and job performance also signals that HRM practices are not only supportive mechanisms but also mediators that shape the relationship between employees' innovative activities and organizational competitiveness. The red cluster includes terms like creativity, psychology, self-efficacy, and creative self-efficacy, pointing to the psychological foundations of employee innovation. This highlights the importance of individual cognition, attitudes, and motivation in driving innovation. The proximity of employee, creativity, and job performance suggests that innovative behavior is closely tied to individual outcomes as well as organizational success. The emphasis on psychological constructs indicates that research is not limited to structural enablers but also examines the inner drivers of innovation, aligning with theories from psychology and behavioral sciences.

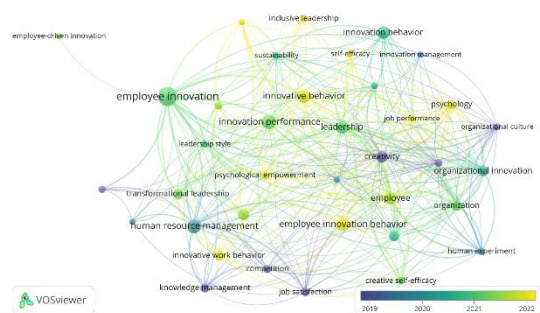


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

The map shows “employee innovation” as the central and most influential node, reflecting its position as the anchor of the literature. Closely connected terms such as innovation performance, innovative behavior, and leadership indicate that research traditionally emphasizes the link between employee-level innovation and organizational outcomes. These clusters are

largely green in color, suggesting that much of this work was published between 2019 and 2020. This indicates that the foundational studies defining the relationship between innovation, leadership, and performance emerged in the earlier phase of the dataset and have continued to shape subsequent research. Recent research trends are visible through yellow-colored nodes, which represent more recently published topics (2021–2022). Keywords such as inclusive leadership, sustainability, employee innovation behavior, and self-efficacy fall into this category, highlighting a shift toward exploring contextual and psychological enablers of innovation. The appearance of sustainability suggests that employee innovation is increasingly linked to broader societal and environmental goals, while the rise of inclusive leadership reflects a growing concern for diversity and empowerment in fostering innovative behavior. This temporal trend indicates that the field is evolving from structural perspectives to more nuanced, people-centered and context-sensitive analyses. Peripheral terms such as employee-driven innovation, knowledge management, and creative self-efficacy represent niche or underdeveloped areas. While they are connected to the core themes, their smaller node size and weaker linkages show that these areas have not yet been fully integrated into mainstream discussions. The presence of digital or remote-work related terms is notably absent, suggesting a research gap given the post-pandemic shifts in workplace dynamics.

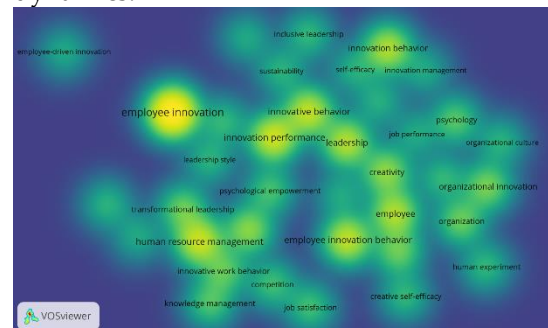


Figure 3. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

The third figure above highlights “employee innovation” as the most intensely

researched theme, represented by the bright yellow hotspot at the center. Closely connected areas such as innovation performance, innovative behavior, leadership, and human resource management also appear in warmer colors, suggesting that these topics have attracted substantial scholarly attention and form the core of the field. The prominence of these clusters indicates that much of the literature has concentrated on linking employee innovation to organizational outcomes, leadership influence, and HRM practices that foster innovative behaviors. These dominant themes reflect the mainstream of research where theoretical and empirical contributions are most developed. In contrast, peripheral terms such as employee-driven innovation, creative self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and human experiment are represented in cooler green or blue tones, showing that they are less frequently studied. While these areas are connected to the main clusters, their weaker intensity signals underexplored opportunities for future research. For example, the limited focus on employee-driven innovation suggests the need for deeper inquiry into bottom-up innovation processes, while the relatively sparse attention to creative self-efficacy highlights a gap in understanding psychological enablers of innovative work behavior.

Co-Authorship Analysis

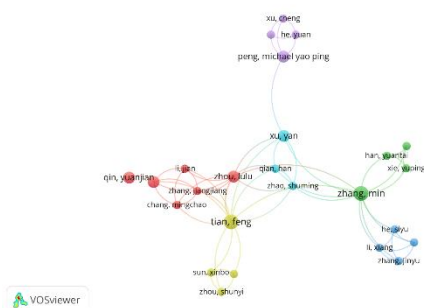


Figure 4. Author Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 4 illustrates several distinct clusters of researchers contributing to the field of employee innovation, with Zhang Min and Tian Feng emerging as central connectors across different groups. Zhang Min's network links with scholars such as He Siyu, Li Xiang,

and Zhang Jinyu, suggesting a collaborative hub that bridges multiple research strands. Similarly, Tian Feng appears connected to both Zhou Lulu and Sun Xinbo, indicating an influential role in expanding collaborative efforts. Other clusters, such as the group led by Qin Yuanjian and Zhang Jiangjiang, show strong internal collaboration but weaker connections to the broader network, reflecting specialized but somewhat isolated contributions. Meanwhile, figures like Peng Michael Yao Ping and Xu Yan act as intermediaries, linking peripheral nodes to the main network.

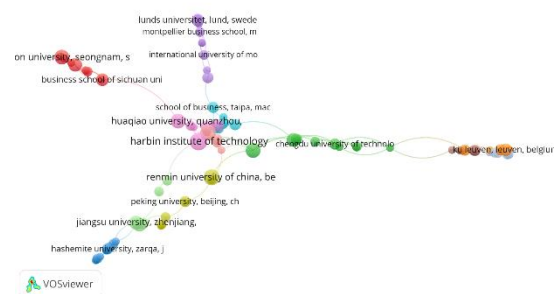


Figure 5. Affiliation Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 5 shows that research on employee innovation is anchored by strong clusters of Chinese universities, particularly Harbin Institute of Technology, Huaqiao University (Quanzhou), and Renmin University of China, which act as central hubs connecting to multiple institutions domestically and internationally. Surrounding these hubs are collaborations with Peking University, Chengdu University of Technology, and Jiangsu University, indicating a dense national network. At the international level, institutions such as KU Leuven (Belgium), Lund University (Sweden), and Montpellier Business School (France) form distinct clusters, though they remain more loosely connected to the Chinese network. Other universities, such as the Hashemite University (Jordan) and International University of Macau, appear at the periphery, suggesting emerging but less integrated collaborations.

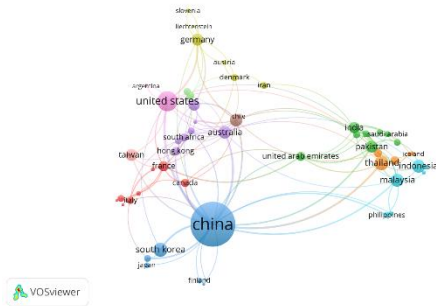


Figure 6. Country Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 6 reveals China as the dominant hub in employee innovation research, with the largest node size and extensive connections to both Asian and Western countries, highlighting its leading role in global knowledge production. Strong partnerships are visible between China and regional neighbors such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and South Korea, while also extending to major global research centers like the United States, Australia, Germany, and France. The United States and Australia appear as secondary hubs, actively connecting with European and Asian partners, though with less density than China. Meanwhile, South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia form an interconnected cluster with emerging contributions, and European countries like Germany, Italy, and France are positioned as bridges linking Western and Asian scholarship.

Practical Implications

The findings of this bibliometric study provide several insights for practitioners, managers, and policymakers. First, the dominance of themes such as leadership, human resource management, and innovation performance suggests that organizations should invest in leadership development and HRM practices that foster psychological empowerment and job satisfaction, as these are proven levers of employee innovation. Second, the emerging prominence of inclusive leadership and sustainability highlights the need for firms to create inclusive, socially responsible workplaces where innovation is not only tied to performance outcomes but also to broader

societal and environmental goals. Third, the identification of underexplored areas such as employee-driven innovation and creative self-efficacy implies that organizations can benefit by encouraging bottom-up initiatives and enhancing employees' confidence in their creative abilities. These practical insights can inform training, organizational design, and strategic decision-making to build cultures that continuously stimulate innovation from within.

Theoretical Contributions

This study advances the theoretical understanding of employee innovation in three key ways. First, by mapping the intellectual structure of the field, it demonstrates how the concept of employee innovation has evolved from traditional theories of creativity and organizational behavior toward more integrative frameworks that link psychological, managerial, and contextual factors. Second, the analysis highlights fragmentation in the literature, showing how constructs such as innovative work behavior, employee creativity, and employee-driven innovation are often studied separately, despite significant overlaps. This fragmentation underscores the need for future theoretical models to synthesize these strands into a unified framework. Third, the study reveals temporal shifts, with recent emphasis on sustainability and inclusivity, suggesting that employee innovation theory is increasingly being aligned with broader discourses on corporate social responsibility, digital transformation, and global collaboration. This points to the potential for new, multi-level theoretical frameworks that incorporate individual, organizational, and societal dimensions of innovation.

Limitations

While this study provides a comprehensive overview of employee innovation research, it has several limitations. First, the data source was restricted to the Scopus database, which, while extensive, may not capture all relevant publications indexed in other repositories such as Web of Science or Google Scholar. This could lead to bias in the coverage of certain regions, languages, or

journals. Second, bibliometric analysis focuses on publication metadata (e.g., citations, keywords, co-authorship) and does not directly assess the quality or depth of theoretical and empirical contributions, meaning that nuances of argumentation and contextual detail may be overlooked. Third, the analysis is limited to the time window of 2000–2025; hence, very recent publications may not yet have accumulated sufficient citations to appear prominently in the results. Finally, while bibliometric mapping reveals patterns and gaps, it does not explain causal relationships, which requires complementary approaches such as systematic literature reviews or empirical studies.

4. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving landscape of employee innovation research, highlighting its central themes, emerging trends, and existing gaps. The analysis

confirms that leadership, human resource management, and organizational performance remain dominant anchors of the field, while newer areas such as inclusive leadership, sustainability, and creative self-efficacy signal promising directions for future inquiry. Although China and the United States emerge as major contributors, the collaboration map indicates growing regional networks across Asia and Europe, underscoring the importance of cross-border partnerships in advancing this discourse. By synthesizing fragmented constructs such as employee creativity, innovative work behavior, and employee-driven innovation, the study emphasizes the need for more integrative theoretical frameworks and context-sensitive analyses. Overall, the findings not only enrich academic understanding of employee innovation but also offer actionable insights for practitioners aiming to build inclusive and innovative workplaces, while pointing to fertile ground for future scholarly exploration.

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