

Identifying Gaps in Literature Related to Empowering Leadership on Individual Work Performance

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Abstract. Empowering leadership is increasingly recognized for enhancing individual work performance by delegating authority, autonomy, and participation in decision making. A synthesis of studies published between 2019 and 2024 indicates generally positive associations—particularly with task and contextual performance—and reduced counterproductive behavior, though effects vary across contexts. Key gaps remain: (1) under-specified mediating mechanisms (e.g., engagement, job crafting, relational energy, psychological empowerment) and their potential serial ordering; (2) insufficient tests of multilevel moderators, including culture, individual differences, job design, and hybrid/remote arrangements; (3) outcome heterogeneity, especially for innovative and adaptive performance and counterproductive behaviors; and (4) methodological issues (measurement invariance, publication bias, and the dominance of cross-sectional designs) that limit causal inference. Priority directions include longitudinal and diary designs, rigorous tests of moderated mediation across industries and cultures, instrument standardization, and identification of optimal empowerment levels to prevent benefits from turning into burden. This research consolidates current evidence and maps a focused research agenda.

Keywords: empowering leadership; individual work performance; task performance; contextual performance; innovative work behavior

1 INTRODUCTION

Empowering leadership has emerged as a critical leadership paradigm focusing on sharing power, delegating authority, and motivating employees to pursue superior performance [1]. The concept involves leaders fostering psychological empowerment in subordinates through mechanisms such as decision-making participation, autonomy provision, and confidence expression in employee capabilities. This relational approach stands in contrast to more hierarchical or controlling leadership styles, recognizing that organizational success increasingly depends on unlocking employee discretionary effort and commitment.

Individual work performance encompasses multiple dimensions including task performance, contextual performance, innovation performance, and counterproductive work behavior [2]. Task performance involves the fulfillment of formal job responsibilities and core technical duties, while contextual performance encompasses organizational citizenship behaviors and extra-role activities that support organizational functioning. Innovation performance reflects employees' capacity to develop and implement creative solutions, and counterproductive work behavior includes actions that intentionally undermine organizational goals. Meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that empowering leadership positively correlates with individual performance outcomes across diverse organizational contexts, with research indicating particularly strong relationships in East Asian contexts compared to Western organizational environments [2]. The accumulated empirical literature consistently shows positive associations between empowering leadership and both task and contextual performance dimensions, alongside reductions in counterproductive behaviors.

Despite extensive empirical research establishing the positive main effects of empowering leadership on individual work performance, significant gaps persist in understanding the boundary conditions, underlying mechanisms, and contextual factors that explain when and how empowering leadership optimizes individual work performance. While psychological empowerment has been identified as a key mediating mechanism through which empowering leadership influences performance outcomes, comparatively little research examines how organizational context, individual differences, and situational constraints moderate these relationships. Additionally, questions remain regarding the differential effects of empowering leadership across various performance dimensions, the role of structural empowerment alongside psychological empowerment, and how cultural or industry-specific factors shape the leadership-performance linkage. This literature review synthesizes existing research to identify critical research gaps requiring future investigation and proposes a framework for understanding the complex relationships between

empowering leadership and individual work performance.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Mechanisms Linking Empowering Leadership to Individual Work Performance: Underexplored Mediators

Empirical research has identified multiple mediating pathways through which empowering leadership influences individual work performance, yet significant inconsistencies and gaps persist in understanding how these mechanisms operate across diverse contexts. Work engagement and affective commitment represent two prominent mediators examined in the literature; however, findings reveal unexpected results that diverge from prevailing theoretical expectations. In a study of Correctional Service counselors in Indonesia, work engagement failed to significantly mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and task performance, contrary to established theoretical frameworks [3]. This anomaly highlights a critical research gap: situational factors determining when engagement-based mechanisms function effectively remain largely unexplored. Understanding these boundary conditions would clarify why psychological pathways operate effectively in certain organizational contexts but not in others, particularly across public and private sector organizations.

Job-crafting behaviors represent an emerging yet underexplored mediating pathway connecting empowering leadership to performance outcomes. Recent evidence demonstrates that seeking resources, seeking challenges, and reducing demands—three distinct job-crafting dimensions—mediate the effect of empowering leadership on work engagement and in-role performance among Chinese employees [4]. However, limited research exists investigating how different organizational contexts, industry characteristics, and cultural orientations influence the strength and prevalence of these job-crafting pathways. The literature also lacks investigation of relational energy as a mediator, with one study revealing that empowering leaders generate positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes through employees' relational energy and task performance [5]. Beyond psychological empowerment, which has been extensively documented as a mediator in multiple studies, researchers have paid insufficient attention to how structural empowerment—encompassing access to resources, information, and sociopolitical support—interacts with psychological empowerment mechanisms to produce differential performance effects. This represents a significant gap in understanding the complete empowerment ecosystem facilitating performance outcomes.

Psychological processes such as role-breadth self-efficacy reveal substantial complexity in empowering leadership effects that challenge the universally positive view presented in prior research. Followers with low role-breadth self-efficacy experience hindrance-related stress from empowering leadership, subsequently increasing turnover intention [6]. This double-edged sword effect demonstrates that individual difference moderators critically determine empowering leadership effectiveness in ways the literature has underemphasized. The following table synthesizes key mediating mechanisms, their documented effects, and research gaps requiring future investigation:

Table 1. Synthesizes key mediating mechanisms

Mediating Mechanism	Identified Effects	Research Gaps	Contextual Contingencies
Work Engagement	Generally, positively related to task and contextual performance; inconsistent effects across contexts	When and why engagement fails to mediate; threshold effects; industry-specific patterns	Public vs. private sector; occupational demands; organizational climate
Affective Commitment	Partial and full mediation reported; stronger for task performance than innovation	Temporal dynamics; sustainability of commitment; competing commitment foci	Organizational tenure; leadership stability; career stage
Job Crafting(Resources/Challenges/Demands)	Positive mediation for both engagement and in-role	What a cultural values shape job-crafting prevalence; interaction with job	Cultural dimensions; task interdependence; work design characteristics

	performance; differential pathway strengths	autonomy; team-level effects	
Psychological Empowerment	Strong, consistent mediation across multiple outcome domains including creativity and voice	Optimal empowerment levels; individual trait interactions; cross-cultural boundaries	Power distance; uncertainty avoidance; organizational structure type
Relational Energy	Positive mediation for engagement, knowledge sharing, and task performance	Whether energy transmission differs by dyadic relationships; sustainability; energy depletion cycles	Work unit structure; team composition; remote vs. co-located work
Role-Breadth Self Efficacy	Moderator revealing curvilinear or negative effects at low levels; stress mechanism	Boundary conditions for beneficial vs. detrimental effects; development interventions	Task complexity; supervisor support; feedback quality

The accumulated evidence suggests that empowering leadership's effectiveness depends substantially on underexplored individual differences, organizational structures, and situational constraints that modify how psychological processes translate into performance outcomes. Future research should prioritize examining these contingency factors, investigating the temporal dynamics of mediation pathways, and clarifying the relative contributions of multiple mechanisms operating simultaneously within organizations.

Boundary Conditions and Moderating Factors: Contextual Contingencies Requiring Investigation

Despite the documented positive relationship between empowering leadership and individual work performance, the strength and nature of this relationship varies substantially across contextual factors that remain insufficiently investigated. Cultural and regional differences represent one of the most significant boundary conditions, with meta-analytic evidence demonstrating that correlations between empowering leadership and individual task performance, team performance, and team task performance are substantially stronger in East Asian samples compared to European and American samples [2]. This East-West disparity persists across multiple performance dimensions, yet the specific cultural mechanisms driving these variations remain underexplored in the literature. Power distance orientation exemplifies how cultural values moderate empowering leadership's effects, as supervisors with high power distance orientation obtain fewer benefits from empowering leadership relative to those with low power distance orientation [7]. Beyond power distance, critical research gaps exist concerning how other Hofstedian dimensions such as collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity interact with empowering leadership to shape performance outcomes, particularly in understanding whether cultural values alter the salience of psychological versus structural empowerment mechanisms.

Individual-level moderators remain severely underexplored in empowering leadership research, despite evidence suggesting that personality traits and emotional characteristics significantly constrain or enhance leadership effectiveness. Emotional stability emerges as a critical boundary condition through which empowering leadership influences conflict management and employee performance, with emotional stability moderating the effectiveness of empowering leadership in organizational sustainability contexts [8]. Regulatory focus patterns represent an additional personality dimension warranting investigation, as promotion focus and prevention focus may determine whether employees perceive empowerment as motivating or anxiety-inducing [9]. The literature documents inconsistent patterns where empowering leadership generates challenge stress and enhances innovative performance for promotion-focused individuals, while prevention-focused employees may experience primarily hindrance stress without corresponding performance gains. Yet beyond these initial investigations, personality dimensions including conscientiousness, openness to experience, and trait emotional intelligence remain unexamined as potential moderators determining how empowering leadership translates to individual performance outcomes.

Workforce composition and industry context introduce substantial but unexplored contingencies affecting empowering leadership outcomes. Research on hybrid work contexts demonstrates that empowering leadership influences adaptive performance through sequential mediation of knowledge sharing and employee agility [10], establishing that work arrangement structure shapes which mediating pathways activate. However, comparable

empirical investigation in remote-only, gig economy, and flexible work arrangements remains absent from the literature. Industry-specific distinctions merit particular attention given that public sector organizations, manufacturing firms, service industries, and knowledge-intensive sectors likely experience differential empowering leadership effects based on task structure, accountability requirements, and organizational norms. The following table synthesizes identified moderating variables requiring future research investigation:

Table 2. Synthesizes moderating variables

Moderating Variable Category	Specific Variables	Current Evidence Status	Research Gaps
Cultural Dimensions	Power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, masculinity	Power distance shows consistent negative moderation; East-West differences documented	Mechanisms explaining cultural variance; interactions among dimensions; generational effects
Individual Differences	Emotional stability, regulatory focus, personality traits, emotional intelligence	Emotional stability and regulatory focus emerging; limited replication	Conscientiousness, openness, trait anxiety, self-efficacy as moderators; optimal trait profiles
Organizational Context	Industry type, organizational structure, public vs. private sector, organizational climate	Minimal cross-industry comparison; climate effects largely unexplored	Systematic industry comparisons; structural contingencies; climate interaction effects
Work Arrangements	Hybrid work, remote-only, gig economy, flexible scheduling, co-located work	Hybrid work mediation pathways identified	Remote-only and gig contexts entirely unexplored; temporal factors in work arrangement effects
Task and Job Characteristics	Task complexity, task interdependence, autonomy levels, feedback quality	Job autonomy examined in isolation	Complexity thresholds; team interdependence contingencies; feedback timing effects

The cumulative evidence suggests that empowering leadership effectiveness operates within narrow contextual boundaries that research has only begun to delineate. Future investigation must prioritize identifying the specific configurations of cultural values, individual traits, organizational structures, and work arrangements under which empowering leadership maximizes individual performance across task, contextual, and innovation dimensions.

Performance Dimensions and Outcome Heterogeneity: Differential Effects Across Performance Types

Empowering leadership demonstrates heterogeneous effects across performance dimensions, with research revealing a complex landscape where positive effects vary substantially by outcome type. Meta-analytic findings indicate that empowering leadership correlates positively with individual task performance and contextual performance, yet demonstrates no significantly positive relationship with organizational-level performance [2]. This performance hierarchy reveals critical gaps in understanding how individual-level empowerment translates to organizational outcomes through aggregation mechanisms and collective performance dynamics. While task and contextual performance dimensions show consistent positive associations with empowering leadership, the pathway to organizational-level performance remains underexplored, raising questions about whether organizational outcomes require additional mechanisms beyond individual empowerment or whether measurement challenges obscure these relationships.

Innovative versus adaptive performance represent distinctly understudied outcomes where empowering leadership effects diverge significantly. Empowering leadership enhances innovative job performance through dual pathways involving challenge stress increases and hindrance stress reductions [9]. However, this mechanism depends substantially on employee regulatory focus, with promotion-focused individuals experiencing primarily challenge stress and performance benefits, while prevention-focused employees encounter predominantly hindrance stress without corresponding innovation gains. In contrast, adaptive performance in hybrid work settings shows promise as an emerging outcome dimension, with empowering leadership influencing adaptive performance through sequential mediation of knowledge sharing and employee agility [10]. This suggests distinct mechanisms operate across performance types, with innovative performance relying on stress-regulatory processes while adaptive performance depends on knowledge dissemination and behavioral flexibility. Comparative research examining how different stress types and regulatory focus patterns influence adaptive performance in dynamic environments remains limited, particularly regarding whether the challenge stress mechanism operates similarly across varied organizational contexts and work arrangements.

Counterproductive work behavior represents a critically underexamined negative performance dimension warranting investigation. Empowering leadership shows negative correlations with counterproductive work behavior [2], suggesting empowerment mechanisms reduce dysfunctional employee actions. However, insufficient research examines the underlying mechanisms through which empowerment discourages counterproductive behaviors or identifies boundary conditions under which this protective effect diminishes or reverses. Workforce agility partially mediates empowering leadership effects on counterproductive work behavior, but mediation patterns remain incomplete [11], indicating that substantial variance in counterproductive behavior reduction occurs through unmeasured pathways. This incomplete mediation pattern raises questions about whether empowerment paradoxically increases counterproductive behaviors under certain conditions—such as when employees feel overextended, under-supported, or lack appropriate role clarity—and whether individual differences in moral reasoning or self-control moderate these effects.

Performance Dimension	Evidence of Empowering Leadership Effects	Identified Gaps	Unexplored Outcome Measures
Task Performance	Positive, consistent correlation across studies; stronger in East Asian samples	Threshold effects; interactions with task complexity; temporal sustainability	Task completion speed; quality consistency; error rates; adaptability within task
Contextual Performance	Positive correlation; mediated by POS and affective commitment	Sustainability across organizational transitions; differential effects by role type	Helping behaviors toward diverse colleagues; initiative demonstration; informal mentoring
Innovative Performance	Positive through challenge stress pathway; moderated by regulatory focus; mediated by creative self-efficacy	Prevention-focus employee outcomes; optimal empowerment levels; cross-cultural boundaries	Number of implemented ideas; implementation speed; commercial value of innovations
Adaptive Performance	Positive in hybrid work through knowledge sharing and agility; promising but limited evidence	Effects in remote-only and fully distributed teams; longitudinal patterns; team-level aggregation	Response speed to change; flexibility in approach; learning agility; resilience
Creative Performance	Positive correlation; strongest with multidimensional empowerment; mediated by creative self-efficacy	Boundary conditions for optimal creativity; relationship with task performance trade-offs	Originality of ideas; feasibility perceptions; implementation barriers
Counterproductive Work Behavior	Negative correlation; partially mediated by workforce agility	When empowerment increases counterproductive behaviors; individual trait interactions; team-level effects	Absenteeism patterns; interpersonal deviance; sabotage; theft; organizational deviance

These performance heterogeneities reveal fundamental gaps in understanding when, how, and for whom empowering leadership optimizes individual work outcomes. Future research must systematically investigate differential mechanisms across performance dimensions, identify optimal empowerment levels avoiding paradoxical effects, and clarify how individual differences, contextual constraints, and organizational structures determine which performance dimensions respond to empowering leadership. Additionally, research should examine whether empowering leadership effects on multiple performance dimensions operate through shared or distinct mediating mechanisms, and whether simultaneous improvements across all dimensions are possible or represent inherent trade-offs organizations must navigate.

Organizational and Contextual Factors: Situational Moderators and Interaction Effects

Work environment and perceived organizational support represent incompletely researched contextual factors shaping empowering leadership effectiveness. While work environment demonstrates significant positive associations with employee performance [12], empowering leadership surprisingly shows no direct impact on employee performance or job stress in culinary industry settings, revealing critical boundary conditions. This counterintuitive finding suggests that empowering leadership operates contingently on supportive work environments rather than independently. Sequential mediation analysis shows that perceived organizational support mediates empowering leadership effects on subjective well-being but not work performance [13], indicating that

organizational support functions as a conditional pathway activated only under specific circumstances. These findings reveal a fundamental gap: the mechanisms determining when work environment support activates versus dampens empowering leadership's impact remain systematically unexplored. Additionally, perceived organizational support enhances psychological resilience among psychiatric nurses and demonstrates moderating effects on burnout relationships [14], yet how organizational support interacts with empowering leadership to buffer against occupational strain across sectors remains unexamined.

Psychological contract dimensions provide emerging theoretical frameworks requiring substantial expansion. Empowering leadership mitigates adverse effects of perceived overqualification on work alienation through both relational and transactional psychological contract dimensions in public sector project management [15]. Yet psychological contract theory application remains limited to specific occupational contexts—notably project management in developing economies—with generalizability across sectors, organizational types, and cultural contexts unclear. Research has not systematically investigated whether psychological contract mechanisms operate similarly in private versus public organizations, across hierarchical levels, or within organizations experiencing different degrees of change. The relational-transactional distinction may function differently depending on organizational structure, employment security, and career advancement opportunities, creating substantial unexplored interaction effects warranting investigation.

Industry-specific and occupational characteristics create differential empowering leadership effects requiring systematic comparative analysis. Research spanning healthcare, hospitality, banking, construction, and public sector contexts reveals context-dependent mechanisms [16], [17]. However, systematic cross-industry comparison to identify which mechanisms operate universally versus context-specifically remains absent. Healthcare settings demonstrate that transformational leadership positively affects nurses' work environment through structural empowerment, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction [17], whereas hospitality and banking research reveals differential mediation pathways depending on industry structure. Construction projects show that empowering leadership operates through basic psychological needs satisfaction [18], suggesting mechanisms differ fundamentally across sectors. These differential patterns suggest that organizational structure, regulatory environment, professional norms, and occupational task characteristics fundamentally shape how empowering leadership translates to individual performance. Future research must identify which contextual characteristics—task interdependence, hierarchy formalization, performance accountability mechanisms—determine which empowerment pathways activate across different industries and occupational settings.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

Measurement inconsistency and construct validity concerns persist across empowering leadership research, limiting the comparability and generalizability of findings. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that measurement approaches for empowering leadership and data types significantly moderate the relationship with individual performance [2], yet systematic investigation of construct validity issues and measurement bias across instruments remains limited. The Global Servant Leadership Scale represents the most utilized measure in healthcare contexts [19], indicating substantial measurement standardization gaps in other sectors and across occupational domains. Recent scale development work, including the Psychological Empowerment Leadership Scale (PELS), addresses misalignment between current empowering leadership measures and the underlying psychological empowerment construct they purport to assess, revealing that existing instruments exhibit psychometric flaws and conceptual inconsistencies [20]. This developmental gap necessitates systematic comparison of empowering leadership instruments across industries to establish measurement equivalence and identify construct validity problems obscuring true relationships with performance outcomes.

Publication bias substantially affects confidence in empirical relationships and threatens the reliability of accumulated evidence. Meta-analytic reviews reveal publication bias in subjective well-being, team performance, and team task performance literature [2], suggesting existing effect estimates are likely overestimated. This methodological concern demands transparency in reporting null and unexpected findings, particularly regarding empowering leadership's non-significant direct effects on performance in specific contexts, including settings where work environment, rather than empowering leadership alone, drives performance outcomes [12], and circumstances where empowering leadership operates only through organizational commitment pathways [21]. Publication bias assessment requires routine application of statistical methods including funnel plot analysis, trim-and-fill procedures, and Egger regression tests across empowering leadership literature to establish the true magnitude of leadership-performance associations. Additionally, reporting negative findings and contextual boundary conditions where empowering leadership fails to predict performance would strengthen meta-analytic conclusions and prevent overestimation of universal applicability.

Temporal and causal inference limitations critically constrain theoretical advancement and practical recommendations. Most research employs cross-sectional designs or single-wave surveys, severely limiting causal inference capacity and preventing understanding of dynamic implementation processes. While time-lagged designs exist in emerging research examining mediating mechanisms [22], longitudinal investigations tracking empowering leadership implementation across multiple timepoints, mediating process development trajectories, and performance change patterns over extended periods remain insufficient. Experience sampling methods and daily diary approaches represent underutilized methodological strategies for capturing within-person fluctuations in leadership behaviors, psychological states, and performance outcomes over time, potentially revealing temporal dynamics obscured by snapshot-based designs. Longitudinal designs incorporating measurement points spanning implementation phases (pre-intervention baseline, mid-implementation, post-implementation) would enable researchers to examine whether empowerment effects strengthen, stabilize, or diminish as organizational members adapt to leadership changes, addressing fundamental questions about sustainability and long-term effectiveness.

Key Methodological Gaps Requiring Research Attention

1. **Measurement Inconsistencies:** Multiple instruments measure empowering leadership with varying dimensionality, item content, and psychometric properties; lack of cross-instrument validity studies limits meta-analytic comparability; healthcare sector standardization around Global Servant Leadership Scale contrasts sharply with measurement fragmentation in other industries; construct validity concerns regarding alignment between measurement approaches and theoretical conceptualization of psychological empowerment mechanisms
2. **Publication Bias and Reporting:** Documented overestimation of effects in subjective well-being, team performance, and team task performance domains; selective publication of statistically significant findings obscures contextual boundary conditions and null results; insufficient transparency regarding non-significant direct effects and conditional relationships that vary across settings; need for routine publication bias assessment and reporting of negative findings to prevent inflated effect size estimates
3. **Cross-Sectional Design Dominance:** Predominance of single-time-point surveys prevents causal inference and understanding of implementation processes; inability to track empowerment development trajectories or identify critical implementation phases; limited capacity to examine whether mediation pathways operate consistently across time or show temporal dynamics; restricted investigation of how leadership interventions produce sustained versus temporary performance changes
4. **Temporal Process Investigation:** Insufficient longitudinal tracking of empowering leadership implementation phases and corresponding changes in mediating mechanisms; lack of daily diary or

experience sampling approaches capturing within-person fluctuations in leadership behaviors and employee responses; missing research on optimal timing for measurement of mediator activation relative to performance outcomes; limited investigation of empowerment sustainment and potential performance plateaus or declines following initial implementation

5. **Recommended Research Approaches:** Conduct systematic instrument comparison studies evaluating construct validity across empowering leadership measures; implement multi-wave longitudinal designs with measurement intervals spanning implementation and stabilization phases; employ experience sampling or daily diary methods to capture dynamic processes; conduct meta-regression analyses examining how study design (cross-sectional vs. longitudinal), measurement approach, and data type moderate empowering leadership-performance relationships; establish pre-registration protocols for empowering leadership studies to reduce selective reporting and publication bias; develop measurement equivalence studies assessing invariance across cultural, occupational, and organizational contexts

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This comprehensive literature review identifies critical gaps across multiple research domains that, if addressed systematically, will substantially advance understanding of when, how, and for whom empowering leadership optimizes individual work performance. The accumulated evidence reveals that empowering leadership demonstrates positive main effects across diverse organizational contexts; however, the boundary conditions, contingency factors, and contextual mechanisms underlying these relationships remain incompletely understood. Mechanistic understanding requires substantial advancement beyond current theoretical frameworks, particularly regarding when mediating pathways function effectively versus ineffectively across diverse contexts. Work engagement functions as a reliable mediator in certain occupational settings yet fails to mediate empowering leadership effects on task performance in public sector correctional services [3], revealing critical gaps in understanding situational factors determining mechanism activation. Job-crafting pathways demonstrate promise as mediators in Chinese organizational contexts [4], yet comparable investigation across industries, cultures, and organizational structures remains absent. Relational energy operates as an underexplored mediator generating positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes [5], while psychological empowerment continues to emerge as a robust mediator in multiple domains [39]. However, the literature lacks theoretical specification of conditions determining which mediating pathways activate across different performance dimensions, organizational contexts, and employee populations. Sequential mediation processes add complexity to mechanistic understanding, with knowledge sharing and employee agility serially mediating adaptive performance effects [10] while mastery goal orientation and work engagement sequentially mediate creative performance outcomes [23]. Future research must prioritize understanding these sequential dynamics, examining whether outcome type, organizational characteristics, or employee traits determine which mediation chains activate across performance dimensions. Contextual investigation must systematically examine cultural, organizational, occupational, and demographic contingencies moderating empowering leadership effects with specificity currently absent from the literature. Cultural differences represent one of the most significant boundary conditions, with meta-analytic evidence establishing substantially stronger empowering leadership effects in East Asian compared to Western samples [2]; yet the specific cultural mechanisms explaining these regional variations remain underexplored. Individual-level moderators including emotional stability [8], regulatory focus [9], and power distance orientation [7] demonstrate preliminary evidence as critical boundary conditions, yet personality dimensions including conscientiousness, openness to experience, and emotional intelligence require systematic investigation as potential moderators. Work arrangement structures fundamentally shape which mediating pathways activate, with hybrid work contexts demonstrating distinct mechanisms [10]; however, remote-only and gig economy arrangements remain entirely unexamined. Industry-specific and occupational distinctions merit particular attention given documented differential effects across healthcare, hospitality, construction, and public sector contexts [16], [17], [18], yet systematic cross-industry comparison identifying universal versus context-specific mechanisms remains absent. Performance heterogeneity research should clarify differential mechanisms across task performance, contextual performance, innovative performance, and adaptive performance dimensions, as empowering leadership demonstrates inconsistent effects across outcome types. Task and contextual performance show consistent positive associations with empowering leadership [2], yet no significantly positive relationship emerges with organizational-level performance, raising questions about aggregation mechanisms and collective performance dynamics. Innovative performance operates through stress-regulatory processes with regulatory focus moderating these relationships [9], while adaptive performance depends on knowledge dissemination and behavioral flexibility in hybrid work settings [10]. Counterproductive work behavior shows negative correlations with empowering leadership, yet insufficient research examines when empowerment paradoxically increases dysfunctional behaviors or identifies underlying mechanisms producing incomplete mediation patterns [11]. Future research must investigate whether multiple performance dimensions require distinct empowerment mechanisms or whether shared

pathways produce differential outcomes across performance types.

Methodological advancement priorities address critical limitations constraining scientific progress in empowering leadership research. Longitudinal designs capturing dynamic empowerment processes remain substantially underdeveloped, with cross-sectional survey dominance preventing understanding of implementation trajectories and process dynamics. Multi-wave longitudinal investigations spanning implementation phases (pre-intervention, mid-implementation, post-implementation) would enable researchers to examine whether effects strengthen, stabilize, or diminish as organizational members adapt to leadership changes. Experience sampling and daily diary methods represent underutilized approaches for capturing within-person fluctuations in leadership behaviors, psychological states, and performance outcomes that snapshot-based designs obscure. Measurement inconsistency and construct validity concerns persist across instruments, with meta-analytic evidence indicating that measurement approaches significantly moderate leadership-performance relationships [2]; yet systematic investigation of construct validity across instruments remains limited. Healthcare sector standardization around the Global Servant Leadership Scale contrasts sharply with measurement fragmentation in other industries [19], necessitating systematic comparison establishing measurement equivalence. Publication bias documented in subjective well-being, team performance, and team task performance literature [2] suggests existing effect estimates are likely overestimated; routine application of statistical bias assessment methods and transparent reporting of null findings would strengthen meta-analytic conclusions. Pre-registration protocols reducing selective reporting and cross-cultural measurement equivalence studies assessing invariance across occupational and organizational contexts represent important methodological priorities.

Theoretical integration should develop meta-frameworks specifying conditions favoring different underlying mechanisms and explaining paradoxical effects that current fragmented approaches inadequately address. Research employs social cognitive theory [5], conservation of resources theory [7], job demand-resource theory [9], social exchange theory [10], and self-determination theory without specification of conditions determining which theoretical mechanisms activate. Dark-side effects including dual contradictory work-life impacts through serial mediation of learning demands and passion dimensions [27], hindrance stress generation among low self-efficacy followers [6], and limited career plateau effectiveness [28] demand theoretical explanation beyond current frameworks. Integration efforts must clarify whether different theories explain identical phenomena from alternative perspectives or whether distinct mechanisms operate across populations and contexts, establishing when social cognitive pathways dominate versus when conservation of resources or social exchange mechanisms prove central.

Integration of intersectionality and demographic diversity into research designs represents an ethical and empirical imperative currently unmet in empowering leadership literature. Generation-specific effects show emerging but limited investigation [31], with research demonstrating generational value differences [32] and differential regulatory focus patterns [33] suggesting customized empowerment approaches; yet comparative effectiveness across generational cohorts remains scarce. Gender and intersectional identities remain minimally examined despite identified importance for marginalized group leadership experiences [34], with intersectional analysis of differential performance effects across demographic groups entirely absent. Occupational role variations introduce substantial heterogeneity, with research predominantly focusing on private sector employees while public service contexts demonstrate context-dependent mechanisms in police [36], correctional services [3], family planning [21], and social service [37] settings.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This comprehensive identification of gaps provides a foundation for advancing empowering leadership science and practice toward more effective and equitable individual work performance optimization. Future research systematically addressing these gaps will enhance theoretical understanding of when and how empowering leadership operates, clarify boundary conditions and contingency factors, and establish practical implementation strategies enabling organizations to realize empowerment benefits across diverse contexts and populations.

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