

How Empowering Leadership fosters Adaptive Performance: unleashing the missing links through Identification, Vitality, and Goal Orientation

List of Authors & Affiliations

1. Astha Pandey

Research Scholar, Vinod Gupta School of Management, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur.

Email: astha2293@gmail.com; astha22@kgpian.iitkgp.ac.in

2. Dr. Srinivasan Sekar

Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, Indian Institute of Technology Madras.

Email: srinivasan@iitm.ac.in; ssrini31@gmail.com

3. Dr. Susmita Mukhopadhyay

Associate Professor, Vinod Gupta School of Management, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur.

Email: susmita@vgsom.iitkgp.ernet.in; susmitamukhopadhyay2@gmail.com

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Abstract

Purpose: Drawing on the self-expansion model the present study develops a serial mediation-moderation model to investigate the impact of empowering leadership (EL) on adaptive performance (AP). The study identifies relational identification (RI) and proactive vitality management (PVM) as the underlying mechanism of this relationship. Moreover, the study examines the moderating effect of learning goal orientation (LGO).

Methodology: A multi-source survey was conducted to collect data from 315 supervisor-subordinate dyads from the service sector organisations.

Findings: The results revealed that EL positively impacts AP while RI and PVM serially mediated this relationship. Additionally, LGO moderated the positive effect of PVM on AP.

Originality/Value: The study offers new insights by elucidating leadership processes through self-expansion. It establishes a foundation for fostering favorable social interactions in the workplace by demonstrating interlinked relationships.

Keywords: Empowering Leadership, Relational identification, Proactive Vitality Management, Adaptive Performance, Learning goal orientation

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1. Introduction

The contemporary business organizations operating in an environment characterized by VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) rely heavily on the adaptability of their human capital to drive long-term growth and competitive advantage (Campbell and Kryscynski, 2019). Such scenarios prompted early researchers (Pulakos *et al.*, 2006; Allworth and Hesketh, 1999) to coincide with the concept of adaptive performance (AP) to reflect the acclimation that employees undergo. They defined adaptive performance as “flexible work behaviors that help employees to accustom to changes” (Park and Park, 2019). The prevalent studies in this domain have primarily advocated for the selection and recruitment of inherently adaptable individuals (e.g., Kanojiya, 2024; Issahaku *et al.*, 2023) with limited exploration of workplace factors that contribute in enhancing the adaptive performance of existing employees. Hence, the present study seeks to investigate the contextual drivers that foster the adaptive performance of the employees. Among distinctive contextual factors, leadership styles play an instrumental role in regulating the perceptions and actions of subordinates (Karatepe *et al.*, 2024). Prior studies suggested that traditional 'top-down' leadership—where supervisors mainly issue formal directives should be supplemented by a 'bottom-up' approach that promotes employee autonomy (Fortunisa *et al.*, 2023; Peng *et al.*, 2023). As a bottom-up leadership style, empowering leadership (EL) adopts an employee-centric approach by fostering bottom-up decision-making and delegating authority at lower levels of the hierarchical structure (Zhou *et al.*, 2024). Despite empowering leadership being expected to enhance subordinate's adaptive performance, fragmented literature shows inconsistent results and lacks the strong underlying phenomena shaping this relationship (Saleh, 2022; Rousseau and Aube, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2017). This study seeks to examine the explanatory processes by which empowered leaders affect subordinates' adaptive performance, based on the self-expansion model (Aron *et al.*, 2022).

Sluss and Ashforth (2007) highlighted the significance of role relationships in shaping employees' behaviors through relational identification (RI). Empowering leaders can influence subordinates' self-concept via RI, thereby impacting their behavior and social interactions (Lord and Hall, 2005). The study positions RI as a core mechanism linking empowering leadership (EL) to adaptive performance (AP). While role relationships support self-expansion, the self-expansion model suggests that enhancing one's emotional, cognitive, and energetic capacities enables better adaptation to workplace demands (Aron *et al.*, 2022). Supervisors play a key role in encouraging such proactive resource management (Mattingly and Lewandowski, 2014). In this light, the study introduces proactive vitality management (PVM) a self-initiated strategy to restore energy (Op den Kamp *et al.*, 2018) as an additional mechanism in the EL–AP link. Thus, the study argues that empowering leaders foster RI, which motivates subordinates to engage in PVM, ultimately enhancing their adaptive performance. However, the extent to which PVM enhances subordinates' adaptive performance is contingent upon their learning orientations. Jund *et al.* (2015) posited in their study that individuals vary in their goals and, consequently, allocate their resources. Subordinates with robust learning convictions actively utilise their emotional, cognitive, and energetic resources to acquire diverse skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing their adaptability during workplace transitions (Op den Kamp *et al.*, 2018; Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 1986). Prior studies have highlighted the importance of examining the impact of individual traits on proactive behaviours and adaptive performance dynamics (Lemoine *et al.*, 2016; Kain and Jex, 2010; Parker *et al.*, 2010). Hence, the study investigates learning goal orientation (LGO) as a moderator that may influence the relationship between subordinates' proactive vitality management and adaptive performance.

Notably, the present study aims to develop and test a serial mediation-moderation model of adaptive performance through the theoretical lens of self-expansion theory. The study is structured across seven sections. The following section outlines theoretical support and hypothesis development. The third section details the methodology and analysis. Subsequent sections present the findings, followed by theoretical and practical implications. The final section addresses limitations and suggests future research directions.

2. Theory and hypotheses development

2.1. Empowering leadership and subordinates' adaptive performance

Empowering leadership is defined as “a process of sharing power, granting autonomy and discretion to followers, teams, or collectives through a specific set of leader behaviours designed to enhance internal motivation and achieve work success” (Ahearne et al., 2005). In contrast to other leadership styles, empowering leadership offers a significant advantage through the formal leader’s relinquishment of authority and control, culminating in improved performance levels (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015). Prior studies have revealed that empowering leaders plays a crucial role in enhancing individual-level task performance, organizational job embeddedness, and workplace proactivity (Wen *et al.*, 2023; Qian *et al.*, 2018). In light of the dynamic and unexpected characteristics of modern work environments, employees are increasingly necessitated to confront new difficulties, adapt swiftly to changes, and exhibit flexibility in their positions (Griffin *et al.*, 2010; Pulakos *et al.*, 2006). Leaders who cultivate a psychologically safe and resource-abundant workplace empower their subordinates to acquire the confidence and autonomy necessary to navigate changing demands (Aryee *et al.*, 2012; Sharma and Kirkman, 2015). By means of encouragement, delegation, and recognition, these leaders foster task-specific competencies while also instilling a proactive mindset in employees that inspires them to pursue learning opportunities, embrace uncertainty, and remain composed amid workplace disruptions (Fortunisa *et al.*, 2023; Ahearne *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, the intrinsic drive elicited by empowering leadership fosters a sense of significance and accountability, which is essential for adaptive behaviours (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). These leaders act as a catalyst in equipping employees cognitively, emotionally, and mentally so that they can demonstrate elevated levels of adaptive performance (Kaltiainen and Hakanen, 2022).

Grounded in the JD-R theory, empowering leadership functions as an essential job resource that aims to develop competent employees and believes in providing them with the necessary assistance to exhibit better adaptability at the workplace. Empowering leaders mitigates the adverse impacts of job expectations while enhancing employees' sense of competence and ownership, thereby facilitating a more effective response to organisational change. The adaptive performance of employees has been examined in the light of various leadership styles such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and paradoxical leadership (Kaltiainen and Hakanen, 2022; Li and Ding *et al.*, 2022; Kaya and Karatepe, 2020). A study by Peng *et al.* (2023) found a direct relationship between empowering leadership and individual adaptive performance, however support of other literature for this relationship is modest. As per cheong *et al.* (2019, p.19), future studies need to examine the construct of empowering leadership more at dyad or organisational levels so that analysis of a multilevel perspective could be established. Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of studies examining this interaction at the dyadic level (supervisor-subordinate). Consequently, the subsequent hypothesis is posited:

H1: EL positively influences the subordinates' adaptive performance

2.2. The indirect effect of Empowering leadership on subordinates' adaptive performance

The self-expansion concept posited by Aron *et al.* (2022) asserts that individuals are usually urged to have a finite set of resources so that they can thrive and adapt to external workplace challenges. They highlighted these resources as improved physical and mental health, broad knowledge, and wide perspectives. Incorporating the self-expansion model, the study emphasises that having an empowering leader at the workplace can be fruitful as such leaders aggressively promote autonomy, skill enhancement, involvement in significant decision-making, and experiences that facilitate psychological development (Dobson *et al.*, 2024). These connections not only augment employees' emotional and intellectual resources but also foster a sense of inclusion and reciprocal trust, which are fundamental to self-expansion processes. Empowering leaders facilitate the relational and motivational conditions that enable subordinates to take initiative and undertake tough activities, thereby expanding their abilities, views, and identities (Schummer *et al.*, 2024; Rousseau and Aube, 2020; Mattingly and Lewandowski, 2014). They create a work climate that stimulates continuous learning, encourages exploration, and allows room for employees to express themselves authentically and take ownership of their roles. Consequently, employees are more inclined to adjust to evolving work situations, seek personal growth, and demonstrate elevated levels of engagement and performance (Wen *et al.*, 2023). For instance, if bosses ban subordinates from using headphones or taking short breaks, their energy levels will diminish, leading to decreased concentration in completing vital duties. In contrast, when employees experience a sense of psychological freedom and support, they are more likely to invest effort in maintaining their energy and focus throughout the workday. Thus, relational identification with an empowered leader is essential for employees to actively regulate their vitality and enhance their adaptive performance (Zhou *et al.*, 2024). It acts as a catalyst that strengthens their internal drive and resourcefulness in the face of dynamic job demands. Consequently, we put forth the following hypothesis:

H₂: The positive indirect effect of empowering leadership on subordinates' adaptive performance will be serially mediated by perceived RI and PVM.

2.5. The moderating role of learning goal orientation

Learning Goal Orientation (LGO) denotes an individual's intrinsic goal to enhance competence through the acquisition of new abilities, mastery of tasks, and experiential learning (Dweck, 1986; Vandewalle, 1997). Employees with a high level of Learning Goal Orientation (LGO) typically welcome challenges and perceive effort as a means to personal development, particularly in dynamic and uncertain contexts. Individuals who practice Proactive Vitality Management (PVM), the intentional modulation and rejuvenation of their physical and mental energy in the workplace are more inclined to direct their vitality towards developmental outcomes, such as adaptive performance. Adaptive performance necessitates individuals to modify their behaviour, cognition, and emotional reactions to align with evolving work requirements (Pulakos *et al.*, 2006). PVM can function as a fundamental resource in this process by augmenting employees' energetic capability. The degree to which this vitality results in adaptive outcomes may be contingent upon an individual's motivational orientation. The positive influence of proactive vitality management on adaptive performance is likely to be stronger among individuals high in learning goal orientation, as they are more intrinsically driven to apply their energy towards self-improvement and constructive problem-solving (Op den Kamp *et al.*, 2018; Parker *et al.*, 2010; VandeWalle, 1997). High-LGO individuals do not just replenish their physical and mental energy; they view such vitality as an enabling force to pursue goals, refine competencies, and convert obstacles into learning experiences. Their growth-oriented mindset encourages persistence, reflective thinking, and emotional regulation, which in turn allow them to navigate ambiguity and unpredictability more effectively (Dweck and Leggett, 1988). Moreover, these individuals are more likely to translate the psychological

benefits of vitality such as enthusiasm, optimism, and focus into active behavioral experimentation and flexible responses in demanding environments.

On the other hand, individuals low in LGO may lack the interpretive lens through which vitality is seen as a tool for growth. Although they might experience similar levels of restored energy, they may not invest it meaningfully into change-oriented behaviors (Wu and Chen, 2024). Instead, they may seek comfort, stability, or efficiency rather than learning and adaptation. This weakens the motivational pathway through which PVM influences adaptive performance (Wen *et al.*, 2023; Ren *et al.*, 2024). In such cases, the energy replenished through PVM might be underutilized or misdirected, leading to less behavioral change in the face of dynamic job demands. Thus, Employees exhibiting elevated levels of LGO are more inclined to harness their revitalised energy to investigate innovative methods, endure obstacles, and adapt flexibly to uncertain circumstances. Conversely, individuals with low levels of LGO may exhibit a lack in intrinsic motivation to invest their efforts in growth and adaptation, therefore undermining the PVM–AP connection. Hence following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: The relationship between PVM and subordinate's adaptive performance is moderated by LGO

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Participants and Procedure

The data was collected from the supervisors and their immediate subordinates working in the service sector organisations of India. The informed consent of all the participants was obtained. Both supervisors and their subordinates were distributed separate questionnaires, such that supervisors rated their subordinate's adaptive performance and subordinates responded about their supervisors EL and their own RI, PVM and LGO. A total of 400 dyads were approached for data collection through convenient sampling. After discarding 85 unengaged responses, 315 dyads were further utilized for statistical analysis. Of the supervisors, 185 were male and 130 were females (average age= 45.2 years). Of the subordinates, 192 were males and 123 were females (mean age= 25.3 years).

3.2 Measures

A seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) = strongly disagree to (7) =strongly agree was utilized for measurement.

3.2.1. Empowering Leadership: The empowering leadership of supervisors was assessed using a 12-item scale adapted from Zhang and Bartol (2010). The sample item was “My immediate supervisor believes that I can handle demanding tasks”.

3.2.2. Relational Identification: Subordinates relational identification with respect to their supervisors was measured using a 10-item scale adapted from Walumbwa and Hartnell (2011). Sample item include: “I have a mutually beneficial relationship with my immediate supervisor.

3.2.3. Proactive Vitality Management: To measure subordinates PVM, Op den Kamp *et al.*'s (2018) 8-item scale was adapted. The sample item was, “To meet the expectations of my immediate supervisor, I make sure that I can do things that make me enthusiastic”.

3.2.4. Adaptive Performance: A 19-item scale modified from Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) was used to assess the subordinates' adaptive performance. The sample item was "My immediate subordinate willingly adapts his/her behaviour to work well whenever needed”.

3.2.5. Learning goal orientation: The 5-item Don Vandewalle (1997) scale was modified to assess the learning goal orientation of subordinates. The sample item was, “For me, it is important enough to take risks for the development of my work abilities”.

3.2.6. Control Variable: The socio-demographic variables such as age, gender and education were used as control variables in the study (Pulakos *et al.*, 2006). Control variables allow for an accurate estimation of the effect of the hypothesised relationships.

3.3 Data analysis strategy

Preliminary analysis including descriptive statistics, common method bias and validity and reliability of the scales was assessed through SPSS 29 and AMOS 23. Hypothesised relationships were examined through Hayes PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2017). Serial mediation effect was examined with the help of Model 6 and moderation was analysed through Model 1.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables.

----- Table I-----

Common method bias was evaluated in light of the cross-sectional research design in order to prevent any possible threats to the validity of the study's findings. Podsakoff et al. (2003) recommendations were followed to ensure CMB is minimized. Harman's single-factor test was performed to identify the common method variance in the data. The unrotated single-factor solution indicated 17.42% of variation which was within the threshold limit of 50%. Hence, it was concluded that data was not affected by CMB.

4.3 Psychometric assessment of the measures

To examine the model fit indices, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The CFI, TLI, and GFI should approximate 0.9 or greater, while the RMSEA should be 0.08 or lower, which is typically regarded as a favourable sign of the model. The CMIN/DF ratio of 3 or less is specifically regarded. The hypothesized model (EL, RI, PVM, LGO and AP) identified to be the best fit among other alternatives ($p < 0.05$, CMIN/df= 2.62, CFI= 0.91, GFI= 0.96, TLI= 0.87, RMSEA=0.04).

Convergent validity was assessed to measure the internal consistency of the constructs. The value of composite reliability (CR) of each construct exceeded the threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010) and the reliability assessed through Cronbach's alpha (CA) was also above the recommended value of 0.6, indicating a strong convergent validity. Further, average variance extracted (AVE) was evaluated to assess how much variance, a construct captures from its indicators relative to the amount due to measurement error. The value of AVE of each construct was above 0.5, indicating that more than half of the variance in the construct is accounted by its items rather than being attributed to measurement error. The discriminant validity was examined to determine that the constructs incorporated in the model are distinct from each other. Fornell and Larcker (1981) method was employed to assess the discriminant validity. The bivariate correlations of each construct were compared with the square root of AVE of each construct: EL (0.77), RI (0.74), PVM (0.76), AP (0.74), LGO (0.72) and it was found that the square root of AVE of each construct was greater.

4.4 Hypotheses testing

The proposed serial mediation model examines the impact of empowering leadership on adaptive performance through two serial mediators: relational identification and proactive vitality management. Firstly, control variables such as age, gender education was tested, whether they impact the concerned variables. Results revealed that there was no significant impact of the control variables (Refer Table II). The first hypothesis investigates the direct impact of EL on AP, results exhibited in table II indicates that the relationship was significant ($\beta = 0.37$, $CI = 0.22-0.56$, $p<0.001$), hence supporting *H1*. Other direct paths were also significant as mentioned in Table II. The second hypothesis assessed the indirect effect of EL on AP through sequential mediation of RI and PVM. The results exhibited in Table II indicated a significant indirect impact ($\beta = 0.18$, $CI = 0.08-0.29$, $p<0.01$), thus supporting *H2*. However, the direct path between EL and AP was still significant ($\beta = 0.34$, $t = 6.87$; $95\% CI = 0.22-0.40$), hence, the results indicated a partial serial mediation effect. The third hypothesis posited that the association between PVM and subordinates' AP would be contingent upon LGO. Table II demonstrates that the interaction term (PVM×LGO) shows a positive and significant influence on AP ($\beta = 0.14$, $t = 2.39$; $95\% CI = 0.04-0.33$, $p<0.001$), thus *H3* is supported. Moreover, Table II also illustrates the conditional impacts of PVM on AP at various levels of LGO.

-----Table II-----

5. Discussion

The notion of self-expansion is essential for comprehending the dynamics of leader-subordinate relationships (Aron *et al.*, 2022). This study draws upon the self-expansion model to investigate a serial mediation-moderation model, confirming the beneficial effect of empowering leadership on subordinates' adaptive performance within organisational contexts. The results indicated a substantial impact of EL on subordinates' adaptive performance, corroborating other studies that identify EL as a prominent predictor of employee's positive workplace outcomes (Zhou *et al.*, 2024; Peng *et al.*, 2023; Wen *et al.*, 2023). These findings resonate with the broader body of literature suggesting that when leaders delegate authority and encourage autonomy, employees become more psychologically engaged, confident, and equipped to handle dynamic work challenges (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). The findings from the serial mediation paths, encompassing subordinates' RI and PVM reinforce the assertion made by Dobson *et al.* (2024) that close workplace relationships are key enablers of self-expansion. RI strengthens the emotional bond between leaders and subordinates, which acts as a psychological gateway through which motivational resources like vitality can be channelled toward adaptive outcomes. This aligns with evidence from Wang *et al.* (2024), who noted that employees who strongly identify with their leaders tend to experience increased relational energy, which in turn promotes resilience and adaptability in uncertain environments. Besides, the study also highlights the crucial role of PVM as a self-regulatory strategy that fosters adaptive performance. The results are consistent with the findings of Li and Liu (2023), who found that employees with high levels of energy self-regulation are more likely to pursue challenging tasks and engage in cognitive flexibility, both of which are essential for adaptation. Our findings corroborate Vijayan's (2024) assertions that leaders can foster adaptation and creativity in the workplace through their self-expanding behaviours. Lastly, the results indicated that LGO moderates the beneficial effect of PVM on subordinates' AP. Our findings, based on Bakker *et al.* (2020), affirm the substantial moderating influence of learning goal orientation, indicating that it shapes employees' self-regulatory strategies, including effort levels, goal-setting capabilities, persistence, and

feedback-seeking behaviours, thereby enhancing their adaptation to new work responsibilities. Similarly, Ren *et al.* (2024) findings indicated that the impact of PVM on well-being was stronger for those who had high learning goal orientation facilitating the pursuit of opportunities to develop and use a varied array of skills, hence augmenting their creative output. Moreover, recent work by Wu and Chen (2024) supports the current findings by suggesting that high-LGO individuals actively reinterpret stressful situations as developmental opportunities, thereby amplifying the positive influence of proactive behaviors such as PVM.

6. Theoretical Implications

The study significantly contributes to the domain of human resource development and change management. Firstly, the study findings extend the argument of Griffen *et al.* (2010), stating that when managers are supportive and hold a vision for change, their employees are more prone to engage in high levels of adaptive performance. Further, the study addresses the call of Qian *et al.* (2018), who recommended examining the effect of both relational as well as behavioral processes through which empowering leaders can influence his/her subordinate's adaptive performance. Aryee *et al.* (2012) indicated that a serial mediation model better explains the distal favorable relationship between leadership and employee performance constructs. Hence, drawing upon self-expansion theory, the study advances the literature by conceptualizing a serial mediation model and unravels the psychological processes, i.e., subordinates' RI and PVM, that occur due to the presence of an empowering leader at the workplace.

Secondly, this study identifies relational identification (RI) as a fundamental psychological mechanism by which empowering leaders can influence the work behaviour of their subordinates. Subordinates' relational identification with their leader extends beyond direct interaction and encompasses the assessment of the leader's personal and role-based identities. Prior studies on identification have often been framed in the literature concerning groups, departments, or organisations, overlooking its effects at the interpersonal level (Jang and Kim, 2024; Schummer *et al.*, 2024). This study aims to address this gap by suggesting that the leader-subordinate dyadic relationship can significantly influence the subordinate's adaptive performance.

Thirdly, our study enhances the literature on positive organisational scholarship (POS) by exploring the behavioural mechanisms via which empowering leaders might promote their subordinates' adaptive performance. Prior studies on adaptive performance have concentrated on proactive behaviours intended to modify the environment (Vakola *et al.*, 2023; Park *et al.*, 2020); however, proactive vitality management, seeks to transform the self, remains empirically underexplored as a proactive behaviour. This work advances the proactivity literature by demonstrating that PVM serves as a significant proximal predictor of adaptive performance, in contrast to the predominant focus of previous studies on distal environmental and personality characteristics (Charbonnier-Voirin *et al.*, 2012; Griffin and Hesketh, 2003).

Lastly, the study unveils learning goal orientation as the potential moderator that plays a crucial role in augmenting the positive repercussions of PVM on subordinates' adaptive performance. The study findings extend the argument of Ren *et al.* (2024) about learning goal orientation having strong intrinsic motivational properties. It indicates the fact that an employee characterized by high learning orientation constantly works towards managing his energy resources so that he can reciprocate by handling complex work demands. In a nutshell, drawing upon the self-expansion theory, the study envisages an interactional approach for underscoring complex organizational dynamics.

7. Practical Implications

The study delineates numerous pragmatic implications for organisations. It is recommended that conventional management methods, defined by hierarchical structures and traditional leadership strategies, be augmented with approaches that emphasise employee empowerment. In today's fast-paced and unpredictable work environment, rigid command-and-control styles often restrict innovation and personal initiative. Empowering leadership, by contrast, encourages autonomy, participation, and ownership, which are vital for building an agile and resilient workforce. To achieve this shift, organisations should provide structured platforms where leaders can receive feedback from employees and reflect on their own leadership behaviors. Furthermore, embedding empowerment-focused metrics into performance appraisals may help ensure that these behaviors are not only encouraged but systematically reinforced. Employees functioning at the supervisory level need to be more exuberant and accommodating in providing necessary support to their subordinates. They should be trained to act as facilitators rather than controllers of work, offering timely guidance while allowing sufficient space for employees to experiment and learn from their experiences. Supervisors must foster a harmonious and inclusive work environment where employees feel psychologically safe to voice their concerns, share feedback, and discuss their work-related issues without fear of judgment. Leaders must also practice active listening and display empathy to nurture an environment grounded in mutual respect. Our study recommends that organizations should make it mandatory for their managers to enroll themselves in executive leadership programs especially those focused on empowerment, coaching, and inclusive leadership so that they can inculcate empowering behaviors and foster compliance with both organizational goals and employee development needs.

Secondly, organisations are advised to redesign their workplaces and promote more informal communication between supervisors and subordinates so that a smooth rapport can be developed between them. Such informal settings can dissolve hierarchical barriers and encourage more spontaneous, authentic, and meaningful exchanges. This can be supported through open-door policies, informal one-on-one meetings, cross-functional mingling spaces, and collaborative lunch-and-learn sessions. Furthermore, leaders can cultivate relational identification with subordinates by demonstrating authentic concern for their well-being in both professional and personal matters. Taking time to acknowledge employees' personal milestones, being supportive during personal hardships, or simply checking in informally can strengthen this bond. These measures encourage subordinates to emotionally invest in their adaptation efforts, as they feel seen, valued, and supported. Consistent team-building activities, including problem-solving games, trust-building exercises, and informal retreats, can enhance mutual understanding and emotional rapport between supervisors and subordinates. Thus, it fosters the development of high-quality relational identification among them and facilitates exploration, creativity, and the exchange of ideas, thereby improving overall adaptability in the organization.

Thirdly, our findings highlight the crucial role of energy resources in meeting urgent job demands. In a world of constant connectivity and information overload, the ability to sustain energy levels is a key determinant of adaptive performance. Employees need to take ownership of their physical and mental well-being by incorporating short, restorative activities such as micro-breaks, stretching exercises, or brief mindfulness practices between their working hours. These brief interruptions have been shown to replenish cognitive resources and improve focus and creativity. Organisations, in turn, should take proactive steps to create energy-supportive environments. They can develop play zone areas, wellness lounges, or recharge rooms within their premises so that employees can engage in sports, recreational activities, or simply unwind. Such initiatives not only enhance mood and reduce burnout but also foster creative thinking, which is critical for generating novel solutions to complex work problems. Additionally, top-

down strategies should be aligned to empower subordinates with more discretion and decision-making authority, thereby creating favourable conditions for adaptation to emerge. Organisations can conduct regular awareness workshops focused on physical vitality, mental stamina, and energy renewal strategies. These workshops can train employees in practical tools like task-switching, digital detox, and active rest, ultimately enabling them to maintain confidence and adaptability in high-pressure situations.

Lastly, management needs to foster a robust learning culture within the organisation. In today's ever-evolving work landscape, employees who continually learn, experiment, and adapt are crucial assets. This can be facilitated by identifying and rewarding individuals who have shown excellent learning capabilities, whether through solving difficult client issues, acquiring new skills, or mentoring others. Recognizing and celebrating such behaviors through spotlight emails, 'learner of the month' awards, or career advancement opportunities can further motivate others to embed learning orientation into their daily work attitudes. Managers should also encourage reflective practices, such as after-action reviews or peer learning circles, where teams come together to debrief, learn from mistakes, and celebrate progress. Additionally, relational quality development activities—such as emotional intelligence training, leader-member exchange (LMX) workshops, or role-reversal exercises—can be offered by organizations to strengthen high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships. These efforts not only improve relational identification but also build a work environment that is resilient, adaptive, and future-ready. In conclusion, organisations aiming to enhance adaptive performance must adopt a holistic strategy that combines leadership development, energy management, workplace design, and a learning-centric culture. By institutionalising empowering practices and fostering high-quality relationships, companies can create an agile workforce that thrives in uncertainty and responds effectively to the demands of the modern workplace.

8. Limitations and Future Research Direction

Although the study provides significant insights, it has potential limitations that should be addressed in future research. While attempts were made to tackle the issue of common method bias (CMB) by collecting multi-source data, future studies could further reduce bias and strengthen causal inference by adopting a time-lagged or longitudinal research design. Such approaches would enable researchers to capture the dynamic evolution of constructs like empowering leadership, proactive vitality management, and adaptive performance over time, offering a more robust understanding of directionality and temporal effects. To expand the validity and generalizability of the self-expansion model in workplace contexts, future research could examine how other contemporary leadership styles such as ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and paradoxical leadership affect employees' adaptive performance. These leadership approaches may promote resource expansion through different mechanisms, such as moral guidance, self-awareness, or managing dualities, which could reveal new pathways or moderating conditions. Exploring these alternatives would also allow researchers to compare the relative efficacy of empowering leadership vis-à-vis other styles in promoting adaptability. Moreover, the current study's findings are limited to service sector organisations, which may possess certain contextual characteristics (e.g., high emotional labour, customer-facing roles) that shape the way leadership and employee outcomes unfold. To improve external validity, future studies could replicate this model across other sectors such as manufacturing, hospitality, healthcare and academia especially using dyadic and multi-level data to gain a more granular understanding of how relational dynamics between supervisors and subordinates influence adaptive performance across diverse contexts. Another important limitation is that the study exclusively focused on the positive outcomes of empowering leadership, overlooking possible

negative or unintended consequences. While empowering leadership is generally considered beneficial, in certain contexts it may create ambiguity, role overload, or decision fatigue particularly when employees are unprepared or unwilling to take on additional responsibility. Future research should investigate the boundary conditions or contextual factors under which empowering leadership may backfire or be perceived as ineffective, and examine possible coping mechanisms or leadership training that can mitigate these adverse effects. Lastly, the current model includes two specific mediators—relational identification and proactive vitality management but other psychological and relational mechanisms may also help explain the empowering leadership–adaptive performance link. Future studies could explore the mediating roles of constructs such as relational energy, psychological safety, voice behavior, or self-efficacy, which may act independently or in combination to drive adaptive outcomes. Investigating these mediators could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the internal and interpersonal processes through which empowering leadership shapes employee adaptability. In summary, while the current study makes a meaningful contribution to the leadership and adaptability literature, addressing these limitations in future research would not only enhance theoretical depth but also improve the practical applicability of the findings across varied settings.

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Table I: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	25.34	5.24								
2. Education	3.20	0.68	0.32**							
3. Empowering Leadership	5.00	0.65	-0.03	0.08	-0.10*	(0.77)				
4. Relational Identification	5.06	0.60	0.02	0.05	-0.05	0.22***	(0.74)			
5. Proactive Vitality Management	5.18	0.82	-0.07	0.03	-0.04	0.44***	0.29***	(0.76)		
6. Adaptive Performance	5.05	0.57	-0.14*	0.09	-0.10*	0.66***	0.35***	0.47***	(0.74)	
7. Learning Goal Orientation	5.07	1.09	-0.16	0.13	0.07	0.34***	0.25***	0.38***	0.28***	(0.72)

Notes: Correlation is significant at ***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05 (two-tailed); square root values of AVE are reported in parentheses

Source: Author's own

Table II: Results of the serial-mediation moderation model (direct, indirect and conditional effects)

Variables	β	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
<i>Direct effects:</i>			
EL→AP	0.37***	0.22	0.56
EL→RI	0.55***	0.44	0.67
RI→PVM	0.46	0.35	0.57
PVM→AP	0.28	0.12	0.33
<i>Indirect effects:</i>			
EL→RI→PVM→AP	0.18**	0.08	0.29
<i>Conditional effects:</i>			
(PVM*LGO→AP)	0.14	0.04	0.33
High level of LGO	0.27**	0.40	0.73
Low level of LGO	0.04 ^{ns}	-0.08	0.22
<i>Control Variables:</i>			
Age	0.06 ^{ns}	-0.07	0.16
Gender	0.11 ^{ns}	-0.24	0.37
Education	0.03 ^{ns}	-0.05	0.15

Notes: EL= Empowering Leadership; RI= Relational Identification; PVM= Proactive Vitality Management; AP = Adaptive Performance; LGO= Learning Goal Orientation

CI= Confidence Interval ***p<0.001; **p<0.01

Source: Author's own