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The Impact of Empowering Leadership on Flourishing at Work: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: This systematic review examines the impact of empowering leadership on employee flourishing across diverse organisational settings. This study's method is a systematic review that analyses 20 articles. Drawing on evidence from recent empirical studies, the review highlights that empowering leadership characterised by autonomy-supportive behaviours, trust, and shared decision-making significantly enhances psychological empowerment and contributes to higher levels of well-being, engagement, meaningfulness, and positive workplace functioning. Future studies should focus on the intricacies and long-term effects of empowered leadership, ensuring that businesses can deliberately harness leadership behaviours that promote both employee well-being and corporate success.

Keywords: Empowering Leadership, Flourishing, Work

INTRODUCTION

The concept of flourishing has long been a cornerstone of human inquiry; its importance in research and policy endeavours, especially involving physical and mental well-being, is fast expanding (Cebal-Loureda et al., 2022). The science of flourishing suggests an optimistic approach (Simula, 2023). Flourishing at work, described as a sense that one's life at work is going well and that one is functioning well, has been demonstrated to reduce burnout, improve subjective well-being, and increase job satisfaction (Butt et al., 2020; Rothmann & Wissing, 2013). Employees who flourish demonstrate higher levels of resilience, creativity, productivity, and commitment, making this concept essential for sustainable organizational development. Beyond individual well-being, thriving individuals make significant contributions to organisational performance by generating growth, revenue, and profit while also demonstrating innovative work behaviours (IWBs) and excellent citizenship behaviour (Giolito et al., 2021).

Leadership style also plays a crucial role. Empowering leadership is a practical approach to fostering workplace well-being. Empowering leaders provides trust, autonomy, and opportunities for members to participate in decision-making. This style fosters a sense of responsibility, meaning, and commitment among organisational members (Rusydi, 2025). Rooted in motivational and social exchange theories, empowering leadership is believed to

cultivate internal motivation, strengthen psychological empowerment, and support employees' sense of purpose (D. Kim & Vandenberghe, 2021).

Empowering leadership has garnered substantial attention as a particularly promising predictor of employee flourishing. Distinct from general transformational leadership, empowering leadership is defined by specific behaviours such as leading by example, participative decision-making, coaching, informing, and showing concern for the team (Peethambaran & Naim, 2023). Theoretically, empowering leadership style aligns closely with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that human beings thrive when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Jiang & Wei, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). By delegating authority and encouraging self-management, empowering leaders directly nurture these needs, potentially transforming the work environment from a place of obligation to a space of personal growth and intrinsic motivation (Zhang et al., 2023).

Despite the growing interest in empowering leadership and flourishing, existing empirical findings remain scattered across various disciplines, methodological approaches, and organisational settings. A comprehensive synthesis is therefore needed to clarify the extent to which empowering leadership influences flourishing at work, identify underlying mechanisms, and highlight potential boundary conditions. This systematic review aims to consolidate current evidence, offering theoretical and practical insights into how empowering leadership can serve as a strategic lever for enhancing employee well-being and organisational performance.

METHOD

This research strategy involves conducting a systematic review of the literature. Additionally, the results were reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) criteria. The authors sourced publications from ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Web of Science using the keywords "empowering leadership" and "flourishing at work". These keywords are critical for the effects of empowering leadership. The search focused on full-text English-language publications published between 2021 and 2025. More records were found through free searching. Data analysis was performed using content analysis, which aids comprehension by evaluating the text of each article and its corresponding literature references. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA 2020 Diagram Flow.

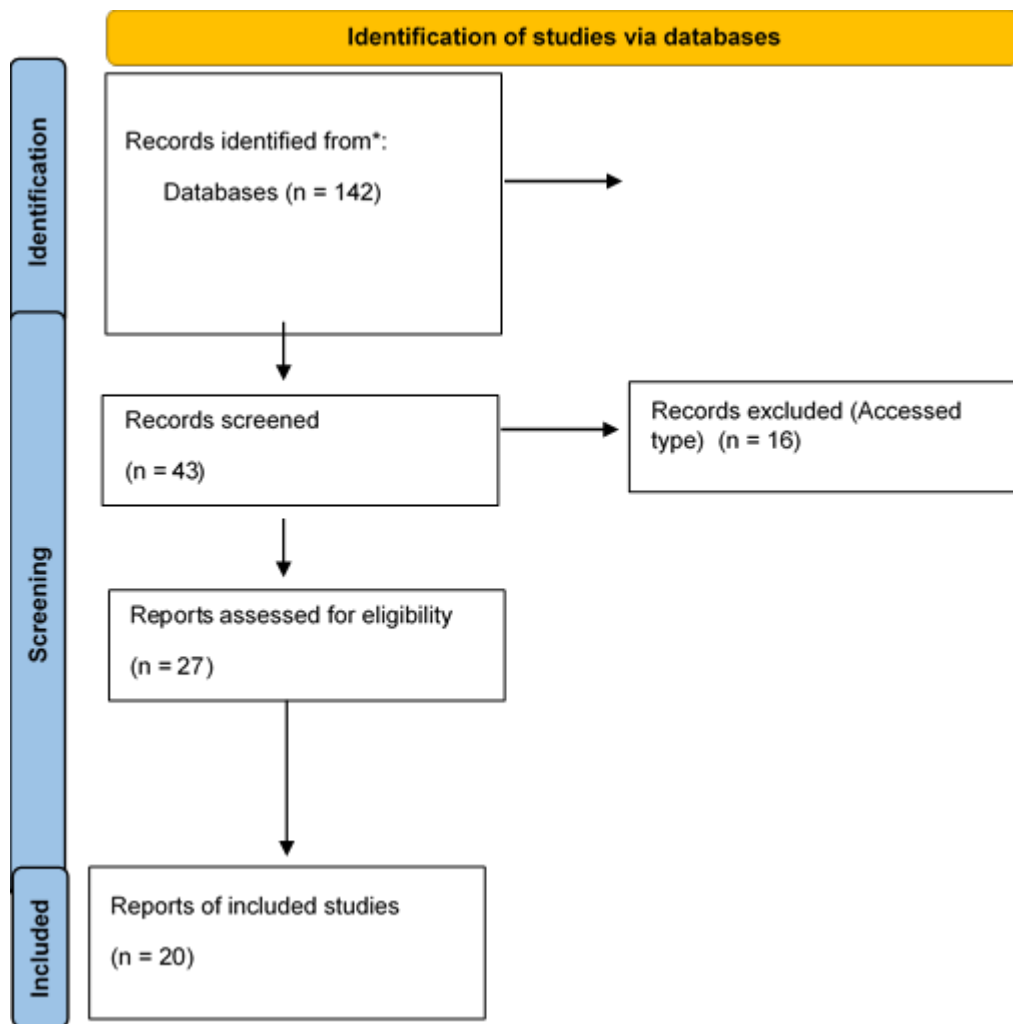


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Diagram Flow

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Overview of Included Studies

| No. | Authors | Methods | Sample | Results |
|-----|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------|---|
| 1. | (Peethambaran & Naim, 2023) | Literature review | | Empowering leadership can improve EWP and thus raise employee well-being (flourishing). |
| 2. | (Fikri et al., 2024) | Cross sectional | 250 workers | Integrating empowered leadership and cultural intelligence becomes crucial in building a work environment that promotes job flourishing. |
| 3. | (R. Verma et al., 2025) | Literature review | | Individuals who flourish excel in all parts of their lives, including pleasure and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, intimate social relationships, and financial/material stability. |

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|-----|-----------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| 4. | (Khan et al., 2025) | Cross sectional | 212 nurses | Empowering leadership is concerned with transferring power from supervisors or managers to their subordinates. |
| 5. | (Yam et al., 2022) | Literature review | | Empowering leadership does not encourage deviation among followers who have a strong moral identity or a weak desire for dominance. |
| 6. | (Malhotre & Vasrani, 2024) | Cross sectional | T-BPM sector (310 participants) and various other service industries (255 participants). | Positive leadership and our personal psychological strengths, particularly in the context of trust, have a direct impact on our sense of flourishing. |
| 7. | (Kumar & Patrick, 2022) | Cross sectional | 203 workers | Employees experienced moderately favorable leadership behaviors from their superiors, which contributed to their psychological empowerment at work, ultimately helping them thrive. |
| 8. | (Balootbangan et al., 2025) | Quasi experiment | 30 teachers | Psychological empowerment improves workflow and personal fulfillment among school administrators and instructors. |
| 9. | (Ahmed et al., 2022) | Cross sectional | 400 employees | Goal clarity and self-efficacy mediate the influence of empowering leadership behaviors on workers' job performance. |
| 10. | (Kleynhans et al., 2022) | Cross sectional | 314 employees | Authentic leadership was a significant predictor of flourishing through trust in the leader. |
| 11. | (Lin et al., 2022) | Cross sectional | 675 employees | Work unit situational characteristics (e.g., self-determination, broad exchange of information, a respectful and trustworthy climate, and performance feedback) and workplace resources (e.g., positive meaning, knowledge, positive emotional resources, and relationship resources) may enhance proactive behaviors, enabling individuals to thrive at work. |
| 12. | (M. Kim & Beehr, 2021) | Cross sectional | US employee | Empowering leadership resulted in increased personal and professional resources, including |

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|-----|-------------------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| | | | | psychological capital (PsyCap) and leader trust. |
| 13. | (Suleman et al., 2021) | Cross sectional | 564 secondary schools | Leadership empowering behaviours positively predict employees' psychological well-being. |
| 14. | (Iqbal et al., 2025) | Cross sectional | 465 banking employees | psychological well-being, as well as joy at work and creative ability, within the banking sector. |
| 15. | (Singh, 2023) | Cross sectional | Four National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare | Psychological safety is a strong mediating variable between knowledge sharing and empowering leadership, as well as workplace proactivity. |
| 16. | (Joo et al., 2023) | Cross sectional | 633 employees | Organizational trust and empowering leadership accounted for 68% of the variance in employees' psychological safety. |
| 17. | (Ye et al., 2025) | Cross sectional | 283 leaders | Autonomy support positively influences the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, which subsequently promotes positive emotions and enhances creative performance |
| 18. | (van Dierendonck & Lam, 2023) | Literature review | | Eudaemonic well-being can be improved. |
| 19. | (Goraya et al., 2024) | Cross sectional | workers | The critical role of personal resilience and organisational support in navigating the insightful impacts of organisational agility |
| 20. | (Varga et al., 2024) | Cross sectional | | Hedonic (basic needs satisfaction) and eudaimonic (vocational identity) wellbeing indicators, the frequency of aesthetic experience (showing self-transcendent wellbeing) showed a substantial unique effect positively predicting human flourishing. |

Discussion

This systematic review aimed to synthesise the current research on the relationship between empowering leadership and workplace flourishing, drawing on findings from various organisational settings and analytical techniques. The study finds strong and consistent evidence that empowered leadership has a considerable impact on employee flourishing, which includes psychological well-being, engagement, meaningfulness, positive connections, and optimal workplace performance (Peethambaran & Naim, 2023).

Empowering leadership is concerned with transferring power from supervisors or managers to their subordinates. Empowering leadership is regarded as a driving force that

increases autonomy, self-efficacy, productivity, teamwork, and collaborative decision-making (Khan et al., 2025). Employees moderately encountered favourable leadership behaviors from their superiors, leading to psychological empowerment at work, which helps them thrive (Kumar & Patrick, 2022). Empowering leadership does not encourage deviation among followers who have a strong moral identity or a weak desire for dominance (Yam et al., 2022).

Empowering leadership does not directly influence flourishing; instead, it operates through enhanced self-efficacy, perceived meaningfulness of work, and increased involvement in work tasks. (M. Kim & Beehr, 2021). Employees who feel trusted and capable are more likely to engage proactively, be creative, and have higher levels of good affect—all of which are directly related to job satisfaction (Syamsudin et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the review focuses on contextual elements that influence the success of empowering leadership. Organisational culture, job complexity, and individual differences such as proactive personality or mindfulness influence how strongly empowering behaviours translate into flourishing (Iqbal et al., 2025; Malhotre & Vasrani, 2024; S. Verma & Singh, 2022). Cultures characterised by trust, psychological safety, and open communication amplify the positive effects of empowering leadership (Joo et al., 2023).

Individuals who flourish excel in all parts of their lives, including pleasure and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, intimate social relationships, and financial/material stability (Varga et al., 2024; S. Verma & Singh, 2022). Individuals who thrive are more likely to address the vulnerabilities and obstacles they face than those who do not flourish. The concept of flourishing is expressed by hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Kleynhans et al., 2022). Eudaimonic well-being includes psychological and social well-being, as well as other factors such as life purpose, meaning, positive connections, and personal development (van Dierendonck & Lam, 2023). Employees who thrive at work are less likely to leave their organisation because they tend to be above-average achievers, going above and beyond what is required of them and contributing to organisational performance (Kleynhans et al., 2022). The current work environment is unclear and insecure (precarious), which hurts employee health and well-being (Kleynhans et al., 2022).

The importance of leadership development programs that foster empowering behaviours. Organisations should prepare leaders to promote autonomy-supportive communication, participatory decision-making, and psychological safety (Joo et al., 2023; Singh, 2023; Ye et al., 2025). This enables organisations to cultivate flourishing individuals who exhibit resilience, inventiveness, and sustained performance—all of which are essential for organisational success in a rapidly changing environment (Goraya et al., 2024). Future studies should focus on the intricacies and long-term effects of empowered leadership, ensuring that businesses can deliberately harness leadership behaviours that promote both employee well-being and corporate success.

CONCLUSION

Empowering leadership is critical in promoting employee well-being in a variety of business circumstances. While its impact is not always direct, empowering leadership consistently improves important psychological mechanisms such as self-efficacy, perceived meaningfulness, and proactive engagement, all of which promote well-being, happy emotions, and optimal workplace performance. Contextual elements such as company culture, job qualities, and human features all have an impact on the success of empowering leadership. Flourishing employees not only have better psychological, social, and physical well-being, but they also contribute considerably to organisational performance through increased dedication, innovation, and lower turnover. Given the increasingly unpredictable and uncertain workplace, the findings highlight the need of leadership development programs that promote autonomy-supportive practices, participatory communication, and psychological safety.

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