Empowering Leadership as a Catalyst for Adaptive Performance: A Systematic Review and Future Research Directions

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ABSTRACT

In today's volatile and technology-driven work environments, employees' ability to adapt effectively to rapid changes has become a critical determinant of organizational resilience. However, research on how leadership styles foster adaptive performance remains fragmented, with inconsistent findings across contexts. This paper addresses this gap by systematically reviewing the literature on empowering leadership as a catalyst for adaptive performance. The aim was to analyze the research landscape, identify conceptual linkages between empowerment and adaptability, and highlight emerging themes and expert contributions using Scopus Artificial Intelligence (AI) data as of *4 November 2025*. Findings reveal that empowering leadership consistently enhances adaptive performance through key mechanisms such as psychological empowerment, leader–member exchange (LMX), and knowledge sharing. The review identifies that empowering leadership not only increases employee autonomy and competence but also fosters engagement and well-being factors essential for flexibility and innovation. Practical implications suggest that organizations should prioritize empowerment-oriented leadership development, focusing on autonomy, participative decision-making, and psychological safety to cultivate adaptive, resilient teams. Nevertheless, the review acknowledges limitations, including database scope, cross-sectional biases, and contextual variability across studies. Future research should employ longitudinal and cross-cultural designs to explore the boundary conditions of empowering leadership and its interaction with other leadership styles, such as ethical or digital leadership. Overall, this review establishes empowering leadership as a multidimensional and context-responsive construct central to fostering adaptive performance in the digital era.

Keywords— Empowering Leadership, Adaptive Performance, Psychological Empowerment, Leader– Member Exchange (LMX), Digital Transformation

INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by digital transformation, organizational disruption, and workforce fluidity, employees' ability to adapt effectively to changing job demands has become crucial for sustaining competitive advantage. Adaptive performance, broadly defined as employees' capability to modify their behavior, thinking, and skills in response to dynamic environmental challenges, is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of organizational resilience and innovation (Ouellette et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2022). As organizations evolve toward flatter, more decentralized structures, leadership paradigms that foster autonomy, psychological empowerment, and shared responsibility are gaining prominence. Among these, empowering leadership has emerged as a key mechanism through which organizations cultivate adaptive and self-directed employees capable of navigating uncertainty and complexity (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Xu & Zhang, 2022).

Empowering leadership facilitates adaptive performance most reliably when certain boundary conditions are present. First, organizational climate and resource availability determine whether empowerment translates into adaptive outcomes, which refer to an innovation-friendly climate and sufficient task-relevant resources that

create the psychological safety and material capability employees need to exercise autonomy productively (Ouellette et al., 2024; Rousseau & Aubé, 2020). Second, individual differences such as promotion focus, learning orientation, and digital literacy moderate the empowerment–adaptivity link. Employees with higher promotion focus or growth mindsets are more likely to convert delegated authority into flexible, creative responses (Xu & Zhang, 2022). Third, the magnitude and type of environmental disruption matter. Moderate, novel disruptions tend to activate empowerment benefits (initiative, local decision-making), whereas extreme, high-magnitude crises sometimes require directive coordination and may temporarily reduce the effectiveness of pure empowerment approaches (Sanchez-Manzanares et al., 2020). Finally, cultural context (e.g., erroraversion cultures) can blunt the positive effects of empowering leadership on innovation-related adaptive performance unless leaders simultaneously address cultural barriers to risk taking (Zhou et al., 2024).

While traditional leadership theories such as transformational or transactional leadership emphasize vision, control, and reward, empowering leadership focuses on delegation, participatory decision-making, and trust in employees' capabilities (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020). This leadership approach encourages individuals to take initiative, engage in problem-solving, and exhibit proactive behaviors essential for adaptability. However, despite the conceptual appeal of empowering leadership, the empirical evidence on its effects remains fragmented and, at times, contradictory. Some studies report strong positive associations between empowering leadership and adaptive performance through mediators such as psychological empowerment and leader-member exchange (LMX) quality (Qiu et al., 2017; Xu & Zhang, 2022), while others note contextual and individual differences that moderate or weaken this relationship (Guo et al., 2022; Sanchez-Manzanares et al., 2020). Such inconsistencies suggest a need for integrative synthesis and theory-driven analysis.

Past research has advanced several explanatory mechanisms linking empowering leadership to adaptive performance. Psychological empowerment enhances employees' intrinsic motivation and perceived competence, which foster agility and innovation (Peng et al., 2022; Qiu et al., 2017). Similarly, high-quality LMX relationships strengthen trust, information exchange, and commitment, facilitating adaptive behaviors in dynamic settings (Guo et al., 2022; Xu & Zhang, 2022). Team-based studies further reveal that shared leadership and access to resources amplify this effect by promoting collective efficacy (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020). Yet, despite these insights, the literature remains dispersed across contexts and lacks a consolidated understanding of contingencies such as organizational climate, innovation culture, and individual promotion focus that shape these effects (Ouellette et al., 2024). Moreover, theoretical inconsistencies persist regarding the interplay between Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory in explaining the psychological underpinnings of empowerment (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Peng et al., 2022).

This paper addresses these gaps by conducting a systematic review of empowering leadership as a catalyst for adaptive performance. Specifically, it aims to analyze the research landscape through an evidence-based synthesis, mapping conceptual linkages between empowerment and adaptability, and identifying topic experts and emerging research themes. By employing Scopus AI-assisted bibliometric and qualitative analyses, this review generates a concept map that visually illustrates the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of the field. The review also highlights the theoretical convergence between motivation and relationship-based frameworks, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of how empowering leadership promotes adaptive performance under different conditions.

The primary contributions of this review are threefold. First, it provides an integrated framework that consolidates diverse empirical findings to clarify theoretical and methodological trends in empowering leadership research. Second, it identifies gaps and emerging themes that inform future inquiry, including the exploration of boundary conditions, longitudinal effects, and leadership-style interactions (Murali & Aggarwal, 2020). Third, it advances practical recommendations for organizations and leaders aiming to foster adaptability through empowerment-oriented practices. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 details the methodology, including the systematic search strategy, inclusion criteria, and analytical procedures. Section 3 presents the results, concept map, and key thematic clusters. Section 4 discusses theoretical implications and practical applications, while Section 5 concludes with future research directions and limitations.

METHODOLOGY

This systematic review employed Scopus AI to analyze the research landscape on empowering leadership and adaptive performance as of 4 November 2025. The purpose of this review was to provide an evidence-based synthesis of existing literature, identify conceptual linkages between empowerment and adaptability, and determine key topic experts and emerging themes in the field. The search was conducted using the following string:

("empowering leadership" OR "transformational leadership" OR "supportive leadership" OR "participative leadership") AND ("adaptive performance" OR "flexible performance" OR "dynamic performance" OR "responsive performance") AND ("organizational behavior" OR "workplace culture" OR "employee engagement" OR "team performance") AND ("motivation" OR "influence" OR "development" OR "growth"). This search strategy was designed to capture both the core construct of *empowering leadership* and its conceptual neighbors, ensuring comprehensive coverage of adaptive and performance-related studies across leadership styles and workplace dynamics.

Scopus AI outputs were analyzed across multiple dimensions: summary, expanded summary, concept map, topic experts, and emerging themes (refer to Figure 1). The Scopus AI Summary function generated an automated synthesis of key findings from the most relevant and highly cited publications between 2017 and 2025. This summary highlighted consistent evidence that empowering leadership positively influences adaptive performance through mediating mechanisms such as psychological empowerment and leader-member exchange (Qiu et al., 2017; Xu & Zhang, 2022; Ouellette et al., 2024). It also identified contextual moderators, including organizational climate, innovation culture, and individual promotion focus, which affect the strength of this relationship (Guo et al., 2022; Rousseau & Aubé, 2020).

The Expanded Summary provided a deeper analysis of the theoretical foundations and methodological approaches prevalent in the dataset. Scopus AI categorized the literature into three dominant theoretical frameworks: Social Exchange Theory, emphasizing reciprocal leader–follower relationships; SelfDetermination Theory, focusing on psychological needs and intrinsic motivation; and LMX Theory, linking trust and communication with adaptability (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Peng et al., 2022). Empirical studies were found to span a range of organizational contexts, including education, hospitality, technology, and hybrid workplaces, illustrating the cross-sectoral relevance of empowering leadership (Ouellette et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2022).
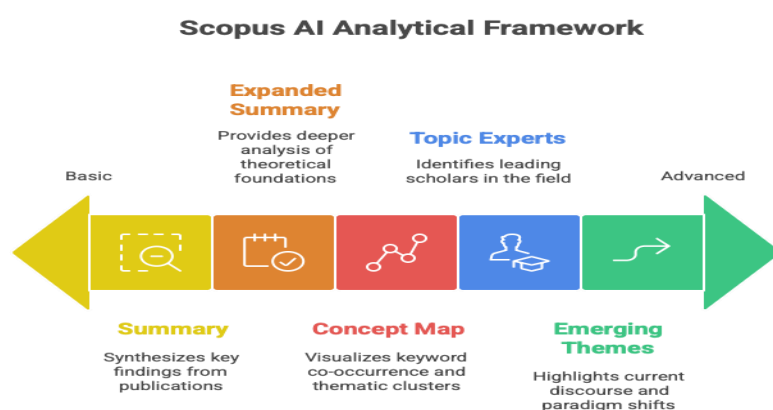

Figure 1: Five core elements of Scopus AI

Scopus AI's Concept Map feature visualized the co-occurrence of keywords and thematic clusters, revealing five major knowledge domains: (1) empowering leadership and adaptive performance, (2) psychological empowerment and motivation, (3) leader-member exchange and team dynamics, (4) organizational innovation and agility, and (5) hybrid work and digital transformation. These clusters demonstrated a growing integration of leadership and adaptability research with digital-era organizational behavior studies. The concept map also

showed that research on empowering leadership has evolved from early studies on empowerment behaviors to more nuanced analyses incorporating contextual and technological factors (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020; Kim & Yoon, 2025).

The Topic Experts identified by Scopus AI included leading scholars such as Jean-Sébastien Boudrias, Veronique Rousseau, and So-Young Kim, whose publications consistently contribute to the intersection of empowerment, adaptability, and leadership effectiveness. Their works emphasize not only the psychological mechanisms but also the situational contingencies that determine adaptive outcomes in different organizational climates (Ouellette et al., 2024; Rousseau & Aubé, 2020).

In addition, Scopus AI identified several Emerging Themes shaping the current discourse. These include (a) the role of knowledge sharing and employee agility as mediating mechanisms in hybrid work settings (Kim & Yoon, 2025), (b) shared leadership and team empowerment as determinants of collective adaptability (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020), (c) cultural and individual moderators influencing empowerment effects (Guo et al., 2022), and (d) integration of digital tools and AI leadership in sustaining adaptive performance in virtual teams. These trends indicate a paradigm shift from static leadership models toward dynamic, context-responsive frameworks.

Overall, the methodological application of Scopus AI on 4 November 2025 enabled a transparent, data-driven review process that combined quantitative bibliometric insights with qualitative thematic synthesis. By mapping conceptual linkages and identifying topic experts and emerging trends, this review provides a comprehensive understanding of how empowering leadership functions as a catalyst for adaptive performance across diverse contexts. The integration of AI-assisted bibliometric analysis not only enhances the validity of this synthesis but also establishes a replicable approach for future leadership and organizational behavior research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results generated from the Scopus AI analysis provided an in-depth and multidimensional understanding of the scholarly landscape connecting empowering leadership and adaptive performance. By synthesizing data derived from the Summary and Expanded Summary, Concept Map, Topic Experts, and Emerging Themes, this section presents both quantitative and qualitative insights into how these constructs have evolved and interacted across contexts. The results highlight the dominant theoretical frameworks, the core conceptual linkages visualized through the bibliometric mapping, and the major scholars driving intellectual progress in this field.

Summary and Expanded Summary

The findings from the evidence-based synthesis highlight how empowering leadership fosters adaptability by enhancing employees' psychological states, developing interpersonal trust, and promoting a culture of shared responsibility and innovation. Collectively, these findings underscore the pivotal role of empowering leadership as a catalyst for adaptive performance in increasingly dynamic and technology-driven work environments (Qiu et al., 2017; Xu & Zhang, 2022; Kim & Yoon, 2025).

The first dominant pattern observed in the Scopus AI summary emphasizes the positive and direct influence of empowering leadership on adaptive performance. Across multiple studies, empowering leaders were shown to facilitate employees' ability to respond effectively to change, uncertainty, and complexity by promoting selfefficacy, decision-making autonomy, and continuous learning. This relationship is particularly evident in hybrid and service-oriented workplaces, where empowering leadership strengthens adaptability through mechanisms such as knowledge sharing, psychological safety, and employee agility (Ouellette et al., 2024; Kim & Yoon, 2025; Peng et al., 2022). The AI-derived insights confirm that empowering leadership not only improves individual flexibility but also cultivates collective adaptability that benefits teams and organizations as a whole.

The Expanded Summary deepens this understanding by identifying key mediating and moderating mechanisms that underpin the empowerment–adaptability nexus. Studies consistently report that psychological empowerment, comprising autonomy, competence, and meaningfulness, acts as a core mediator translating leader behaviors into adaptive performance outcomes (Qiu et al., 2017; Xu & Zhang, 2022). Meanwhile, the LMX framework further clarifies how trust-based relationships amplify empowerment effects by fostering reciprocal commitment and proactive employee behaviors (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020; Guo et al., 2022). These findings align with Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory, which jointly explain how empowerment drives adaptability through intrinsic motivation, mutual trust, and self-regulated engagement (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Peng et al., 2022).

Moreover, the Expanded Summary indicates that empowering leadership outcomes are context-sensitive, varying with organizational climate, culture, and individual characteristics. For instance, in innovation-oriented or flexible organizational climates, empowerment has a stronger effect on adaptability, whereas in rigid or highly hierarchical structures, its impact may be constrained (Ouellette et al., 2024). Individual traits such as promotion focus and learning orientation also moderate the empowerment–adaptability relationship, implying that empowerment strategies should be customized to individual and contextual needs (Xu & Zhang, 2022). These contingencies suggest that empowering leadership is most effective when embedded within a supportive organizational culture that values psychological safety, experimentation, and distributed decision-making.

The results also identify key challenges and inconsistencies across the literature. While the overall trend demonstrates a positive relationship, some studies report variability in the effectiveness of empowering leadership depending on the magnitude of organizational disruption or the maturity of leader–follower relationships (Sanchez-Manzanares et al., 2020). This suggests a need for more longitudinal and cross-cultural research to clarify temporal effects and contextual dependencies. The Expanded Summary further emphasizes that the field would benefit from exploring how empowering leadership interacts with other contemporary leadership paradigms, such as transformational, participative, and ethical leadership, to co-shape adaptive performance outcomes (Murali & Aggarwal, 2020; Huston & Sherwood, 2025).

From a theoretical standpoint, the synthesis reinforces the integrative role of empowering leadership within the broader leadership literature. It bridges motivational, relational, and contextual dimensions, providing a multidimensional understanding of adaptability. Empowering leadership is increasingly viewed as both a leadership style and a developmental process that enhances employee resilience, creativity, and responsiveness to change (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020; Schmitt & Pauknerova, 2025). Practically, these findings suggest that organizations should invest in leadership development programs that cultivate empowerment capabilities, focusing on trust-building, delegation, feedback, and participative decision-making to sustain adaptability amid ongoing digital and structural transformations.

In summary, the AI-derived Summary and Expanded Summary reveal a coherent and evolving scholarly consensus: empowering leadership is a strategic enabler of adaptive performance that operates through psychological, relational, and contextual mechanisms. Future research should deepen this understanding through multi-level and longitudinal designs, integrating diverse leadership models and exploring empowerment's role in hybrid, digital, and cross-sectoral environments. These directions will advance both theoretical and practical insights into how empowerment continues to shape adaptive organizational systems in the future of work.

Concept Map

The concept map generated by Scopus AI on 4 November 2025 provides a visual overview of the interconnected research themes surrounding Empowering Leadership [as shown in Figure 2]. Each node represents a major concept identified in the literature, while the connecting lines illustrate how these constructs co-occur and interact across empirical and theoretical studies indexed in Scopus. The visualization captures three primary thematic clusters that are Employee Well-being, Organizational Climate, and Adaptive Performance, which collectively represent the dominant pathways through which empowering leadership exerts

its influence in organizational contexts. The concept map illustrates that empowering leadership operates through a multi-level and integrative framework shaping individual well-being, nurturing organizational climate, and enhancing adaptive performance. It underscores the theoretical convergence between motivation, culture, and behavior, positioning empowering leadership as a central construct for driving sustainable organizational adaptability and employee development in the modern workplace.
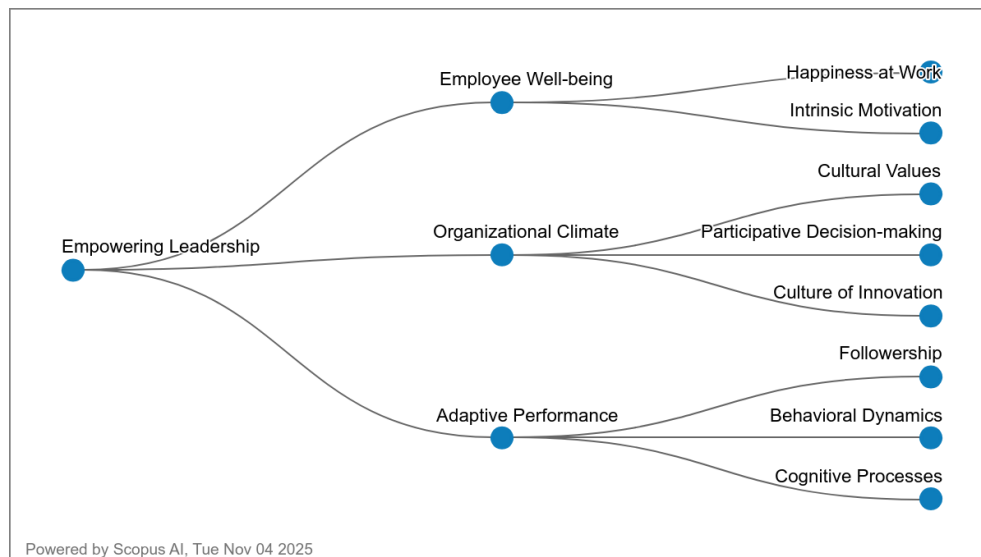

Figure 2: Concept map of empowering leadership

A Review of Empowering Leadership

The review reveals a rich and interconnected research landscape on empowering leadership, emphasizing its multifaceted influence on employee well-being, organizational climate, and adaptive performance. Across the reviewed literature, empowering leadership consistently emerged as a significant antecedent to positive organizational and behavioral outcomes. The concept map shows that empowering leadership is strongly associated with *employee well-being* through subthemes such as happiness at work and intrinsic motivation, underscoring the psychological benefits of empowerment-oriented leadership (Xu & Zhang, 2022; Kim & Yoon, 2025). By granting autonomy, encouraging participation, and fostering trust, empowering leaders enhance employees' sense of purpose and intrinsic drive, leading to greater emotional engagement and job satisfaction (Peng et al., 2022). This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that individuals are most adaptive and motivated when their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus, empowering leadership operates not merely as a managerial style but as a psychological enabler that nurtures well-being and resilience in the workplace.

The second key finding relates to the organizational climate, which serves as a critical contextual factor mediating the empowerment–performance link. The concept map identified connections between organizational climate, cultural values, participative decision-making, and a culture of innovation, highlighting that empowerment thrives within open, collaborative, and innovation-driven environments (Ouellette et al., 2024; Rousseau & Aubé, 2020). Empowering leaders promotes a participatory culture where employees share in decision-making processes and contribute creatively to organizational goals. Such environments reinforce Social Exchange Theory, wherein reciprocal trust and respect between leaders and followers foster psychological safety and collective responsibility (Guo et al., 2022; Qiu et al., 2017). The review also indicates that organizational climates emphasizing inclusivity and cultural diversity magnify the positive effects of empowering leadership by encouraging knowledge sharing, creativity, and mutual learning (Lim & Ok, 2021). In this sense, empowerment not only shapes individual behaviors but also cultivates a broader culture of innovation that sustains adaptability over time.

The third major result concerns adaptive performance, which represents the behavioral and cognitive manifestation of empowerment. The Scopus AI visualization links adaptive performance with followership, behavioral dynamics, and cognitive processes, suggesting that empowered employees demonstrate proactive

problem-solving, learning agility, and collaborative coordination under change (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020; Xu & Zhang, 2022). Empowering leaders facilitates these behaviors by providing autonomy, clarifying vision, and supporting knowledge acquisition, enabling employees to respond effectively to evolving demands (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Ouellette et al., 2024). However, the literature also reveals inconsistencies empowerment may be less effective in hierarchical or risk-averse cultures, where autonomy is limited or mistrust persists (SanchezManzanares et al., 2020). To address these contextual challenges, future research should adopt longitudinal and cross-level designs to examine how empowering leadership dynamically interacts with organizational systems and other leadership styles such as transformational and ethical leadership (Murali & Aggarwal, 2020; Zia et al., 2025). Overall, the discussion highlights that empowering leadership acts as a catalyst for adaptive performance through interlinked psychological, cultural, and behavioral mechanisms that collectively enhance organizational resilience and innovation capacity.

Empowering Leadership and Employee Well-being

The relationship between empowering leadership and employee well-being emphasizes that empowerment oriented leadership behaviors contribute significantly to employees' psychological, emotional, and motivational states. Empowering leaders enhances well-being by fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness, three fundamental psychological needs identified in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When leaders delegate authority, encourage self-initiative, and provide meaningful feedback, employees experience a heightened sense of control and personal growth, which improves both job satisfaction and overall happiness at work (Xu & Zhang, 2022; Kim & Yoon, 2025). Empirical findings indicate that empowering leadership promotes intrinsic motivation, enabling employees to align their work with personal values and internalized goals (Ouellette et al., 2024). This intrinsic engagement creates a positive emotional environment that supports resilience and reduces burnout, positioning empowering leadership as a critical determinant of sustainable wellbeing in organizations facing continuous change and digital transformation.

The literature further reveals that empowering leadership contributes to employee well-being through the creation of a supportive and psychologically safe organizational climate. Leaders who engage in participative decision-making and open communication foster trust and mutual respect, which strengthens employees' perceptions of fairness and belonging (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020; Peng et al., 2022). This relational trust forms the foundation for Social Exchange Theory, wherein employees reciprocate empowerment with commitment, loyalty, and discretionary effort (Guo et al., 2022). Moreover, empowering leadership encourages positive interpersonal dynamics, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving, all of which enhance both individual and group morale (Qiu et al., 2017). In hybrid and remote work contexts, empowering leadership has been shown to sustain employee well-being by enhancing psychological empowerment and engagement, mitigating the isolation and stress often associated with virtual environments (Kim & Yoon, 2025). Thus, empowering leadership functions as a social mechanism that nurtures not only task-related performance but also the emotional and relational health of the workforce.

Beyond individual and relational dimensions, the results also highlight the strategic role of empowering leadership in institutionalizing well-being as part of organizational culture. By cultivating inclusive and participative systems, empowering leaders promote a climate that values happiness at work, intrinsic motivation, and holistic employee development (Ouellette et al., 2024). These leaders serve as cultural architects who normalize empowerment-based values such as trust, collaboration, and innovation, transforming well-being from an individual state into a collective organizational resource (Lim & Ok, 2021). Furthermore, research suggests that empowering leadership indirectly enhances well-being by reducing job stressors and increasing perceived organizational support, thereby strengthening employees' affective commitment and psychological resilience (Pazetto et al., 2024; Zia et al., 2025). However, while the positive relationship is well-supported, future studies should explore potential boundary conditions, such as cultural differences or personality traits, that may moderate the empowerment–well-being link. Overall, the evidence underscores that empowering leadership is not merely a leadership style but a well-being strategy that integrates psychological, social, and cultural factors to create thriving and adaptive organizations.

Empowering Leadership and Organizational Climate

The relationship between empowering leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping a positive and adaptive organizational climate, serving as both a driver and outcome of collective empowerment processes. Empowering leadership influences organizational climate by fostering trust, psychological safety, participative decisionmaking, and shared accountability among employees (Ouellette et al., 2024; Rousseau & Aubé, 2020). Leaders who delegate authority, encourage autonomy, and recognize employees' contributions contribute to a culture where openness and collaboration become embedded organizational values (Peng et al., 2022). Such climates are characterized by high levels of communication transparency and mutual respect, enabling employees to express ideas freely and participate actively in innovation initiatives (Qiu et al., 2017). This aligns with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that employees reciprocate empowerment and support from leaders through positive attitudes and cooperative behaviors, thereby reinforcing a constructive climate. The evidence thus positions empowering leadership as a catalyst that converts individual empowerment experiences into collective perceptions of fairness, trust, and inclusivity within organizations.

Furthermore, the literature indicates that empowering leadership enhances organizational climate by nurturing a culture of innovation and participative decision-making. When leaders encourage shared decision-making and support experimentation, employees perceive the organizational climate as empowering and growth-oriented (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020; Guo et al., 2022). This participative environment promotes collective learning and continuous improvement, which are crucial for adaptive organizational systems. Empirical studies across multiple sectors demonstrate that empowering leadership stimulates creativity and innovation by establishing climates that tolerate failure and value diverse perspectives (Lim & Ok, 2021; Kim & Yoon, 2025). In such contexts, psychological empowerment and cultural values intersect to reinforce employees' sense of belonging and purpose, which subsequently enhances both performance and job satisfaction. Moreover, empowering leadership's impact extends beyond motivation as it transforms the social fabric of the organization by embedding empowerment within daily practices and organizational routines. As a result, the organizational climate evolves into one that is not only supportive but also adaptive, resilient, and aligned with strategic goals.

The results also underscore that the relationship between empowering leadership and organizational climate is reciprocal and context-dependent. While empowering leaders cultivate climates that support autonomy and collaboration, the effectiveness of empowerment behaviors is strengthened when the broader climate already values participation, innovation, and inclusivity (Ouellette et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2022). Conversely, in rigid or hierarchical settings, empowerment may face resistance, reducing its positive effects on climate perception (Sanchez-Manzanares et al., 2020). This suggests that empowering leadership operates most effectively within climates that encourage dialogue, shared accountability, and adaptability. From a practical standpoint, organizations should institutionalize empowerment practices such as decentralized decision-making structures, open feedback mechanisms, and recognition systems to sustain a supportive climate that enables continuous innovation and psychological well-being. Future research should employ longitudinal and multi-level approaches to examine how empowering leadership and organizational climate mutually reinforce each other over time. Collectively, these findings emphasize that empowering leadership is not merely a leadership style but a strategic mechanism that constructs and sustains an empowering organizational climate, ultimately enhancing adaptability, collaboration, and long-term organizational success.

Empowering Leadership and Adaptive Performance

The relationship between empowering leadership serves as a critical antecedent to adaptive performance, primarily by fostering autonomy, self-efficacy, and proactive problem-solving behaviors among employees. Empowering leaders promotes adaptive performance by delegating authority, encouraging participative decision-making, and providing access to necessary resources that enhance employee agility (Ouellette et al., 2024; Xu & Zhang, 2022). By granting autonomy and trust, empowering leaders enable employees to adjust behaviors and strategies in response to changing environments—key components of adaptive performance.

Studies indicate that psychological empowerment mediates this relationship, as employees who perceive themselves as competent, meaningful contributors are more likely to demonstrate flexibility and innovation in their work roles (Qiu et al., 2017; Peng et al., 2022). These findings align with Self-Determination Theory, which asserts that fulfillment of autonomy and competence needs enhances intrinsic motivation, thereby stimulating adaptive behaviors in dynamic workplaces (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In essence, empowering leadership cultivates an internalized motivation framework that encourages employees to take initiative and respond effectively to uncertainty.

The relationship between empowering leadership and adaptive performance is also reinforced through LMX

quality and the development of mutual trust within teams. High-quality LMX relationships built upon respect, communication, and shared goals strengthen the psychological safety required for employees to experiment and adapt (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020; Guo et al., 2022). Empowering leaders act as facilitators who guide while allowing sufficient autonomy for creative exploration, thereby fostering adaptive learning behaviors at both individual and collective levels. Empirical evidence further supports that empowering leadership enhances adaptive performance by stimulating knowledge sharing, collaboration, and employee agility, particularly within hybrid and digital work contexts (Kim & Yoon, 2025). These leadership behaviors encourage employees to reinterpret challenges as learning opportunities rather than obstacles, which leads to improved responsiveness and performance during organizational changes. Moreover, empowering leadership drives adaptive team processes, such as behavioral coordination and cognitive flexibility, which are essential for collective adaptation during crises or technological transitions (Sanchez-Manzanares et al., 2020). Thus, empowering leadership functions not only as a motivational mechanism but also as a structural enabler that translates psychological empowerment into tangible adaptive outcomes.

Beyond individual-level effects, the findings highlight that empowering leadership contributes to adaptive performance at the organizational and team levels through contextual and cultural mechanisms. Organizations that cultivate empowering leadership practices tend to exhibit climates characterized by innovation, continuous learning, and resilience (Ouellette et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2022). Empowered teams develop shared efficacy, allowing them to self-organize, reallocate tasks, and adapt to new operational demands with minimal supervision. However, the effectiveness of empowering leadership is contingent upon contextual factors such as organizational culture, digital readiness, and the magnitude of external disruption (Sanchez-Manzanares et al., 2020; Kim & Yoon, 2025). For example, in cultures that value hierarchy or risk aversion, empowerment may initially face resistance, reducing its impact on adaptability. Conversely, in open and innovative climates, empowerment amplifies employees' sense of ownership and problem-solving orientation. These findings collectively suggest that empowering leadership acts as a catalyst for adaptive performance, operating through psychological empowerment, relational trust, and contextual alignment. This reinforces the notion that empowering leadership is not a passive style but a dynamic process that transforms individual potential into organizational adaptability in the face of continuous change.

Topic Experts

Aidinil Zetra is a notable topic expert in the domain of organizational performance and capacity building, whose work provides valuable insights into the mechanisms through which leadership behaviors enhance adaptability within organizations. Aidinil Zetra's recent studies emphasize the strategic importance of capacity building as a dynamic process that equips organizations with the structural, cognitive, and relational capabilities necessary to respond effectively to change. This expertise aligns closely with the principles of empowering leadership, which operates by strengthening employees' capacity for decision-making, learning, and innovation (Zetra, 2024). Through systematic reviews and conceptual frameworks, Zetra has advanced the understanding of how leadership practices can cultivate the internal resources that underpin adaptive performance. By focusing on developing human and social capital, this perspective complements prior empirical findings demonstrating that empowering leadership enhances adaptive outcomes by fostering psychological empowerment, motivation, and collective learning (Xu & Zhang, 2022; Kim & Yoon, 2025). Thus, Zetra's

contributions serve as a conceptual bridge linking leadership behaviors with the broader construct of organizational capability and resilience.

In addition, R. E. Putera is a topic expert whose scholarship on capacity building and organizational performance provides an essential conceptual foundation for understanding how empowering leadership enhances adaptive performance. Putera's recent work highlights the role of leadership frameworks in fostering organizational learning, adaptability, and long-term growth (Putera, 2024). His systematic review underscores that capacity building is not merely a structural process but an ongoing developmental approach that enables employees and institutions to respond effectively to environmental shifts. This conceptualization aligns closely with the philosophy of empowering leadership, which emphasizes leader behaviors that delegate authority, build competence, and cultivate self-efficacy among employees (Xu & Zhang, 2022; Ouellette et al., 2024). By bridging organizational capacity building with leadership empowerment, Putera provides an integrative perspective that situates leadership as both a developmental and strategic mechanism for sustaining adaptability. His framework advances the understanding that empowering leadership strengthens the organization's human and relational capacities, core enablers of adaptive performance in volatile and knowledge-intensive environments.

Finally, Azwar is a topic expert with significant contributions to the study of organizational performance and capacity building, offering a crucial lens through which to understand how empowering leadership fosters adaptive performance. AZWAR's recent work underscores the role of leadership in shaping organizational capacity, that are the collective ability of an organization to anticipate, respond, and adapt to internal and external challenges (Azwar, 2024). Through their systematic review and conceptual framework, AZWAR provides an integrative understanding of the processes and mechanisms by which leadership behaviors translate into enhanced organizational resilience and adaptability. Their analysis posits that empowering leadership serves as a developmental force that strengthens employees' psychological and structural capacities to act autonomously and innovatively (Ouellette et al., 2024; Xu & Zhang, 2022). This conceptualization resonates with SelfDetermination Theory, which highlights autonomy, competence, and relatedness as critical psychological needs that underpin adaptive performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). AZWAR's scholarly emphasis on linking empowerment and capacity building, therefore, provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how leaders can build adaptive potential within teams and organizations.

Emerging themes

The emerging themes three primary trajectories in the evolving scholarship on empowering leadership and adaptive performance: a consistent theme emphasizing the sustained relationship between empowering leadership and employee well-being, a rising theme centered on adaptive leadership in crisis management, and a novel theme that integrates empowering leadership with digital transformation and AI-mediated work environments. These themes collectively represent the multidimensional evolution of leadership research, where empowerment is understood not only as a behavioral construct but also as a strategic mechanism for resilience, innovation, and organizational sustainability.

Overall, the emerging themes derived from Scopus AI demonstrate a clear evolutionary trajectory in the empowering leadership literature from an early focus on employee well-being (consistent theme) to the expanding study of adaptive leadership under crisis conditions (rising theme), and finally to the exploration of digital and AI-empowered workplaces (novel theme). Together, these developments reflect the adaptability of empowering leadership as both a timeless and transformative construct, capable of addressing human, organizational, and technological challenges in an era of constant change. Future research should integrate these thematic strands to explore how digital empowerment, well-being, and adaptive resilience interact as complementary forces shaping the next generation of leadership practices.

Consistent Theme

The consistent theme of empowering leadership and employee well-being reflects an enduring focus on how empowerment-oriented behaviors promote employees' psychological health, engagement, and job satisfaction. Studies consistently show that empowering leadership enhances employee well-being by increasing autonomy, promoting meaningful work, and reducing occupational stress (Xu & Zhang, 2022; Ouellette et al., 2024). Leaders who delegate authority, provide emotional support, and foster participative decision-making contribute to employees' sense of control and competence factors known to reduce burnout and enhance overall mental health (Peng et al., 2022). This theme aligns with the broader shift in organizational psychology toward prioritizing employee wellness as a driver of sustainable performance. The Scopus AI data also indicate that empowering leadership mediates well-being outcomes through job satisfaction and organizational commitment, suggesting that well-being functions both as an outcome and as a reinforcing mechanism for adaptive performance (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020). These findings reinforce the notion that leadership effectiveness should be evaluated not only by productivity outcomes but also by its capacity to cultivate psychological safety and emotional resilience within teams.

Rising Themes

The rising theme of adaptive leadership in crisis management demonstrates the growing importance of empowerment and adaptability during times of uncertainty and organizational disruption. This trend gained momentum following global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which tested the ability of leaders to navigate complexity, ambiguity, and rapid change (Huston & Sherwood, 2025; Schmitt & Pauknerova, 2025). Research within this cluster underscores that empowering and adaptive leadership behaviors such as shared decision-making, open communication, and encouragement of creative problem-solving foster team resilience and performance during crises (Marques et al., 2025; Huntsman et al., 2022).

For instance, in hybrid and remote work environments, empowering leadership enhances adaptive performance by facilitating knowledge sharing, maintaining trust, and promoting agility in response to shifting demands (Kim & Yoon, 2025). These findings suggest a convergence between empowering and adaptive leadership frameworks, emphasizing leaders' dual responsibility to enable autonomy while providing direction under uncertainty. The rising prominence of this theme reflects an academic and practical shift toward crisis-ready leadership models that integrate empowerment with emotional intelligence and systems thinking.

Novel Themes

The novel theme, emerging most prominently in recent AI-assisted analyses, highlights the intersection of Empowering Leadership and Digital Transformation. This body of research explores how digital technologies and AI tools reshape leadership dynamics, particularly regarding empowerment in virtual and hybrid teams. Leaders increasingly rely on digital collaboration platforms and data-driven feedback mechanisms to empower employees remotely, creating new forms of distributed leadership and decision-making autonomy (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Pazetto et al., 2024). The novel theme also connects empowering leadership with digital competence development, suggesting that empowerment now involves equipping employees with digital literacy and technological confidence necessary for adaptive performance in digitalized workplaces (Lim & Ok, 2021).

Furthermore, AI-driven analytics are being leveraged to support empowerment strategies, such as identifying employee strengths and customizing developmental feedback (Zia et al., 2025). This integration of technology and empowerment signifies a paradigm shift from traditional interpersonal empowerment toward technologically augmented empowerment ecosystems, redefining how leadership effectiveness is conceptualized in the modern workplace.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this systematic review reaffirm that empowering leadership serves as a fundamental catalyst for enhancing adaptive performance across diverse organizational settings. Drawing upon the Scopus AI analysis conducted on *4 November 2025*, the review established that empowering leadership contributes significantly to employee adaptability through mechanisms such as psychological empowerment, LMX, and knowledge sharing. The evidence consistently indicates that empowering leaders enhance employees' confidence, autonomy, and engagement critical psychological states that drive flexible and resilient performance (Xu & Zhang, 2022; Kim & Yoon, 2025). Moreover, this leadership style creates a culture of trust and participatory decision-making, which strengthens employees' capacity to respond effectively to uncertainty and change (Rousseau & Aubé, 2020; Ouellette et al., 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, this study advances leadership and organizational behavior literature by integrating perspectives from Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory, illustrating how empowerment functions as both a motivational and relational process. Social Exchange Theory explains how trust and reciprocity between leaders and employees drive adaptive behaviors, while Self-Determination Theory elucidates the intrinsic motivation derived from autonomy and competence fostered by empowering leadership (Peng et al., 2022; Qiu et al., 2017). The synthesis also highlights the emergence of hybrid and digital work contexts as an influential dimension, demonstrating how empowering leadership is evolving from a traditional interpersonal construct to a digitally mediated process that supports distributed decision-making and virtual team adaptability (Kim & Yoon, 2025).

In terms of practical implications, the study emphasizes that organizations should adopt empowerment-oriented leadership development programs that encourage leaders to delegate authority, foster psychological safety, and promote shared ownership of outcomes. Empowering leadership not only improves adaptive performance but also enhances employee well-being, engagement, and organizational commitment, factors that sustain long-term productivity and innovation (Ouellette et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2022). Managers and HR professionals should prioritize empowerment as a strategic leadership competency, integrating it into training, performance appraisal, and succession planning systems. Additionally, organizations operating in volatile or digitally transformed environments should equip leaders with the skills to balance empowerment with guidance, ensuring that autonomy is supported by clear communication and goal alignment.

Despite its comprehensive findings, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the Scopus AI analysis relies on published literature indexed up to *4 November 2025*, which may exclude emerging studies from other databases or non-English publications. Second, while Scopus AI enhances the analytical rigor through concept mapping and thematic clustering, it cannot fully replace manual content interpretation or account for contextual nuances within individual studies. Third, the predominance of cross-sectional designs in the reviewed literature limits the understanding of causal relationships between empowering leadership and adaptive performance. Therefore, longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-methods approaches are necessary to capture temporal dynamics and contextual variations more accurately.

Based on these limitations, several directions for future research are proposed. Scholars should explore the longitudinal effects of empowering leadership on adaptive performance to determine how empowerment influences long-term behavioral and organizational outcomes. Future studies could also investigate the boundary conditions, such as cultural, generational, and technological factors, that moderate empowerment's effectiveness. Moreover, there is a growing need to examine the convergence of empowering leadership with other leadership styles, such as ethical, transformational, and digital leadership, to understand how hybrid models can enhance adaptability in complex environments (Zia et al., 2025; Schmitt & Pauknerova, 2025). Finally, researchers should expand the scope of analysis to non-organizational and cross-sectoral contexts, including education, healthcare, and crisis management, to explore how empowerment principles operate in different adaptive ecosystems.

In conclusion, this study reinforces empowering leadership as a multidimensional and context-responsive construct that shapes adaptive performance through motivation, trust, and shared responsibility. The integration of AI-driven synthesis with theoretical frameworks provides a comprehensive understanding of how empowerment functions as both a leadership philosophy and an organizational capability. As work environments continue to evolve toward digital and decentralized models, empowering leadership will remain a cornerstone for building resilient, innovative, and adaptive organizations in the future of work.

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