

Empowering Leadership and Employee Job Performance: Review and Prospect

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Abstract. At present, the internal and external environment faced by enterprises is becoming more and more complex, the industry competition is fierce, and the knowledge level of employees is constantly improving. It is particularly important to improve organizational performance and thus enhance the competitiveness of enterprises from the perspective of improving employees' job performance. Empowering leadership was born with the times, and is constantly appearing in the practical application of enterprises. Therefore, how to effectively implement empowerment management, give full play to the maximum effect of leadership empowerment, and open the black box of the role of empowered leadership on employee work performance has become a hot topic in the theoretical and practical circles. This paper summarizes the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' job performance by combing past research literature, mainly including the following three viewpoints: (1) Empowering leadership is conducive to improving employee job performance; (2) Empowering leadership has a negative effect on employee job performance; (3) The double-edged sword effect of empowering leadership on employee job performance. It has a clearer understanding and grasp of its impact process and a deeper understanding, and prospects for future research that can be further developed.

Keywords: employee job performance, empowering leadership, social exchange theory, role theory, inverted U shape.

1. Introduction

Entering the era of big data, enterprises are faced with a complex external environment. In the face of massive information, the competition of enterprises is intensified. In order to gain a foothold in the complex external environment, enterprises are required to have relatively stable organizational performance, and employee job performance is the basic of organizational performance. The overall performance of an enterprise is mainly determined by employee work performance, and the importance of employees' job performance is obvious. Therefore, how to improve employees' job performance more effectively has become a hot topic of concern for business managers and academic researchers.

Leaders, as the core figures in an enterprise, play a crucial role in the daily management of the enterprise, and have an important impact on the operation of the enterprise, the work status and behavior of employees, and are also one of the key factors affecting the work performance of employees. From the outside of the enterprise, information technology is developing rapidly, industrial upgrading is accelerating, and the external environment is extremely complex. Leaders alone face this challenge from the external environment and appear to be under too much pressure. Authorization has become the best choice to relieve pressure. Authorized teams have also become the best choice for companies to replace traditional management structures. From the internal point of view of the enterprise, the number of knowledge-based employees and the new generation of employees in the enterprise has been rising, and they have gradually become the main force in the enterprise. Most of them have received high-level education. They hope to have more autonomy, give full play to their advantages and specialties, and hope to gain a stronger sense of work meaning and happiness. Therefore, the empowering leadership gradually gets everyone's attention.

Based on this, how to effectively implement empowerment management, give full play to the maximum effect of leadership empowerment, and open the black box of the role of empowered leadership on employee work performance has become a hot topic in the theoretical and practical

circles. There are many studies on the relationship between empowering leadership and employee job performance in academia, and most of them focus on the concept, effect and mediation of the two. In recent years, research on the influencing factors of empowering leadership has also increased. At present, the empirical research conclusions on the relationship between empowering leadership and employee job performance have not been unified. Based on the existing literature, this paper summarizes the concept of the two and the mechanism of empowering leadership on employee job performance, so as to have a clear understanding and grasp of its impact process and a deeper understanding, and prospect for further research in the future.

2. Analysis of Related Concepts

2.1. Employee Job Performance

2.1.1 The Concept of Employee Job Performance

The study of job performance began in the 1970s, and has attracted the attention of many scholars since it was proposed. Due to different research purposes and focuses, scholars at home and abroad do not have a completely consistent view on the definition of job performance. By reviewing relevant domestic and foreign literatures, it is found that they are mainly defined from three perspectives: behavioral view, result view and comprehensive view.

Scholars who hold a behavioral view believe that performance is a dimension of evaluation based on behavioral descriptions. Performance is an individual behavior or action that is controllable and related to organizational standards. Job performance refers to the performance of employees. A set of behaviors related to or contributing to organizational goals that are the behavior itself rather than the result of the behavior (Campbell, 1993)^[1].

Scholars who hold the results view believe that job performance is not the behavior itself, but the result of the behavior. Bernardino (1984) thinks that job performance is the result of work done in a specific position during a specific period of time. In the follow-up research, he again shows that job performance refers to the work result completed within a specified time limit. The definition of job performance should involve time, manner and results. The definition of job performance should be in terms of time, manner and result, they define job performance as “a certain result achieved in a certain way by an individual or an organization within a certain time frame” (Yang Jie et al., 2000)^[2]. Scholars such as Jerry define job performance as: the production efficiency and production quality of individuals or organizations within a specific time period.

Scholars who hold a comprehensive view believe that job performance does not only include a certain aspect of behavior or results, but should take into account both the importance of results and behavior. They generally believe that individual behavior has an important impact on performance results, while performance results are the reflection of individual behavior. When Motowidlo (2003)^[3] studied performance, he differentiated and compared the concepts of behavior, performance and result. He defines behavior as the work that people actually do, performance as the expected organizational value achieved by the behavior, and result as behaviors that people engage in that contribute to or hinder organizational efficiency, resulting in changes in the state or situation of people and things. Furthermore, Motowidlo defines performance as all discrete behavioral events that individuals engage in within a standard time period that have expected value to the organization. At present, Motowidlo's definition of performance is widely recognized and considered a more rigorous definition.

2.1.2 Dimensions and Measurements of Job Performance

Campbell (1993) and others put forward an eight-factor performance model, which believes that job performance consists of three levels: “procedural knowledge”, “job skills and motivation” and “declarative knowledge”. The dimensions contained in these three levels are: specific job performance, non-specific job performance, hard work, compliance, written and verbal communication, supervision and leadership, and facilitating and managing the business and others.

Borman et al. (1993)^[4] divided job performance into task performance and peripheral performance on the basis of Campbell's research. Task performance is in-role behavior, and peripheral performance is out-of-role behavior. He compiled a 16-item measurement scale. This task-peripheral performance two-dimensional model has been recognized and further verified by a large number of scholars in the later period.

Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996)^[5] subdivided the peripheral performance into two dimensions of interpersonal promotion and work dedication on the basis of the task-peripheral two-dimensional model, and this peripheral performance scale was also recognized by scholars.

Scholars such as Allworth divide job performance into task performance, peripheral performance and adaptive performance, and believe that employees' behaviors and responses to environmental changes are also important, and developed a 14-item measurement scale for this three-dimensional job performance.

Wen Zhiyi (2005)^[6] based on China's national conditions, took managers as samples, and based on previous research, divided job performance into four dimensions: task performance, interpersonal performance, adaptive performance, and effort performance, and compiled a list of 29-item measurement scale. Han Yi (2007)^[7] extended the traditional model to measure job performance from four dimensions: task performance, relational performance, learning performance and innovation performance, and compiled a measurement scale with 39 items.

2.2. Empowering Leadership

2.2.1 The Concept of Empowering Leadership

The concept of "empowering" comes from participatory management. Participatory management theory advocates improving employees' work autonomy and providing employees with work enthusiasm by sharing decision-making power. Sim and Manz (1996)^[8] formally proposed the concept of "empowering leadership" through comparative research. Sim and Manz divide leadership styles into transformational leadership, direct leadership, empowering leadership, and transactional leadership. Among them, empowered leaders focus on improving subordinates' work autonomy, encouraging teamwork, and supporting employees' self-development.

Since then, Sims, Pearce, Ahearne and many other scholars have conducted in-depth explorations on empowering leadership, and have formed two research perspectives, "situational empowerment" and "psychological empowerment". Among them, the perspective of situational empowerment emphasizes that starting from the context of the organization (such as leadership behavior, work design, etc.), leaders decentralize decision-making power through a series of management measures such as forming autonomous work groups and developing self-management teams. On the other hand, compared with situational empowerment, the perspective of psychological empowerment pays more attention to employees' inner motivation, self-efficacy, job meaning and other inner feelings, and pays attention to the internal motivation of subordinates. The concept of "psychological empowerment" is derived from this perspective. Since then, some scholars have combined the two perspectives and evolved an "integrated perspective", defining empowering leadership as the leader's delegation of authority, thereby improving the subordinate's intrinsic motivation level (Srivastava et al., 2006)^[9]. Zhang and Bartol (2010)^[10] defined empowering leadership as a process of sharing power between leaders and employees by explaining the meaning of work, expanding work autonomy, expressing trust in subordinates' abilities, and removing obstacles caused by performance for employees. Based on the above analysis, this paper summarizes the relevant concepts of "authorized leadership", as shown in Table1 below.

Table 1. The concept of empowering leadership

Scholar	Years	content
Conger & Kanungo	1988	From the perspective of subordinates, the process of eliminating unfavorable factors and improving employees' internal efficacy in the team through formal organizational behavior or informal effective information methods. This concept believes that empowerment is an intrinsic work motivation with multi-faceted aspects that enhance employees' work meaning, autonomy, competence and influence.
Thomas & Velthouse	1990	Put forward the concept of psychological empowerment, which includes four dimensions of job meaning, competence, influence and choice, which refers to the improvement of employees' intrinsic motivation.
Ford & Fotte	1995	From the perspective of superiors, superior leaders share information with subordinates and enable subordinates to gain more work autonomy and control, so as to achieve organizational goals.
Kirkman & Rosen	1999	Starting from the team level, it means that leaders outside the team encourage members to set work goals, self-manage work tasks, and participate in team management decisions.
Konczak	2000	Refers to the leader granting power and rank to subordinates, improving employees' decision-making autonomy, sharing information with employees, providing opportunities to improve work skills, and guiding employees to innovate.
Leach, Wall & Jackson	2003	From the perspective of situational empowerment, it emphasizes that superiors share power and decision-making autonomy with subordinates, so that employees can better complete tasks.
Ahearne, Mathieu & Rapp	2005	It includes four dimensions: emphasizing the meaning of work, encouraging participation in decision-making, confidence in high performance, and giving work autonomy. It refers to a leadership behavior in which leaders share power with employees, improve employees' work autonomy, stimulate their work motivation, and enhance their self-efficacy.
Srivastava	2006	Leaders decentralize authority, thereby improving the intrinsic motivation level of subordinates.
Zhang & Bartol	2010	Explain the importance of work, improve decision-making autonomy, express confidence in subordinates' abilities, and remove obstacles caused by performance for employees to realize the process of power sharing between leaders and employees.
Amundsen & Martinsen	2014	Empowering leadership influences subordinates through autonomy support and development support designed to promote their ability to work autonomously within the overall goals and strategies of the organization.

Source: Compiled from relevant literature

To sum up, although the research perspectives and conceptual definitions of empowering leadership are different, they all emphasize that leaders assign responsibilities to subordinates, improve employees' work autonomy, and thus stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation.

2.2.2 Dimensions and Measurements of Empowering Leadership

Based on the perspective of "situational empowerment", some scholars have divided empowering leadership into five dimensions from the team level: leading by example, guiding employees to participate in decision-making, teaching, information sharing, caring and interaction (Arnold et al., 2000)^[11]. And they developed a measurement scale consisting of 38 items. Some scholars have confirmed that the scale constructed by Arnold can be used not only at the individual level, but also at the team level. Therefore, the scale has been widely used by subsequent researchers, or some items

are selected according to actual research needs. Konczak et al. (2000)^[12] divided empowering leadership into six dimensions from the individual level: empowerment, assuming responsibility, skill development, information sharing, autonomous decision-making, and guidance on innovation performance, and developed a scale consisting of 17 items. Other scholars have constructed a six-dimensional leadership empowerment scale with 24 items based on the organizational situation in China, including personal development support, process control, power delegation, result and goal control, participation in decision-making, and work guidance (Wang Hui et al., 2008)^[13].

From the perspective of “psychological empowerment”, scholars have developed a six-dimensional scale that is measured at the team level, including encouraging self-reward, engaging in goal setting, focusing on teamwork, supporting independent action, encouraging opportunistic thinking, and motivating self-development, which is based on previous research and their own previous research (Pearce et al., 2002)^[14]. Building on the theoretical framework of Conger et al. (1988), Ahearne et al. (2005)^[15] developed a four-dimensional scale of empowering leadership behavior, including enhancing job meaning, encouraging employee participation in decision-making, demonstrating confidence in high performance, and providing autonomy right. At present, the scale is favored by a large number of scholars due to its few items, and its reliability is verified by empirical analysis.

In a word, different scholars have different definitions of empowering leadership, as well as different dimension divisions and measurement tools. The specific content is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Dimensional division of empowering leadership

Dimension	Scholar	Content
Six Dimensions	Konczak et al. (2000)	Delegating authority, emphasizing responsibility, encouraging independent decision-making, sharing information, building skills, encouraging innovation
	Wang Hui et al. (2008)	Development support, process control, delegation of authority, control of results and goals, participation in decision-making, work instruction
Five Dimensions	Arnold et al. (2000)	Leading by example, participatory decision-making, information sharing, caring, teaching
Four Dimensions	Ahearne et al. (2005)	Emphasize job meaning, promote participatory decision-making, convey confidence in performance, reduce bureaucracy
Three Dimensions	Robert et al. (2010)	Autonomous action, opportunistic thinking, cooperation
Tow Dimensions	Amundsen et al. (2014)	Self-support, development support

Source: Compiled from relevant literature

3. The Relationship between Empowering Leadership and Employee Job Performance

At present, the research results on empowering leadership and employees' job performance are relatively abundant at home and abroad. However, due to the differences in research objectives, research objects and research scenarios, there is no unified conclusion on the relationship between the two. Currently, it mainly includes the following viewpoints: (1) Empowering leadership is beneficial to improve employee job performance; (2) Empowering leadership has a negative effect on employee job performance; (3) The double-edged sword effect of empowering leadership on employee job performance. This paper will sort out the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' job performance from these aspects.

3.1. The Promoting Effect of Empowering Leadership on Employee Job Performance

Some scholars believe that leadership empowerment can enhance employees' psychological empowerment and self-efficacy, and have a positive impact on their innovation performance. Li Miaomiao et al. (2018)^[16] confirmed through research that in the context of highly empowered leadership, employees have higher self-efficacy for non-routine work, which can improve their creative work performance. Zhang et al. (2010)^[10] found through survey data of professional employees and their supervisors in a large Chinese information technology company that empowering leadership positively affects psychological empowerment, which in turn affects intrinsic motivation and creative process engagement, and the latter two variables have a positive impact on employees' innovative job performance. Kundu (2018)^[17] found through a survey of Indian bank employees that empowering leadership behavior has a positive impact on subordinates' psychological empowerment and job performance, and psychological empowerment mediates the positive impact of empowering leadership behavior on subordinates' work performance.

Some scholars have analyzed the promotion mechanism of empowered leadership on employees' work performance according to the social exchange theory. Applying social exchange theory, Lorinkova et al. (2014)^[18] theoretically deduced and empirically tested that when leaders have high-quality relationships with their bosses, empowering leadership has a positive impact on employees' psychological empowerment, and employees may reciprocate positive treatment from organizational supervisors, thereby promoting individual employee performance. Based on the social exchange theory, when employees perceive the "goodwill" from participation in decision-making and personal development support and leadership empowerment, they will continue self-learning and creativity in a way that generates rewarding responses, ultimately giving positive feedback to leadership empowerment behaviors in the form of improved innovation performance (Zhu Yongyue et al., 2019)^[19]. Houman et al. (2021)^[20] proceeded from the social exchange theory, introduced tacit knowledge sharing as a mediator variable and emotional intelligence as a moderator variable, and confirmed through research that leadership empowerment and employees' innovation performance are significantly positively correlated; tacit knowledge sharing plays a partial mediating role between leadership empowerment and employees' innovation performance; emotional intelligence positively moderates the relationship between leadership empowerment and employees' innovation performance; emotional intelligence also positively moderates the relationship between tacit knowledge sharing and employees' innovation performance.

Others have examined the positive impact of empowering leadership on employee performance from other perspectives. Some scholars have examined the trickle-down effect of empowered leadership across hierarchical levels in organizations through the lens of social learning. Through their research, they found that the empowering leadership of superior leaders promoted the empowering leadership of subordinate leaders, which indirectly improved the task performance of employees (Steven et al., 2020)^[21]. Some researchers have used a combination of qualitative pre-determined research, using teamwork, empowerment and motivation as indicators, and found that employees' performance in an organization is positively correlated with empowering leadership (Roy et al., 2020)^[22].

All in all, the existing researches on the promotion effect of empowering leadership on employees' job performance mainly used psychological empowerment and self-efficacy as mediators or based on social exchange theory and a few from other perspectives to investigate its mechanism.

3.2. The Negative Effects of Empowering Leadership on Employee Job performance

Although many studies have supported the positive role of empowering leadership, some scholars have also found that the effectiveness of empowering leadership is not generally supported. Some researchers believe that empowering leadership may trigger potential negative effects that adversely affect employees' performance.

Role theory has become an important theory to understand the source of negative effects of empowering leadership. Some scholars believe that empowerment may lead to inconsistencies

between an individual's new job role and the behavior of the original job role. In addition to performing the original work tasks, employees also need to assume new work roles brought about by authorization. The inconsistency of the behaviors between different roles may lead to role conflicts of employees. The self-leadership and self-management advocated by empowering leadership invisibly increase employees' environmental uncertainty and role ambiguity, which will lead to a decrease in individual job performance (Martin, Liao, & Campbell, 2013)^[23]. Schilpzand et al. (2018)^[24] also believe that leadership empowerment will make employees have role ambiguity, which will lead to poor job performance. Some researchers have conducted research from the perspective of leader-subordinate matching, and found that the more mismatch between empowering leadership and subordinate self-leadership, the higher the role conflict of subordinates, the higher the emotional exhaustion, and the lower the job performance (Chen Chen et al., 2020)^[25].

Some scholars believe that based on implicit leadership theory, employees will form expectations and assumptions about the leaders' behavior, which determine the interpretation and positioning of employees' specific leadership behaviors, and then affect employees' work attitudes and behaviors. Over-empowerment by leaders can signal to employees that they are not interested in or value these tasks, which may reduce employees' efforts to improve job performance (Lee et al., 2017)^[26]. When leaders' empowerment to employees exceeds their expectations of empowerment, employees may view empowerment as leaders' shirk of their own responsibilities (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008)^[27]. In this case, employees will resist the autonomy and uncertainty brought about by empowerment, making it difficult for employees to fulfill the responsibilities conferred by the empowerment, resulting in performance degradation. When managers or leaders unconditionally empower subordinates, subordinates may perceive their leader as a forgiving person and feel that the leader is abdicating their responsibilities or duties. If so, it will induce tension by increasing subordinates' work and reduce subordinates' job role performance (Cheong et al., 2016)^[28].

Other scholars have proposed that the dual task processing effect can help explain the source of the negative effects of empowering leadership. When employees undertake multiple work tasks at the same time, there may be potential depletion of personal resources and lead to a decrease in individual work performance (Levy & Pashler, 2001)^[29]. The research of Cordery et al. (2010)^[30] also showed that empowering leadership will increase the perceived task complexity and uncertainty of employees, and employees will develop resistance to work autonomy, which will also reduce employees' job performance.

In addition, some scholars have pointed out that leadership differentiation empowerment will also have a negative impact on employee job performance. Li Shaolong et al. (2017)^[31] conducted research from the perspective of interactive fairness climate, and the results showed that leadership differential empowerment has a significant negative impact on team member performance. Cui Yang et al. (2019)^[32] conducted research through cross-level analysis based on social identity theory. The results also showed that differentiated empowering leadership significantly negatively affects individual innovation performance across layers, and differentiated empowering leadership significantly negatively affects team innovation performance. Huo et al. (2015)^[33] analyzed a sample of 372 followers of 97 teams in China based on the perspective of Chinese traditionality and found that when the Chinese traditionality of the followers was low, the differential empowerment leadership had a higher impact on the follower-leader trust. The negative impact is significant, which has a negative impact on the job performance of employees.

3.3. The double-edged sword effect of empowering leadership on employee job performance.

In recent years, more and more scholars have emphasized the boundary conditions that empowering leadership has positive or negative effects on employees' job performance, rather than simply promoting or inhibiting them.

Some researchers have empirically confirmed a direct "inverted U-shaped" relationship between empowering leadership and employee task performance, and that employees' personal characteristics (i.e., learning orientation) moderate this relationship (Lee et al., 2016)^[26]. Yin Kui et al. (2016)^[34]

based on the cost of autonomy theory and introduced the sense of self-determination as an intermediary variable. Their analysis of 478 pairs of superior-inferior paired data found that empowering leadership behavior indirectly had an inverted U-shaped impact on task performance through a curvilinear path of self-determination. This is because the most direct consequence of leadership empowerment behavior is to enhance employees' work autonomy and make them feel self-determination, but the role of self-determination is not always positive (Langfred & Moyem, 2004)^[35]. Jiang Liqin and Xu Yiwei (2020)^[36] based on social exchange theory, role theory, resource conservation theory and adjustment focus theory to investigate the “too much” effect and its influencing mechanism between empowering leadership and employee task performance, and to test the mediating role of leader-member exchange and the moderating role of trait moderating focus. The research results show that the relationship between empowering leadership and task performance is inverted U-shaped; leader-member exchange plays a mediating role in the relationship between empowering leadership and task performance; employee trait moderating focus positively moderates the “inverted U-shaped” relationship between empowering leadership and task performance.

Other scholars have explored the two sides of the role of empowering leadership on employees' job performance by introducing different intermediary mechanisms. For example, Hao et al. (2017)^[37] used a binary model of work enthusiasm to explore why and when empowering leadership has different effects on employees' job performance. Through field survey data of 69 teams and 266 employees, they show that empowering leadership have a positive indirect relationship with employee job performance via harmonious work passion and a negative indirect relationship with job performance via obsessive passion for work. The model is shown in Figure 1. This is because individual role breadth self-efficacy moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' two work passions, thereby affecting the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' job performance.

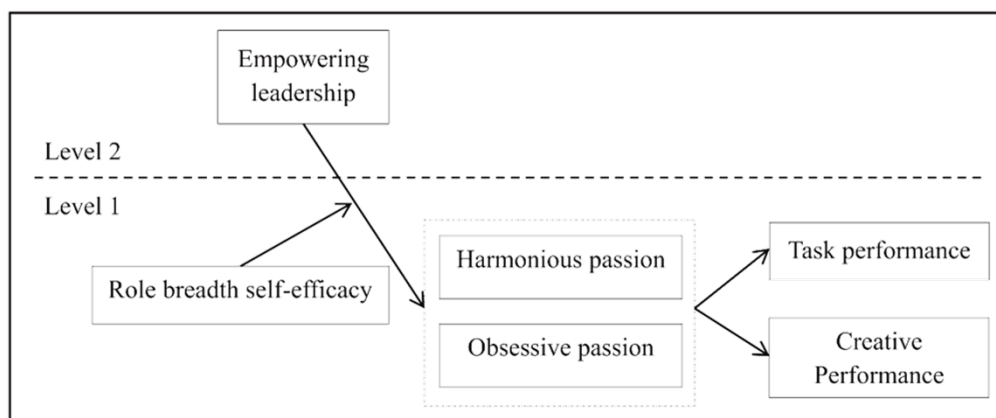


Fig. 1 Dual-mediation model of work passion

To sum up, the impact of empowering leadership on employee job performance may have a “too much” effect, rather than “the more empowerment, the better the outcome”. In addition, empowering leadership will also have different impacts on employees' job performance through different intermediaries in different scenarios.

4. Summary and Research Outlook

By sorting out the relevant literature, this paper finds that the current research on the relationship between empowering leadership and employee job performance has richer research results on exploring a single promoting or inhibiting effect, while the research on the double-edged sword effect of empowering leadership is relatively few, and there are still gaps. For example, the exploration of the dual mediation mechanism and boundary conditions is still insufficient, and the research dimension is relatively single. Based on this, future research can be carried out from the following aspects:

(1) Reveal the relationship between the dimensions of empowering leadership and employees' job performance

By reviewing the existing literature, it is found that the existing researches all explore the concept of empowering leadership as a whole, and seldom deeply analyze the mechanism of the various dimensions of empowering leadership and employees' job performance. The existing literature puts more emphasis on the dimension of empowering leadership "giving employees work autonomy". Future in-depth discussions on other dimensions and the interaction between dimensions will help us to understand the role of empowering leadership in a clearer black box.

(2) Re-exploration of the boundary conditions for empowering leadership to affect job performance

Existing research is not very rich in analyzing the dual-mediating mechanism of empowering leadership affecting job performance, and only initially discusses the boundary conditions that weaken the negative mediation path from the perspective of self-efficacy. Most of them only analyze the effect of superior support, and have not explored other job resource factors (e.g., peer support, management support, and performance feedback). In addition, future research may consider the moderating role of individual characteristic factors (e.g., political skills), as well as the influencing mechanisms of other job characteristic factors (e.g., job complexity).

(3) In-depth exploration of the mechanism by which empowering leadership affects employee work performance

By combing the relevant literature, it is found that most of the existing research focuses on the exploration of the outcome variables of empowering leadership, ignoring what factors cause empowering leadership to affect employee work performance. Sharma and Kirkman (2015) proposed that exploring the mechanism of empowering leadership is an important research direction in the future. Therefore, future research can build a model of "Empowering leadership characteristics-Empowering leadership behavior-Individual/team behavior-Job performance", and comprehensively develop and enrich the research on the impact of empowering leadership on employees' job performance.

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