

# THE GLOOMY PICTURESQUE EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF WORK ENGAGEMENT

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## Abstract

The present research aims to first investigate a negative individual outcome that empowered staff experience and is theoretically relevant, however, not yet examined: work-family conflict. Furthermore, this study will examine if work engagement serves as mediator for the relationship between work-family conflict and empowering leadership.

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**Keywords:** Empowering leadership, work engagement

## Introduction

In spite of the various empirical and theoretical studies on empowering leadership that have contributed to the understanding of different individuals and organizational outcomes, there is a lack of research examining the dark side of high empowering leadership. One goal of the present research is to examine whether there is negative effect of this leadership style that could affect employees' behavior. Based on the pervious literature, we are able to predict the work-family conflict as negative consequences of empowering leadership.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine how empowering leadership could affect the degree of work-family conflict, which subordinates experience. There is a significant relationship between an employee's work and family life (Frone, 2003); and the literature has always shown negative organizational and individual outcomes for individuals that undergo high levels of work-family conflict. In this light, it is of great importance for the leadership literature to expand beyond the traditional studies based on organizational outcomes and investigates the leader's influence on non-work variables including work-family conflict. Furthermore, the present research aims to arrive at an understanding of the mechanisms that lead empowered employees to experience work-family conflict. In particular, we will examine job stress and work engagement as

factors that mediate this relationship. We will also examine gender as a factor that moderate the relationship between work engagement and work–family conflict.

## **Literature review and Hypothesis development**

### **Hypothesis Development**

Considerable research has highlighted the importance of leader behaviors for employee performance (e.g., Druskat & Wheeler, 2003; Durham, Knight, & Locke, 1997; Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004). Among the diverse leader behaviors that have been studied, empowering leader behaviors have assumed special importance, as is consistent with the trend toward providing increased autonomy to employees (Bennis & Townsend, 1997).

Empowering leaders delegate authority to employees, involve employees in decision making, share power with employees, encourage self-management of work, and convey confidence in employees' ability to handle challenging work (Ahearne et al., 2005). Therefore, it is argued that these leadership behaviors can help employees gain a sense of competence and autonomy, hence enhancing intrinsic motivation and subsequently work performance.

In addition, recent theoretical development of performance (Parker et al., 2006) proposes role breadth self-efficacy (i.e., self-perceived capability to perform a range of proactive, interpersonal, and integrative activities that extend beyond prescribed tasks) as a key driver of proactive work performance and as stimulated by work environment factors such as autonomy and supportive supervision. Consequently, empowering leadership, which offers employees autonomy and support for pursuing unstructured tasks, should enhance employees' role breadth self-efficacy—and subsequent proactivity and performance.

On the other hand, Leaders are critical elements of the work context that can influence how individuals view their work. In line with the arguments presented by Kahn (1990), Macey and Schneider (2008) argue that when empowering leaders delegate authority to employees, involve employees in decision making, share power with employees, encourage self-management of work, and convey confidence in employees' ability to handle challenging work (Ahearne et al., 2005) leaders will have positive effects on employee engagement by engendering a sense of attachment to the job and engagement.

Empowering leadership behaviors positively influence employees' affective commitment because the behaviors lead employees to feel more personally accountable and emotionally engaged with work processes and outcomes in their organization.

Based on the above theoretical analysis and empirical evidence, it is expected that empowering leadership will be positively related to work engagement, which, in turn, will be related to work performance. With regard to the mediating role of work engagement, Salanova et al. (2005) showed that levels of work engagement of employees working in hotels and restaurants are related to employee work performance. Demerouti and Bakker (2006) concluded that work engagement seems to reveal a strong relationship with work performance. Accordingly, Xanthopoulou et al. (2008) found that work engagement mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and work performance. self-efficacy is one of the elements of empowering leadership. Furthermore, Seeley (2007) also discovered a significant, positive correlation between work engagement and work performance. It is therefore concluded that work engagement mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and work performance. In short, we formulated our hypotheses:

**H1: Empowering leadership will be positively related to employee performance**

**H2: Empowering leadership will be positively related to work engagement**

**H3: Increased Work engagement will be positively related to employee work performance.**

**H4: Work engagement mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and performance.**

Empowered leaders assign authority to employees, involve employees in decision making, distribute power with employees, inspire self-management of work, and share confidence in employees' ability to handle challenging work (Ahearne et al., 2005),

Empowering leadership behaviors positively effect employees' psychological commitment because the behaviors lead employees to feel more personally accountable and emotionally engaged with work procedures and consequences in their organization.

Prior studies of engagement have mainly focused on identifying its antecedents. This research indicates that engagement is often a consequence of positive traits, some studies have examined the outcomes of engagement is associated with higher performance (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) and lower turnover intentions (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). For this reason, the engagement literature seems to suggest that engagement is a good thing from the perspective of both employees and employers alike, and thus far, the existing research appears to support this view. At the same time, though, Macey and Schneider (2008) recently noted that "there are limits on the pool of energy and resources available to employees" and that "sustained levels of engagement will be difficult to

achieve” (p. 25). Moreover, it is possible that employees who expend significant amounts of energy and resources at work may find themselves with less energy and resources when they go home.

One of the aspects of multiple roles is referred to as the scarcity paradigm (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). According to this perspective, role involvement leads to competing claims on the limited and finite resources of an employee’s time and energy. This view emphasizes the conflicts created by multiple roles and links role involvement with undesirable outcomes. For example, in studies of investment of time resources, researchers have found that people are more likely to reduce family time to meet work demands than vice versa (e.g., Eagle, Miles, & Icenogle, 1997). In light of these findings, Rothbard and Edwards (2003) suggested that there may be an asymmetry in the boundary between work and family such that work resources are more difficult to invest in family because employees have less discretion in how they invest in work (e.g., they can only engage in work at certain times; see Johns, 1991) or because people can more easily justify resource investments in work because such investments may lead to material support that will assist the family in the long run (cf. Evans & Bartolome, 1986; Zedeck, 1992).

In contrast, According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) work family conflict is a “form of inter role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (p. 77). They further delineated three types of work family conflict: time based (where time spent in one role takes away from time in another role), strain based (where strain in one role either carries over to the other role or makes it difficult to fulfill obligations in the other role), and behavior based (where behaviors expected in one role make it difficult to fulfill obligations in the other role). I expect work engagement to be associated with these three types of work interference with family. According to Macey and Schneider (2008), high levels of work engagement are characterized by absorption in work such that individuals are excited about their job, committed to the work role, and very concerned with their work. As a result, employees who are highly engaged will have fewer resources available to use in other realms. In other words, as employees devote more of their psychological attention and energy to investments in the workplace, this is likely to reduce the psychological resources available to address the obligations associated with their family role (Eckenrode & Gore, 1990; Small & Riley, 1990). Thus, when empowering leadership is high, people will be so focused on their work and investing their psychological resources there that they are less able to deploy those resources back home. Consequently, high levels of work engagement are likely to be associated with work family conflict.

Based on the above theoretical analysis and empirical evidence, I expect that empowering leadership will be positively related to work engagement, which, in turn, will be related to work family conflict. In short, we formulated our next hypothesis: The positive relationship between empowering leadership and work family conflict will be mediate by work engagement.

**H5: Empowering leadership will be positively related to work family conflict.**

**H6: Work engagement is positively related to work family conflict.**

**H7: Work engagement mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and work family conflict.**

## **Measures**

### *Demographic Information*

The demographic information was collected to assist in determining if the sample is an adequate representation of the population of Indian employees. Respondents were asked their age, sex, martial status, number of children living with them, education level, position tenure and organizational tenure.

### *Work Engagement*

Work engagement was measured using the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES- 9; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The scale assesses all three components of work engagement; vigor (e.g. ‘At work today I felt bursting with energy’), dedication (e.g. ‘I was proud of my work today’), and absorption (e.g. ‘I was immersed in my work today’). These three dimensions have been shown to be highly correlated, motivating arguments to adopt a composite score for the UWES (Sonnentag, 2003). The scale’s instructions and items were modified to focus on daily rather than global work engagement. Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5(Strongly Agree).

### *Work life conflict*

Work family conflict was measured with a five-item index measuring the frequency with which family responsibilities affect work Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996).Higher values indicate greater work family conflict. Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5(Strongly Agree).

### *Job performance*

Supervisors rated subordinates' job performance using five items used Tepper et al. (2011)(e.g., "This subordinate always accomplishes his/her in-role assignments"; Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5(Strongly Agree).

### *Empowering leadership*

For empowering leadership, we used Kirkman & Rosen (1999) measure. This 14 item measure has multi-item subscales corresponding to four dimensions: (1) enhancing the meaningfulness of work, (2) fostering participation in decision making, (3) expressing confidence in high performance, and (4) providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints, Response options ranged from 1

### *Control Variables*

Based on a review of the literature, there are several variables that were controlled because they were expected to convey with work-interference with family, the ultimate dependent variable. Education, age, marital status, number of children are my control variable in this research.

### *Analytical procedure*

This study utilizes survey questionnaire technique to collect data for this cross-sectional research design. The questionnaire was formulated in English Language but due to the local language influence. The questionnaire was translated into Hindi language to let participants understand the questionnaire of the study. Due to cross-sectional nature of the research the data was collected in one point of time from different industries including IT industry, Hospital, and services sector.

We have controlled number of variables with expected considerable influence in this study. Cronbach's alpha were calculated to find out the reliability estimates ranging from .70 to .91 in all variables of the study. Confirmatory factor analyses were used by AMOS 20.0 version to exclude the common variance method biasness associated with the collected data. Correlations of coefficients were estimated to investigate the possible relationships between the selected variables of the study. Multiple hierarchical regression analyses were calculated to test the hypotheses.

## **Results**

Total number of 300 set(each set include employee, spouse and supervisor) of questionnaires were distributed amongst the selected participants in different industries as mentioned above. Out of total 300

administered questionnaires 234 respondents completed the questionnaire with a response rate of 78% achieved.

**Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA)**

| Model              | $\chi^2$   | df  | GFI | RMSEA | CFI | NNFI |
|--------------------|------------|-----|-----|-------|-----|------|
| One-factor model   | 4365.11*** | 527 | .41 | .15   | .44 | .36  |
| Three-factor model | 3789.55*** | 345 | .86 | .07   | .87 | .81  |
| Five-factor model  | 768.34***  | 587 | .91 | .05   | .91 | .90  |

*Note: n= 484; Five Factor Model refers to the proposed five factors in this study. In the threefactor model the negative outcome variables Empowering Leadership, Work Engagement, and Work Performance are utilized. Similarly, in one factor model all items were included in one latent variable. GFI= Goodness of Fit Index; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; NNFI= Non normed Fit Index; \*\*\* p < .001.*

CFA table presents the results of confirmatory factor analyses. I conducted series of CFAs to test the validity and distinctiveness of variables and their items in this study, including empowering leadership, work engagement, work performance, job stress, work family conflict .we tested five factors model which is our baseline model. The CFA result shows that five factors model obtained best fit, and other alternative models estimated obtained significantly worth fit as compare to measurement baseline model. for example, in one factor model goodness fit index (GFI) = 0.41, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.44, non normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.36, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.15, resulted the worse model fit as compared to five factors model which obtained the best model fit e.g. goodness fit index (GFI) = 0.86, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.87, non normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.81 ,root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05, resulted the worse model fit as compared to five factors model which obtained the best model fit.

**Correlation Coefficients**

|        | Mean | SD   | 1      | 2     | 3      | 4 |
|--------|------|------|--------|-------|--------|---|
| 1. EL  | 3.43 | 0.59 | 1      |       |        |   |
| 2 WE   | 2.37 | 0.84 | .157** | 1     |        |   |
| 3. WFC | 2.59 | 0.84 | .192** | .104* | 1      |   |
| 4 WP   | 3.12 | 0.89 | .194** | .113* | .451** | 1 |

*Notes: n= 234, \* p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001; WE= Work Engagement; EL=Empowering Leadership; WFC=Work Family Conflict,*

The correlation coefficients table shows inter correlation matrix of studied variables. according to our results empowering leadership is significantly correlated to work engagement (r = 0.157, p<0.01),work

engagement is significantly correlated to Work performance ( $r = 0.113$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), work engagement is significantly correlated work family conflict ( $r = 0.138$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). work engagement is significantly correlated stress ( $r = 0.234$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

### *Mnop0*

|                                 | Work<br>Engagement | Work Performance |          |          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------|----------|
| Age                             | 0.010              | -0.91            | -0.096*  | -0.097*  |
| Highest Degree                  | -0.070             | -0.132**         | -0.126*  | - 0.119* |
| Position Tenure                 | -0.036             | 0.270***         | 0.255**  | 0.258**  |
| Origination Tenure              | -0.034             | 0.065            | 0.056    | 0.059    |
| Number of Children              | -0.037             | 0.101*           | 0.084    |          |
| Empowering<br>Leadership        | .180***            |                  | 0.108*   | 0.090*   |
| Work Engagement                 |                    |                  |          | 0.101**  |
| <i>F Statistic</i>              | 3.030**            | 13.611***        | 12.41*** | 11.52*** |
| <i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>   | 0.25               | 0.115            | 0.124    | 0.145    |
| <i>Δ Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i> | 0.29               |                  | 0.09     | 0.30     |

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; FC=Frequency of Change, PCF= Psychological contract fulfillment

## Findings and Discussions

Previously ample research has been conducted about the impact of empowering leadership on employee outcomes. The present research aims to examine whether there is a dark area to this kind of leadership style that could affect employees' behavior. Our study found interesting result about empowering leadership, work engagement, and work performance. The conceptualized model predicted that empowered leadership leads to increased work engagement and work performance in organizations. Our study contributes to the existing literature in manifold ways. Firstly, none of the pervious studies till date have utilized the combinations of empowering leadership, work engagement and work performance altogether in a single study. Our study found that this proposition supported in our hypothesis testing. When there is empowered leadership there will be increased work engagement and there will be more work performance. Empowering leadership delegates authority to employees, involve employees in decision making, share power with employees, encourage self- management of work, and convey confidence in employees' ability to handle challenging work (Ahearne et al., 2005). Our study is in line with some previous studies discussed in literature review chapter that leadership behaviors can help employees gain a sense of competence and autonomy, hence enhancing intrinsic motivation and subsequently proactive behavior. Work engagement mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and work performance. Work engagement increases the level of involvement within



employees and that in turn increases performance of employees with increased level of organizational performance.

Secondly, another key purpose of this study was to find out the dark side of empowered leadership. Based on the pervious literature, this study able to predict that the work-family conflict has negative consequences of empowering leadership. The present research was aimed to investigate which empowering leadership mechanism could result in work-family conflict. In circumstances of high level of empowering leadership delegates shared confidence, coworker support, shared power to employees, involvement in decision-making, self-efficacy enhancement, increased work engagement. Our study hypothesized that higher empowering leadership leads to positive work engagement and in turn more increased work family conflict. This is the dark side of empowering leadership and work engagement. In such situation, work family conflict increase which ultimately creates negative consequences on employees behaviors e.g. anxiety, stress, work performance. On one side, increased work engagement leads to more work involvement, and increased work performance that leads to increased organizational performance and positive outcomes for organization and employees. In contrast, increased work engagement based on higher empowering leadership leads to negative consequences i.e. increased work family conflict. Our findings support this conceptualization that increased work engagement on the bases of increased empowering leadership leads to more job work family conflict.

Thirdly, the circumstances of increased work engagement leads to more increased job stress, work pressure on employees. Individuals who are highly engaged are more likely to find their work life conflict with their stress. Macey and Schneider (2008) suggest that employees only have a finite quantity of resources and energy, and regularly using them to maintain a high level of engagement may prove challenging in the long run (Halbesleben, Harvey & Bolino, 2009), and cause stress, strain, exhaustion and burnout.

Job stress is kind of strain based conflict, which includes role-produced strain. On other hand strain based conflict is kind of family work conflict, our findings are inline with above suggestions and demonstrate that job stress leads to more work family conflicts.

Finally, this study employs gender as a moderator of relationship between work engagement and work family conflict. Findings suggest that gender does not moderate the relationship between work engagement and work family conflict. This study predicted that gender will moderate this relationship but in this study due to increased work engagement and higher empowering leadership gender has not moderated or influenced this

relationship significantly. Mainly, because due to context of study is based on male dominated economy gender has not affected this relationship.

### **Strengths and Limitation**

Cross sectional research design is one of the limitations of this study as it does not allow more in-depth causality of constructs in the model. A greater focus on longitudinal research designs may give a better indication of empowering leadership, work engagement, work place performance, job stress, and work family conflict.

Further, for the purpose of this study data were collected from Indian hospital and IT sector, therefore findings of the study is limited to generalize in common nature. To determine the generalizability of this research results, future researchers should be replicated with samples from different cultures. Because Indian culture may differ from other culture e.g. social system, power distance and so on.

Another limitation of our study is the current study focused only on external factors as predictor variables, without incorporating personality, which is a stable construct of individuals (Rahim, 2008). The remaining unexplained percentage in work family conflict might indeed be contributed to by the personality of employees (Noor, 1996) and this is not currently addressed.

Finally, Our study has measured stress using self-report questionnaires. Although questionnaires are a useful in measuring stress, it has been argued that it is important to use objective outcome measures as a supplement to self-report measurements.

Despite these limitations, however, this study does have several strengths worthy of mention. First of all most of the studies report job performance with self-ratings. Although self-reports of performance have some advantages (see, e.g., Levine, 1980), they may be less accurate than supervisor ratings. For example, empirical work indicates that self-reports may reflect favorable or leniency biases, and the agreement between self and other reports tends to be lower than the agreement between different sources of other reports (see Harris & Schaub-oeck, 1988; Ostroff, Atwater, & Feinberg, 2004; Thornton, 1980). Furthermore, supervisor-reported performance ratings are important because they are used to determine such important outcomes as pay and promotions. Accordingly, it was considered prudent to replicate findings of performance rating using supervisor rather than self-assessments of performance.

Previous studies have not studied the positive and the negative sides of empowered leadership and increased work engagement based on work family conflict simultaneously. Another strength of this study is the use of self rated and spouse rated responses of work family conflict. Most of the

previous studies have utilized self rated responses of work family conflict which does not demonstrate the complete outcomes of this construct. Job stress was used as a mediator between work engagement and work family conflict which further highlights the mediating role to further predict the moderation role of Gender in this present study.

Different sector employees have been examined to find the more common outcomes related to work family conflict.

### **Opportunities for Future Research:**

Because daily life consists of work and family responsibilities, working adults will always have to find the right balance between them. Therefore, as long as people work and have families, conflict between the two realms will need to be studied. The issue of work and family conflict is often seen as an intrinsic part of adult working life, and some may feel that it will always be present. Future research should examine attitude and behaviors concerning conflict among different types of people.

longitudinal research would also be beneficial. Its applications could include specific times in a family's life cycle where work wins out over family, times when family wins out over work, how choosing one option over the other consistently affects the family and the individual, and so much more. Following the "success" of the family and the individual over the life course (marriage, divorce, promotion, career change, etc.) would provide great insight into work and family conflict.

The current study focused only on external factors as predictor variables, without incorporating personality, which is a stable construct of individuals (Rahim, 2008). The remaining unexplained percentage in work family conflict might indeed be contributed to by the personality of employees (Noor, 1996) and this is not currently addressed. Thus, future research should incorporate both internal and external factors to produce better representation and more complex relationships in the prediction model of work family conflict.

Our findings may be specific to this cultural context. It is necessary to replicate the study in other cultures, as work family conflict is strongly related to cultural context. Finally, while our choice of mediating variables was theoretically grounded, additional research could expand the group of tested variables.

I suggest that future research examine the relationship between various leadership behaviors and non-work outcomes across multiple levels of leadership (e.g., supervisors, middle-level managers, top management team) within multiple organizations. One might find that certain leader behaviors have a uniformly positive or negative impact on both work and non-work outcomes, while other leader behaviors may have both positive

and negative effects (e.g., positively impact work outcomes, but negatively impact non-work outcomes).

I suggest future research examine these phenomena in the context of leadership development programs. The current research demonstrates that empowering leadership behaviors can both help and hurt employees' perceptions of the organizational work-family climate.

### **Practical Implications**

This study highlights the importance of the dark side of empowering leadership and work engagement in work family conflict perspective. The managers can deeply look into the issues associated with increased work engagement, job stress and work family conflict related problems of employees to better understand the behavioral responses of employees in order to achieve well established work place performance and engagement.

This study also can serve as a valuable guide for employers, as a good management team needs to understand their employees' perspective, and needs to listen and identify their needs (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007). With ample knowledge about significant predictors of work family conflict, both the individual and the organization may be prepared to react positively. The study also has the potential to be applied to improve workers' wellness as the findings of the research may be of help to counselors and organizational psychologists, specifically India , enabling them to develop appropriate interventions.

The study raises the question of whether it is possible for employees to be engaged at work without experiencing the negative side effect of work interference with family. there may be a need for managers to develop strategies for stimulating employee engagement that do not also contribute to increased work interference with family. Work-family programs, such as on-site day care or flexible hours, which have been studied in the context of high-commitment work systems (Osterman, 1995), may be one possible way to decrease potentially negative consequences of employee engagement. Additionally, managers may need to be conscientious about addressing this issue themselves and encouraging their employees to seek adequate balance between engagement and family life.

### **Conclusion**

The current study provides evidence that although empowering leadership leads to better performance of employee but from other hand, it has dark side which leads to work-family conflict by creating a stress in an individual that transfers from work to home. Furthermore, this study will investigate if work engagement serves as mediator for the relationship between empowering leadership and work family conflict. In addition, it has

also examined the role of gender on relationship between work engagement and work family conflict.

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