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The role of job crafting in linking empowering leadership and job performance

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Orientation: Job crafting involves employees proactively shaping their job demands and resources, such as physical or relational job boundaries, leading to positive outcomes such as increased meaningfulness and job performance. Leadership is a key catalyst for job crafting within organisations. This study explores how empowering leadership influences job crafting behaviour and, in turn, impacts job performance.

Research purpose: This research aimed to examine the mediating effect of job crafting on the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance (task and contextual performance).

Motivation for the study: Limited research has explored how empowering leadership shapes employee job crafting behaviours and their subsequent performance. The mechanisms through which leadership drives job crafting remain underexplored.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was used, with data collected from 261 employees.

Main findings: Mediational analyses supported the hypotheses. All job crafting dimensions, except for decreasing hindrance demands, mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance.

Practical/managerial implications: Organisations should foster autonomy, power-sharing, and developmental support to encourage employees to proactively shape their jobs, enhancing performance outcomes.

Contribution/value-add: This study highlights empowering leadership as a key antecedent to job crafting behaviour and underscores its role in promoting proactive workplace behaviours and improved performance.

Keywords: leadership; empowering leadership; job crafting; job performance; mediation.

Introduction

Empowering leadership is a form of leadership in which leaders enable employees to make independent and informed decisions (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). It is a positive, motivational type of leadership that focusses on providing employees with autonomy (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). An identified problem within the leadership literature is that studies fail to explore the impact that empowering leadership has on various employee and organisational outcomes. In particular, the *processes* through which empowering leadership affects employee job performance are understudied. Job performance refers to those discrete behavioural episodes of employees that contribute to the total expected value of the organisation (Motowidlo & Kell, 2003). This study proposes that the effect of empowering leadership on employee job performance can manifest in particular ways, one of which is through job crafting behaviour.

Job crafting is 'the process of employees redefining and reimagining their job designs in personally meaningful ways' (Berg et al., 2013, p. 2). Tims and Bakker (2010) describe job crafting as a proactive form of workplace behaviour that involves employees initiating changes to their level of job characteristics, namely their job demands and job resources. Because empowering leaders offer their employees autonomy (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014), employees may feel motivated to engage in job crafting behaviours which may improve their overall job performance. The aim of the study is therefore to investigate the mediating role of job crafting in the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. This study is important for several reasons. It contributes to the broader field of literature in developing and broadening the current understanding of how leaders can improve employee job performance. Additionally, it assists in filling the

knowledge gap of the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. Finally, it provides organisations with information that might be useful to practitioners who create interventions to improve leadership practices and encourage employee job crafting behaviours.

Empowering leadership

Empowering leadership represents a redistribution of the traditional hierarchy of authority and assigns autonomous decision-making power to employees (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Vecchio et al., 2010). Amundsen and Martinsen (2014) propose two dimensions of empowering leadership, namely development support and autonomy support. The former measures a leader's behaviours and actions towards employee's continuous learning and development, while the latter measures their behaviours and influence towards employees' opportunities and motivation to do their work tasks (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014).

The two dimensions are further broken down into eight distinct behaviours: *delegation*, which involves a leader handing over authority to subordinates such that subordinates can make autonomous decisions; *coordination and information sharing*, in which leaders share information openly to allow employees to make informed decisions; *encouragement of initiative*, which refers to leaders who motivate their employees to take on tasks without being told to do so; *encouragement of goal focus*, which refers to leaders who actively inspire employees to remain committed to achieving their goals; *efficacy support*, which describes a leader who helps employees to believe in themselves and their abilities; *inspiring*, which refers to leaders who create the desire to work hard in employees; *modelling*, which poses that empowering leaders should model desirable behaviours for their employees and *guiding*, which refers to leaders who actively direct and empower their employees' development.

Empowering leadership can be understood through Deci and Ryan's (2011) self-determination theory (SDT) which posits that individuals are likely to be motivated and involved when their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are met. Empowering leaders allow their employees to make decisions, meeting the need for autonomy. Similarly, through providing autonomy, empowering leaders enable employees to develop new skills and abilities, enabling a sense of competence. Finally, because empowering leaders foster work environments that value information sharing, support and modelling (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014), employees' need for relatedness may also be met through empowering leadership.

Research has found that employees who perceive their leaders to be empowering are more likely to be innovative (Mutonyi et al., 2020), display higher organisational citizenship behaviour (Lee et al., 2018) and have increased motivation (Kim et al., 2018) and creativity (Zhang et al., 2018). In a meta-analysis conducted by Kim et al. (2018),

empowering leadership was found to be positively related to job performance.

Job performance

Job performance has been categorised into two distinct elements, namely task and contextual performance (Koopmans et al., 2013). *Task performance*, also called in-role behaviour, refers to individual actions that impact an organisation's technical core (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). It denotes how effectively employees complete the tasks that fall within their job description. *Contextual performance*, also called extra-role behaviour, refers to an individual's activities that impact the workplace's organisational, social and psychological dimensions (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). They are extra-role behaviours because they do not fall within the scope of an employee's job description, but are discretionary behaviours.

Empowering leadership and job performance

Research has shown a positive correlation between empowering leadership and job performance. In a study conducted by Qian et al. (2018) on over 200 individuals, empowering leadership positively correlated to task performance. Similarly, in a meta-analysis of 105 studies, Lee et al. (2018) identified a positive correlation between empowering leadership and task performance. Comparatively, research on empowering leadership and contextual performance is relatively limited. In a study conducted by Pazetto et al. (2023) on 182 employees in Brazil, empowering leadership was positively related to contextual performance. Kim et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis found that empowering leadership was positively related to contextual performance, and Jiang et al. (2019) found similar findings among 400 Chinese employees. Similarly, in a study among 655 accountants in Norway, Humborstad et al. (2014) reported a direct and curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour (a component of contextual performance). Based on the above findings, we hypothesise that:

H1: Empowering leadership is positively related to (1) task performance and (2) contextual performance.

Job crafting

Job crafting was pioneered by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001, p. 179) as 'the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task, cognitive or relational boundaries of their work'. They proposed three forms of crafting practices: *task crafting* is when employees alter the number or type of job tasks that they complete at work; *relational crafting* involves employees altering their interactions or relationships with colleagues at work and *cognitive crafting* entails employees altering their views of work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Job crafting has also been explained from the perspective of the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti, 2014; Tims & Bakker, 2010; Tims et al., 2012). Using this

approach, job crafting is seen as a specific form of proactive behaviour in which employees "initiates changes in the level of job demands and job resources in order to make their job more meaningful, engaging, and satisfying" (Demerouti, 2014, p. 237). According to the JD-R perspective (Tims et al., 2012), job crafting can take the form of four behaviours: *increasing structural job resources* refers to changing physical job boundaries, such as a manager choosing to work from a remote location rather than the office; *increasing social job resources* refers to altering one's workplace relationships to attain higher levels of interaction, resulting in improved relationships; *increasing challenging job demands* occurs when an employee seeks new challenges and opportunities at work and *decreasing hindering job demands* occurs when employees actively reduce the number of job demands, such as putting off making difficult decisions or avoiding problematic clients (Roczniewska & Wojciszke, 2021).

By controlling job demands and resources, employees can redesign their jobs to align with their needs and improve individual outcomes (Tims et al., 2012). Research has shown that engaging in job crafting offers benefits, such as decreased employee turnover intentions (Zhang & Li, 2020), job boredom (Harju et al., 2016) and increased work engagement (Harju et al., 2016). Liu et al. (2021) and Shin et al. (2020) found that job crafting leads to improved job performance. Other researchers have reported positive correlations between job crafting, task performance (Luu, 2017) and contextual performance (Dierdorff & Jensen, 2018). We propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Job crafting is positively related to (1) task performance and (2) contextual performance.

Empowering leadership and job crafting

Research has shown that certain leadership styles enable job crafting behaviours. For example, Wang et al. (2017) found that transformational leadership was associated with expansion crafting behaviours (i.e. increasing job resources and challenging job demands). Similarly, Tuan (2022) identified an association between servant leadership and resource seeking, challenge seeking and demand reducing job crafting behaviours. It seems that positive leadership styles may serve as a means by which employees craft their job demands and resources to suit their needs. Although limited, preliminary evidence points to a positive relationship between empowering leadership and job crafting (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Luu, 2021). Positive correlations have indeed been reported between empowering leadership and the four crafting dimensions defined earlier (see Audenaert et al., 2020; Esteves & Lopes, 2016; Tang et al., 2020; Thun & Bakker, 2018). Because job crafting is an agentic form of employee behaviour driven by one's autonomy, and empowering leaders provides followers with autonomous decision-making power, it makes theoretical and practical sense for empowering leadership to positively influence the crafting behaviours of employees. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is made:

H3: Empowering leadership is positively related to job crafting behaviour.

Empowering leadership, job crafting and job performance

Few studies have explored the processes through which empowering leadership affects employee job performance. The present study proposes job crafting as an explanatory mechanism linking empowering leadership to employee job performance. To understand the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance, researchers have focussed on employees' psychological states and less so on their concrete behaviours. Factors such as psychological empowerment (Fong & Snape, 2015; Kundu et al., 2019), self-efficacy (Ahmed et al., 2022) and thriving at work (Ali et al., 2018) have been found to mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. Limited research has been conducted to understand *how* empowering leadership affects *employee behaviour* and their subsequent performance. Some promising attempts have been made. For example, Vuong and Hieu (2023) found that innovative working behaviour mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance, while Qian et al. (2018) confirmed that feedback-seeking mediates said relationship. In a study by Lichtenthaler and Fischbach (2018), employee-oriented leadership was indirectly related to performance through promotion-focussed job crafting. This mediation relationship suggests that leaders motivated their employees to increase their job resources and challenging demands, which improved their performance. We argue that more research is needed to understand the mechanisms through which the empowering leadership-performance relationship unfolds. Thus, our study offers job crafting as a form of proactive employee behaviour that may explain how empowering leadership affects job performance:

H4: Job crafting mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance.

Research design

Approach

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional research approach with a survey research design. This approach is particularly effective for testing theoretical models, such as the mediating role of job crafting, in a structured and standardised manner across a diverse sample (Bryman, 2016).

Participants

This study used non-probability, purposive sampling to recruit participants. Participants were required to be working individuals, report to a manager and/or supervisor, have held their current position for at least 1 year and reside in South Africa, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK) or the United States (US). These countries were selected to increase the generalisability of our findings and to facilitate comparative studies. The final sample comprised 261

individuals (*n* = 261). The participants' average age was 36.84 (median = 34, standard deviation [SD] = 11.05) years. There were more self-identified women (*n* = 145, 56%) than men (*n* = 114, 44%). The majority of the sample was from the UK (*n* = 114, 43.6%), followed by South Africa (*n* = 67, 25.6%), the US (*n* = 55, 21%) and the Netherlands (*n* = 25, 9.5%). They had worked for 15.55 years (median = 12, SD = 11.39) on average across their careers, 4.58 (median = 3, SD = 4.93) years on average in their current job and 5.91 years (median = 4, SD = 6.18) on average in their current organisation. The participants were from 151 industries, including, for example, health care, advertising, legal, telecommunications and software engineering. The sample had either a university degree (*n* = 180, 69%), diploma and/or certificate (*n* = 44, 17%) or Grade 12 or secondary school (*n* = 37, 14%). The majority of the sample was full-time employees (*n* = 251, 96%).

Procedure

We used *Prolific* to collect data with the aid of screening and attention check questions to minimise the risk of poor-quality data. Prolific is an online platform that recruits participants for studies, surveys and experiments (Prolific, 2012). Researchers can select criteria to meet the study requirements on Prolific, and only participants meeting the requirements are notified to participate in the study. Two quality checks were incorporated – one asking the participants to please identify any errors or difficulties they may have had with the questionnaires and another inviting the participants to provide their email contact details. Inspection of these responses suggested that human participants completed the questionnaires. We hosted the questionnaire on Google Forms and accepted responses throughout August 2023.

Measuring instruments

Empowering leadership
Empowering leadership was measured using the 18-item Empowering Leadership Scale (ELS) developed by Amundsen and Martinsen (2014). The scale measures two dimensions of empowering leadership: autonomy support and development support. Participants responded to the items using a 7-point frequency scale ranging from 1 = never to 7 = always. The ELS has demonstrated strong internal consistency for both the autonomy support (*α* = 0.93–0.95) and development support (*α* = 0.91–0.94) dimensions (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014).

Job crafting
The 21-item Job Crafting Scale (JCS) (Tims et al., 2012) was used to measure the four dimensions of job crafting: increasing structural job resources, decreasing hindering job demands, increasing social job resources, and increasing challenging job demands. Participants responded to the items using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = never to 5 = very often. Peral and Geldenhuys (2019) validated the JCS in South Africa and reported the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients: Increasing structural job resources (*α* = 0.84), increasing social

job resources (*α* = 0.83), increasing challenging job demands (*α* = 0.81), and decreasing hindering job demands (*α* = 0.81).

Job performance
Job performance was measured using the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire 1.0 (Koopmans et al., 2014). This questionnaire is an 18-item scale used to measure three dimensions of job performance: task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behaviour. We only used the task- and contextual performance scale scores. Participants responded to the items using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = seldom to 5 = always. Koopmans et al. (2014) reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.63 to 0.66 for task performance and 0.72 to 0.82 for contextual performance.

Data analysis

We analysed our data with R version 4.3.1 (R Core Team, 2023) and Process Macro version 4.2 (Hayes, 2022) in SPSS version 29 (IBM, 2023). We also used the *psych* version 2.3.6 (Revelle, 2023), Hmisc version 5.1-0 (Harrell, 2023) and MBESS version 4.9.2 (Kelley, 2022) *R* packages during the data analysis. We investigated the mediation with the Process Macro. The mediation model was investigated using Hayes's (2022) indirect approach. In this approach, the indirect effect is the product of the paths leading from the independent variable (X) to the mediator variable (M) – path *a* – and the mediator variable (M) to the dependent variable (Y) – path *b*. The product of these paths indicates the direction and strength of the mediation effect. The sampling distribution of the indirect effect does not form a normal distribution (Hayes, 2022). Therefore, we used percentile bootstrapping (Efron, 1981) with 5000 resamples to obtain an empirical distribution and determine the indirect effect's statistical significance (Hayes, 2022).

Ethical considerations

This study obtained ethical clearance from the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management Research Ethics Committee (IPPM-2023-753[M]). The questionnaires included a participant information form explaining the study and what information we required from the participants. The participants then indicated on the consent form that they understood the terms and conditions of participating and provided their consent for us to use their data in our study. We also obtained their consent to include their item responses as part of the collated data on the Open Science Foundation. The participants did not have to agree to include their responses in the collated data to participate. The participants voluntarily provided their responses, and we assured them that their data would remain anonymous and confidential.

Results
Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics for job crafting, task performance, contextual performance and empowering leadership scale scores are presented in Table 1. For job crafting, the participants

TABLE 1: Descriptive statistics of the job crafting, task performance, contextual performance and empowering leadership scale scores.

Variable	Mean	SD	Mdn.	Skew.	Kurt.	SE
Increasing structural job resources	3.76	0.80	3.80	-0.40	-0.54	0.05
Increasing social job resources	2.57	0.82	2.40	0.56	0.03	0.05
Increasing challenging job demands	2.93	0.90	2.80	0.25	-0.61	0.06
Decreasing hindering job demands	2.75	0.89	2.67	0.34	-0.67	0.06
Task performance	3.67	0.75	3.80	-0.44	-0.28	0.05
Contextual performance	3.35	0.88	3.38	-0.12	-0.70	0.05
Empowering leadership	4.82	1.05	4.89	-0.39	0.60	0.06

SD, standard deviation; Mdn., median; Skew., skewness; Kurt., kurtosis; SE, standard error of the mean.

TABLE 2: Pearson correlation coefficient matrix for the job crafting, task performance, contextual performance and empowering leadership scale factor scores.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Inc. structural	-	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001
2. Dec. hindering	0.28	-	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.005	0.020
3. Inc. social	0.42	0.32	-	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001
4. Inc. challenge	0.74	0.25	0.48	-	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001
5. Task performance	0.51	0.25	0.30	0.44	-	< 0.001	< 0.001
6. Contextual performance	0.75	0.17	0.43	0.82	0.53	-	< 0.001
7. Emp. leadership	0.46	0.14	0.58	0.46	0.37	0.48	-

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients are below their probability values above the diagonal.

Emp. leadership, empowering leadership; Inc. structural, increasing structural job resources; Dec. hindering, decreasing hindering job demands; Inc. social, increasing social job resources; Inc. challenge, increasing challenging job demands.

scored highest on increasing structural job resources (mean = 3.76, SD = 0.80) and lowest on increasing social job resources (mean = 2.57, SD = 0.82). They scored higher on task (mean = 3.67, SD = 0.75) than on contextual performance (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.88). The mean empowering leadership scale score is 4.82 with a standard deviation of 1.05.

Pearson correlation coefficients

The Pearson correlation matrix for the study variables is presented in Table 2. Increasing structural job resources had a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) positive linear relationship with task performance ($r = 0.51$), contextual performance ($r = 0.75$) and empowering leadership ($r = 0.46$). Decreasing hindering job demands had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with task performance ($r = 0.25$), contextual performance ($r = 0.17$) and empowering leadership ($r = 0.14$). Increasing social job resources had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with task performance ($r = 0.30$), contextual performance ($r = 0.43$) and empowering leadership ($r = 0.58$). Increasing challenging job demands had a statistically significant positive relationship with task performance ($r = 0.44$), contextual performance ($r = 0.82$) and empowering leadership ($r = 0.46$). Empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive relationship with task and contextual performance ($r = 0.37$ and $r = 0.48$), respectively.

Mediation analysis

Empowering leadership -> Job crafting -> Task performance

The mediation analysis involved testing both the direct and indirect paths. The first mediational paths to be tested were the indirect relationships between empowering leadership and task performance through the four job crafting dimensions, respectively (see Table 3). Each crafting dimension was tested separately as a mediator in the above relationship.

Empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with increasing structural job resources ($b = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). Increasing structural job resources ($b = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and empowering leadership ($b = 0.12$, $p = 0.006$) had statistically significant positive partial-linear relationships with task performance. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($b = 0.14$, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [0.09, 0.21]), indicating that empowering leadership increases increasing structural job resources, which, in turn, increases task performance.

Empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with increasing social job resources ($b = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Increasing social job resources ($b = 0.13$, $p = 0.048$) and empowering leadership ($b = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$) had statistically significant positive partial-linear relationships with task performance. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($b = 0.06$, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.18]), indicating that empowering leadership increases increasing social job resources, which, in turn, increases task performance.

Empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with increasing challenging job demands ($b = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$). Increasing challenging job demands ($b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$) and empowering leadership ($b = 0.15$, $p = 0.001$) had statistically significant positive partial-linear relationships with task performance. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($b = 0.12$, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.17]), indicating that empowering leadership increases increasing challenging job demands, which, in turn, increases task performance.

Lastly, empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with decreasing hindering job demands ($b = 0.12$, $p = 0.001$). Decreasing hindering job demands had a statistically significant positive partial-linear relationship with task performance ($b = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$).

TABLE 3: Estimated mediation model path coefficients for job crafting on empowering leadership and task performance.

Dependent variable	Independent variable(s)	Path	b	CI	SE	p
Emp. lead. → Inc. structural → Task performance						
Inc. structural	Emp. lead.	a	0.35	[0.27, 0.44]	0.04	< 0.001
Task performance	Inc. structural	b	0.41	[30, 0.52]	0.06	< 0.001
-	Emp. lead.	c'	0.12	[0.03, 0.20]	0.04	0.006
Indirect effect	-	ab	0.14	[0.09, 0.21]	0.03	-
Total effect	-	c	0.26	[0.18, 0.34]	0.04	< 0.001
Emp. lead. → Inc. social → Task performance						
Inc. social	Emp. lead.	a	0.45	[0.37, 0.53]	0.04	< 0.001
Task performance	Inc. social	b	0.13	[0.00, 0.25]	0.06	0.048
-	Emp. lead.	c'	0.20	[0.11, 0.30]	0.05	< 0.001
Indirect effect	-	ab	0.06	[0.04, 0.12]	0.03	-
Total effect	-	c	0.26	[0.18, 0.34]	0.04	< 0.001
Emp. lead. → Inc. challenge → Task performance						
Inc. challenge.	Emp. lead.	a	0.40	[0.30, 0.50]	0.05	< 0.001
Task performance	Inc. challenge	b	0.29	[0.19, 0.39]	0.05	< 0.001
-	Emp. lead.	c'	0.15	[0.06, 0.23]	0.04	0.001
Indirect effect	-	ab	0.12	[0.07, 0.17]	0.03	-
Total effect	-	c	0.26	[0.18, 0.34]	0.04	< 0.001
Emp. lead. → Dec. hindering → Task performance						
Dec. hindering.	Emp. Lead.	a	0.12	[0.02, 0.23]	0.05	0.020
Task performance	Dec. hindering.	b	0.17	[0.07, 0.26]	0.05	< 0.001
-	Emp. lead.	c'	0.24	[0.16, 0.32]	0.04	< 0.001
Indirect effect	-	ab	0.02	[0.00, 0.05]	0.01	-
Total effect	-	c	0.26	[0.18, 0.34]	0.04	< 0.001

Emp. lead., empowering leadership; Inc. structural, increasing structural job resources; Dec. hindering, decreasing hindering job demands; Inc. social, increasing social job resources; Inc. challenge, increasing challenging job demands; b, unstandardised beta coefficient; CI, 95% percentile bootstrapped confidence intervals; SE, standard error of the unstandardised beta coefficient;

TABLE 4: Estimated mediation model path coefficients for job crafting on empowering leadership and contextual performance.

Dependent variable	Independent variable(s)	Path	b	CI	SE	p
Emp. lead. → Inc. structural → Contextual performance						
Inc. structural	Emp. lead.	a	0.35	[0.27, 0.44]	0.04	< 0.001
Context. performance	Inc. structural	b	0.74	[0.65, 0.84]	0.05	< 0.001
-	Emp. lead.	c'	0.14	[0.07, 0.21]	0.04	< 0.001
Indirect effect	-	ab	0.26	[0.18, 0.35]	0.04	-
Total effect	-	c	0.40	[0.31, 0.49]	0.06	< 0.001
Emp. lead. → Inc. social → Contextual performance						
Inc. social	Emp. lead.	a	0.45	[0.37, 0.53]	0.04	< 0.001
Context. Performance	Inc. social	b	0.25	[0.11, 0.39]	0.07	< 0.001
-	Emp. lead.	c'	0.29	[0.18, 0.40]	0.06	< 0.001
Indirect effect	-	ab	0.11	[0.05, 0.19]	0.04	-
Total effect	-	c	0.40	[0.31, 0.49]	0.05	< 0.001
Emp. lead → Inc. challenge → Contextual performance						
Inc. challenge	Emp. lead.	a	0.40	[0.30, 0.49]	0.05	< 0.001
Context. performance	Inc. challenge	b	0.75	[0.67, 0.83]	0.04	< 0.001
-	Emp. lead.	c'	0.11	[0.04, 0.17]	0.03	0.002
Indirect effect	-	ab	0.30	[0.19, 0.40]	0.05	-
Total effect	-	c	0.40	[0.31, 0.49]	0.05	< 0.001
Emp. lead. → Dec. hindering → Contextual performance						
Dec. hindering	Emp. lead.	a	0.12	[0.02, 0.23]	0.05	0.020
Context. performance	Dec. hindering	b	0.10	[-0.00, 0.21]	0.05	0.058
-	Emp. lead.	c'	0.39	[0.30, 0.48]	0.05	< 0.001
Indirect effect	-	ab	0.01	[-0.00, 0.04]	0.01	-
Total effect	-	c	0.40	[0.31, 0.49]	0.05	< 0.001

Emp. lead., empowering leadership; Inc. structural, increasing structural job resources; Dec. hindering, decreasing hindering job demands; Inc. social, increasing social job resources; Inc. challenge, increasing challenging job demands; b, unstandardised beta coefficient; CI, 95% percentile bootstrapped confidence intervals; SE, standard error of the unstandardised beta coefficient; context. performance, contextual performance.

Empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive partial-linear relationship with task performance ($b = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect was statistically significant ($b = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.05]), indicating that empowering leadership increases decreasing hindering job demands, which, in turn, increases task performance.

Empowering leadership -> Job crafting -> Contextual performance

The second mediational paths to be tested were the indirect relationships between empowering leadership and contextual performance through the four job crafting dimensions, respectively (see Table 4).

Empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with increasing structural job resources ($b = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). Increasing structural job resources ($b = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$) and empowering leadership ($b = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$) had statistically significant partial-linear relationships with contextual performance. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($b = 0.26$, 95% CI = [0.18, 0.35]), indicating that empowering leadership increases increasing structural job resources, which, in turn, increases contextual performance.

Empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with increasing social job resources ($b = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Increasing social job resources ($b = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$) and empowering leadership ($b = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$) had statistically significant partial-linear relationships with contextual performance. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($b = 0.11$, 95% CI = [0.05, 0.19]), indicating that empowering leadership increases increasing social job resources, which, in turn, increases contextual performance.

Empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with increasing challenging job demands ($b = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$). Increasing challenging job demands ($b = 0.75$, $p < 0.001$) and empowering leadership ($b = 0.11$, $p = 0.002$) had statistically significant positive partial-linear relationships with contextual performance. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($b = 0.30$, 95% CI = [0.19, 0.40]), indicating that empowering leadership increases increasing challenging job demands, which, in turn, increases contextual performance.

Lastly, empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with decreasing hindering job demands ($b = 0.12$, $p = 0.020$). Decreasing hindering job demands had a non-statistically significant positive partial-linear relationship with contextual performance ($b = 0.10$, $p = 0.058$), and empowering leadership had a statistically significant positive partial-linear relationship with contextual performance ($b = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect was non-statistically significant ($b = 0.01$, 95% CI = [-0.00, 0.04]). These results indicate that there is no evidence to suggest that the relationship is mediated by decreasing hindering job demands.

Discussion

The research sought to investigate the mediating role of job crafting in the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. It was proposed that the autonomous nature of empowering leaders enables employees to proactively shape (i.e. craft) their job demands and resources, which in turn, results in increased levels of job performance, which was operationalised as both task and contextual performance.

Empowering leadership and job performance

Results derived from Pearson's correlation analysis yielded support for Hypothesis 1, which proposed that there is a positive relationship between empowering leadership and

(1) task and (2) contextual performance. This finding lends support to previous research and adds to the well-established body of knowledge surrounding the association between leadership and employee job performance (Kundu et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018; Pazetto et al., 2023; Qian et al., 2018). Empowering leadership may thus enhance the extent to which employees perform their core job responsibilities and engage in discretionary activities (e.g. organisational citizenship behaviours) which benefit the organisation. This highlights the need for organisations and managers to demonstrate positive leadership styles, like empowering leadership, to create the right conditions for employees to effectively complete their jobs and go over and above what is required of them.

Job crafting and job performance

This study found that increases in job crafting were associated with increased levels of job performance, leading us to accept Hypothesis 2. In particular, positive relationships were evidenced between all crafting and performance dimensions, respectively. Researchers such as Dierdorff and Jensen (2018) and Luu (2017) have found similar findings, yet our study did not treat job crafting as a composite score but rather showed how job performance is related to each crafting dimension separately. Our results are consistent with Rofcanin et al. (2016) who found positive relationships between the job crafting dimensions and task and contextual performance, albeit with a different job performance measure.

This study's findings suggest that the four job crafting dimensions are related differently to job performance. Increasing social job resources, structural job resources and challenging job demands had stronger correlations with contextual performance than decreasing hindering job demands. Although sample correlations must not be overinterpreted because of sampling error, this weaker correlation for decreasing hindering job demands may be understood through social determination theory, which suggests that people flourish when their needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy are met (Deci & Ryan, 2011). It may be argued that increasing challenging job demands satisfy employees' need for competence, increasing structural job resources meet employees' need for autonomy, and increasing social job resources meet employees' need for relatedness. Decreasing hindering job demands may be physically and psychologically taxing and thus prevent employees from engaging in behaviours that extend beyond their job requirements.

Empowering leadership and job crafting

Hypothesis 3 proposed that empowering leadership will be positively associated with job crafting. Our findings indeed confirmed this, and although still in its infancy, lend support to previous research findings (Kim & Beehr, 2021; Luu, 2021; Tang et al., 2020; Thun & Bakker, 2018). These results suggest that the empowering behaviours of leaders motivate

employees to craft their jobs in personally meaningful ways. Audenaert and colleagues (2020) reported increased crafting behaviours among a sample of Belgian nurses because of empowering leadership behaviour. Furthermore, results from daily diary studies confirm that empowering leadership increases work engagement and subsequent crafting behaviours among employees (Jiang et al., 2021). Similar to Wang et al. (2017) who reported increases in expansion crafting as a result of transformational leadership, we found the same for empowering leadership. Interestingly, our results closely mirror those of Thun and Bakker (2018) who found that decreasing hindering job demands was least related to empowering leadership. While we found statistical significance, this crafting dimension displayed the weakest relationship to empowering leadership. Under the influence of empowering leadership behaviours, it may be that employees choose to focus more on promotion or expansion-focussed crafting (i.e. increasing structural and social job resources, and challenging job demands) and less so on avoidance crafting (i.e. decreasing demands), because the latter crafting strategy has generally been associated with decreases in employee well-being (Demerouti, 2014; Petrou et al., 2015).

Empowering leadership, job crafting and job performance

The results of mediation analyses provided support for Hypothesis 4. The results indicated that all four crafting dimensions explained the relationship between empowering leadership and task performance. Empowering leadership led to increased crafting behaviours, which in turn, resulted in employees effectively completing prescribed job tasks. However, only three dimensions of job crafting (apart from decreasing hindrance demands) were found to mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and contextual performance. So, when employees are given power and autonomy (empowered) by their leaders, they are likely to increase their structural and social job resources, as well as increase their challenging job demands. In turn, these changes may result in employees performing tasks that are not part of their job descriptions to benefit the social and technical core of their organisations (e.g. contextual performance). A possible explanation for decreasing hindering demands not mediating the relationship between empowering leadership and contextual performance is that employees may not necessarily have time or energy to engage in extra-role behaviours when they are busy decreasing the demanding aspects of their jobs. Although little research exists on the mediating effect of job crafting on the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance, there is evidence showing that this relationship is mediated by other proactive behaviours, such as feedback-seeking (Qian et al., 2018) and innovative work behaviour (Vuong & Hieu, 2023). Our finding sheds further light on the *processes* through which empowering leaders may positively impact employees' performance. When leaders motivate, inspire and offer room for autonomous decision-making, employees may feel safe to craft their job demands and resources, which may have positive effects on their job performance levels.

Practical implications

The results suggest that empowering leadership is an important antecedent to job crafting behaviour. Empowering leaders can foster proactive work behaviours, like job crafting, among employees to reduce the demanding aspects of their jobs and increase the motivating aspect of their jobs (i.e. job resources), which in turn, may yield positive returns for organisational productivity. Practitioners should consider equipping leaders with empowering behaviours, such as power sharing, autonomy and developmental support, to be bestowed upon their followers, resulting in a workforce that takes proactive measures in creating meaningful work experiences and increased efficiency.

Limitations

Although we sampled individuals from four different countries, caution should be exercised in applying the findings to any particular national context. Because we did not establish measurement invariance, the scores from the various sample groups may not be directly comparable, biasing the results when the scores from the participants are combined. We did not investigate measurement invariance in this study because the sample sizes for each country were too small, leading to large standard errors and limited statistical power. Future research should consider looking at relationships within countries and conducting invariance studies before grouping different populations. Doing so would allow for more valid and meaningful results by removing the confounding effect of countries.

Our second limitation concerns Prolific as our data collection platform. This data-gathering service is efficient and compensates individuals for their participation. However, the sample may be subject to volunteer bias. Specifically, participants may be motivated to participate in the study because of the monetary incentive, potentially limiting the sample to individuals of a similar age or socioeconomic status. Further, Prolific requires individuals to register on their platform to participate in research, potentially attracting individuals who are naturally more motivated and proactive and possibly more likely to job craft than the average person.

Conclusion

The study found that job crafting mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. When employees are provided with autonomous decision-making power in the ways they uniquely alter their job boundaries (i.e. job demands and resources), they are likely to demonstrate increased levels of job performance.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

J.D. wrote the introduction and literature review of the article. S.L.P. transformed the original thesis into an article, focusing on the method, results and overall discussion. J.D. consented to S.L.P. being listed as the first author.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, S.L.P. upon reasonable request.

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