

Chair of Leadership, Organizational Behavior, and Human Resource Management
(Prof. Dr. Eric Kearney)

Business Administration

**EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP, FOLLOWER
REFLECTION, AND LEADER WELL-BEING:
THE BENEFITS OF EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP
FOR FOLLOWERS AND LEADERS**

Dissertation

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Dean: Prof. Dr. Maik Heinemann

Supervisor and first reviewer: Prof. Dr. Eric Kearney

Second reviewer: Prof. Dr. Uta Herbst

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OVERALL ABSTRACT

This research focuses on empowering leadership, a leadership style that shares autonomy and responsibilities with the followers. Empowering leadership enhances the meaningfulness of work by fostering participation in decision-making, expressing confidence in high performance, and providing autonomy in target setting (Cheong, 2016). I examine how empowering leadership affects followers' reflection. I used data from 528 individuals across 172 teams and found a positive relationship between empowering leadership and followers' reflection. Followers' reflection, in turn, is negatively associated with followers' withdrawal, which mediates the beneficial effect of empowering leadership on leaders' emotional exhaustion. As for the leaders, I propose that empowering leadership is negatively related also to leaders' emotional exhaustion. This research broadens our understanding of empowering leadership's effects on both followers and leaders. Moreover, it integrates empowering leadership, leader emotional exhaustion, and burnout literature. Overall, empowering leadership strengthens members' reflective attitudes and behaviors, which result in reduced withdrawal (and increased presence and contribution) in teams. Because the members contribute to team effort more, the leaders experience less emotional exhaustion. Hence, my work not only identifies new ways through which empowering leadership positively affects followers but also shows how these positive effects on followers benefit the leaders' well-being.

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ABBREVIATIONS

α	Cronbach's alpha
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
ART ANOVA	Aligned-ranks transformed analysis of variance
b	Unstandardized regression coefficient
BIC	Bayesian information criterion
BootCI	95% bootstrap confidence interval
BootSE	Standard error of bootstrap samples
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
CFI	Confirmatory fit index
CI	95% confidence interval
COR	Conservation of Resources
df	degrees of freedom
EL	Empowering leadership
F	F-value of the F-statistics
ICC	Intraclass coefficient
IMM	Index of moderated mediation
LLCI	Lower level confidence interval
M	Mean
MSE	Mean square error
N	Sample size
n.s.	Not significant at the level of $p < .05$
OLS	Ordinary Least Square
p	probability of making a type-one error
PSI	Perceived social impact
r	Pearson correlation
R ²	Coefficient of determination
r _c	Corrected population correlation
RMSEA	Root mean square error of approximation
rwg(j)	Interrater agreement
SD	Standard deviation

SE	Standard error
SRMR	Standardized root mean square residual
t	T-value of the t-statistic
ULCI	Upper level confidence interval
χ^2	Chi-square

*Note: For hypothesis testing, I use exact p-values rounded to three decimals in the text. For larger tables, I use asterisks and * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0001$ for a better overview.*

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Empowering leadership, as discussed in this dissertation, is a leadership style that imparts power to others to fortify strength, productivity, and confidence (Oxford University Press, 2022). Since political philosophy casts people as self-interest-seeking creatures by nature, giving power to them is an enabling gesture widely viewed as positive behavior in the literature (Hobbes, 1651; Locke, 1689; Smith, 1776; Hume, 1739). The research on empowerment is plentiful as the topic has always been popular and meriting salience in the context of human rights, emancipation, and underprivileged minorities (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Naturally, relatively few would reject this concept of empowerment. Still, empowerment opponents have expressed wide-ranging theories to support their points of view, from claims that empowerment is a commonly misused substitute for delegation (McCord, 2018) to notions that what people lack is not power, but autonomy (Mills, 2019), and that empowerment focuses more on the subject than the object (Moyers, 1995).

Overall, “empowering leadership” enjoys a positive connotation, the phrase conjuring a favorable emotional response as empowerment fosters an environment of trust where people can understand their successes and learn from failure (Oldham, 2020). This leadership style works toward the goal of passing on the leadership torch so others can share the ride. Brief remarks of two famous leaders suffice to illustrate:

“It is not the tools you have faith in. Tools are just tools. It’s the people you have faith in or not.” Steve Jobs, Founder of Apple

“The inventory, the value of your company, walks out the door every evening.” Bill Gates, Founder of Microsoft

Bill Gates has related in detail that every company empowers workers [with certain sets of tools], and Microsoft’s success relies on the company stepping back and thinking through [the business model]. Bill Gates founded Microsoft in 1976, but resigned as CEO in 2006 and from his duties on the Supervisory Board in 2020. During his tenure, Microsoft went public as a stock exchange-listed company in 1986 and achieved a 26% average return on investment per year for 35 years until 2021. Microsoft’s mind-blowing growth has yielded a 3000-fold total return, rewarding every USD invested in Microsoft’s 1986 IPO with 3,220 USD in 2021 for its investors. Microsoft’s unmatched performance exemplifies team success under Bill Gates’ leadership.

Similar to the anecdotal impacts cited above, the establishment of empowering leadership in the scientific community dates to the 1990s. In the first publication on empowering leadership, Manz coined the expression “super leadership” (Manz, 1990). Later, Pearce extended leadership theory and proposed a four-factor theory comprising transformational, transactional, instrumental, and empowerment leadership types by exploratory factor analysis (Pearce, 2003). This work also validated empowerment leadership through factor analysis using the third sample to confirm it as an independent type of leadership (Liu, 2015). A closer look (see Table 1) reveals what is rather unique about empowering leadership: the extent to which leaders empower followers.

TABLE 1

Unique Items on Empowering Leadership from Pearce et al. (2003)

Encouraging opportunity-thinking
Encouraging self-rewards
Encouraging self-leadership
Engaging in participative goal-setting
Encouraging teamwork

First, this itemized list made me wonder whether empowering leadership might put too many demands on the leader and followers. This is a concern that others have formulated as well. Kim and Beehr (2017) studied empowering leadership that encourages and facilitates job-crafting behavior in employees that, in turn, leads to subjective career success and the physical and psychological well-being of followers. Another study found empowering leadership to influence job engagement directly and indirectly through psychological capital, mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' psychological well-being (Park, Kim, Yoon & Joo, 2017). Searching the literature, I noticed a gap in scientific research regarding to empowering leadership's effect on the *leader's* well-being.

Empowering leadership theory (Rajotte, 1996) has also argued that empowering leaders motivate their followers to be involved in their organizations and apply empowerment principles for followers to become successful leaders of the future. While initial research on this matter found support for hypotheses [as to participating, self-leadership, and teamwork] (Pearce et al., 2003), I wondered whether the effects of empowering leadership would still (or even better) work when followers reflect and engage, or whether its effects would abate when followers fail to reflect and act. Therefore, in sum, I derived four overall research questions to guide my dissertation:

- 1) How does empowering leadership relate to leaders' emotional exhaustion?
- 2) How does empowering leadership relate to follower reflection?
- 3) How does empowering leadership relate to follower withdrawal?
- 4) How do follower reflection and withdrawal relate to leader burnout?

To advance knowledge regarding these questions on empowering leadership, I conducted a leader-follower field study that scores the leader's leadership style, member reflection, member withdrawal, and leader emotional exhaustion.

This research aims to contribute new theoretical perspectives to the empowering leadership literature and develop empirical evidence applying advanced methods versus single-source correlational studies featuring only one measurement. For this reason, the studies presented in the following chapters include individual data, dyadic data, and team-level data. Moreover, I aim to unearth new empirical evidence for three different types of outcomes: leader emotional exhaustion (i.e., a state of feeling emotionally worn-out and drained as a result of the accumulated stress; a key feature of burnout), follower reflection (i.e., the ability to analyze self-experience to improve ways of learning and working), and follower withdrawal (i.e., specific actions or certain behavior linked to disengagement from groups). This study uses a single large sample of measures based on established scales, data from single measurement times, and sources – all tested for robustness.

Much effort has been put into comparing various leadership styles such as transformational leadership (Arnold et al., 2007), servant leadership (Kaltainen, & Hakanen, 2020), authentic leadership (Rahimnia, & Sharifirad, 2015), charismatic leadership (Erez et al., 2008) and empowering leadership (Kim, & Beehr, 2017) as to impact on team-member well-being. Far less work has focused on empowering leadership's positive effect on team members' well-being from perceived organizational and co-worker support (Kim, Daeho, Moon, & Shin, 2018) in the cultural context (Cai, Cai, Sun, & Ma, 2018) via the mediating role of psychological capital (Park et al., 2017).

Finally, empowering leadership's impact on leaders' own well-being has evaded scrutiny. Therefore, the major goal of my research is to build and test the theory that links empowering leadership with leader well-being, while exploring the mechanisms that link these variables. Theoretically, it is vital that researchers especially understand how empowering leadership can enhance leader well-being. To address this research void, I enlist both teammate reflection and withdrawal to serially mediate empowering leadership's moderating effect on leaders' well-being.

2. INTRODUCTION

The scientific study of leadership has spanned many disciplines such as military, religion, business, politics, history, etc. Encyclopedia of Leadership (Goethals, Sorenson, & Burns, 2004), totaling almost 2000 pages, embodies over 300 authors and thousands of scholars responsible for this breadth of leadership research. Popular interest in leaders and leadership manifests in how often biographies of leaders reach the best-seller lists. Some research has cast leadership as an evolutionary factor in the survival of our species (Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). Others have posited theories backed by empirical evidence that the tendency to credit thrilling victories or blame agonizing defeats that leaders do not truly deserve constitutes human misattribution (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985).

Within the discipline of psychology, social psychologists studying social interactions and group dynamics originally spearheaded leadership research since it involves people engaging and influencing others in the context of a group, especially small-group research carried out circa 1940-1970 (Cartwright, & Zander, 1953; Shaw, & Harkey, 1976). Leadership studies arguably reached climactic influence in both social and organizational psychology with Fiedler's (1964, 1978) *contingency theory* that casts effective leadership as a functional match of a leader's behavioral style to the circumstances of the group led. Hollander's (1985) work on leadership and power forms another benchmark in small-group social psychology studies. In the 1970s and 80s, social-psychological focus migrated to social perception and social cognition, reflecting group research interests moving from small group to intergroup relations (Moreland, Hogg, & Hains, 1994). This shift passed the torch of leadership research from social psychologists to *organizational* psychologists.

The study of leadership has been welcomed by organizational sciences (Hogg, 2007; House, & Aditya, 1997) since profit-oriented organizations award personal career advancement based on securing leadership positions on senior management teams where firm-wide success stems from effective organizational leadership. While ignored by social psychology, leadership research has proliferated in the organizational and management sciences fields (Yukl, & Mahsud, 2010) as mainstream organizational psychology researchers had resumed work on contingency theories of leadership (Fiedler, 1994), extending the classic social-psychological theories of social exchange (e.g., Thibaut, & Kelley, 1959) toward explaining the interpersonal dynamics of leader-follower relationships in work groups (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, & Cashman, 1975).

Here, the theory of leader-member exchanges first claimed leadership to be, not top-down, but a *reciprocal* relationship where leader and followers mutually influence each other (Dienesch, & Liden, 1986; Graen, & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Martin et al., 2010). With reciprocity between leader and followers defined, the door for transactional theories of leadership opened to include path-goal (House, 1971), leader-member exchange (Graen, & Uhl-Bien, 1995), and Hollander's (1958) analysis of idiosyncrasy credit, as well as analyses of followership (Riggio, Chaleff, & Lipman-Blumen, 2008) – a dyadic transaction where consenting followers are rewarded (Bass, 1985).

The other main branch of leadership research treats the transformational function of the leader as either an individual difference in personality or capability that transforms groups and organizations (Avolio, & Yammarino, 2003; Berson, Dan, & Yammarino, 2006; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Varied arguments and concepts both in favor and against the capability of the individual leader, such as “heroic motive” and the “romance of leadership” (Meindl, 1995; Meindl, & Lerner, 1983), also comprise this branch of transformational leadership research.

Traditional leadership literature has approached leadership as top-down than as a group-membership-based influence process, lagging social-psychological research on social cognition, group processes, social influence, and self and identity (Hogg, van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012). Since 2000, social psychologists have resumed leadership studies (Hogg, 2007a, 2010, 2013). This revival has steered research on leadership to focus on group process (Chemers, 1997, 2001) that features power (Fiske & Dépret, 1996; Fiske, 2010), gender (Eagly, & Carli, 2007; Eagly, & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995; Wood, & Eagly, 2010), social cognition and perception (Lord, & Brown, 2004; Lord, Brown, & Harvey, 2001). Meanwhile, organizational psychology has never abandoned its leading role in leadership research. Common research topics in organizational psychology include stress and workplace (Panigrahi, 2016; Greenberg, 2004), theory of motivation (Reeve, 2016; Gawel, 1996), employee empowerment (Honold, 1997; Nykodym, Simonetti, Nielsen, & Welling, 1994), leadership styles (Dulewicz, & Higgs, 2005; Yahaya, & Ebrahim, 2016), and – the topic of this study – the well-being of both leader and followers.

2.1. Empowering Leadership

The nature of employment has changed substantially in recent decades, becoming more complex and cognitively demanding for employees (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Highly skilled, educated knowledge workers have thus emerged as the core growing segment of the workforce (Parker, Wall, & Cordery, 2001) as simple repetitive tasks are being replaced by artificial intelligence. In this transformational environment, empowering leadership has emerged as a specific type that promotes *workforce enhancement*, distinct from other approaches such as directive, transactional or transformational leadership (Pearce et al., 2003). At its core, employee empowerment reallocates autonomy at work through delegation of responsibility and authority to

lower hierarchical levels where able decisions can be made (Conger, & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas, & Velthouse, 1990). Here, empowering leaders are marked by resource-sharing attributes toward their followers (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010).

Empowering leadership is here defined as ‘leader behavior directed at individuals or entire teams and consisting of delegating authority to employees, promoting their self-directed and autonomous decision-making, coaching, sharing of information, and asking for input’ (Sharma, & Kirkman 2015: 194). Despite empowerment’s positive leadership traits that followers like, a recent meta-analysis of 105 studies on this empowering leadership style has found it effective *only in select circumstances* (Lee, Willis, & Tian, 2018). First of all, empowerment works best in motivating creative tasks versus mere routine performance. Second, this same study found empowering leadership to influence certain types of behavior, such as citizenship behavior (i.e., acts not officially acknowledged or rewarded: helping coworkers or attending non-mandatory work functions) rather than those formally recognized. Finally, empowering leaders seem more prone to be trusted by subordinates versus leaders who do not empower others, and they are more effective at influencing worker performance in Eastern versus Western cultures. They also exert a more positive impact on staff new to their organizations.

In summary, empowering leadership seems effective only in creative-type tasks and can influence only specific kinds of behavior in certain cultures and with newer hires. Yet, there is no literature on how a leader’s well-being and emotional exhaustion suffer when empowering leadership fails. Since empowering leadership’s effectiveness is limited by certain demographic and environmental factors, the purpose of this research is twofold: (1) to explore the extent to which empowering leaders may benefit by curbing their respective levels of emotional fatigue,

and (2) to investigate and identify ways through which empowering leaders can positively influence followers and thereby benefit *themselves*.

Beyond the scope of the model developed in this study, positive effects of empowering leadership abound at the personal, group, and organizational levels, as documented by much research. At the individual level, followers who feel empowered in the workplace tend to be more satisfied with life (Kim, & Beehr, 2019), the job (Wong, & Kuvaas, 2018), career (Biemann, Kearney, & Marggraf, 2015; Kim, & Beehr, 2017) and a better engagement in job and work (Park, Kim, Yoon, & Joo, 2017; Lee et al., 2017), as well as being more likely to work in creative ways (Amundsen, & Martinsen, 2015; Byun, Dai, Lee, & Kang, 2016; Chow, 2018; Hon, 2011, 2012; Li & Zhang, 2016; Zhang & Zhou, 2014; Zhang, Ke, Frank Wang, & Liu, 2018).

At the team level, empowering leadership yields positive relationship outcomes such as team achievement (Zhu, & Chen, 2016) and performance (Lee, Lee, & Park, 2014; Liu & Shieh, 2015; Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006), effectiveness in leadership (Amundsen, & Martinsen, 2014a; Hassan, Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia, 2013), and buy-in of the strategic vision at lower tiers (Margolis, & Ziegert, 2016). At the organizational level, empowering leadership fosters increased organizational flexibility (Wong, & Kuvaas, 2018) with ambidexterity (Siachou, & Gkorezis, 2018), productive work behavior toward the organization (Li et al., 2017), organizational performance, (Ling, Wei, Klimoski, & Wu, 2015) and service results (Wu, & Chen, 2015).

The extant literature on empowering leadership has documented both positive and adverse outcomes at the individual, team and organization levels, such as escalated task uncertainty (Cordery, Morrison, Wright, & Wall, 2010; Martin, Liao, & Campbell, 2013), runaway cost due to initial performance delay (Lorinkova, Pearsall, & Sims, 2013), employee

job-induced tension (Cheong, Spain, Yammarino, & Yun, 2016), worker cynicism (Lorinkova & Perry, 2017), and time theft (Lorinkova & Perry, 2017).

2.2. Team Reflection

Since its debut (Dewey, 1933), the concept of *reflection* has gained attention in multiple literature streams. Still, the lack of a common understanding and explicit definition of reflection has impeded the development of methods (Bengtsson, 1995) to analyze, assess, or even utilize the leadership literature. Reflection is a complex, multifaceted concept to define with terminology (reflection, reflective practice, thinking, and cognition) used interchangeably and inconsistently (Kember, Jones, Loke, McKay, Sinclair, & Tse, 2001). Despite the increasing number of publications on reflection, the imprecise understanding of it has diluted its meaning, often the result of over-simplification (Boud, 1998). In response, Nguyen et al. (2014: 1176) developed a complex, yet precise, definition of reflection from a systematic literature review: “Reflection is the process of engaging the self in attentive, critical, exploratory and iterative interactions with one’s thoughts and actions, and their underlying conceptual frame, with a view to changing them and with a view on the change itself”..

To establish a simpler, common and pragmatic understanding, *follower reflection* in terms of leadership study should feature a follower’s: (1) openness to seek different interpretations in tackling a problem, (2) readiness to criticize other followers’ work to improve team effectiveness, (3) preparedness to reflect on ways of acting, (4) engagement in evaluating common weak points in attaining effectiveness, (5) willingness to challenge others’ opinions, (6) and openness toward reassessing a proposed solution. Reflection is known to be an effective method of professional development for learning and elevating competence (Sutton, & Dalley, 2008).

Reflection in teams (i.e., *team reflection*) is a process where members assimilate their work or learning experiences and focus on ways to boost future learning and performance (Hare, 2016). Its purpose is “for members to express thoughts, feelings, and opinions about a shared experience, to build openness and trust in the team, and to draw out key learnings and insights to take forward to improve future application” (Reflection: Team, 2022). Team reflection is thought to develop trust within the team and a better understanding of other members’ roles and duties, thus serving as an enabler for the team (Kember et al., 2001). Kember and colleagues (2001) have suggested the main benefits of team reflection to be: improved communication and data-sharing, greater clarity of roles and responsibilities of individual team members, and the forging of trust. Furthermore, reflection at the team level can yield creativity superior to working alone, widen the scope of learning, and spark critical thinking – particularly in people lacking reflective skills (Kember et al., 2001).

While the literature asserts that reflection benefits teams in various aspects, little is known about the processes supporting team reflection (Sutton, & Dalley, 2008). In one investigation on how to support and enhance the team reflection process, Sutton & Dalley (2008) found that effective implementation of team reflection hinges on team makeup and its stage of development, which then determines whether the environment facilitates every member expressing opinions. Yet, Sutton & Dalley (2008) further advised that lack of ground rules and trust, or ignorance of each other’s roles and responsibilities, can distort team dynamics that impair team reflection. The healthcare field study by Sutton and Dalley (2008) also recognized the necessity of formal structure and managerial support to favor team reflection, confirming the idea that empowering leadership positively affects team reflection.

Indeed, one effort investigating the relationship between transformational leadership and team reflection detected a direct, positive relationship with a safe team climate characterized by positive relationships between knowledge-sharing and team reflection (Anselmann & Mulder, 2020). The fact that a safe team atmosphere typifies, not transformational, but empowering leadership further supports the notion of its potential direct, positive relationship with team reflection.

There are three types of reflection: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-on-practice per Schön (1983). Reflection-in-action is “thinking while on one’s feet:” observing the *present* experience, paying attention to what might unfold, connecting with feelings, and building new understandings that inform actions during the experience. Reflection-on-action distinctly involves thinking about the experience *afterward*, pondering why one acted a certain way during the experience, considering what happened individually or in a group, and exploring circumstances that might have held sway. Finally, reflection-on-practice involves thinking about future actions *after the repetitive* activity to reshape further to discover patterns of good and bad practices in order to refine future activity (Schön & Bennett, 1996).

Leadership studies that collect follower responses at a particular time are mainly reflection-on-action, while questionnaire responses given *during* team activities typify reflection-in-action. Reflective practice, whether in-action or on-action, is a habit, structure, or routine for examining individual or group experiences that vary in depth, frequency and length depending on the purpose (Amulya, 2004). While Amulya (2004) noted that reflection could happen anytime, particular types of positive and negative experiences offer better opportunities for professional reflective learning. Here, struggles serve as windows into what succeeds or not, acting as tools for analyzing the true nature of a problem. Both individuals and groups can engage in reflective

practice, but learning depends on the agenda: reflective questions may arise relating to advanced practitioner thinking as to the *individual* process, or collective processes may help align actions to organizational values and goals (Amulya, 2004). For the latter, leadership guidance is crucial in team reflection.

The *reflexivity framework* proposed by West (2000) suggests that team reflection, defined as collectively musing past dealings (Otte, Knipfer, & Schippers, 2018), yields better team results. Evidence for this central hypothesis has been collected concerning various outcomes such as team performance (e.g., Schippers, Den Hartog, Koopman, & van Knippenberg, 2008; Schippers, Homan, & van Knippenberg, 2013; Villado & Arthur, 2013), innovation (Tjosvold, Tang, & West, 2004; Schippers, West, & Edmondson, 2017), and effectiveness (Widmer, Schippers, & West, 2009). One recent effort differentiating quantity versus quality of reflection (Otte, Konradt, Garbers, and Schippers, 2017) called for a more granular analysis that simultaneously weighs both quantity and quality to better understand the reflection process and its effect on team output.

In their follow-up study (Otte, Konradt, & Oldeweme, 2018) that casts time and team effort as *limited* resources, the best performance gains were made by teams that reflected less often, but more deeply and carefully. Moreover, Otte et al. (2018) implied that *how* insights from reflection are implemented by the team might account for incremental variance in the level of improvement. Here, the quantity versus quality dimension of team reflection goes undetected since the focus is *emotional well-being*, not follower performance. Yet, the potential effects of low- versus high-quality team reflection on follower withdrawal remains open for future examination.

One team reflection study by Shin, Kim, and Lee (2017) found team reflection mediates relationships among team learning, performance goal orientation, and creative performance.

These findings of team reflection research indicate that a shared vision drives team reflection (Schippers 2004; Schippers et al., 2008). When teammates do not pursue a similar vision or goal, they consequently fail to develop a shared understanding or commitment toward team goals, thus yielding inferior team reflection (Widmer et al. 2009). Therefore, incompatibility in team goal orientation among team members can endanger team-wide reflection (Shin, Kim, & Lee, 2017). The Shin et al. (2017) findings are important for my study in terms of spotlighting leadership as a *necessary* condition for team reflection to emerge and succeed.

One rare study (Siegel, & Schraagen, 2017) recently scrutinized team-reflection effects on indirect performance-related team factors, such as team resilience. Team reflection may include the behavior of questioning, analyzing, making use of knowledge explicitly, and musing the past with a self-awareness that resolves over time to a new awareness (West, 2000). Team reflection, combined with planning and action, commonly comprises a broader reflective process (Schippers et al., 2014; West, 2000) where teammates collectively ponder the team's objectives, strategies, and progress. Results of such reflection can be fed back into the planning and action/adaptation phases to forge team resilience (Siegel & Schraagen, 2017). Such work especially applies to my study, where resilience and withdrawal exert *opposing* impacts on both the emotional exhaustion and well-being of followers. Here, team reflection's positive effect on resilience would also lead to the conclusion that team reflection could counter any withdrawal tendencies.

Moreover, reflection is critical to team learning and innovation (Kukenberger, Mathieu, & Ruddy, 2015; West, 2000), with effects on innovation even more observable in a demanding work environment (Schippers et al., 2015). Widmer et al., (2009) have confirmed team reflectivity as best developed in environments that allow teammates cognitive and social space to reflect on work processes. Thus, allocating team members specific time or platforms for

reflection will contribute to the creativity and innovation of the team in the long run. Google is one company that implements the “20% rule” that asks its employees to spend 20% of their time pondering how they can benefit their employer (Murphy, 2020). Google founders stated in its 2004 Initial Public Offering letter to investors that several of Google’s most productive ideas were sourced through the 20% rule. Third in market value (2021), Google has led a most-enduring reflection program of follower practice that has served as living proof of reflectivity’s impacts on productivity and creativity. Widmer’s (2009) findings on reflection’s effect on productivity and innovation also indicate reflection’s countervailing effect on withdrawal – the topic of the next section.

2.3. Follower Withdrawal

Withdrawal is defined as “taking specific actions or exhibiting certain behavior to disengage themselves from your organization” (Employee Withdrawal, 2022). Two types of withdrawal recognized in the organizational behavior literature are based on the observed effects: physical withdrawal is observed in the form of lateness and absenteeism, while psychological withdrawal is observed more in the form of laziness and lack of cognitive effort or contribution (Berry, Lechok, & Clark, 2012). Studies focusing on withdrawal at work have typically treated physical and psychological withdrawal under two dimensions. Further classified sub-dimensions for physical withdrawal include absenteeism, lateness/tardiness, and turnover, with psychological withdrawal featuring passive compliance, minimal effort on the job, and a lack of creativity (Erdemli, 2015; Pinder, 2008). Although studies indicate positive correlations between two types of withdrawal simultaneously, this research focuses on the effects of *psychological* withdrawal.

Hanisch and Hulin (1990) have empirically detected another dimension of organizational withdrawal behavior: job versus work withdrawal. Job withdrawal refers to behavioral modes

“that dissatisfied individuals enact to avoid the work situations ... designed to allow avoidance of participation in dissatisfying work situations” (Hulin, 1991: 476). Variables such as a wish to retire or resign, ease of quitting, and turnover intentions well exemplify job withdrawal gestures. Work withdrawal refers to behavior “dissatisfied individuals use to avoid aspects of their specific work-role or to minimize the time spent on their specific work tasks while maintaining their current organizational and work-role memberships” (Hanisch, & Hulin, 1991: 111). Signs such as unfavorable job behavior, lateness, and absenteeism well signal work withdrawal.

The relationships among different types of withdrawal have been documented under the popular theory ‘*Progression of Withdrawal Hypothesis*’ proposed by Farrell & Petersen (1984). This hypothesis predicts a hierarchy among withdrawal behavior: lateness followed by the absence that spawns quitting. Rosse (1988) presented a longitudinal data sample of 63 hospital workers’ attendance in his analyses of conditional probabilities. It revealed lateness escalating to absence to multiple absences to quitting, with tentative evidence of a lateness-quitting scale progression. Initial lateness was further demonstrated to worsen subsequent lateness, and likewise for absence. A meta-analysis of the interrelationships among employee lateness, absenteeism, and turnover (Berry, Lelchook, & Clark, 2011) discovered the *progression of the withdrawal* model as gaining the most support based on path analyses. This implies that lateness may moderately predict absenteeism, and absenteeism may moderately predict turnover.

The Theory of Reasoned Action developed earlier by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) supports assessing *why* the progression of the withdrawal hypothesis occurs. *Reasoned Action* theorizes that a person's behavior is determined by a motive to act and that this intention is, in turn, a function of attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms in terms of perceptions of relevant groups or individuals such as family members, friends, and peers that may affect one's eventual

behavioral decision (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). For example, if one follower intends to quit (attitude) while family perception against unemployment is very negative (subjective norms), a quitting attitude may manifest as lateness echoing the attitude while not violating subjective norms. Later, as subjective norms relax over time, lateness can progress into absence and eventual resignation. On the other hand, I interpret certain leadership behavior as serving as an intervention to dispel follower attitudes toward quitting, thus countering withdrawal intentions.

In early work on staff withdrawal, Mobley et al. (1979) noted that, while relationships between macroeconomic indicators and job dissatisfaction factors to withdraw were then well established, these variables proved "conceptually simplistic and empirically deficient" for understanding the withdrawal process. Therefore, Mobley and colleagues (1979) completed a meta-analysis of all withdrawal studies and crafted a fifty-factor model that averted mediation or moderation analysis. Another prior leadership study examined the relationship between leader behavior and employee withdrawal to find that leader-member *exchange* was a far more effective predictor of employee withdrawal than leadership style (Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982). Ferris (1985) repeated this study and confirmed leader-member exchange as the more dominant predictor of employee turnover. Another recent study linking leader-member exchange with psychological withdrawal behavior mediated by psychological empowerment revealed that followers with a high-quality relationship with their leader enjoy high psychological empowerment, where their withdrawal behavior also proves low (Aggarwal, Chand, Jhamb, & Mittal, 2020). Aggarwal et al., (2020) further unveiled at that time that high levels of empowerment (via the leader) also exert a positive impact on follower engagement toward work, thus further lessening psychological withdrawal behavior.

2.4. Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout

Burnout, a term describing a particular type of stress reaction, is defined as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion toward work in response to chronic organizational stressors (Maslach, & Jackson, 1981, 1982). The salience of the burnout concept emerges from its relationships first with *organizational* outcomes such as absenteeism, turnover, job dissatisfaction and a drop in job quality performance, and second with *personal* outcomes such as alcohol-drug use, physical and mental disorders, and disintegrating family and social relationships (Maslach, & Jackson, 1981).

Maslach's burnout theory identifies three symptoms and dimensions of burnout that may stem from a leader's dealings with followers: (1) emotional fatigue which represents the individual component of burnout and refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted by one's own emotional or physical resources, (2) cynicism or de-personalization that represents the interpersonal component of burnout and refers to a negative, excessively detached response to the job, and (3) inefficacy that represents the self-evaluation component and refers to feelings of incompetence or a lack of achievement and productivity (Maslach, 1998).

Emotional exhaustion, the first symptomatic dimension in multi-dimensional burnout, is one of the extreme varieties of a work-related stress reaction in burnout (Gaines & Jermier, 1983). It manifests in employees as a general loss of feeling and concern, trust, interest, and spirit (Maslach, 1982b), and involves feelings of fatigue, emptiness, irritability, frustration, and being worn out (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Here, employees' emotional resources deplete, and they no longer feel able to give of themselves at a psychological level (Gaines, & Jermier, 1983).

I selected *emotional exhaustion* as the final *dependent* variable in this study since the literature's general consensus casts emotional exhaustion as the core dimension (Maslach, 1982b) or main component (Schaufeli, & Van Dierendonck, 1993) of burnout. Emotional exhaustion is also the most widely used and most thoroughly analyzed aspect of burnout, being the central and

most overt manifestation of burnout. When burnout is reportedly observed in a person, the most commonly observed symptom is exhaustion (Leiter, & Maslach, 1988). In one field study, staff responding to a burnout survey scored much higher in exhaustion versus just moderately higher than average in burnout's other two dimensions (Pick, & Leiter, 1991). Emotional exhaustion has also been introduced as the leading component of burnout (Maslach, & Jackson, 1981), often seen as the first of three signs of burnout, with cynicism and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment deemed subsequent, delayed reactions (Maslach, & Leiter, 2016). Emotional fatigue has been well identified as the first symptom to develop in the burnout process (Leiter & Maslach, 1988).

A strong linkage between emotional exhaustion and burnout has also led to interpretations excusing any need to distinguish these two concepts (Shirom, 1989). However, burnout theory (Maslach, 1998) that defines emotional exhaustion as the center of burnout states, despite its centrality as well as necessity, does not mean emotional exhaustion is sufficient for burnout. Although emotional exhaustion is very commonly caused by stress, rarely by skepticism, skepticism can, indeed, be the source of burnout (Jackson et al., 1986). In fact, when emotional exhaustion caused by stress is not prevented, immediate reactions observed in employees include depersonalization toward human factors, i.e., teammates, and cynicism toward non-personal factors such as deadlines (Maslach et al., 1996).

The relationship between efficacy and burnout is more complex. Some research findings have found efficacy to be a function of either emotional exhaustion or cynicism, or a *mix* of both (Byrne, 1994; Lee, & Ashforth, 1996). Other research has concluded that efficacy develops in parallel with emotional exhaustion and cynicism, not sequentially (Leiter, 1993). Indeed, there are few proposals in the literature explain the development sequence of burnout dimensions. The

earliest proposal opined that different dimensions develop *simultaneously*, but independently (Golembiewski et al., 1986). Another model has posited *sequential* progression over time where one dimension follows the other. The phase proposal casts *depersonalization as the first phase* of burnout, then self-efficacy into emotional exhaustion (Golembiewski, & Munzenrider, 1998). One alternative sequential model proposed by Leiter and Maslach (1998) had slotted emotional exhaustion occurring first, leading to depersonalization and ending in reduced self-efficacy, a.k.a. personal accomplishment. Most research released after Leiter and Maslach (1998) has supported the latest theory enlisting statistical causal models that exclude any longitudinal data that directly track the trajectory of burnout.

Instead of underload, the precursor to emotional exhaustion is the experience of *overload* that does not fit mental or physical states that follow boring, monotonous experiences (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Emotional exhaustion positively correlates with, yet is distinct from, depression (Leiter & Durup, 1994), and it has often been thought that burnout accelerates negative effects on mental health such as anxiety and depression. On the other hand, another causal probability explaining the positive relationship between depression and emotional exhaustion is that mentally healthy employees more ably cope with chronic stressors and are thus less prone to experience burnout and depression. One study examining longitudinal data of workers facing interpersonally demanding jobs (Jenkins, & Maslach, 1994) has demonstrated that those having experienced psychologically healthy adolescence are more likely to work, retain such jobs, and enjoy higher involvement and satisfaction from such employment. Otherwise, emotional exhaustion incurs various negative consequences for employers and employees: lower work motivation, poorer job performance, less organizational citizenship behavior, lower job satisfaction and commitment, less innovation and creativity, and higher turnover motive

(Cropanzano et al., 2003; Halbesleben, & Bowler, 2007; Halbesleben, & Buckley, 2004; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Such emotional exhaustion and burnout have become challenging issues in modern organizational life (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004) for leaders as well as followers.

Despite most studies focusing on burnout and its emotional exhaustion component dating back to the 1990s, the plethora of research on followers' emotional exhaustion has failed to consider that of the leader. Therefore, I aim to broaden the knowledge of how leaders can effectively empower followers while caring for their own work demands and well-being in order to prevent emotional exhaustion and burnout.

Empirical studies have also shown a strong relationship between burnout and engagement where highly energetic, involved, effective leadership can, too, incur burnout. Leiter & Maslach (1998) identified engagement as the polar pathway to burnout: *the engagement-burnout continuum*. As with burnout, engagement embodies three dimensions, but the positive types. In other words, engagement features high energy instead of exhaustion, strong involvement instead of cynicism, sense of efficacy instead of lack of attainment (Maslach, 1998). According to Maslach (1998), engagement is a distinct construct that differs from commitment, satisfaction or involvement in the sense that engagement offers a more complex, total perspective on one's relationship with work in a positive sense. As burnout constitutes a non-neutral state of distress, engagement is a non-neutral state of fulfillment. This concept of *the engagement-burnout continuum* enhances our understanding of follower-leader well-being by defining a new complete set of positive follower-leader reaction behavior (Maslach, 1998). The relevance of the engagement and engagement-burnout continuum for this study lies in the degree of involvement at the polar end of cynicism as one of the three dimensions of engagement, one significantly and

negatively correlated with withdrawal. Therefore, strategies to enhance involvement can prove useful in curtailing cynical withdrawal.

The causes of burnout include various mismatches between a follower and: the team, the workload, culture, rewards, capabilities, the leader, etc. This mismatch between followers and other factors, or cluster of factors, is relevant to the theory of burnout since the concept of burnout is a product of *organizational context*, even when the symptoms are highly personal (Maslach, & Leiter, 1997). Indeed, these authors defined six mismatches that each indicate more chronic and long-term mismatches between a follower and the respective factors causing burnout.

The first mismatch per Maslach & Leiter (1997) is the workload where job demands exceed the limits of the employee, thus relating to *the Conservation of Resources*. Mismatch #2 is a lack of control when its span is too limited subject to rigid policies, strict monitoring, or chaotic conditions that hamper problem-solving skills or contributions to the organization (Maslach, & Leiter, 1997). The third mismatch is a lack of rewards that includes internal types, i.e., self-satisfaction, and external such as monetary (Maslach, & Leiter, 1997).

The fourth mismatch is a breakdown in community, where a worker loses the positive sense of connection under isolation or unresolved conflict (Maslach, & Leiter, 1997). Mismatch #5 is the absence of fairness when a system lacks just, fair procedures in remuneration, performance evaluation, or promotion (Maslach, & Leiter, 1997). The sixth mismatch is where values conflict to exert dissonance between the values of the employee versus those central to job requirements (Maslach, & Leiter, 1997). These six mismatches are not mutually exclusive and can interrelate where the excessive workload can trigger a lack of control, for instance (Maslach, & Leiter, 1997). While no research in the literature reveals any mismatch as being

more impactful than others, it seems logical that multiple mismatches may outweigh any single causal factor toward burnout.

The causes and consequences of burnout have been largely investigated in *survey research*. Here, employees complete inquiries about perceptions of working conditions, leading practices, and occupational factors (Cautin, & Lilienfeld, 2014) that highly overlap with high-impact stress factors and empowering leadership traits. Research results have unveiled that employees having little participation in decision-making or a lack of autonomy or social support from supervisors and colleagues are especially prone to burnout (Cautin & Lilienfeld, 2014), thus supporting mismatch causes in burnout theory. Empirical research on contributing factors has also shown situational variables to more strongly predict burnout than personal factors (Maslach et al., 1996). For example, as job-centric stressors – tackling job demands such as work overload, personal conflicts, deadlines, or lack of resources such as autonomy, social support, and decisional input – exert stronger links to burnout (Cautin, & Lilienfeld, 2014), resource scarcity seems more critical than the workload itself (Maslach et al., 1996).

Meanwhile, research has not yet shown personal variables to be predictors of burnout despite the common misconception of gender. Maslach and Jackson (1985) pointed out the main reason for the discrepancy between perception and reality where gender is confounded by status and career type, i.e., female RNs versus male MDs. Analysis has confirmed that where occupational differences are controlled, gender difference drivers tend to fade (Maslach, & Jackson, 1985). Demographic variables have also failed to exert statistically significant relationships to burnout. However, Maslach et al. (1996) have countered that no reliable database for racial or ethnic differences exists despite their salience.

Consequences of burnout have commonly and regularly been observed as different forms of withdrawal ranging from less commitment to absenteeism and turnover that result in poorer quality and lower quantity output (Maslach et al., 1996). Consequences of burnout also clearly link with personal health hazards, including mental and physical health deterioration coupled with social relation conflicts (Cordes, & Dougherty, 1993; Lee, & Ashforth, 1996; Leiter, & Maslach, 1998; Maslach et al., 1996; Schaufeli et al., 1993).

My model is based on burnout theory for two key reasons. First, burnout theory not only showcases work relationships (with clients, colleagues, and supervisor) at the center of burnout (Maslach, 1998), but it also treats relationships as the source of both emotional stress burdens and rewards, the source of coping with job stress and the bearing of burnout's negative effects (Maslach, 1998). Here, burnout theory assumes relationships at work, depending on their quality, act either as an inhibitor or catalysts. Burnout theory thus ably predicts higher (lower) emotional exhaustion in work settings with low (high)-quality work relationships. Second, burnout theory recognizes the Conservation of Resources model, assuming that burnout arises from persistent threats to available resources. When people sense that the resources they value are threatened, they scramble to maintain them as resource loss – even its expectation – may aggravate burnout (Maslach, & Leiter, 2016). This description strikingly invokes empowering leadership's feature of *resource-sharing*. The next section will elaborate on the overlap of empowering leadership's effective factors with the stress factors identified by burnout theory.

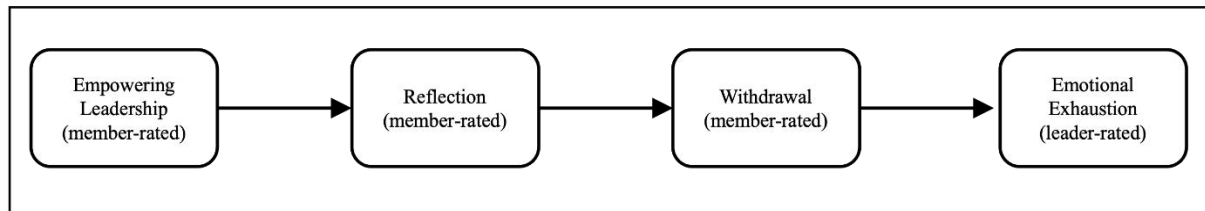
2.5. The research model

Below, I propose a model (see Figure 1) where empowering leadership relates to a leader's emotional exhaustion through follower reflection and withdrawal. I argue that empowering leadership correlates positively with follower reflection and negatively with withdrawal since

empowering leadership prompts followers to work as teams, share resources, reduce intra-team conflicts, self-lead and self-award, and allows them a voice in the goal-setting process.

FIGURE 1

Theoretical Model on Empowering Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion



I further propose that empowering leadership creates various positive work outcomes (such as follower performance, trust environments, intrinsic motivation, reflection, and engagement) that outweigh the costs of resource-sharing incurred by emotional exhaustion. I also posit that empowering leadership leads to and positively correlates with follower reflection. Finally, I propose that teammate reflection negatively correlates with follower withdrawal while this can directly relate to a leader's emotional exhaustion.

This research contributes to the leadership literature in three main ways. First, I investigate the key concern that empowering leadership might increase a leader's emotional exhaustion via leader *resource-sharing* characteristics. I reason that as long as this concern holds sway, it can hinder a leader's adoption of empowering leadership behavior despite its numerous benefits.

Second, I develop and test a theoretical model of how empowering leadership relates to a leader's emotional exhaustion through team member reflection and withdrawal. Though initial efforts have explored the relationship between empowering leadership and a leader's emotional exhaustion, research on the potential negative effects of empowering leadership remains in its

early stages. Thus far, research has mostly focused exclusively on the positive effects of empowering leadership on just followers, having yet to fully explore all explanatory processes.

Therefore, to complement and extend the literature, I develop a theory on why and how empowering leadership benefits leaders by reducing a leader's level of emotional exhaustion to thus benefit followers. Moreover, I theorize how, under certain conditions, empowering leaders emotionally exhaust themselves, while under different conditions, they sidestep emotional fatigue. Here, I take a new approach that casts member reflection and withdrawal as key mechanisms and indicators for followers' immediate responses to empowering leadership. I then link member reflection and withdrawal, as influenced by empowering leadership, to the emotional exhaustion of the leader. To this end, I consider the overlap between the risk factors for burnout (Maslach, & Jackson, 1981) and the elements of empowering leadership (Pearce et al., 2003).

3. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

3.1. Theoretical background

Despite the overwhelming percentage of leader-follower relationship studies spotlighting leader effects on followers, a few theories have tried to explain *follower effects on the leader* that would enhance understanding of the model. Followership theory is one such theory that focuses on follower impacts on the leader and leadership. First, followership theory researchers have attributed literature imbalance mostly to confusion and misunderstanding as to the followership constructs and how they relate to leadership theory not often seen as a *social-relational process* among people (Fairhurst, & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Followership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), too, invokes a process where leadership occurs only where there is followership; without followers and their behavior, there is no leadership. Therefore, according to followership theory, follower behavior forms a crucial component in leadership processes. As a whole, follower response generally signals accepting deference to another figure in some way (DeRue, & Ashford, 2010; Uhl-Bien, & Pillai, 2007; Shamir, 2007).

Followership theoretical constructs can be categorized into four groups of process steps (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), three relating to the follower and one to the leader: followership traits, leadership characteristics, followership behavior, and followership outcomes. The first group of followership traits specifies characteristics that impact how one defines and enacts followership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Sample variables for follower characteristics include role orientations and motivations, as well as intellectual and analytical abilities. The second group of leadership characteristics – not unique to followership theory – derives from leadership theory constructs. Sample variables for leadership characteristics include leader power (e.g., empowerment), leader

perceptions (e.g., leader identity), and leader effects (e.g., positive or negative). The third group comprising followership behavior, defines conduct from the standpoint of a follower role or being in the act of following (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Sample variables here include obeying, deferring, voicing, resisting, advising, etc. The fourth and final group of followership theory constructs embodies followership results defined as the outcomes of followership traits and behavior that can be analyzed in four distinct variable groups based on the outcome recipient.

These include individual follower outcomes (e.g., informal leadership and follower effectiveness), individual leader outcomes (e.g., burnout and leader derailment), relationship outcomes (e.g., trust), and leadership process outcomes (e.g., goal accomplishment, mission fulfillment, and unethical acts) (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). In sum, followership theory explains followership trait effects on followership behavior, as well as followership and leadership behavioral interactions that mutually shape *followership* outcomes. Here, followership theory not only asserts that leadership cannot be fully assessed without followership effects, but it also explains leader burnout as an individual leader outcome among various followership outcomes.

Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2014) have cataloged leadership research into five main clusters based on the treatment of followers in the research: leader-centric, follower-centric, rational view, role-based followership, and constructionist followership. *Leader-centric* research, such as trait approaches, scientific management, behavioral methods, contingency approaches, and various leadership treatments, has typically cast followers as mediators or moderators of leader influence in producing outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). On the other hand, *follower-centric* research has viewed followers as constructors of leaders and their leadership, with romance of leadership, implicit leadership, and social identity theory of leadership being categorized as follower-centric (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

The third cluster, called the *rational view*, treats followers as engaged with leaders in a mutually influential process per Lord's connectionist information-processing, Follett's power with theory, Weierter's charismatic relationships, Hollander's relational-view theory, leader-member exchange theory, and Klein & House's "Charisma on Fire." Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser's toxic triangle is also classed as rational-view research (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). The fourth cluster, *role-based* followership research, views leaders as mediators or moderators of follower influence in producing outcomes. Various followership theories, including Carsten's followership role orientations and Sy's implicit-followership theories, fall into role-based followership research categories (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). A final category of leadership research bases its treatment of followers under *constructionist* followership assertions that they are co-creators with leaders in their leadership. Constructionist arcs include DeRue & Ashford's leadership identity construction process, Shamir's co-production, Collinson's post-structuralist identity view, and Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien's relational (discursive) approach (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Notably, leader-centric and role-based research differ by placing the follower or leader as a mediator and moderator of the outcome, while follower-centric research has followers creating leaders. Finally, constructionist research treats both leader and follower as leadership *co-creators*, and the relational view asserts that follower and leader mutually influence the outcome.

3.1.1. Leader-centric romance of leadership

The *romance of leadership* notion (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985) is one follower-centric approach that explains the follower effect on the leader and well-being by complementing leader-centric perspectives without replacing them. *Romance of leadership* features a biased perception prone to exaggerate the relative importance of leadership factors on followers, leaders, and firms (Meindl, 1990, 1993) by relaxing typical presumptions as to the significance of leaders

(Meindl, 1995). *Romance* focuses on the ideas of followers to unveil how leaders are constructed and occupy follower thought systems. The romance approach examines the relationship between leaders and followers as constructed in the minds of followers rather than as linked in a causal way where a (leader-centric) behavioral approach casts follower conduct as far more subject to the influence of the leader (Meindl, 1995).

While the romance of leadership interprets from one leader-centric perspective, the *personality approach* places the personality of the leader as a causal force on follower actions, although the images of leaders that followers construct may overshadow a leader's personality (Meindl, 1995). Some leader-centric studies have attempted to respect the impact of social constructs by enlisting questionnaires to distinguish between leader characteristics and *perceived* leader characteristics. While I will discuss using follower- versus leader-rated questionnaires for detecting insights as to perceived differences between leader and follower, this still does not address the image versus personality factor being the object of my study. In general, the romance of leadership fails to address any direct effects of leader actions that are not moderated or mediated in its leadership construct. Here, leader behavior *cannot* represent better leadership. Instead, behavioral leadership registers a broader range of constructs revealed by leadership ratings from followers as opposed to the behavioral effectiveness of the leader *per se* (Meindl, 1990, 1993, 1995).

3.1.2. Follower-centric romance of leadership

As much as a leader-centric research agenda examines what specific leader behavior sparks what follower reaction, a contrasting *follower-centric* agenda of the romance of leadership interprets the constructs among followers and their implications for behavior (Meindl, 1990, 1993, 1995). While leader-centricity explains the close interpersonal linkages between leader and

followers by focusing on the causal relationship of their behavior, the romance of leadership posits that a personal relationship exists *in the minds of followers as a byproduct of inter-follower* interactions (Meindl, 1990, 1993, 1995). In other words, instead of the interaction dynamics of the social relationship that develops between leader and followers, romance of leadership examines the leader-member relationship as a function derived from *relationships among followers* (Meindl, 1990, 1993, 1995). Bottom line, the romance of leadership model proposes that a follower's individual ideas mingle with inter-follower thinking to create leadership that fosters allegiance to a leader alongside self-defined followership *simultaneously*, both forging follower response (Meindl, 1990, 1993, 1995).

From its applications and a practical angle, as much as leader-centric approaches advise direct control of followers through leadership action, the romance of leadership recommends *indirect* impact on followers as constructs replace behavior (Meindl, 1990, 1993, 1995). In like manner, instead of personality matching the leadership style as suggested by leader-centricity, follower-centric approaches seek the opportunity to create the right impression where reputation is more important than action (Meindl, 1990, 1993, 1995).

3.1.3. Romance of leadership attribution of blame and credit

Romance of leadership states that exaggerated use of leadership stems from the psychological imperative to make sense of complex phenomena (Bligh, & Schyns, 2007). Moreover, empirical research has shown the tendency to attribute success or failure as more strongly asserting in more extreme situations with ultra-high or -low levels of performance (Bligh, & Schyns, 2007). Meindl et al.'s (1985) empirical work confirmed that people tend to over-attribute organizational outcomes to leadership, and this tendency amplifies in step with the magnitude of such outcomes. Meindl and colleagues (1985) specifically found under extreme

positive or negative outcomes of an event that observers across three experiments were more likely to attribute causality to the leader over just as likely alternatives such as subordinates or external cause. Even though without followers no leader creed or motto could gain traction, Collinson (2005) recently noted that leadership research persists in delinking leaders from followers. Collinson (2005) called for re-imagining leadership as a set of dialectical relationships where leader–follower interactions are overtly treated as mutual co-productions amid inherent tension, ambiguity and contradictions that typify leader–follower dynamics as being double-sided and co-built. Collinson (2005) favored developing a more dialectical understanding of the complex, interactional relationships between leader and followers over the mere replacement of leader-centricity with follower-centricity.

Empirical evidence has suggested an extension to the romance of leadership where blame and credit are attributed differently depending on a leader’s status in the organizational hierarchy, particularly when causal uncertainty is high (Gibson, & Schroeder, 2003). Results have shown blame to rise with hierarchy rank: observers tend to place blame on upper-level management to a greater degree for performance failures than at lower levels. When assigning credit, observers differentiate little based on hierarchy, with upper levels applauded at similar rates as lower levels (Gibson, & Schroeder, 2003). A pattern has emerged where upper-level leaders receive more blame than credit, and lower-level leaders receive more credit than blame.

Gibson and Schroeder (2003) also found notably lower levels of credit and blame being assigned to *groups* than to individuals. Social-psychological research has long predicted groups being viewed as less coherent and more diffuse than a person, thus resulting in lower attributions of responsibility to groups than to individual leaders. Indeed, it seems easier to pin the tail on a single donkey than on a herd of them. Gibson and Schroeder’s (2003) findings further indicated

that *the romance of leadership* could be a double-edged sword for leaders under the higher attribution rate of leader success and failure when no explicit causal relationship applies. There is clear potential to dichotomize leaders into heroes or villains based on relatively little evidence except rank in the hierarchy, while groups enjoy less exposure to such causal assignment without due evidence. While some studies have detected a positive correlation between romance and transformational-charismatic leadership (Al-Dmour & Awamleh, 2002; Awamleh, 2003; Meindl, 1990; Shamir, 1992), others have found none at all (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Bligh et al., 2005; Schyns & Sanders, 2004). Other studies have further reported *mixed* results regarding the relationship between the romance of leadership and perceptions of leadership effectiveness.

3.1.4. Implicit leadership and followership theories

Implicit leadership theory is another follower-centric approach cognitively based on the idea that individuals create cognitive representations and use these preconceived notions to size up the world around them and control their behavior (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Implicit leadership theory categorizes leadership into three levels. The highest, most general level known as the *superordinate level* carries a simple dichotomous distinction of leader versus non-leader based on a few traits that befit all leaders with no overlap with non-leaders (Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984). In the second level called the *basic level*, leaders are classified into one of eleven different types based on the setting such as business, sports or media leader, etc. (Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984). Any leader can be categorized into one of eleven types by comparison with the best example in each category, also called the category prototype (Mervis & Rosch, 1981). To illustrate, small red edible objects are classified as apples (a basic term) rather than fruit (a superordinate term). The lowest, most specific level of categorization is called *subordinate*

where apples could be broken down into variants such as Macintosh or Rome Beauty (a subordinate term).

Since implicit leadership theorizes individual schemas composed of features that benefit leaders (Eden & Leviatan, 1975), then *implicit followership*, too, theorizes personal schemas composed of attributes that characterize followers (Sy, 2010). De Vries and van Gelder (2005) debuted this idea of implicit followership under the general perception of greatly needing leaders and leadership. Implicit leadership theory complements the romance of leadership from an alternate perspective where followers are seen as so dependent that the notion of super-leader is continually reinforced (de Vries et al., 2002). Implicit leadership theory suggests that followers have implicit expectations and assumptions about the personal characteristics, skills, and qualities inherent to leaders, and these assumptions define individual perceptions and responses to leaders (Schyns, & Meindl, 2005). The term *implicit* derives from such assumptions going unstated, and the term *theory* connotes the generalization of past experiences into new ones (Forsyth, 2009).

Although implicit leadership theories vary between individuals, theories overlap in many task skills and relationship skills that all leaders should possess to be successful (Forsyth, 2009). As for task skills, a leader must be in control, determined, influential, and continuously involved in group efforts. Regarding relationship skills, a leader must be caring, honest, open to new ideas, and interested in group activities (Forsyth, 2009). Earlier, Offermann, Kennedy and Wirtz (1994) had applied implicit leadership theory across (1) leaders, (2) effective leaders, and (3) supervisors to identify eight factors of implicit leadership theory stable across all subjects – male versus female – and across leaders, effective leaders and supervisors. These eight factors including charisma, sensitivity, dedication, intelligence, attractiveness, masculinity, tyranny, and

strength, suggest that, while implicit leadership theory differs per person, individual differences may be systematic and, sometimes, even predictable (Offermann, Kennedy, and Wirtz, 1994).

In other words, as implicit leadership theory suggests, follower perceptions of leadership set a theoretical basis for, if not explain, how follower personalities affect perceptions of specific leader behavior. Moreover, the extent to which a leader's personality matches an ideal stereotype constructed in followers' thoughts (Van Knippenberg et al., 2006; Giessner et al., 2009) truly shapes their perceptions of certain leadership behavior and, in turn, their psychological and behavioral outcomes at work. Simply put, implicit leadership theory indicates that followers' *perceptions* of leader behavior drive follower outcomes (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011).

On the practical side, implicit leadership concepts equip followers to both identify and respond to leaders properly. One study asked 439 employees to apply implicit leadership theory factors to actual leaders at work. This survey found that followers who perceive higher rates of factor match tend to experience greater satisfaction with their position and exhibit higher commitment toward their group (Epitropaki, & Martin, 2005). This study also showed that the match between follower-rated implicit leadership theory factors and actual leader traits exerts an indirect positive impact on a follower's well-being (Epitropaki, & Martin, 2005). One negative scenario is when a potential leader fails to match these factors. Here, the acceptance of a leader might erode, or the leader might face resistance regardless of actual leadership skills (Epitropaki, & Martin, 2005).

Since my study aims to unveil the various ways leader well-being is affected and interacts with follower well-being, implicit leadership theory offers an explanation of how follower well-being is affected by the *perception* of a leader's skill set. This should also hypothetically explain how a leader's well-being is impacted as a result.

3.1.5. Social identity theory

Social identity theory of leadership is another follower-centric type of leadership research. This is built on the premise that leaders can be identified by a specific social group, rather than by its leader, that imbues power to push through the group's agenda under leader approval that achieves a result meeting the group's needs (Hogg, 1996). From a purpose-driven perspective that appeals to group needs, such leadership involves a personal fit with the identity of the group as a whole (Northouse, 2007). As groups develop, group prototypes of leadership also form, and individuals become leaders in the group as they morph into group prototypes (Northouse, 2007).

Social identity theory of leadership is based on social identity concepts that attempt to explain group findings that blend categorization and social perception, prejudice, discrimination, and social conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). At heart, this theory of leadership defines social identity as an "individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972: 292). Social groups, including teams at work, offer group members (i.e., followers) a shared identity that defines who they are, what they should believe, and how they should behave. Social identities also separate the in-group from relevant out-groups as applicable to a particular social context (McKeown, Haji, & Ferguson, 2016) – called the social identity theory of *intergroup relations* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As a result of such various effects, social identity regulates one's self-concept and how one expects to be treated and viewed by others (McKeown, Haji, & Ferguson, 2016). Consequently, when members compare their own group with an out-group, there is a drive to ensure in-group distinction positivity that renders any group comparisons as intrinsically and positively in-group biased (Brewer & Campbell, 1976).

Members' beliefs about the relationship between the in-group and a specific out-group shape their strategies toward managing social identity (Ellemers, 1993; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Beliefs that members consider when comparing in- versus out-groups focus on status, stability, legitimacy, permeability, and cognitive alternatives (McKeown, Haji, & Ferguson, 2016). Permeability belief is one type relating to social mobility – a belief that intergroup boundaries soft and easy to cross would cause members of lower status groups to disidentify from their own and seek acceptance in higher status out-groups. However, real-world intergroup boundaries are rarely permeable, and attempts to cross mostly fail, leaving candidate crossers in social identity crises when excluded by *both* groups (McKeown, Haji, & Ferguson, 2016). Here, social identity theory of leadership suggests that leader effectiveness over team members is not due to effective leader actions *per se*, but because of skillfully addressing members' needs in the effort to 'fit' the team members' prototype. A model of this study could hypothetically be analyzed from the team members' perspective regarding its leader's proximity to their prototype, where members remain engaged and the team leader emotionally energized.

Revisiting the social identity theory of leadership perspective, team members' in-group stability might be another key parameter explaining a leader's successful match of the members' prototype in ways that exert a positive effect on team member reflection modeled in my study. This very leadership may yield a positive *or* negative impact on different groups according to the level of in-group stability of its members: for those with weak in-group stability, the motivation that triggers team reflection might prove lower than for teams having higher in-group stability.

3.2. Team size as a control variable

Leadership research features situational factors that notably moderate or mediate the relationship between the leader or leadership and the outcomes of followers (Si & Wei, 2012).

Team size is an organizational reality as modern business scale outperforms individual capability, with organizations mobilizing teams in all shapes and sizes (Cha, Kim, Lee, & Bachrach, 2015). Therefore, team size lies at the heart of leadership research (Klein, Diaz Granados, Salas, Burke, Lyons, & Goodwin, 2009). Further, the effects of team size on its processes are not fully grasped, and empirical results of studies yield contradictions (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Gurău, 2011). Although team size is a recognized variable on team outcomes in team and leadership studies, scant research has addressed its contingent effects. Thus, team size influence must be considered in the underlying relationship between leadership and team outcomes (Cha et al., 2015; Hashmi, Ishak, Hassan, & Ahmad, 2017).

Team size is an input variable for team behavior and is deemed among team characteristics such as team composition and structure (Gist, Locke, & Taylor, 1987). Bettenhausen (1991) has identified team size as a contextual variable that exerts changing effect, depending on the context, and shapes team outcomes. Research on optimal team size suggests that large teams are distinct from small teams as to functioning, but there is no optimal size (Hoegl, 2005). Also, the nature of work is decisive as to what team size will succeed (Hackman, 1987). Likewise, much research has compared the advantages and disadvantages of small versus large teams, yielding divergent, inconsistent findings – including statistical insignificance and U-shaped relationships.

In one study of the effects of team size on leadership style, Cha et al. (2015) have noted the superior effect of *transformational* leadership on teamwork quality in large versus small teams. Moreover, no study has yet scrutinized the effects of team size on the linkage between empowering leadership and team outcomes. Therefore, since team size imposes complex effects on team outcomes and is a determining variable on team dynamics, my study controls for team size.

3.3. Task complexity as a control variable

Task complexity itself is a markedly intricate construct that makes its definition elusive (Liu, & Li, 2012). While tasks can be classed as simple or complex in practice, task complexity cannot be defined with a verbal recipe that works across diverse fields of science and literature (Wood et al., 1987). Rather, three main distinct definitions or concepts of task complexity arise: structuralist, resource requirement, and interaction approaches (Liu, & Li, 2012).

3.3.1. Structural approach to task complexity

Structural approach to task complexity defines complexity according to the task layout. For example, the structure of a task can be defined as a function of the number of components comprising the task and the complexity of relationships among these. A complex task is expected to embody many components that interact or interconnect. Per Liu et al. (2012), task models that structurally define task complexity include Wood's (1986), Campbell's (1988), Bonner's (1994), Harvey's (1997), and Ham et al.'s (2012). According to Wood (1986), a task has three essential components: products, acts and information cues all embracing three dimensions. These include *component* complexity (the number of distinct acts and information cues needed to finish a task), *coordinative* complexity (the nature of relationships linking task inputs with task products), and *dynamic* complexity (the stability of these relationships among task inputs and task products).

Campbell's (1988) task complexity model features one or more of the following traits: multiple paths or outcomes, conflicting path interdependence, or uncertain probabilistic linkages (Zigurs, & Buckland, 1998) dubbed i) solution-scheme or outcome multiplicity, ii) conflicting interdependence, and iii) solution scheme-outcome uncertainty, respectively. Bonner (1994) later classified elements of task complexity into three types: input, processing and output complexity all acting in two dimensions – amount and clarity of information. For example, the amount of

input complexity relates to the number of alternatives, the number of attributes per alternative, and the number of cues. As the input amount rises, more information loads the human memory and attention.

Harvey's team task complexity model (Harvey, 1997; Harvey, & Koubek, 2000) covers three dimensions: task scope, structurability and uncertainty. *Scope* is defined by the task's reach, breadth, extent, range, or its general size (Harvey and Koubek, 2000). *Structurability* echoes how well-specified the sequence and relationships are among subtasks (Harvey and Koubek, 2000). *Uncertainty* is defined by level of task predictability or confidence (Harvey and Koubek, 2000). Notably, Harvey's task complexity model (2000) of scope, structurability and uncertainty invoke only a few factors that compose and define task complexity in detail. For example, scope has five factors: the number of sub-tasks, products, product traits, specification conflicts, and information.

Finally, Ham et al.'s (2012) task complexity model suggests that a task has three aspects: functional (task goals), behavioral (cognitive information-processing activities), and structural (task expression, structural forms) that reside in the three dimensions of size, variety, and order or organization. Therefore, task complexity is identified and organized as a 3x3 matrix reflecting these three aspects of tasks and three dimensions of task complexity.

3.3.2. Resource requirement approach

A second approach to task complexity is *resource requirement*, a method defining task complexity based on resource requirements for finishing a task (Liu, & Li, 2012). Resources may be visual, auditory or cognitive, including psychomotor resources, knowledge, skills, and time (Liu, & Li, 2012). These are consumed by cognitive demands, physical and mental demands, along with any short-term memory requirements for the task (Liu, & Li, 2012). According to this resource requirement approach, the more complex the task, the more resources task performers

need to invest in its efforts. Wood (1986) stated that complexity influences task performance and behavior via loads placed on its performers. Campbell (1988) defined task complexity as relating to features that amplify information load, diversity or rate of change – all determinative in the required level of cognitive efforts. A complex task thus incurs high cognitive costs on performers (Campbell, 1988). Wood (1986) and Campbell (1988) explicitly noted that resource requirement is determined by or a result of task complexity. Various researchers have treated resource needs as a measure of task complexity (Chu and Spies, 2000; Sintchenko and Coiera, 2003; Bedny et al., 2012). According to the resource requirement view, task complexity is thus indistinguishable from task load or demand.

3.3.3. Interaction approach

The third approach to task complexity is the *interaction approach*. This casts complexity as an interactive product of task and task performer characteristics, such as idiosyncratic needs, prior knowledge or experience. Interactive complexity can be a very subjective, relative concept (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Byström and Järvelin (1995) argued measuring task complexity based on the *perceived* task since each performer who evaluates complexity may interpret the same task *differently*. Here, task perception thus forms the basis for interpreting information needs and actions. Byström and Järvelin (1995) classified tasks into five categories based on *a priori* determinability where task categorization is expected to cover all tasks from simple to complex. Task complexity can also be defined in the narrow to broad range (Liu, & Li, 2012). In the narrow sense, task complexity is restricted to the quantity, relationship and variation of task components (Liu, & Li, 2012). In the broader sense, *any* intrinsic element may be identified as a part of task complexity that itself forms an integrative task characteristic (Liu, & Li, 2012). In

short, according to the resource requirement approach, any task characteristic that influences resource requirements imposed on task workers may embody task complexity (Liu, & Li, 2012).

3.3.4. Remaining challenges in task complexity

There remain many conceptual problems related to task complexity including the confusion and frustration in efforts to define task complexity. First, individual and task characteristics are nearly inseparable for practical measurement (Wood et al., 1987), which leads to misconceptions as to objective versus subjective task complexity versus task difficulty. Second, while task complexity escapes any widely-accepted definition, various partial definitions seem functional in particular fields when limited to certain aspects. Although task complexity is expected to be a key determinant in information-processing, decision strategy, cognitive load and goal-setting effects, along with intrinsic motivation and satisfaction of the task performer (Campbell, 1988; Gill, & Hicks, 2006), task complexity as a research topic is often criticized for its conceptual vagueries (Wood et al., 1987; Byström, 1999).

Finally, various research results on complex tasks have implied that difficult goals can stimulate strategy development (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). Here, complex tasks thus merged with a difficult goal might lead to improved task performance under the effects of both cognitive and motivational processes (Campbell, & Gingrich, 1986). Considering that motivation positively correlates with engagement and negatively to withdrawal, task complexity is enlisted as a control variable in this study to account for its effect on follower withdrawal to isolate team reflection as a measurable element.

3.4. Task interdependence as a control variable

Task interdependence within a team is the degree that its members must interact to finish their jobs (Shea, & Guzzo, 1987; Langfred, 2000). Task interdependence amplifies interaction

(Courtright et al., 2015) to the extent that teammates rely on one another to work effectively (Van der Vegt, & Janssen, 2003). By inversion, one key to encouraging teamwork must be team task interdependence that reflects its needed member exchange of data and resources to collaborate (Wageman, 1995). Per this proposition that greater task interdependence requires team members to cooperate better, then elevated levels of task interdependence leverage empowering leadership thus to exert a higher impact on team self-concordance and creative efficacy (Hon, & Chan, 2013).

Task interdependence within a team can be either highly independent or interdependent tailored to leadership needs (Van der Vegt, Van de Vliert, & Oosterhof 2003). In performing independent and routine tasks, teams need less leadership since individual responsibilities are more explicit and less interaction is required (Van der Vegt, Emans, & Van de Vliert 2001). In contrast, team leadership functionality proves vital when tasks are highly interdependent and complex, since members need oversight or coordination to create environments (Saavedra, Earley, & VanDyne, 1993). Likewise, when the team task is highly interdependent, leaders must ensure that members have the interest and ethos to discuss differences of opinion, assess the situation, and identify working strategies that solve problems (Van der Vegt, Van de Vliert, & Oosterhof, 2003). In contrast, when the task is very independent, team members need only follow standard procedures for well-defined, routine tasks where discussions of work methods usually prove moot (Gilson, Shalley, & Ruddy, 2005). Here, when the level of team task interdependence is low, team leaders less effectively serve as empowering leader, which would needlessly encourage more team interaction (Hon, & Chan, 2013).

3.4.1 Substitutes for leadership theory

Substitutes for leadership theory has identified certain situational factors that can enhance, neutralize, or even replace leader behavior (Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2001). A neutralizer is defined as something able to paralyze, destroy, or counteract the effectiveness of something else. In the context of leadership, neutralizers may denote elements that effectively derail a leader from making a difference. A substitute, in leadership parlance, describes a characteristic that can render leadership itself impossible or unnecessary.

Substitutes for leadership theory (Kerr, & Jermier, 1978) deems leadership effects as either direct or indirect. A direct effect of leadership occurs when a follower is influenced by any leader's behavior, while an indirect effect is when a follower is influenced by the *implications* of behavior as to some future consequence. Attempts by the leader to influence subordinates must either yield direct and indirect effects or when strong substitutes for leadership exist, none. The distinction between direct versus indirect effects of leader behavior looms large regarding leadership substitutes. For example, House and Dessler (1974) have stated that followers having high needs for social approval would experience friendly behavior from a leader as an instant source of satisfactory direct effect. Therefore, when team members provide others with sufficient social approval, this dissolves dependency on a leader (House, & Dessler, 1974). Yet, followers extrinsically motivated could be shaped by a leader's friendly behavior primarily in view of the perceived *implication* of receiving likely future rewards (House, & Dessler, 1974). Here, the effect is *indirect*, one that peers approval and affiliation cannot replace (House, & Dessler, 1974).

Substitutes for leadership theory have further posited how task-related and organizational factors can *imitate* the effects of leadership where various factors in effect proxy a leader's behavior on the individual- and team-level outcomes. Likewise, research results indicate task interdependence at the team level as replacing the effect of empowering leadership behavior on a

team's sense of purpose and, consequently, its performance (Lisak, Harush, Icekson, & Harel, 2022). Since task interdependence among members, too, can act as a proxy for the empowering behavior of a leader, this casts high interdependence within teams as enabling task-relevant guidance and feedback by teammates *themselves*, thus substituting for formal leadership activities (Kerr, & Jermier, 1978; Howell, & Dorfman, 1986).

Finally, empirical results have shown task interdependence as significantly and positively influencing team cooperation and job performance, as well as softening relationship conflict (Lee, Lin, Huan, Huang, & Teng 2015). Results from survey data from managers and workers in China have shown team task interdependence to strengthen the direct effects of empowering leadership on team self-concordance and creative efficacy, as well as indirectly enhancing team creativity (Hon, & Chan, 2013).

As a result, task interdependence at the team level has been documented as moderating the effects of empowering leadership and team discussion on joint tasks (i.e., team reflection) as being more necessary where task interdependence is high and less so where low. Substitute of leadership theory proposes that task interdependence in close-knit teams is a *substitute* for leadership. *Task interdependence* thus serves as a control variable for this study.

3.5. Empowering Leadership and Leader's Emotional Exhaustion

In spite of the rising interest in empowering leadership and scrutiny of its various implications, as well as the relations and impacts on other variables (Randolph, & Kemery, 2011; Raub, & Robert, 2010), scale development studies published on the construct itself remain quite rare (Arnold et al., 2000; Cox, & Sims, 1996; Konczak et al., 2000; Manz, & Sims, 1987). Amundsen & Martinsen (2014: 488) have discussed empowering leadership measures that allow classification into three main groups: "The first group includes studies (e.g., Dewettinck, & van

Ameijde, 2011, Raub, & Robert, 2010) that employed the Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) developed by Arnold et al. (2000), or studies (e.g., Hakimi, van Knippenberg, & Giessner, 2010) that used the Leader Empowering Behavior Questionnaire (LEBQ) developed by Konczak et al. (2000). This first group also includes studies (e.g., Boudrias et al., 2009; Boudrias et al., 2010) that employed a combination of both measures. The second group includes studies (e.g., Tekleab et al., 2008; Vecchio et al., 2010; Yun et al., 2006) that used EL measures based on the Self-Management Leadership Questionnaire (SMLQ) developed by Manz and Sims (1987), and/or the Strategic Leadership Questionnaire II (SLQII) originated by Cox and Sims (1996) and later analyzed by Pearce and Sims (2002). These two latter measures seem to be based on the superleadership approach of EL, which in particular has focused on facilitating subordinates' self-leadership (Manz & Sims, 2001). The third group consists of studies (e.g., Wallace et al., 2011; Zhang, & Bartol, 2010) that employed an EL scale developed by Ahearne, Mathieu, and Rapp (2005).”

The *social exchange* theory (Blau, 1964; Settoon et al., 1996) has stated that people make decisions by (un)consciously measuring the costs and rewards of a relationship or action in an effort to maximize rewards – one of the most influential conceptual paradigms in organizational behavior (Cropanzano, & Mitchell, 2005). Since employees as leaders or followers spend significant parts of their lives in the workplace where work *per se* is a cost-benefit culture, the social exchange can well explain how and why empowering leadership affects team-level follower well-being. Based on social exchange (Blau, 1964), research has already identified the mediating effects of perceived social support on the linkage between empowering leadership and follower well-being (Kim, Moon, & Shin, 2018), more specifically, perceived organizational and co-worker support.

Employees also seem more likely to prosper under subtler leadership behavior that entails protection and support, not mere direction and control (Mintzberg, 1998). In this regard, empowering leadership offers potential due to its empowerment, autonomy and encouragement attributes (Amundsen, & Martinsen, 2014; Conger, & Kanungo, 1988; Vecchio et al., 2010). Empirical work has shown that empowering leadership directly correlates with follower outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Dallner et al., 2000), affective commitment (Albrecht, & Andretta, 2011), psychological empowerment (Amundsen, & Martinsen, 2014), creativity (Zhang, & Bartol, 2010), knowledge-sharing, team efficacy, performance (Srivastava et al., 2006), and motivation in the form of work engagement (Tuckey et al., 2012).

Yet, no empirical attention has focused on how and why empowering leadership impacts *leader well-being*, though empowering leadership's popularity in the research literature offers a few theories on follower outcomes that may indirectly explain the effects on leader well-being. Based on empowerment and empowering leadership theories (Amundsen, & Martinsen, 2014; Bass, & Riggio, 2006; Conger, & Kanungo, 1988; Dallner et al., 2000; Manz, & Sims, 1990; Pearce et al., 2003; Srivastava et al., 2006; Thomas, & Velthouse, 1990; Vecchio et al., 2010), I propose that empowering leadership relates to various positive follower outcomes that, in turn, affect leader well-being positively. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to empirically investigate how and why empowering leadership is related to leader well-being.

3.5.1. Emotional exhaustion based on conservation of resources theory

Lack of literature that tests relationships between leadership style and leader emotional exhaustion do not enable positing any strong claims. Still, among all the established positive leadership approaches such as transformational, servant, authentic, and charismatic leadership, empowering leadership may rank most prone to *emotionally exhaust* (see Lee, Lyubovnikova,

Tian, & Knight, 2019 and Hoch et al., 2018 for meta-analyses). I sense the rationale for this lies in *conservation of resources* theory (Ito, & Brotheridge, 2003) which implies resource allocation to employees positively correlates with the use of active coping strategies (i.e., positive orientation, working harder, seeking advice and assistance). Resource support has also been associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion.

Likewise, empowering leaders share their own power and authority as they encourage self-leadership, self-award, participative goal-setting and teamwork. Here, I dub such power and authority as *leader resources*. In other words, empowering leadership features the sharing of *leader resources* with followers while keeping less for themselves. While transformational leadership focuses on a vision, superordinate goals, and high output (Bass, 1985; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004; van Knippenberg, & Sitkin, 2013), any sharing of a leader's own resources does not apply here. Likewise, charismatic leaders who use their charisma, communication skills and persuasiveness to influence others do not necessarily suffer deprivation of their own resources. Moreover, while servant leadership mainly features serving other people (Greenleaf, 1970, 2008), this leader type does not end with fewer resources since these remain unshared here. As a result, the fact that empowering leadership is based on the idea that leaders share their own resources must mean that such empowerment potentially exposes this type of leader to chronic stress.

Finding the reason for and explaining the dynamics of a negative association between worker exhaustion and the level of resources available to them is out of the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the underlying cause of such emotional exhaustion could be checked for lack of resources *per se* versus fear of failure initiated by a lack of resources. In other words, the impact of scant resources on emotional exhaustion might be moderated by fear of failure.

Conservation of resources (COR) theory's core doctrine is that people seek to obtain and retain things valuable to them (Hobfoll, Shirom, & Golembiewski, 2000). COR theory posits that individuals have powerful cognitive biases that magnify resource loss over gain. Based on these two assumptions, COR theory suggests that stress initially occurs when central key resources are *threatened* with loss, next when *actually* lost, and finally when significant effort fails to (re)gain those key resources (Hobfoll, Shirom, & Golembiewski, 2000). At heart, COR is an evolution-centric motivational theory that explains human behavior based on survival's need to conserve resources – an inherited behavioral genetic impulse (Hobfoll, 2002).

Humans, as social beings, must gain and retain both personal strengths and social bonds. Different from other social animals, people can create complex tools to ensure survival under the advantage of complex language interchange that favors both personal strength and social bonds. Thus, COR theory states (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018) that people employ essential resources not only in response to stress, but also to reserve resources in case of future need. Moreover, obtaining and retaining personal, social, and material resources is a physical and psychological defense mechanism at the individual, group, and organizational level that secures the capacity to meet stressful challenges. COR further notes that while universally valued resources (such as health, well-being, family, self-esteem, as well as a sense of purpose and meaning in life) might take different forms in various cultures, they everywhere exert priority as individually important resources (e.g. promotion, title and wealth) (Hobfoll, Freedy, Lane, & Geller, 1990). In terms of implications for my study, COR reasonably confirms both the stress and stress-relief factors defined in my study as causing follower withdrawal to be universally valid.

3.5.2. Stress-appraisal theory based on perception

On the other hand, Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) *stress-appraisal theory* posited a different view of stress and resources versus COR theory. Stress-appraisal theory (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984) has long asserted that stress takes shape from what is *perceived* as stressful. Lazarus and Cohen (1977) had earlier defined three stress factor types: i) significant changes affecting many people such as natural disasters or manufactured cataclysms, ii) major changes touching one or a few people such as a loved one's death, terminal illness or imprisonment, and iii) daily hassles such as having a sick pet, a rude roommate or a minor tussle with a life partner (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982). As apparent from these examples, daily struggles may prove far less severe while imposing more critical consequences for health due to *frequency* or other reasons (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981).

Frequency of stress factors is such a definitive factor as to impact that Elliott & Eisdorfer (1982) categorized stress factors into four types of frequency: *acute* stressors such as parachute jumping, stressor *sequences* such as divorce, *chronic intermittent* stressors such as conflict-filled visits to parents-in-law, and chronic stressors such as *permanent* disabilities. On the other hand, as stress factors are classified by content, characteristics, duration, and frequency, the individual differences in vulnerability to each stress factor become more overt (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984). In other words, stress-appraisal theory implies that stress is a *matter of perception* while COR treats stress as objectively defined.

Critiques of stress-appraisal theory deem it non-intuitive and non-predictive since, by definition, one cannot know beforehand whether an occurrence will be stressful or not (Hobfoll, Freedy, Lane, & Geller, 1990). Yet, proponents of the stress-appraisal theory claim that stress factors can still be defined as intuitive and predictable in advance *based on the values* of the person, group or organization. Criticism of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) looms especially large

when their theory potentially blames the victim and imposes the burden of addressing the situation on individuals facing the stress who should thus refine their appraisals in moral cases, such as social justice, workplace harassment, or abusive leadership. Skeptics claim that if abusive leadership is to be interpreted as a matter of appraisal, then court cases should be vacated by the legal system due to insufficient evidence.

While stress-appraisal theory universally defines stress as perceived, some stress-triggered stimuli or responses in certain situations, such as natural disasters, may be deemed objectively stressful beyond personal interpretation variance (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984). A crucial point for understanding stress lies in the definition of stress that emphasizes the *relationship* between the person and the environment, accounting for *both* personal characteristics and the nature of the environmental event (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984). Moreover, as cognitive appraisal processing serves as some sort of mediating reaction, it plays an essential role in adequate psychological understanding and interpretation of an event when distinguishing experiences that harm, threaten, challenge or nurture (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, the cognitive appraisal process is necessary for the individual to reflect on the relationship dynamics between one's unique traits and an environment whose features must be predicted and interpreted (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984).

The implications of stress-appraisal theory vary. Where stress factors are assumed to be not universal and objective, but perceptions, intervention strategies wisely focus on appraisals to redress the causes of cognitive biases. My study will also yield multiple facades as stress factors causing follower withdrawal are assumed to be perceptive and idiosyncratic, where not only intervention strategies change, but team reflection loses reliability as a preventative occurrence. Meanwhile, I argue that the role of empowering leadership in relation to follower withdrawal

shifts from physical to psychological resource provider in terms of leading efforts to encourage and steer followers toward meaningful, mindful, purposeful interpretation of follower challenges. Furthermore, I discuss team reflection processes as primarily involving efforts to work on cognitive biases, if not cognitive appraisal itself, that inevitably result in group-thinking bias that resolves divergent follower opinions into a coalesced team mindset. Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) stress-appraisal theory has opened many doors for researchers to understand human coping with stress and stress-related health problems, just as COR has advanced our comprehension of stress (Carver, & Connor-Smith, 2010).

3.5.3. Style or mode types of coping

Strategies for coping (or specific responses) may be defined as “behaviors, cognitions, and perceptions in which people engage when contending with their life problems” (Pearlin, & Schooler, 1978: 5). Coping strategies may merge to form *a coping style* understood as a “preferred set of coping strategies that relatively fixed across time and circumstances” (Carver et al., 1989: 270). Endler and Parker (1999) have defined coping styles as cognitive-behavioral modes typically invoked by a person facing stressful situations. There are numerous coping strategies categorized into five general types: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, social support, religious coping, and meaning-making (Folkman, & Moskowitz, 2004).

First of all, *problem-focused* coping covers behavior and thinking that targets the problem and acts to solve it by seeking information, taking direct action, or breaking down the problem into more manageable pieces (Harrington, 2013). That said, postponing or canceling an action can also comprise an effective problem-focused strategy depending on the situation, such as consciously avoiding a direct confrontation that may de-escalate tension and lead to a more rapid,

anger-free solution (Aldwin, 2004). COR theory's resource-oriented solutions overlap with this problem-focused coping strategy type.

Emotion-focused coping includes a wide range of strategies that aim at managing fruitless emotional responses to problems such as avoidance, withdrawal, emotional venting, and the use of substances like drugs, alcohol or food (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984). While some emotion-focused strategies yield adverse outcomes such as avoidance, many emotion-focused strategies correlate with positive results, i.e., expressive journal-keeping (Aldwin, 2004). Emotion-focused coping types earlier defined by Lazarus & Folkman (1984) mainly rest on stress-appraisal theory. These researchers have identified two basic categories, i.e., problem- versus emotion-focused coping, where responses aim at “managing or altering the problem causing the distress” and “regulating emotional responses to the problem,” respectively (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984: 150).

A third type of coping strategy, *social support*, features both emotional and physical aid from others (Aldwin, 2004). The outcome of social support coping strategy often depends on the social context, such as seeking advice after a trauma – which is generally associated with better outcomes. However, when advisers misguide, emotional distress may instead be worsened (Aldwin, 2004). A fourth type of *religious coping* often contains elements of social support or problem-focused and emotion-focused coping as it seeks to conserve or transform *meaning in the face of adversity* (Aldwin, 2004). Religious coping generally links with positive results depending on the context. When sectarian belief is abused, though, this may lead to extremism that incurs self-harm.

The final type, *meaning-making*, involves trying to see the positive or meaningful aspects of a situation, especially under severe or chronic stress factors (Aldwin, 2004). As with problem- or emotion-focused, social support and religious coping, the *meaning-making* type of coping, too,

reportedly yields both positive and negative outcomes as to effectiveness. With meaning-making, how the stressed employee tries and finds purpose likely affects positive vs. negative association with outcomes. That is, if the discovered meaning constructively benefits an employee's coming "to realize how a problem fits into the larger pattern of an employee's life may be a painful process, but in the end, may be one way in which individuals grow from stressful or traumatic experiences" toward positive outcomes. Still, destructive or non-beneficial pathways such as questioning "why me?" could likely impose adverse outcomes (Aldwin, 2004: 509).

Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) five types of coping strategies are not alone in categorization efforts of coping strategies. Weiten & Lloyd (2008) have identified four focal coping strategies: problem- (adaptive behavioral), emotion-, appraisal- (adaptive cognitive), and occupation-focused coping (Weiten, & Lloyd, 2008). In reality, people adopt multiple coping strategies, and many across different types simultaneously. Likewise, leaders or followers blend several types of coping strategies that may also change over time. While all strategy types have positive and negative outcome case documentation, popularity persists in problem-focused coping due to its direct approach and claims better adjustment to life (Taylor, 2006) by offering employees more perceived control over problems. Emotion-focused coping, in contrast, reputedly seems to reduce perceived control.

Carver et al. (1989) efforts deemed the distinction between problem- and emotion-focused coping as useful, but *insufficient*. Carver et al. (1989) thus cited 13 dimensions of coping: five sub-dimensions of *problem*-focused coping (active coping, planning, suppressing rival activities, restraint coping, and seeking social support for instrumental reasons), plus another five sub-dimensions of *emotion*-focused coping (seeking social support for emotional reasons, positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, denial, and turning to religion). The other three were

classified as “less useful” strategies (venting of emotions, behavioral or mental disengagement) (Carver et al., 1989). To measure these 13 coping strategies extended to include two more scales, humor and substance use, Carver et al. (1989) developed the COPE inventory. Five of these 15 COPE strategies exert valid linkages with mental health (Carver et al., 1989; Scheier et al., 1994).

No studies in the literature have yet explored the relationship between leadership styles and coping strategies. Therefore, popular coping strategies linked to empowering leadership, as well as (dis)functional styles among these, have not yet been documented. Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson (1998) have posited a two-dimensional frame: meaning-making as ‘sense-making’ and meaning as ‘benefit-finding.’ *Sense-making* relates to finding a reason for what transpired and integrating it with existing bodies of knowledge, say, religion or health. *Benefit-finding* relates to ‘silver-lining’ implications of an adverse event or the pursuit of getting the best out of adversity. Wong (1998: 120) proposed five motivational dimensions that echo meaning-making coping: cognitive, motivational, affective, relational, and personal that includes virtues such as, ‘pursues worthwhile goals,’ ‘seeks to actualize one’s potential,’ and ‘strives toward personal growth.’ Whether called a ‘benefit-finding’ aspect of meaning-making coping strategy in two dimensions or ‘motivational’ among a five-dimension scale, both studies point toward the encouraging opportunity-thinking feature of empowering leadership. Therefore, I argue that *meaning-making* may be actively employed by empowering leaders to support followers in coping with stress.

3.5.4. Time dimensions of coping

The time dimension of coping affects strategy directly and therefore merits closer scrutiny. Beehr and McGrath (1996) distinguished five categories according to a sequence of coping and stress occurrence that captures certain temporal contexts: *preventive coping* long in advance of a (possible) stressful event such as a smoker quitting early to avoid cancer, *anticipatory coping*

where *imminent* stress might move someone, for instance, to take a pre-operative tranquilizer, *dynamic coping* during stress such as diverting attention to reduce chronic pain, *reactive coping* after a trauma such as a change in lifestyle for amputees, and finally, *residual coping* long after contending with long-term effects such as quelling destructive thoughts years after an accident. Here, time factors distinguish reactive, dynamic, anticipatory, preventive, and proactive coping.

Reactive coping refers to harm or loss experienced *in the past*, dynamic coping is *present*, anticipatory coping refers to *imminent* threat in the near future, and preventive coping refers to *uncertain threat potential* in the future, while proactive coping involves upcoming challenges that are seen as *potentially self-promoting* (Schwarzer, & Taubert, 2002).

According to *COR theory*, reactive coping is efforts to deal with a past stressful encounter or current actions to compensate for damage or loss such as undergoing divorce, being criticized by parents or friends, having an accident, or losing employment (Schwarzer, & Taubert, 2002). Alternatively, *stress-appraisal* theory suggests that reactive coping can help readjust goals, find benefit, or search for meaning in life attainable via a problem-, emotion-, or social-relation-focus (Schwarzer, & Taubert, 2002). In any case, coping with loss or harm demands one to be resilient since compensation or rehabilitation requires ‘recovery self-efficacy,’ a particular optimistic belief in self-capability to overcome setbacks (Schwarzer, 1999).

On the other hand, anticipatory coping fundamentally differs from reactive coping as the critical event has *not yet occurred*, but is certain or fairly sure to occur in the near future, such as speaking in public, a dentist appointment, an exam, a job interview, promotion, company downsizing, retirement, etc. (Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). There is a risk that the upcoming event may cause harm or loss in its wake, which requires managing the perceived risk. Here, anticipatory coping can thus be regarded as an effort to deal with an approaching

threat (Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). According to COR, whether the situation is deemed threatening or challenging, the function of coping will aim at solving the actual problem at hand by working harder, getting help, or investing in other resources. Per stress-appraisal theory, coping strategy can rest on cognitive efforts such as feeling good despite the risk by recasting the scene as less threatening, distraction, or by gaining reassurance from others. From both COR and stress-appraisal theories, anticipatory coping is the effort to manage known risks by investing personal resources to prevent or combat the stressor, or to reap the most anticipated benefit. Schwarzer & Renner (2000) defined situation-specific ‘coping self-efficacy’ as an optimistic self-belief of being able to cope successfully with a particular situation using a key personal resource or attribute.

Preventive coping can be seen as an effort to prepare for risk potential *in the long run*, such as job loss, forced retirement, crime, illness, dementia, disaster, etc. (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 1996; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). Preventive coping is quite like anticipatory coping in terms of a critical event has not yet occurred, but differs from anticipatory coping that preps for a short-term, high-certainty event (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 1996; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). COR theory defines the aim of preventative coping strategy as mobilizing general resistance resources to soften future strain by cushioning its severity of impact and foreboding feeling of stress. Installing a fire alarm, buying good health insurance, saving money, or maintaining social bonds are preventive acts blind to whether perilous uncertainties will ever occur (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 1996; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). Preventative coping acts against perceived *threatening* events: anticipatory coping prepares for either *loss or harvesting* events (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 1996; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002).

Preventative coping is also a kind of risk management for *vague risks in the distant future* that need managing too (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). Yet, perceived ambiguity stimulates a broad range of coping behavior, such as building general resistance by accumulating psychological strengths, wealth, and social bonds, and by gaining new skills as their development forms a long-term coping process that may help tackle possible trials (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 1996; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002).

3.5.5. Proactive, transactional and transformational versus passive-avoidance traits

Proactive coping is not preceded by a danger, threat or loss, and it can be considered as an effort to mobilize general resources that facilitate promotion toward challenging goals and personal advancement (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). When risks, demands, and opportunities in the far future are perceived as personal challenges, coping mutates from risk management to goal management (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). Here, goals are managed, not reactively, but *proactively* with the aim for life improvement that builds up resources to ensure progress and quality functioning (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). In proactive coping, creating better living conditions and higher performance levels is a means toward a meaningful, purposeful life (Schwarzer, 1992, 1999; Schwarzer et al., 1996; Schwarzer et al., 2000; Schwarzer et al., 2002). Constructively managed *positive* stress, called ‘eustress,’ elicits productive arousal and vital energy (Seyle, 1956).

Proactive coping (Aspinwall, & Taylor, 1997; Greenglass et al., 1999; Schwarzer, 2000; Schwarzer, & Taubert, 1999) is reportedly a leadership trait that constitutes goal-oriented, long-term resilience behavior that habituates before any stressful event occurs, and can even be

triggered by self-imposed goals and visions. Leaders who exhibit resourcefulness, take responsibility, hold values, communicate vision, and believe that people can be favorably influenced are said to be *proactive* (Aspinwall, & Taylor, 1997; Greenglass et al., 1999; Schwarzer, 2000; Schwarzer, & Taubert, 1999). Instead of rashly attributing outcomes to external reasons or succumbing to the idea that outside forces destine one's fate, proactive leaders adopt a realistic, balanced view of the blame for negative events (Aspinwall, & Taylor, 1997; Greenglass et al., 1999; Schwarzer, 2000; Schwarzer & Taubert, 1999).

Taking responsibility for one's present role or lack of past contribution versus contributing toward future success are two distinct kinds of responsibility-taking, the latter being more crucial for proactive leaders who focus on solutions to problems free of self-blame (Aspinwall, & Taylor, 1997; Greenglass et al., 1999; Schwarzer, 2000; Schwarzer, & Taubert, 1999). While people may act according to the social environment, the proactive leader chooses paths of action *based on values*. A proactive leader has a vision and creates meaning in life by striving toward ambitious goals in line with this vision. A proactive leader always self-improves, plans for resource accumulation and against its depletion, and braces for the long run by pursuing a self-imposed mission (Aspinwall, & Taylor, 1997; Greenglass et al., 1999; Schwarzer, 2000; Schwarzer, & Taubert, 1999).

While research, including this study, may fail to find a statistically significant relationship between empowering leadership and burnout, and a statistically significant negative relationship between proactive leadership and burnout exists under proactive coping strategies just explained, *proactive leadership is not the only leadership style* with documented success against burnout. Comparison tests (Zopiatis, & Constanti, 2010) of respondent-perceived leadership level against incurred burnout have suggested significant alternatives. Emotionally exhausted sufferers have

especially shown higher levels of passive-avoidance leadership style dimensions versus the transformational and transactional styles (Zopiatis, & Constanti, 2010). Respondents also scoring high on two more burnout factors – depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment (i.e., self-efficacy) – have shown a significantly higher correlation with the passive-avoidance leadership style (Zopiatis, & Constanti, 2010). Per Bass and Avolio (1994b), a passive-avoidance leadership style characterized by inaction, procrastination, resistance to change, apathy, and avoidance is not only among the least effective leadership styles, but also experiences higher degrees of burnout in comparison to leaders that radiate transformational or transactional traits.

While both transformational and transactional leadership styles report a significant positive correlations with personal accomplishment, only the transformational has proven negatively related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Zopiatis, & Constanti, 2010). On the other hand, passive-avoidance, laissez-faire styles of leadership that fail to engage or commit to a leadership role seem to hide any sign of burnout traits. However, findings (Eid et al., 2008) have suggested the contrary that passive-avoidance, detached styles of leadership are prone to exhibit burnout symptoms and dramatically negative-correlate with personal resilience.

3.5.6. Proactive coping models

The most comprehensive framework derived from research on social cognition, interaction, stress and coping is the model of proactive coping (Aspinwall, & Taylor, 1997) that analyzes the processes where people *anticipate or detect potential stressors and act in advance* to prevent or mute the impact. This proactive coping model identifies five stages: (1) resource accumulation, (2) recognition of potential stressors, (3) initial appraisal, (4) preliminary coping efforts, and (5) elicitation and use of feedback as to initial efforts. The model explains the effect of individual

differences, skills, and resources for each stage and highlights specific predictions enabled by a focus on proactive coping and its significant sense of how to avoid and offset potential stressors.

In essence, both COR and stress-appraisal theories feature the fight against stressors by means of working on cognitive biases and changing one's own opinion. While certain stressors such as harassment, abusive leadership and microaggression in the workplace that cause follower withdrawal are undeniably real and not merely perceived by victims (Sue, 2010), many stressors are subtle and can be misperceived. Here, COR theory argues that major stressful conditions are related with *objectively defined* parts of a life event that commonly impact anyone in that culture (Hobfoll et al., 1990). "Parts of a life event" connotes the idea that getting fired from work is much more than a single event – really a series of events most likely preceded by prior warnings or feedback from a leader, if not by a period of follower burnout. In the wake of such parts of a life event, COR theory advises securing other strong job options, accumulating monetary savings and trimming personal budgets. COR theory does not entirely reject possible perceptions playing a role, but objective acts to gain or secure resources will dominate stressor impact on a follower.

Extending COR theory, Baltes' (1997) *theory of selective optimization with compensation* (SOC) focuses on the gain and loss of resources and explains that inevitable resource loss in the aging process demands a realignment of available resources *to compensate for failing resources*. The theory of SOC describes how age-related changes within individuals relate to changes in behavioral and cognitive styles. As individuals grow old, they often face age-related resource deficits that limit their cognitive and behavioral abilities (Baltes, 1997). To deal with these limits, individuals start to invest resources into certain styles and behavior adapted to new constraints (Baltes, 1997). This specialization in particular behavior and styles leverages faculties that better adapt to encroaching age-related deficits. This clearly takes time, effort and motivation for older

ones to discard unworkable habits and cognitive styles that fail to address developmental limits (Baltes, 1997). The result of this specialization process is an age-related enhancement in selected methods and routines that boost efficiency and improve performance, while curbing unfit styles (Baltes, 1997). In response to age-driven curtailments in unhelpful modes and activities, people utilize specialized capacities as a *compensatory mechanism* created in this process designed to repave gaps in abilities (Baltes, 1997).

Theory of SOC's alignment with COR theory illustrates how a theory from another domain, developmental psychology, can apply to organizational behavior. Although the theory of SOC's implications for my study might be limited in practice due to the homogeneous, youthful subject demographics involved, potential implications for similar research are worth noting. As for SOC, each follower at various development stages in life would face certain resource pressures as one faces a different resource gain-loss ratio that erodes with age. Therefore, individuals at different stages in life – or the same follower throughout life – may use different strategies to cope with age-related resource stress, cumulatively affecting reactions toward workplace stress factors *at the group level*. A follower could be more or less resilient to stress *depending on the person's age group*, meaning that some stress-relief variables (e.g., team reflection) may not always serve to counter negative stress outcomes (e.g., withdrawal).

Prior research has shown certain job demands, such as escalating work pressure, emotional demands and role ambiguity, to spawn various well-being issues such as poor sleep, exhaustion, and increased sickness due to immune deficiency (Doi, 2005; Halbesleben, & Buckley, 2004). On the other hand, job resources such as social support, performance feedback, and increased autonomy may spark better motivation toward job-related learning, commitment and engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001; Salanova et al., 2005; Taris, & Feij, 2004). Note the most commonly

used job-stress models – the demand-control model (Karasek, 1979) and the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) – are restricted to a given, limited set of predictor variables that may not prove relevant for all jobs.

The *demand-control model (DCM)* casts job strain as caused by the disproportional mix of large job demands, i.e., overload or time pressure, with little job control (Karasek, 1979, 1998). Empirical evidence has shown this combination of occupational demands with resources to be a predictor of psychological strain (Karasek, 1979; Schnall et al., 1994). Yet, the buffer hypothesis positing that control can moderate the negative effects of high demands on well-being is unproven (De Jonge, & Kompier, 1997; Van der Doef, & Maes, 1999). Therefore, job control may only *partly* buffer the impact of job demands on employee well-being (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007).

On the other hand, the *effort-reward imbalance (ERI)* model (Siegrist, 1996) replaces control with *reward* as the counterbalance to negative effects of job-related stress. Here, the ERI model claims that job strain stems from an imbalance between effort (comprising extrinsic job demands plus intrinsic motivation tackling these) *versus* reward, such as the extrinsic rewards of salary or promotion and intrinsic rewards, i.e., esteem and job or status retention (Siegrist, 1996). Note the ERI model's lack of reciprocity: high effort and low reward incurs stress, while low effort and high reward fails to yield any similar impact (Siegrist, 1996).

Unhealthy consequences per this unequal effort-reward concept had been earlier captured in *equity theory* (Walster et al., 1978) reflecting risk factors for cardiovascular health, subjective health, mild psychiatric disorders, and burnout (Van Vegchel et al., 2005). Both models partly explain job-related stress, while failing to detail causality due to their simplicity and static nature (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). For example, it is unclear: i) why autonomy is the most important

resource for employees in the DCM, ii) why salary, esteem reward and status control serve as the key job resources in ERI, and iii) why work pressure or effort (intrinsic and extrinsic) should *always* be the most salient job demands (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007).

One major contributor to understanding both follower and leader well-being is *job demand-resource* (JD-R) theory through its explanation of how job characteristics exert a profound impact. Compared to DCM and ERI, the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001a) incorporates a wide range of workplace conditions in treating both negative and positive dimensions of employee well-being. The JD-R model assumes every occupation has its own specific risk inputs related to job stress where these factors can be classified as either job demands or resources (Bakker et al., 2003).

JD-R theory posits an overarching model that applies to numerous occupational settings *independent* of specific demands and resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands here refer to physical, psychological or social dimensions of work that require muscular and/or cerebral (both cognitive and emotional) efforts or skills of the employee. Here, job demands incur certain physiological and/or psychological costs on the employee, i.e., high time pressure under strict deadlines, tough physical environments, and emotion-laden communications with customers (Demerouti et al., 2001). Either onerous job demands or the effort to meet them, especially when workers have not adequately recovered, can become stress factors (Meijman, & Mulder, 1998).

Likewise, job resources refer to physical, psychological or social dimensions of work serving either to attain goals or to limit job demands by cutting the associated physiological and psychological costs, or to stimulate personal growth, learning and development in ways that enrich staff (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job resources may act at the *organizational level* (i.e., pay, career opportunities and job security), *team level* (leader and co-worker support, team climate),

job or individual level (role clarity or voice in decision-making), or *task level* (skill variety, task identity and significance, autonomy or performance feedback (Demerouti et al., 2001). Therefore, JD-R theory treats resources as not only necessary to tackle job demands, but also as important for the employee *regardless of any particular job scope* (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Job characteristics theory (Hackman, & Oldham, 1980) also emphasizes the motivational potential of job resources at the task level, including autonomy, feedback and task significance, *with COR* (Hobfoll, 2001) further stating that the prime human motivation is directed toward the maintenance and accumulation of resources. *Crossover theory* (Bolger et al., 1989) also views resources as means to acquire or protect other valued resources. I thus argue that team reflection can serve as a resource (at team level) that empowering leaders to offer followers as a platform to both achieve work goals and soften job demands by reducing the associated physiological and psychological costs, if not to also stimulate work-learning. I discuss *team reflection* as a *resource* that counters withdrawal by relieving the impacts of job-stress factors on followers. This will work through the enhanced effects of team reflection on goal achievement and team climate.

3.5.7. Team reflection as a job resource

Furthermore, empirical evidence supports the interaction between job demands-resources and withdrawal (Bakker et al., 2003a). First of all, job demands such as work pressure, computer problems, emotional loads, and changes in tasks have been identified as important predictors of health problems that, in turn, yield sickness-related absence. From the motivation perspective, job resources such as social support, supervisory coaching, performance feedback, and time control serve as the only predictors of commitment that, in turn, counter turnover and withdrawal.

Hakanen et al. (2006) found that *burnout* mediated the effect of job demands on ill-health, and that *work engagement* mediated the effect of job resources on organizational commitment.

Bakker et al. (2004b) found job demands, such as work pressure and emotional encounters, acted as the most salient predictors of burnout via exhaustion that, in turn, predicted in-role performance. On the job resource side, autonomy and social support were among the most important predictors of extra-role performance as to disengagement. The study of Demerouti et al. (2001a) also noted job demands as primarily and directly relating to exhaustion, with job resources as primarily and inversely related to disengagement from work. Altogether, these findings support the JD-R model's claim that both job demands and resources initiate two different psychological processes that eventually affect well-being (Bakker et al., 2003c; Schaufeli, & Bakker, 2004).

Job demands correlate with strain that includes lack of energy and evolving health issues, and job resources link to motivation toward engagement or disengagement from work, as well as commitment (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). This process duality leads to my next proposition: under high-level job demands and resources, workers will experience both strain and motivation, while when both demands and resources are low, absence of strain and motivation is expected. As a result, the high demand-low resource condition should incur high strain and low motivation, while the low demand-high resource condition should yield low strain alongside high motivation. Supplementing any indirect negative effects of team reflection on job strain, and given that team reflection is an asset for followers, I argue that: *followers will show more symptoms of withdrawal when team reflection is low and fewer symptoms of withdrawal when team reflection is high.*

3.5.8. COR theory's four principles of resource gain and loss

COR theory's other main contribution to literature is its further accounting of *stress factors*. COR deems stressful events to be poor examples, ill-suited for analysis in human life that indeed

confound understanding of the relationships among different stress factors (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Stressful events are supposedly rare and unfold in complicated sequences (Hobfoll et al., 1990). For example, before layoffs occur in the workplace, there are likely preceding events such as a bad financial outlook and reduced bonus-salary raises, accompanied by management messages about poor performance – all signaling the subsequent layoffs (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Only then does the process of finding new work or adjustment ensue. Further objective factors such as employability, skill level, savings, the handling of the layoff, and the availability of new positions are other variables complicating the result (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Yet more psychological factors confound, such as self-serving bias that distorts cognitive or perceptual processes over the need to maintain and enhance self-esteem, or the tendency to perceive oneself in an overly favorable manner. Altogether, these foment unintended conclusions and confusion.

COR theory suggests that individual appraisals are good tools for combating stress factors. Otherwise, people exert a powerful, evolutionary-based, built-in bias that exaggerates resource loss and discounts resource gain, easily leading to heavier stress symptoms such as withdrawal, emotional exhaustion, and eventual burnout. This bias typifies people within a culture, although prior objective life experience will certainly color such common appraisals (Hobfoll et al., 1990).

The first principle of COR theory is that resource loss looms larger and more noticeably than resource gain (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989), most likely due to cognitive bias. One is *loss aversion* where people differ in magnitudes of positive and negative emotion toward equivalent levels of gain and loss. Since resources are not only essential to COR theory, but also to the concept of empowering leadership where the leader's definitive trait is resource-sharing, it is vital to assign a *general definition of resources*. "Resources are those entities that either are centrally valued in

their own right (e.g., self-esteem, close attachments, health, and inner peace) or act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends (e.g., money, social support, and credit)” (Hobfoll, 2002: 307).

Resources comprise four main types: object resources (e.g., car, tools for work), condition (e.g., employment, tenure, seniority), personal (e.g., skills and personal traits, self-efficacy and optimism), and energy (e.g., knowledge, money) (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). Asymmetry in the effect of resource loss versus gain expresses in the larger impact of resource loss, the speed of that impact, and the duration the impact remains effective (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). Specifically, COR theory states that resource loss is not only more powerful than resource gain in magnitude, but it also tends to affect more rapidly (Hobfoll, & Lilly, 1993). Cognitive biases against losses may have emerged over time in evolutionary terms as even mounting minor losses had resulted in a perceived failure to survive (Hobfoll, & Lilly, 1993). Likewise, the attribute of momentum may also have an evolutionary basis, as slow processes might not have been as easily noticed in time to tangibly produce major or even survival-threatening damage (Hobfoll, & Lilly, 1993).

The second principle of COR theory is that people must invest resources in order to avert resource loss, recover from losses, and gain resources. Investment of resources includes direct replacement (allocating savings to pay for lost income) and indirect investment of such (as honing skills ahead of a tough business environment to boost resources and confidence to offset losses in potential income when gains fail to materialize) (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989).

The third principle of COR treats resource gain as rising in value amid resource loss such that when loss circumstances escalate, resource gains carry more weight (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). This third principle might be interpreted as better-endowed individuals being less vulnerable to resource loss and more able to organize resource gain, as well as those with fewer resources being more sensitive to resource gain versus those having more. Intuitively, resource gain for

individuals with few resources yields a greater pro-rata positive impact than for those with more. Likewise, resource loss for people with few resources exerts more powerful pro-rata negative impact than for those starting with more (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). As a result, both resource gain and loss can trigger their own vicious, self-reinforcing cycles known as *loss spirals*.

The fourth principle of COR states when resources are thin or exhausted, individuals enter a defensive mode featuring aggressive, irrational acts to self-preserve as a defense mechanism (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). Similar to other aspects of COR theory, this fourth principle also likely stems from a built-in evolutionary strategy that is *defensive in nature* (withdrawal allows time to regroup, wait for help, or for stress factors to pass) or *exploratory* where aggressive or irrational responses serve to alter the array of stress factors or allow the emergence of new coping strategy (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989).

COR theory is remarkable in its internal scaling and prioritization of stress factor impact with respect to who is subject to stress factors and to timing. COR theory's implications for this study may be twofold. On the one hand, COR theory would explain the divergence among individual followers within the same group as well as variation across groups reporting to the same leader, depending on stress level. On the other hand, COR treats withdrawal or turnover as a stress symptom that follows a stress factor and feelings driven by that factor – exhaustion, for instance. Therefore, omitting any linkage between follower withdrawal and a leader's emotional fatigue, COR has detected causality between followers' emotional exhaustion and their own withdrawals. Last but not least, COR theory suggests that intervention should be based on enhancing resources and eliminating vulnerability to resource loss, while a cognitive approach to stress management might otherwise act to boost a follower's sense of personal resilience (Hobfoll, & Freedy, 2017).

3.5.9. Crossover theory application

Despite COR theory's groundbreaking effect in explaining job-related stress and its effects on follower well-being, my study benefits best from *crossover theory* (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989) in explaining how follower withdrawal as a stress symptom may impact a *leader's stress and thus well-being*. Crossover theory extends COR and explains the interpersonal process when stress or psychological strain experienced by one individual affects the stress level of another in the same social environment (Bolger et al., 1989). Here, crossover theory defines the two-person transmission of psychological states and experiences (Hobfoll et al., 2017). Crossover theory extends COR by *adding an interpersonal explanation*, expanding the focus to teams and organizations (Westman, 2001), and outlining the mechanisms by which experiences, emotions and resources are socially transferred within the team and organizational contexts.

Westman (2001) proposed three mechanisms to explain how crossover processes occur. The first method of transmission is *direct crossover* where experiences are transmitted between partners via *empathy*. The second method of transmission is *indirect* where specific *mediating* or *moderating* mechanisms, such as coping and interaction styles, intervene in experience transfer (Westman, 2001). A typical example of indirect transmission is where one facing job-related stress expresses pain by undermining a partner who then becomes stressed (Hobfoll et al., 2017). A third transmission mode is a *spurious* crossover where shared stress factors, i.e., financial, impose shared negativity, such as anxiety and dissatisfaction, in *both* partners (Westman, 2001).

Crossover theory had originally emerged to explain the transmission of stress and strain, and most crossover studies have detected evidence of crossover for all kinds of psychological stress and strain (job-related or not) such as anxiety, burnout, and perceived health or family

issues (Westman, Etzion, & Chen, 2009). Moreover, Westman (2001) expanded the scope of crossover theory by broadening the transmitted object to include *positive* experiences, proposing that direct, indirect, and spurious transmission apply equally to negative as well as positive crossover.

As one partner's stress may trigger an empathetic reaction in the other, that escalates the recipient's stress, so may organizational behavior expressed by one fuel the behavior of another (Westman, Shadach, & Keinan, 2013). As with the direct mode, crossover of positive emotions may also occur indirectly following partner interaction. A generic case of *indirect* crossover is where one's resource gain *at work* allows that person to offer more support to another *at home*, enhancing the latter's well-being (Westman, Shadach, & Keinan, 2013). *Spurious* crossover of positive effects may occur in the workplace where all followers are provided the same amount of job resources, such as flexible work time (Westman, Shadach, & Keinan, 2013).

3.5.10. Broaden-and-build theory's positivity

Crossover theory's transmission of positive experiences and states has found reflections in positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000). Fredrickson's (2001) *broaden-and-build theory*, which argues that positive emotions broaden employee thought–action repertoires, has pursued a wider range of thoughts and actions to promote idea-sharing and social bonds that, in turn, build the initiator's personal resources. Broaden-and-build theory views such individual resources ranging from physical to intellectual to social to psychological as *functional reserves* that can be later tapped to improve the odds of successful coping. This has further implications for empowering leadership's effect on follower well-being (Fredrickson, 2001).

Broaden-and-build theory predicts that positive emotions will expand a follower's sense of self to include others and enhance identification with them, yielding greater feelings of self–other

overlap and team belonging (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006). Per these findings, I argue that the empowerment trait in leadership transmits positive feelings to followers beyond a mere relaxation from physical resource-sharing interventions. I believe upbeat feelings of an empowering leader arouse positive sentiments in followers through a direct crossover process involving empathy.

3.5.11. Lack of self-regulatory resources and the COR loss spiral

Extensions of COR beyond stress factors have led to notable findings as to interpersonal relationships at work among followers as well as between followers and leaders. Findings in the leader-follower relationship have indicated that these implications apply beyond the leader to the followers that the leader engages (Chi, & Liang 2013; Hunter et al., 2017; Schmitt et al., 2016). Lam et al. (2017) have reported that when a leader undergoes emotional exhaustion, this leader scores lower in self-monitoring and is more prone to show signs of abuse toward subordinates, as reported by followers. Meanwhile, these followers perform below average. With respect to self-monitoring and emotional exhaustion, studies have shown that the underlying mechanism behind an emotionally exhausted leader's abuse is a *lack of self-regulatory resources* required to restrain retaliation toward underperforming followers (DeWall et al., 2007; Stucke, & Baumeister 2006). Indeed, abusive reactions that are ineffective and destructive cannot improve performance, and these may well incur further erosion. On the other hand, among all response options, a leader wisely takes time and effort to invest resources that help improve the outputs of underperformers, with the understanding that the weakest performer may affect overall team performance, making this supervisor's leadership superior (Tepper et al., 2011) as being most constructive and practical.

Abusive behavior may include consciously placing resources out of follower reach as a leader lazily avoids investing resources that would help elevate a follower's underperformance (Walter et al., 2015). Research results suggest that abusive gestures in resource allocation inhibit follower performance directly, perhaps causing followers to disregard any meaningful feedback (Moss et al., 2003; Tepper et al., 2006; Whitman et al., 2014).

Recalling the resource spiral in COR theory, abusive leader-caused resource loss might incite further resource loss that descends into far worse consequences than at the outset (Debus, & Unger, 2017; Huang et al., 2016; Lavner, & Clark, 2017; Li et al., 2016; Wheeler et al., 2013). Lam et al., (2017) have emphasized that the magnitude of the resource-spiral effect depends on decisive factors such as the performance and vulnerability of the follower, as well as resources available to the leader (Byrne et al., 2014). COR has noted that followers exhibit more aggressive, irrational behavior while becoming more defensive in resource investment strategies as the loss spiral accelerates and imperils well-being (Halbesleben, & Bowler, 2007; Halbesleben, & Wheeler, 2011; 2015). Applying the principle of self-regulation and self-monitoring toward the planning of optimized resource allocation *requires its further use*, and defensive strategies here may not appear overtly aggressive or irrational.

COR's implementations into leadership theory have twofold interpretations for this study. First, leadership styles without resource-sharing characteristics might easily trigger aggressive, irrational behavior that results in withdrawal and turnover beyond any resource depletion itself. Second, under the detrimental effects of resource loss for followers, it is more obvious than before that leadership styles offering resource-sharing characteristics, including empowering leadership, should be fostered not only for the individual- or team-level outputs, but also for societal impacts.

3.5.12. Does empowerment help or harm?

The *resource-sharing features* of empowering leadership and the risk factors for emotional exhaustion listed in *conservation of resources theory* pose a critical sustainability question for empowering leadership from the leader perspective. Despite empowerment's supposed benefits for followers, much research has warned of the potential negative effects of unregulated employee empowerment (Cheong, Spain, Yammarino, & Yun, 2016; Ford, & Fottler, 1995; Forrester, 2000; Honold, 1997; Sharma, & Kirkman, 2015; Wilkinson, 1998; Wong & Giessner, 2015).

For instance, Conger and Kanungo (1988) noted that leaders' unregulated empowerment practices might lead to overconfidence in followers, resulting in a relentless commitment to tactical or strategic errors. Thus, researchers who study the negative effects of empowerment have sought whether an optimal degree of empowerment practice exists. I will address this in the Discussion section as a limitation of this research and in a future research proposal that scrutinizes the linear versus curvilinear nature of empowerment. Findings of a longitudinal study (Lorinkova, Peasall, & Sims, 2013) detected one potential cost of an initial performance delay from empowering leadership where an empowering leader fixates on modeling and idea-exchange among followers to the neglect of task performance. Empowering leadership also tends to mar core performance efficiency as this dissolves control and escalates ambiguity (Martin, Liao, & Campbell, 2013). In the light of numerous research reports of persistent negative outcomes, it is only fair to re-emphasize this key question: *can leaders truly share or expend their own resources without being emotionally exhausted in the long run?*

It is important to answer this question since the emotional exhaustion of a leader threatens the well-being and incurs depletion (Wright, & Cropanzano, 1998). Moreover, research has

warned that depleted leaders tend to engage in abusive behavior toward followers (Barnes, Lucianetti, Bhave, & Christian, 2015). Further, emotionally exhausted leaders may harm followers directly, even indirectly as negative leader conduct impairs relationships among followers (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012). Finally, empowering leaders who enlist followers to aid multiple stakeholders may also exhaust them. One study has shown resource loss to play a mediating role in *crossover burnout* from leaders to followers (Huang, Wang, Wu, & You, 2016).

On the other hand, there are numerous advantages of empowering leadership for followers, and the vast majority of existing literature documents positive effects. As empowered employees believe in their abilities to perform meaningful work and influence their environments, they tend to work independently and exhibit adaptive behavior beyond their formal work roles (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Martin, Liao, & Campbell, 2013; Spreitzer, 2008). Indeed, some studies have shown positive effects of empowerment on some subordinates' work outcomes (Maynard, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012; Maynard, Luciano, D'Innocenzo, Mathieu, & Dean, 2014; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011), sparking intrinsic motivation in employees linked with favorable results in job satisfaction, engagement, creativity, work performance, and extra-role behavior (Amundsen & Martinson, 2015; Humborstad, Nerstad, & Dysvik, 2014; Raub & Robert, 2010; Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010; Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012; Zhang & Zhou, 2014). From the perspective of COR theory (Hobfoll, 2011), positive work experiences harvested from empowering leadership may help staff obtain, retain, and foster enduring personal resources or the energy needed to help teammates better deal with work-related issues, thereby softening the effect of negative emotions. Research reporting the positive effects of empowering leadership has largely outnumbered efforts to detect negative impacts (Kim & Beehr, 2018).

In the introduction section, I questioned the sustainability of empowering leadership, in the long run, owing to its resource-sharing feature. Burnout theory also seems to suggest that leaders who strongly empower followers by sharing their own resources run the risk of becoming emotionally depleted (Maslach, 1998). Since leadership positions usually involve competitive environments subject to time and resource constraints, leaders are challenged in many potentially exhausting ways at emotional, physiological and cognitive levels. As mentioned above, research has yet to examine empowering leadership's effect on leader well-being, but efforts have diverged from traditional perspectives to use Conservation of Resources theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2001; Kim, Park, & Niu, 2017) toward illuminating leader well-being in *transformational* styles (Lin, Scott, & Matta, 2018; Zwingmann, Wolf, & Richter, 2016).

COR theory is well-suited to explain why engaging in transformational leadership behavior can harm leaders themselves despite the fact that it benefits both followers and leaders *since each act of such leadership requires leaders to expend resources*. Likewise, despite the scant research specifically targeting the effects of empowering leadership, recognition that its traits rely on resource-sharing, too, makes it reasonable to assume that this would impose similar negative results on the leader.

However, empowering leadership differs significantly from alternative positive forms of established leadership styles (Lee et al., 2018). Among these positive forms, transformational leadership styles (e.g., Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Shamir et al., 1993) have been most prominently investigated (Dinh et al., 2014). Despite the overlap that follower empowerment enjoys between transformational and empowering leadership, the former requires more leader dependency, the latter more autonomy (Lee & Ding, 2020). While follower

development is a key principle yielding improved job performance in empowering leadership, transformational leadership showcases “performance beyond expectations” (Bass, 1985), organizational goals (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004), and charismatic influence on followers by means of a firm-wide vision (Sitkin & Knippenberg, 2013).

A growing body of research has been showing that a strong emphasis on performance and organizational goals can drive misconduct such as cheating, lying, and abuse (e.g., Mitchell, Baer, Ambrose, Folger, & Palmer 2018; Schweitzer, Ordóñez, & Douma, 2004). This may, especially in the long run, increase leader workloads (e.g., to correct such misdeeds) and emotional fatigue (from fear or anger related to bad acts). Moreover, charismatic transformational leadership also features greater peril that leaders satisfy their own needs in terms of applause and influence at the expense of followers and society (O’Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner, & Connelly, 1995). Thus, I argue that the findings of transformational leadership and exhaustion (such as Lin et al., 2018) cannot be generalized to the empowering leadership case.

Instead, I argue that the primacy of empowering followers in empowering leadership *creates a trust environment* favoring more reciprocal benefits for leaders such as job satisfaction, engagement, creativity, high-quality work performance, and extra-role behavior (Amundsen & Martinson, 2015; Humborstad, Nerstad, & Dysvik, 2014; Raub & Robert, 2010; Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010; Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012; Zhang & Zhou, 2014), as well as superior leader-member exchange relations (Yukl, & Fu, 1999; Yukl et al., 2009) that signal a leader’s confidence and trust in subordinate skill and motivation to accomplish a difficult task or project (Dirks, & Ferrin, 2002; Yukl, 2009). Leaders’ empowerment gestures feed ‘improvement focus’ in followers, which then unleashes free expression of their concerns, ideas and opinions geared

toward better functioning of the team or organization. (Wang, Shenghui; De Pater, Irene E.; Yi, Ming; Zhang, Yuchen; Yang, Tsung-Pao, 2020). Research efforts on the relationship between empowering leadership and leader-member exchange relations remain rare, but several studies have shown a positive relationship between consultation and leader-member exchange relations (Yukl et al., 2009; Yukl, & Fu, 1999). Further, many studies have confirmed a statistically significant positive relationship between leader-member exchange relations and delegation (O'Donnell et al., 2012; Yukl et al., 2009; Yukl, & Fu, 1999; Schriesheim et al., 1998).

In sum, empowering leadership more effectively builds leader-member exchange relations and a trust environment; transformational leadership more strongly shapes follower perceptions of leader effectiveness. Hence, extant literature has suggested that empowering leadership exerts a unique, positive influence superior to other established leadership approaches (Kim et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018). Of course, I must discover if these positive effects are enough to outweigh the demands and costs of empowering leadership on leader well-being and emotional exhaustion.

3.6. Empowering Leadership, Team Reflection and Leader's Emotional Exhaustion

To explore the mechanism that ties empowering leadership to leader emotional exhaustion, I focus on follower withdrawal mediated by follower reflection since burnout theory's main concept marks interpersonal relationships as the source of emotional stress burdens and rewards (Maslach, 1998). At this point, I expect empowering leadership to positively affect interpersonal relationships that, in turn, inversely affect withdrawal. Moreover, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides a theoretical basis for understanding how interpersonal relationships may act against burnout. This theory explains that interpersonal relationships exist not only for functional purposes (e.g., work in groups), but also for satisfying basic human psychological needs such as relatedness (Fernet et al., 2009).

Indeed, high-quality relationships fulfill employee psychological needs by various means, especially positive feedback about one's job competence, psychological support, and much more (Yukl, & Fu, 1999; Yukl et al., 2009). Ultimately, high-quality relationships that satisfy workers' psychological needs help maintain their optimal functioning, while poorer relationships that do not fulfill psychological needs would, over time, incur negative consequences such as burnout (Yukl, & Fu, 1999; Yukl et al., 2009). Key factors that distinguish high-quality relationships from others are four important traits: (1) they **empower**, (2) they forge a sense of trust, (3) they are respectful, and (4) they allow people to be authentic (Davis-Laack, 2018).

Moreover, self-determination theory researchers have assessed the link between follower well-being and psychological need satisfaction featuring these leader gestures: (1) understand and respect followers' views, (2) provide meaningful information, (3) offer opportunities for choice, (4) involve staff in decision-making, and (5) encourage initiative (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). Research has found that when leaders are trained to exhibit a more supportive manner (Deci et al., 1989) and followers perceive leaders are behaving this way (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Deci, Ryan, Gagne', Leone, Usunov, & Kornazheva, 2001), followers display greater job satisfaction and better physical-psychological well-being (i.e., less emotional fatigue). While most research has treated follower relationships with leaders as asymmetrical by nature, one cross-sectional study among followers at the same hierarchical rank has found *high-quality relationships among peers* positively correlating with work motivation that, in turn, inversely correlates to emotional exhaustion (Richer, Blanchard, & Vallerand, 2002).

Since team members constitute a most noticeable aspect of each other's social environment (Dutton & Ragins, 2007), it is essential to better understand how high-quality peer relationships can mitigate burnout over time. While considerable research has indicated a negative association

between interpersonal co-worker relationships and burnout (Zellars & Perrewe', 2001), studies of how follower well-being *impacts that of leaders* remain sparse.

Despite the tight links among reflection, withdrawal, and exhaustion (Kim & Beehr, 2020), no research has yet confirmed whether empowering leadership aids or hinders follower reflection. I argue that empowering leadership is positively related to follower reflection since this type of leadership fosters empowerment, trust atmosphere and a high-quality, leader-member rapport that encourages teamwork (Kim et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018). This further unleashes openness for teammate opinions, perspectives and task-related criticism, as well as a willingness to challenge others' views and proposed solutions. In sum, empowering leadership sets the atmosphere, fulfills the preconditions, and removes obstacles for successful follower reflection to transpire.

Defining reflection as the collection of certain attitudes and behavior, teams that so reflect are in a productive state where collective learning happens. I argue follower reflection is a fragile state secured by empowering leadership traits with followers guided by an empowering leader. Otherwise, critical and open mindsets cannot blossom freely.

Based on empowering leadership theory (Pearce et al., 2003), I argue that empowering leadership boosts follower reflection by its encouragement of: opportunity thinking, self-aware, self-leadership, participative goal-setting and teamwork, as well as empowerment (resource-sharing, a key feature of empowering leadership uncited by Pearce) – all thereby countering follower withdrawal to mitigate physical (i.e., problem-based), mental and emotional exhaustion. In addition, empowering leaders foster an environment of trust among followers yielding high-quality, leader-member relationships that emotionally refresh. Arnold et al. (2000) have reported correlation coefficients exceeding 0.60 among the dimensions of empowering leadership (such as

leading by example, coaching, participatory decision-making, informing, and showing concern) exerting statistical significance ($p=0.001$). While Sharma and Kirkman (2015) in a recent review of empowering leadership noted overlaps with transformational leadership, the transfer of control and power to followers remains uniquely central to empowering leadership.

3.6.1. Encouraging self-leadership and self-award

Encouraging subordinate behavioral self-management is the first basis of the empowering leadership behavioral type (Pearce et al., 2003). Self-leadership is the deliberate habit of focusing one's thinking, feelings and actions on one's own objective/s (Bryant, & Kazan, 2012). Self-award is the process of stirring oneself to improve self-leadership via external motivation. The basic proposition of social cognitive theory is that of triadic reciprocity (Bandura, 1986) where individuals influence their environment through their behavior which both (environment and behavior), in turn, influence the individual. "We shape our houses; then our houses shape us" (Churchill, 1943). In the context of leadership literature, social cognitive theory contributes to the understanding of how modeling influences individual behavior. In terms of the empowering leadership behavioral type, the leader models appropriate self-leadership behavior that is later adopted by the follower. Self-award behavior is also adopted as an extension of self-leadership behavior (Yu, Xu & You, 2015).

Regarding to the relationship between self-leadership and reflection, the evidence is clear. Tat and Zeitel-bank have argued that selected self-leadership competencies could be developed and honed by physical experience and awareness along with reflection (Tat, & Zeitel-bank, 2013). Another study has advised leaders to practice critical reflective thinking in order to gain a greater sense of their environments to meet emerging challenges, since only reflective learning can assist leaders in acquiring the knowledge and skills to make better judgments in ambiguous

situations. Reflection thus lies at the core of self-leadership (Densten, & Gray, 2001). As a result, I argue that empowering leadership positively relates to self-leadership and the reflection that positively reinforces self-leadership.

Self-leadership (Manz, 1986; Manz, & Neck, 2004) is a process that equips followers to control their own behavior, influencing and leading themselves through the use of certain behavioral and cognitive strategies. The concept of self-leadership first branched out of self-management (Manz, & Sims, 1980), distinct from self-control theory (Cautela, 1969) and inspired by Kerr and Jermier's (1978) notion of “substitutes for leadership.” This self-leadership concept has ever since gained more popularity as seen by loads of practitioner-oriented, self-leadership books and articles published on the subject (Manz, 1991; Manz, & Sims, 2001; Sims, & Manz, 1996). Self-leadership has long been the core of leadership literature as evidenced by: i) the plethora of theoretical and empirical self-leadership journal papers (Houghton et al., 2003a; Manz, & Sims, 1987; Markham, & Markham, 1995, 1998; Neck, & Manz, 1992, 1996a; Neck et al., 1996), by ii) observable coverage in management leadership textbooks (Kreitner, & Kinicki, 2003; McShane, & Von Glinow, 2005), and by iii) executive training programs tailored to boost self-leadership skills and habits in the workplace (Neck, & Manz, 1996a; Stewart et al., 1996).

Not long after the self-leadership concept emerged, it was applied to two primary areas: self-managing teams and *empowering* leadership. Per various studies of self-managing teams, self-leadership among followers forms an integral part of the self-managing process (Manz, & Sims, 1986, 1987, 1994; Manz, 1990a). Meanwhile, the concept of empowerment (e.g. Conger, & Kanungo, 1988) as a possible alternative to the heroic leadership of traditional leadership models has been introduced. In particular, the idea of super-leadership, later called empowering

leadership, as a style of *leading others to lead themselves* arose as an effective way to create self-leaders and empower followers (Manz, & Sims, 1989, 1991; Manz, 1990b, 1991, 1992a).

The first empirical study to examine self-leadership in an organizational setting that weighed empowering leadership versus self-managing teams concluded that the most effective external leaders of self-managing work teams are those that engage in behavior that facilitates self-leadership strategies such as self-observation, self-goal setting and self-reward (Manz, & Sims, 1987). Self-leadership's behavioral and cognitive strategies later developed and expanded under the sub-concept "thought self-leadership" (Manz, & Neck, 1991, 1992). The practical use of thought self-leadership documented in a training-intervention-based field study has suggested that individuals under *thought self-leadership training* increased their mental performance, enthusiasm, job satisfaction and decreased nervousness versus those not so trained (Neck and Manz, 1996a). Self-leadership theorists have applied self-leadership concepts ever since within a variety of contextual settings regarding job satisfaction (Houghton, & Jinkerson, 2004; Roberts, & Foti, 1998) and team sustainability (Houghton et al., 2003b). Papers on self- and super-leadership have especially presented significant levels of success (Manz, & Sims, 1989, 1994, 2001; Sims, & Manz, 1996).

Despite enduring, expanding popularity based on its strong intuitive appeal and success in early studies, self-leadership has faced problems and criticism. For instance, much research on self-leadership has been conceptual with few empirical studies in organizational settings (Neck, & Houghton, 2006). The strongest criticism of self-leadership has raised concerns as to group impact. Although initially developed in terms of individual employees leading themselves, the concept of self-leadership eventually extended to group-level analysis (Campion, Medsker, & Higgs, 1993; Cummings, 1978; Hackman, 1987) where collective groups of employees internally

regulate their own behavior. Self-leadership has thus grown into a concept spanning organizational levels, integrating research at individual and group levels of analysis (Stewart, Courtright, & Manz, 2011).

However, most research on self-leadership has not considered its multilevel implications (Stewart, Courtright, & Manz, 2011). Multilevel-perspective review of analyses documented at the individual level has consistently shown increased self-leadership to correspond with better affective responses and improved work performance, but results are not as clear at the team level (Stewart, Courtright, & Manz, 2011). Relationships relating team-level, self-leadership with both affective and performance outcomes appear to be moderated by internal and external contextual factors (Stewart, Courtright, & Manz, 2011). Among these, external leadership looms especially large as self-leadership fails to fully capture external, empowering, and shared leadership types fostering self-leadership of individuals and teams, specifically (Stewart, Courtright, & Manz, 2011). Therefore, this study featured independent variables, both empowering leadership, and empowerment rather than just self-leadership.

3.6.2. Encouraging opportunity thinking

Opportunity thinking in leadership literature is a connotative cousin of *entrepreneurship* in business literature: value creation or extraction by solving problems with innovative methods. Like social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), cognitive behavior modification has been defined as “conceptualiz(ing) cognitive events and ... understanding their role[s] in behavior change” (Meichenbaum, 1977: 11). Empowering leadership leads to cognitive behavior modification, such as re-conceptualizing performance obstacles not as mere problems, but as *opportunities for learning* (Cox, 1994; Manz, & Sims, 1990). Pearce et al. (2003) have argued that this process echoes cognitive self-leadership strategies of empowering leadership as its own strategy offering

another basis for the empowering leadership behavioral type. Studies have posited that where leaders or followers develop constructive thought patterns consistent with opportunity ('primary appraisal of challenge') versus obstacle thinking (primary appraisal of 'threat'), effective stress appraisal and coping behavior blossom (Manz 1992; Neck, & Manz 1992). In the context of leadership literature, follower reflection practically eliminates dead-end opportunities. In essence, followers reflecting on opportunities can sidestep mirages difficult to implement, thus avoiding the potential stress of failure. Therefore, I argue that empowering leadership is negatively related to emotional exhaustion through follower paths of opportunity thinking and reflection.

3.6.3. Engaging participative goal-setting: path-goal theory

Path-goal theory (House, 1971) is built on the basis of leadership behavior and follower perceptions following a particular behavior (path) leading to a certain outcome (goal). Path-goal theory argues that followers will be satisfied when they believe leader behavior brings success (House, 1971). Leader behavior derives from follower satisfaction, motivation and performance (House, 1971). Moreover, followers will be motivated when satisfaction depends on performance and as leaders act to help followers reach goals (Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2001; House, 1971). Path-goal theory predicts that when goals and their pathways are clear, subordinates need not rely on leader guidance (Kerr & Jermier, 1978). A revised path-goal theory (House, 1996) has since argued that a leader acts to complement subordinate skills and compensate for deficiencies.

According to path-goal theory, a leader's job is to guide followers to select the best paths to reach followers' goals that align with leader and team goals. Unlike Fiedler's contingency theory of leadership (1964), path-goal theory also argues that leaders must engage in different types of leadership behavior *depending on the demands of a particular situation* (House, 1971). The leader's task? To assist followers in attaining goals and to provide the direction and support

needed to secure follower goal compatibility with the organization (House, 1971). Leaders fulfill this task when their behavior wins follower acceptance, is perceived as a source of success, and when satisfaction is contingent on performance where the leader rewards the targeted results.

Path-goal theory identifies directive, achievement-oriented, participative, and supportive gestures for leaders. The first type, directive behavior, lets followers know what is expected of them and tells them how to perform their tasks (House, & Mitchell, 1974). Path-goal argues that this behavior has the most positive effect when the role and task demands are ambiguous and intrinsically satisfying (House, & Mitchell, 1974). Second, the achievement-oriented leader sets challenging goals for followers, expects performance at the highest level, and shows confidence in their skills to succeed (House, & Mitchell, 1974). Occupations where the achievement motive most predominates include sales, scientists, techs, engineers, and entrepreneurs (House, 1996). The third type, the participative leader, consults with followers and asks for their suggestions before making a decision. Participative leader behavior is predominant where subordinates take their work very personally (House, 1996). Fourth, a supportive leader shows concern for followers' psychological well-being and is oriented toward the satisfaction of subordinates' needs and preferences. Supportive leadership is especially effective when tasks or relationships are psychologically or physically distressing (House, 1996).

Path-goal theory is important for this study not only because it assumes that leaders are flexible and can change leadership style as situations require, but for its treatment of follower characteristics as a moderator. The theory assigns environment and follower traits as contingency variables that moderate the leader behavior-outcome relationship (Antonakis, & House, 2014). The environment here is viewed beyond leader control, and environmental factors determine the type of leader behavior required to maximize follower outcomes (Antonakis, & House, 2014).

Follower characteristics comprise locus of control, experience and perceived ability (Antonakis, & House, 2014). The personal characteristics of followers determine how the environment and the leader are interpreted (Antonakis, & House, 2014).

In path-goal theory, effective leaders clarify the path to help followers achieve goals and ease the journey by clearing roadblocks (Antonakis, & House, 2014). Research shows employee satisfaction to be positively influenced when a leader compensates for shortcomings in either the employee or work setting (Antonakis, & House, 2014). Path-goal practically reminds leaders of their central purpose: to help followers define and reach their goals efficiently (Northouse, 2007).

When comparing leadership behavior defined by path-goal theory versus established leadership styles, the task-oriented elements of the path-goal model can be classified as a form of instrumental leadership (Antonakis, & House, 2014). On the other hand, according to Dixon & Hart (2010), the path-goal theory of leadership departs from other styles where a leader's traits are *restricted to a single leadership style* that extensively depends on one's inherent *personality*. Leader behavior defined by the path-goal theory of leadership also differs from the contingency leadership approach that argues leaders need not alter leadership behavior to match specific situations or change the situation to fit their styles (House, 1971). However, I discuss common traits inherent to both empowering leadership and certain path-goal theory of leadership gestures. I argue that *achievement-oriented* and *participative* leader behavior embody empowerment and participative goal-setting traits that align with empowering leadership since both styles feature high internal *locus of control for the leader*. Moreover, I argue both leadership styles are likely to have a direct positive relationship with follower team reflection, as well as an indirect positive relationship with follower well-being when a relatively homogeneous, high level of locus of control, experience and perceived ability in team members dominate across the organization.

Since path-goal theory does not offer an established leadership style, research on varied leadership behavior defined in the theory, as well as the effects on teammates and their well-being, does not exist. Moreover, there is no study on path-goal theory to compare its defined leadership behavior versus established leadership traits. How various situational leadership theories, such as path-goal theory and contingency theory of leadership, interact with established leadership styles is open for future study. Still absent and urgently needed is an over-arching theory of leadership that merges research on established leadership styles and situational leadership theories to understand the realm of organizational management better.

Locke and Latham (1990) reviewed 25 years of goal-setting research. Major findings indicated that specific, challenging goals drive higher performance regardless if goals are set unilaterally or jointly. Erez and Arad (1986) had earlier detected cases where group-set goals yield higher performance and satisfaction. However, the empowering leadership behavioral-type emphasis on developing subordinate self-management skills *favors participative* goal-setting, as with Drucker's ideal "management by objectives" system (Drucker, 1954). Further studies have also proved participation in setting goals as affecting self-efficacy, but not performance (Latham, Winters, & Locke, 1994). Self-efficacy is an overall self-confidence a person exudes in the face of different environmental trials or new things (Yao, Zhao, Gao et al., 2018) and is predictive of one's behavior, thinking and emotional reactions. Studies show self-efficacy to exert significant direct and indirect association with mental health such as depression, anxiety and helplessness (Schwarzer R, Hallum S., 2008). One study has confirmed that self-efficacy significantly negative-correlate with exhaustion, suggesting that self-efficacy is an important predictor of burnout (Perrewé et al., 2002). In summary, empowering leadership negatively correlates with leader emotional exhaustion in the presence of participative goal-setting and self-efficacy.

Moreover, studies presented in this review also point to self-efficacy and reflection as two important components related to retention, persistence, and resiliency (Yost, 2016). These results have been confirmed by a literature review that identifies two factors yielding increased resiliency (Bobeck, 2002) and decreased turnover and burnout. Nevertheless, no studies have yet focused on the causality between self-efficacy and reflection. Therefore, I posit that follower self-efficacy is also directly related to follower reflection.

3.6.4. Encouraging teamwork: reciprocal causality

The concept of teamwork in the workplace refers to the interaction of co-workers sharing their skills and experience to more effectively reach their common workplace goals (Galleta-Williams et al., 2020). While a mountain of studies has focused on leadership and reflection, research on reflection for teams and teamwork is sparse. One study focusing on the contribution of reflection on teamwork has found reflection helps followers to distill the key principles of effective team performance (Yu, Xu, & You, 2015). Hence, I propose that empowering leadership is positively related to follower reflection via teamwork.

On the other hand, research as to the effects of teamwork on followers emotional exhaustion is abundant. Galleta-Williams et al. (2020) recently discovered followers value the importance of teamwork toward a boost in morale and burnout mitigation, as well as teamwork's significant negative association with emotional depletion. Thus, cultivating an effective teamwork climate could be a major component of workforce wellness strategy. Notably, multiple studies have also confirmed reflective causality in the negative link between teamwork and emotional fatigue (Welp, Meier, & Manser, 2016). That is, emotionally exhausted leaders or followers were both affected by teamwork negatively over time (Frings, 2011) in a reciprocal

fashion. I thus posit that the empowering relationship negatively relates to emotional exhaustion via follower teamwork.

Empowering leadership also elicits helpful feelings in a follower's psychological state such as trust (Ahearne et al., 2005), subordinate sense of self-efficacy (Ahearne et al., 2005), worker optimism, and a hopeful outlook on life (Segers et al., 2009). However, positive feelings lack much relatedness with follower performance. On the other hand, recent research has shown employee optimism in moderating the relationship between empowering leadership and burnout (Chughtai, & Hussain, 2020). My model manages to capture only a few such positive feelings. Besides, empowering leadership literature has unearthed heartier job-related positive factors such as job engagement (Avey et al., 2008b; Hodges, 2010), task performance (Ahearne et al., 2005; Srivastava et al., 2006; Vecchio et al., 2010), job satisfaction (Konczak et al., 2000; Vecchio et al., 2010), commitment (Konczak et al., 2000), and organizational citizenship behavior (Yun et al., 2007) toward making a follower feel energized and generating a positive sense of well-being (Schaufeli, & Bakker, 2004). Scientific research on positive follower outcomes in both work and personal life is becoming increasingly critical in the management field (Avey et al., 2010a) especially due to its *reciprocal effect on leader well-being*. Hence, I reason that all such positive feelings associated with empowering leadership solidify the idea that a leader is able to manage demanding work under resource restrictions. I contend this, in turn, curbs feelings of exhaustion.

3.6.5. Empowerment dimensions: team reflection hypotheses

According to burnout theory, empowerment inversely correlates to emotional exhaustion, both theoretically (e.g., through resource sharing; Maslach, 1981) and empirically as shown in meta-analyses (Halbesleben, 2006; Lee, & Ashforth, 1996). One study (Schermyly et al., 2011) revealed a strong indirect relationship between empowerment and emotional exhaustion via job

satisfaction, while a direct relationship between empowerment and emotional exhaustion did not prove statistically significant. In this study, empowerment is recognized as one of six behavioral traits of the empowering leader. On the other hand, research on empowerment has identified that among the dimensions of empowerment, *competence* and *meaning* most strongly predicted emotional depletion (Schermyly et al., 2011). Since empowerment mitigates burnout (Nursalarn et al., 2018), higher levels of empowerment correlate with less burnout (Valdez et al., 2019). Psychologically empowered workers believe: 1) their work is personally important, 2) they have the skill to succeed on the job, 3) they are free to choose how to initiate and carry out tasks, and 4) their personal behavior at work purposely contributes to important outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995).

While Lee et al. (Lee, Willis, & Tian, 2018) have argued that many leaders today try to empower employees by delegating authority and decision-making, sharing information, and enlisting their input, Pearce (2003) specified that empowering leaders encourage self-leadership, self-award, participative goal-setting and teamwork. Empowering leaders motivate individuals to break free of inactive mindsets, take risks and embrace self-responsibility, prompting followers to be accountable for their own outcomes (Yun, Cox, & Sims, 2006). Specifically, empowering leadership invokes a set of leader gestures that share power or allocate more responsibility and ownership by enhancing purpose in work, expressing confidence in high performance, promoting participation in decision-making, and offering autonomy from bureaucratic constraints (Ahearne et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2011; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Cognitive efforts to empower followers have been defined in the cognitive model of empowerment as four identifiable cognition task assessments: sense of impact, competence, meaningfulness and choice (Thomas, & Velthouse, 1990). Here, scholars have been preoccupied with conceptualizing the notion of empowerment *externally* versus *internally*, and research may

be largely split along these two lines (Mathieu et al., 2006). The first approach can be dubbed the *structural* form as it focuses on empowerment afforded by the *external* context, such as one's leader, while the second approach considers empowerment as a four-dimensional psychological state based on *employee perception* – called the *psychological* form that focuses on the degree that employees actually *feel* empowered. Research results have revealed that empowering leadership is associated with psychological empowerment at individual and group levels. For individuals, psychological empowerment mediates empowering leadership according to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, in-role behavior, and organizational citizenship conduct. For groups, psychological empowerment mediates among empowering leadership, job satisfaction and in-role behavior *omitting* organizational factors (Fong, & Snape, 2015). Individual-level findings support leaders treating individual subordinates differently in terms of empowerment (Zhang, & Bartol, 2010), while group-level findings spotlight the importance of looking at *between-group* differences in empowering leadership (Fong, & Snape, 2015).

At the individual level, empowerment has served to mediate between transformational leadership and organizational commitment (Avolio et al., 2004). Psychological empowerment has also been identified as a mechanism by which empowering leadership influences employee attitudes and behavior (Maynard, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012; Spreitzer, 1995, 1996; Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997), such as reflection or withdrawal. Spreitzer (1995) has noted followers are experiencing meaningfulness at work and feelings of self-efficacy and ability (Spreitzer, 1995) that intrinsically motivate and engage workers (Spreitzer, 1995) and thus are more likely to perform.

While definitions and identified sources of empowerment are clear, these two approaches obviously intertwine, and there is a mountain of research seeking to understand the degree that

structural empowerment actually translates into employee psychological states (Lee, Willis, & Tian, 2018). Within the duality of structural-psychological forms of empowerment, empowering leadership exemplifies a *structural form of empowerment as leader behavior* attempts to create conditions where followers feel empowered. In this way of moving toward a less hierarchical organization, work teams are empowered, requiring leaders to be concerned less with directing and more with *supporting* followers at work (Arnold et al., 2000) – evidence having proven such empowerment to be positively associated with employees’ attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (e.g. Avolio et al., 2004).

Further, Kanter’s (1993) theory of structural empowerment has deepened the concept of structural empowerment through a detailed discussion of organizational behavior. Per Kanter’s theory of structural power in organizations, formal or informal power, information access, opportunity for growth support, and resources can all promote follower empowerment (Valdez et al., 2019). Empowered employees are more committed to the organization, more accountable for their work, and better able to fulfill job demands in an effective manner (Degner, 2005). Kanter’s theory has been widely applied to the practice of professional nursing (Kluska et al.; Mangold et al., 2006; Siu et al., 2005), showing how organizational structures within the workplace that facilitate access to resources can empower employees to accomplish their work in meaningful ways. Erickson et al. (2003: 96) noted, “empowerment is thought to occur when an organization sincerely engages people and progressively responds to this engagement with mutual interest and intention to promote growth”. Empowerment develops over time as employees gain greater control of their lives and increasingly take part in decisions affecting them. Still, Kanter’s theory of empowerment that explains how *structural* empowerment works in formal and informal ways does not replace, but *complements psychological* forms of empowerment.

Dismissing all structural-psychological forms of empowerment, the opposing argument says that the best way to empower followers is to *remove external leadership altogether* and let teams self-manage entirely. However, empirical evidence informs us that the absence of external leadership is not a realistic way to empower; on the contrary, this can result in followers feeling abandoned by their organizations (Hackman, 1990) – an often cited reason why self-managed teams fail (Manz, & Sims, 1987). Instead, researchers have developed the concept of empowering leadership to define its behavior as that fostering advancement of *psychological* empowerment.

The most common situational theory of leadership (Fiedler, 1964) has long suggested that leadership style stems from experiences during one's lifespan and is extremely difficult to alter. Therefore, Fiedler's *contingency* theory has argued that applied leadership's focus should be on helping leaders understand their own particular leadership styles and how to *match style to the situation* versus teaching them a particular leadership style (Fiedler, & Garcia, 1987). In order to identify a leader's own style, Fiedler developed the Least-Preferred Coworker Scale to classify leaders as either task- or relationship-oriented. Contingency theory of leadership claims that low-LPC (task-oriented) and high-LPC (relationship-oriented) leaders can be effective if their leadership orientations fit the situations (Forsyth, 2006).

According to Fiedler, the ability to control the group situation is crucial for leaders since only with situational control can they be confident that orders and suggestions will be followed (Fiedler, Chemers, & Mahar, 1976). Leaders unfit to assume control over the group situation will not be sure that those they lead will execute their commands (Fiedler, Chemers, & Mahar, 1976). With situational control cast as critical to leadership efficacy, Fiedler broke this factor down into three components: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power (Forsyth, 2006).

Leader-member relations first indicates a level of mutual trust, respect and confidence between a leader and subordinates. When leader-member relations are poor, the leader must shift focus to regulate behavior and resolve conflict underlying team inefficacy (Forsyth, 2006). *Task structure* next refers to the extent of group tasks being structured: clear, unambiguous and straightforward versus ambiguous, with no clear solution or correct approach to attain the goal (Forsyth, 2006). *Position power* reflects the degree of power inherent in the leader's position *itself* (Forsyth, 2006).

The contingency theory allows for predicting the characteristics of appropriate situations for effectiveness while stating that there is *no* ideal leader. Leader effectiveness may improve only by restructuring tasks or changing the amount of power the leader has over resources such as salary, disciplinary action and promotions since leadership behavior is fixed (Fiedler, 1993). Here, theory claims that task group effectiveness depends on two main factors: i) the *personality* of a leader *and* 2) the degree to which the situation gives a leader *power*, control and influence over it *or*, conversely, the degree to which a scenario imposes uncertainty on a leader – called the *demands of the situation* (Nebeker, 1975). Effective leadership here is contingent on matching leader style to the right setting (Northouse, 2007). Fiedler's contingency model is dynamic as the personal characteristics and motivation of the leader interact with the situation that a group faces at the time (Fiedler, Chemers, & Mahar, 1976). Hence, contingency theory began marking a shift from the tendency to attribute leadership effectiveness to personality alone (Forsyth, 2006).

The basic findings of the contingency model are that task-oriented (low-LPC) leaders perform best in what are called "favorable" situations: good leader-member relations with a very structured task under a powerful position. For situations "unfavorable," task-type leaders exert low power, control and influence. Relationship-motivated (high-LPC) leaders tend to fare best in situations where they have *moderate* power, control and influence (Fiedler, 1993). Since both

relationship- and task-oriented leaders perform well under some situations but not others, there is no "good" or "poor" leader; rather, a leader may perform well in one situation but not another (Matteson, & Ivancevich, 1993). Fiedler (1994) found low-LPC leaders to be more effective in extremely favorable *or* unfavorable situations, while high-LPC leaders fare best in situations with *intermediate favorability*. Leaders in high positions of power are able to distribute resources among followers, *rewarding and punishing* followers. Leaders in low position of power, unable to control resources as much, will lack the same degree of situational control (Forsyth, 2006).

Implications of Fiedler's contingency theory on my study model may offer an alternative explanation of the causality chain. While no publication has averaged any scores for established leadership styles, based on empowering leadership traits (Spreitzer, 1995) I expect empowering leaders to score *high* on Least-Preferred Coworker Scale, classifying them as *people-oriented*. Also, the organizational setting of my study features *intermediate-to-high*, leader-member relationship quality and task structure under *intermediate* position power to thus comprise an overall *above-intermediate situational favorability* for a leader. Contingency theory of leadership suggests that high-LPC leaders perform best in situations with intermediate favorability, but *not* in very favorable situations. Therefore, I conclude that the organizational situation for my study tends to favor empowering leadership effectiveness.

Moreover, Fiedler's contingency theory of leadership casts stress as a key determinant of leader effectiveness, and this especially applies to my study where stress is a major contributor to emotional exhaustion and its threat to well-being (Wright, & Cropanzano, 1998). A distinction must be made between stress from a leader's superior and stress related to subordinates or the situation (Fiedler, 1994). Stressful situations mar leader effectiveness due to the tension in the relationship that taxes intellectual abilities on the job (Fiedler, 1994). Thus, *intelligence* is more

effective and often used in *stress-free* situations (Fiedler, 1994). Fiedler (1994) concluded that *experience* impairs performance in low-stress conditions, but contributes to performance *under high stress*. For stressful situations, contingency theory of leadership recommends altering or engineering the leadership situation to leverage a leader's strengths (Fiedler, 1994). Empowering leadership is not randomly delegated power, but sharing power via a certain set of leader gestures that creates a motivational effect on followers (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005; Conger, & Kanungo, 1988).

Empowering-leadership conduct positively molds follower (psychological and structural) empowerment and behavior to yield positive actions and outcomes at all levels – individual, team, and even organizational (Zhang, & Bartol, 2010). Furthermore, both psychological and structural empowerment enhance follower self-efficacy (Conger, & Kanungo, 1988), which strengthens individuals' work-related interests and goals in the workplace (McLennan, McIlveen, & Perera, 2017). Empowering leadership frees followers from bureaucratic constraints, encourages them to participate in decision-making, enhances their perception of meaningfulness in work, and allows them to express confidence and commitment toward high performance (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005). As a result, followers accrue resources, thus having more flexibility to win in the workplace and act as organizational “citizens” (Raub, & Robert, 2010).

Both psychological and structural empowerment further promote creative performance as followers are geared with responsibility and opportunity to make decisions, motivated and able to imagine new ways to perform on various organizational performance indicators, successfully solving issues that reap customer satisfaction (Karatepe, 2016). Moreover, a few recent studies have proven a positive relationship between empowering leadership and proactive work behavior, reflecting initiatives to reshape the internal environment in the modern industrial setting (Haq,

Ahmed, & Khalid, 2019, Bindl, & Parker, 2011). Here, followers intend to improve situations and attempt to create new opportunities in the work surroundings. Compared to passive behavior, followers with proactive work initiative are inclined to reach to work goals instead of waiting for opportunities themselves to pave paths (Crant, 2000). Overall, empowerment strategies move followers take initiative, communicate with others, and engage in change behavior as they wield the flexibility to accomplish self-work (Raub, & Robert, 2013). In sum, I therefore propose:

Hypothesis 1. Empowering leadership is positively related to team reflection.

What sets empowering leadership apart from other leadership approaches is its chief focus on empowerment. Empowering leaders equip followers in as much as they ask them to support their peers. I, therefore, propose that the more leaders engage in empowering-leadership behavior, the more often followers experience situations where they can attain their personal goals, and thus enjoy greater self-efficacy and less stress. In sum, I contend that empowering leadership via team reflection yields positive results that suffice to outweigh the demands it places on followers. Therefore, I expect a negative relationship between follower reflection and follower withdrawal:

Hypothesis 2. Team reflection is negatively related to follower withdrawal.

3.7. Empowering leadership: reflection, withdrawal, and leader emotional exhaustion

To explain follower withdrawal's role proposed in my model, a definition of withdrawal with dimensions and the particular type of withdrawal showcased in this study is first specified. Next, the indirect relationship between empowering leadership and withdrawal through team reflection will be detailed, followed by the relationship tying emotional exhaustion to withdrawal. Finally, I will introduce the mediating effect of withdrawal on the relationship between team reflection and a leader's emotional exhaustion.

A few major studies have analyzed follower personality-trait impact on withdrawal as the main reason, with findings that are coherent, interrelated and unequivocal. In its literature review of the relationship between personality factors and withdrawal, Porter and Steers (1973) reported a tendency in the personality factor toward extreme personality characteristics among followers who were withdrawn. Therefore, in polar hypotheses, Porter and Steers (1973) stated that followers with high levels of emotional instability, anxiety, achievement orientation, aggression, independence, self-confidence and sociability were those prone to withdraw from organizations versus employees with moderate levels here (Meyer, & Cuomo, 1962; Farris, 1971; Sinha, 1963; Hakkinen, & Toivainen, 1960; MacKinney, & Wolins, 1960; Cleland, & Peck, 1959).

Bernardin's (1977) questionnaire featuring 16 personality factors signaled predictable withdrawal behavior from personality characteristics where conscientiousness and anxiety accounted for most of the variance explaining withdrawal. In other words, followers with high levels of anxiety or low levels of conscientiousness seem more likely to terminate employment than others. According to Zimmerman (2008), the trait of emotional stability best predicted employees' inverse *intentions* to withdraw, while those of conscientiousness and agreeableness best predicted inverse *actual withdrawal decisions*. Agreeable followers being more prone to adapt and comply with the environment, as well as develop a better sense of its negative aspects, comprise the main forces cushioning environmental pressures to withdraw. Indeed, agreeable followers seem apt to establish positive, satisfying relationships within the organization (Organ & Lingl, 1995) that yield winsome thoughts in the work environment and increase strength in affective forces (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004) that equip followers to endure (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Moreover, compliance and dependence aspects in aggregable followers aid their sense of contractual obligation in remaining with organizations (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004).

On the other hand, the negative side of agreeableness includes acting without forethought (Clark & Watson, 1999; Eysenck, 1997) and rash, spontaneous quitting (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mobley et al., 1979). Followers rating low in emotional stability, low in agreeableness or high in openness are more prone to engage in unplanned quitting than otherwise (Zimmerman, 2008). Zimmerman's (2008) findings have shown that personality traits exert stronger relationships with withdrawal than non-self-reported measures of work complexity and job characteristics.

On the other hand, conscientiousness as a personal trait rouses moral motivations such that followers having higher conscientiousness adhere more closely to contractual obligations (Zimmerman, 2008). Contractual obligations that stem from numerous factors, including fair treatment, fulfillment of promises, or perceived organizational support (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001), prevent withdrawal while a follower displays the norms of reciprocity until a perceived debt is repaid (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). As for moral-ethical motivational forces, highly conscientious followers believe more in a moral obligation to engage and not withdraw.

Followers with higher extroversion who are more likely to experience positive emotions more frequently (Clark & Watson, 1999; Watson & Clark, 1992, 1997) feel better about their work environments and are more motivated to stay in their organizations (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This implies that high levels of extroversion incur less withdrawal. Also, the linkage between emotional stability and withdrawal *mirrors that for extroversion* where low emotional stability likely impairs follower satisfaction due to encoding and recalling negative information (Watson & Clark, 1984; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), as well as to having negative views of themselves and their environments (Burke, Brief, & George, 1993; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

In one study exploring the relationship between motivation and withdrawal, Maertz and Griffeth (2004), documented that followers with negative views of work environments showed higher rates of withdrawal. This research also demonstrated followers with lower emotional stability to more likely to withdraw earlier in their job tenures due to stress from learning new tasks, performing new job responsibilities, socializing in a new work environment, and being unsure about their own abilities to perform (Judge & Ilies, 2002). Empirical evidence also supports low levels of emotional stability being linked to withdrawal from stressful goals (Judge & Ilies, 2002; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). Among all factors, socialization imposes a disproportionately large effect on turnover (Berlew & Hall, 1966) where emotionally unstable followers experience negative moods more frequently, incurring greater conflict with coworkers (Organ, 1994) and less effective socialization in their organizations. Cote (2005) later theorized that individuals exhibiting negative emotions, such as sadness and anger, are less likely to receive social support from coworkers and are more likely to experience interpersonal conflict, thereby escalating their stress levels and their intentions to quit (Spector & Jex, 1998).

Zimmerman (2008) also focused on traits *beyond the five-factor model* to observe the parallelism between high trait positivity and extroversion, as well as high trait negativity and low emotional stability in terms of follower personal traits impacting withdrawal. Trait positivity describes people who experience positive affects, such as sensations, emotions and sentiments, favorably engaging others and their surroundings (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999) as those generally enthusiastic, energetic, confident, active and alert. Research has also established the linkage among trait positivity and longevity, better sleep, and lower stress hormones (Schenk, et al., 2017). Thus, individuals scoring high in positive affectivity have healthier coping styles, more upbeat self-qualities, and are more goal-oriented (Paterson, Yeung, Thornton, 2015), while

high levels of trait negativity feature sadness, lethargy, distress, and unpleasant engagement that correlate to social anxiety and depression due to lower levels of dopamine (Cohen, et al., 2017). Finally, where analyses included only traits of positive and negative affect, a stronger correlation with turnover intention, i.e., withdrawal, was detected versus studies where only emotional stability and extroversion traits were analyzed (Thoresen et al., 2003).

Beyond personality traits, Zimmerman (2008) further analyzed the relationship between withdrawal and organizational behavior to find job performance directly impacting withdrawal, as well as indirectly through job satisfaction. This impact on job performance can be explained by *expectancy theory* that predicts high performance leads to both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that, in turn, elevate job satisfaction levels (Lawler & Porter, 1967) to incur less withdrawal. Judge et al. (2001) demonstrated this positive relationship empirically by meta-analysis ($\rho = .30$).

However, according to Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) model and Mobley's (1977) scheme, job satisfaction does not exert direct, but *indirect impact through job attitudes* that, in turn, link to turnover. Job satisfaction (Hoppock, 1935) has long been defined as any combination of psychological, physiological and environmental circumstances that causes a person to truly be satisfied with a job. Satisfied followers who thus feel more positively about their jobs are less likely to leave positions. Conversely, when employees have negative attitudes about their own work situations, they will act to avoid such in order to curb negative feelings (Hulin, Roznowski, & Hachiya, 1985). Therefore, where followers have low job satisfaction, they are more likely to intend to withdraw from the work environment (Zimmerman, 2008).

However, various studies have identified *leadership* as the most effective factor driving employee withdrawal (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003; Buckingham & Coffman, 1999) – a plethora having found both significantly negative and significantly effective leadership styles to

impact employee withdrawal. In one study on *despotic leadership's* effect on withdrawal, researchers detected a mediating effect between despotic leadership and employee *performance* through an enhanced level of workplace withdrawal behavior (Nauman, Zheng, & Basit, 2021). Research on the effects of *servant leadership* and job withdrawal intentions of followers has revealed a *negative* relationship between servant leadership and employee withdrawal intention, hence confirming servant leadership's ability to reduce employee job withdrawal intention (Ng, Choi, & Soehod, 2016). A recent multilevel analysis on the moderating effect of servant leadership on follower withdrawal has shown that a higher follower *proactive personality* means less likelihood of withdrawal behavior at work – the negative relationship between the two is stronger under *servant leadership* (Song, & Lee, 2020).

Another study focused on psychological empowerment as a mediator between follower perceptions of *authentic leadership* and withdrawal, identifying the dimension of psychological empowerment as mediating the relationship between authentic leadership and *absence frequency* (Shapira-Lishchinsky, & Tsemach, 2014). Research on the effect of *transformational leadership*, organizational communication, and job involvement on withdrawal behavior recently noted a negative effect of *transformational leadership* on withdrawal behavior (Basyir, Madhakomala, & Handaru, 2020). Using data from China, Kenya and Thailand, Pang & Walumbwa (2007) had earlier reported the moderating effect of *transformational leadership* in the relationships between work flexibility benefits and work withdrawal. Another effort studied the moderating effect of *collectivism* on the relationships between *transformational leadership* and withdrawal at work in China, India and Kenya: transformational leadership proved negatively related to job attitudes and work withdrawal under low, medium, and high collectivism (Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003).

Research on *passive leadership*, its effect on workplace incivility, and its further impact on employee withdrawal suggest that passive leadership exerts a significant direct effect on behavioral incivility *and* an indirect effect through experienced incivility – both incivility types repeatedly found to be significantly and positively related to withdrawal (Harold, & Holtz, 2014). Moreover, Harold, & Holtz (2014) have noted that the correlation *between* experienced and behavioral incivility is conditional on the *level of passive leadership* where the effect of experience on behavior is stronger at higher levels of passive leadership, incurring an amplified positive effect on withdrawal. In a similar study, *passive leadership* has been associated with various negative employee attitudes and behavior, including the desire to leave the organization and an increase in withdrawal (Bernhard, & O'Driscoll, 2011).

A most recent study took place in China to explore how *endurance psychology* directly mediates *authoritarian leadership* and employee withdrawal, and to scrutinize the moderating effect of the *adversity quotient* between authoritarian leadership and employee withdrawal (Zhao, & Chen, 2021). It unveiled a direct linkage between authoritarian leadership and employee withdrawal and its indirect relationship via the adversity quotient. The indirect relationship was stronger when adversity quotients were low versus weaker under high quotients where *adversity quotient* (AQ) is defined as the *ability of a person to deal with adversities* (Zhao, & Chen, 2021).

In a call-center study, León & Morales (2018) addressed supportive leadership enlisting Lawrence, Lenk, and Quinn's (2009) specific concept of *people-oriented leadership* as one of four leadership orientations consistent with the *Competing Values Framework of organizational culture* (Cameron, Quinn, DeGraff, & Thakor, 2006; Hartnell, Yi Ou, & Kinicki, 2011; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983), the remaining three being *change-*, *results-*, and *process-oriented* leadership. León & Morales (2018) found that the *people-oriented leadership* is associated with elevated

absenteeism for high-employable subordinates versus less absenteeism for the low-employable. One meta-analysis study (van der Kamp, 2015) of 53 correlations from 31 sources unveiled the *people-focused leadership* as offering a more negative relationship with employee withdrawal versus *task-focused leadership* behavior – the relationship between task-focused leadership and withdrawal also being negative, but proving *not* significant.

Applying the arguments from *social exchange theory*, Lorinkova & Perry (2014) have examined the relationship of *empowering leadership* with follower empowerment and cynicism, plus its further effects on withdrawal via the moderating effect of leader relationship quality with leaders' *own superiors* as this upward relationship quality influenced follower empowerment. Their sample of 161 employees across 37 direct supervisors (Lorinkova, & Perry, 2014) found *empowering leadership* to correlate with reduced employee cynicism both directly and indirectly through employee psychological empowerment. The indirect relationship between empowering leadership and *follower psychological empowerment* proved positive and statistically significant *only when the leaders themselves enjoyed* high-quality relationships with *their own bosses*. Moreover, in line with social exchange theory, cynicism was directly associated with deliberate withdrawal behavior, suggesting that employees may reciprocate frustrating experiences by withdrawing in minor, yet impactful, ways in efforts to balance their dealings with the firm (Lorinkova, & Perry, 2014). With cynicism comprising a symptom of burnout (Maslach, 1998), this study is relevant in showing the relationship between empowering leadership and burnout.

Enlisting the *conservation of resources* theory, Chi & Liang (2013) examined the linkage between abusive supervision as the dominant factor of *abusive leadership* and work withdrawal from a stress perspective, focusing on the moderating role of follower emotion regulation strategies and the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. Analyzing survey data of 254 ranked

officers in 55 work groups, Chi and Liang (2013) found that follower emotional exhaustion mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and work withdrawal *only* when subordinates engaged in high-frequency expressive suppression *or* low-frequency cognitive reappraisal. This result is particularly useful for my study model in detecting the relationship between follower withdrawal and emotional exhaustion. This study also proves salient to withdrawal literature as it tracked the effectiveness of intervention against follower withdrawal, such as emotional regulation strategies.

While research has not yet found a direct relationship between empowering leadership and withdrawal, empirical evidence based on a mediation model result has indicated empowering leader behavior positively relates to estimates of affective organizational commitment. These, in turn, inversely correlate to *absenteeism* and *turnover intention* as two dimensions of withdrawal. Reinforcing this mediation model, *no significant direct effect* was found that linked empowering leadership with withdrawal behavior (Kim, & Beehr, 2018).

Empowering leadership, which provides followers autonomy and developmental support, may positively affect the follower's decision to engage the organization at various levels and effectively react to the organization in the form of psychological commitment (Kim, & Beehr, 2018). Another study extending prior research models by its examining a full range of withdrawal behavior versus empowering leadership identified *job commitment* as explaining why empowering leader behavior can influence an employee's retention choice (Kim, & Beehr, 2020).

In their most recent study, Kim & Beehr's (2021) serial model of empowering leadership was able to predict *employee job-crafting* through psychological capital and trust in a leader where job-crafting yields three different types of work behavior: psychological withdrawal, physical withdrawal, and positive work gestures. Results suggest that empowering leadership

evokes job resources in the forms of psychological capital and leader trust where job-crafting cues followers to engage in more positive work behavior, with less psychological and physical withdrawal (Kim, & Beehr, 2021). Such findings are important for my study as having uncovered another mediated effect of empowering leadership on follower withdrawal in their model through psychological capital and job-crafting. Kim et al. (2021) also reported significant, direct effects of empowering leadership and psychological capital on psychological withdrawal. While many important studies have also attempted to assess empowering leadership and withdrawal behavior, results have not proven statistically significant. Thus, Kim et al. (2021) findings serve as a vital documentary foothold that ties empowering leadership to a particular form of withdrawal.

In a recent study (Edelmann, Boen, & Fransen, 2020) to track how empowering leaders affect follower well-being (as well as team effectiveness), researchers focused on the impact of *peer leadership* rather than team reflection. Results suggest that when a formal leader wields the empowering leadership style, the empowering leader not only correlates with higher perceived peer leadership quality in four different roles, i.e., task, motivational, social and external leader, but is also perceived as a superior leader (Edelmann *et al.*, 2020). Peer leadership, in turn, also positively correlates with team efficiency and work satisfaction, while inversely so to burnout. Here, *team identification* mediated these relationships: peer leadership with team efficiency, and satisfaction with follower burnout (Edelmann et al., 2020). These results aligned with the *social identity* approach where peer leaders succeeded in creating a shared sense of “we/us” in the team. This team identification, in turn, generated all of the positive outcomes in both performance and well-being dimensions. Therefore, empowering leaders equip peer leaders toward documented results in team effectiveness while also enhancing follower well-being.

Another effort focused on the relationship between emotional fatigue and withdrawal found emotional exhaustion directly driving *days absent from work* as a dimension of withdrawal (Schermyly et al., 2011). As much as a positive relationship between withdrawal and emotional exhaustion has been well-documented as valid for both leaders and followers, direct *cross-effect* of follower withdrawal on *leader emotional exhaustion* remains unreported in literature.

However, a recent *crossover* study of emotional exhaustion from followers upon leaders (Wirtz, Rigotti, Otto, & Loeb, 2017) further explained the linkage between follower withdrawal and leader emotional exhaustion via *follower* emotional exhaustion. Since leadership roles need a leader to interact socially with followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), this implies that emotional well-being could *transfer follower-to-leader via social exchange* (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000), especially where they work closely. Empirical evidence testing of the *cross-effect* theory found that leader emotional well-being transmits to followers, and vice versa (Westman & Etzion, 1999). This direct crossover of emotional exhaustion from followers to leaders has also been reported within group research from multiple resources (Bakker et al., 2009; Westman & Bakker, 2008).

Given that social exchange with followers is inherent to the leadership role, it is crucial to more thoroughly scrutinize crossover that *focuses on leader outcomes*. Research has yet to unveil the direct crossover of emotional exhaustion from followers to leaders. Indeed, many factors affect this relationship, such as power distance and qualitatively distinct, potentially limited numbers of interactions between leaders and followers that may account for emotional distancing that hinder any direct crossover of negative emotions or strain (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Frone, 2000; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). Still, the positive indirect relationship between leader emotional fatigue and follower exhaustion *moderated by leaders' emotional self-efficacy* has

been demonstrated (Wirtz, Rigotti, Otto, & Loeb, 2017), thus supporting a leadership model where followers play an active part beyond any one-way “reception-only” of leadership efforts (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Thus, condition of followers can mold leader well-being at work (Wirtz, Rigotti, Otto, & Loeb, 2017) in support of an *empathetic crossover process*: leaders who deem themselves particularly adept in human skills pay more attention to emotional expressions of their followers (Bandura, 1997), are more likely to detect negative emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1993), and more likely to experience negative emotions themselves (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000). It is also possible that leaders with high emotional self-efficacy *personalize* the negative emotional trials of their followers, thus developing negative symptoms over time *themselves* (Bandura et al., 2003). As a result, the detection of follower withdrawal *cross-effect* on leader emotional fatigue fills the gap in the literature on follower impact on leader outcomes.

Hypothesis 3. Follower withdrawal is positively related to leader emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 4. Empowering leadership has a negative indirect effect on leader emotional exhaustion through team reflection and follower withdrawal.

A negative relationship between empowering leadership and leader emotional fatigue assumes that empowering leaders receive reciprocal benefits – such as commitment and performance – from their investments in followers, and that these benefits facilitate leader efforts. This reasoning is informed by *social exchange and reciprocity* theoretical arguments (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Levinson, 1965) that follower commitment results from positive work experiences created by supportive leaders (Meyer, Irving, & Allen, 1998). Research implies that high investments especially increase follower commitment (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). In support of this reasoning, research has shown empowering leadership positively relates to job satisfaction, engagement, creativity, job performance, and extra-role behavior (Amundsen & Martinson, 2015; Humborstad,

Nerstad, & Dysvik, 2014; Raub & Robert, 2010; Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010; Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012; Zhang & Zhou, 2014).

4. METHOD

4.1. Sample and Procedure

To test my hypotheses, I conducted a multi-source, single wave field study with a total of 172 leader-follower teams. The teams came from various companies from the financial, import, and investment sector in China. While followers completed online questionnaires, leaders were provided with the opportunity to fill out either an online or a paper-based questionnaire. The questionnaires for followers and leaders differed with regard to their content. All data was collected within one month. In total, over 300 teams were contacted for the purpose of this study. Of these, 274 agreed to participate (response rate = 91%). I used an experience sampling approach and included teams in my final sample when the leader and at least three team members provided complete data. Teams which provided incomplete data were excluded from the analysis. This yielded a final sample of 172 teams (consisting of 172 leaders and 528 members).

The sample included leaders and followers working in multinational corporations from various departments including security, human resources, information technology, marketing, sales, government relations, public relations, production and planning, corporate strategy, consultancy, legal, research and development, logistics, internal audit and finance. Thus, the sample included a broad variety of occupations such as security officers, compensation and benefits officers, recruitment professionals, software developers, marketing agents, sales personnel, public relations professionals, production planners, consultants, lawyers, designers, engineers, logistics planners, auditors, tax consultants, accountants and financial controllers. Due

to employment requirements of the employers, all participants were bi-lingual, university graduates or above with significant portion of them studied abroad.

The average team size was 7.9 members ($SD = 4.43$). The 172 leaders were on average 47.41 years old ($SD = 6.78$), with a range from 30 to 65 years. 39 leaders were female (23%), and 133 leaders were men (77%). Of the followers, 304 individuals were women (58%) and 224 were men (42%). On average, followers were 36.71 years old ($SD = 6.91$), with a range from 25 to 65 years.

The vast majority (92%) of the team members communicated at least several times a week, up to several times a day. Only the minority of the team members (8%) did not have weekly communication with the leader. The working experience outside of the current organization was on average, 3.6 years, while the working experience in the current organization was on average 6.0 years. Minimum working hours per week was 30 hours, maximum working hours per week was 60 hours with average 43 hours ($SD = 6.78$).

4.2. Measures

The participants rated the questionnaire items on 5-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Somech, 2006). All questionnaire was prepared in English.

Team size (rated by team members). Team size included the respective respondent and excluded the leader.

Job complexity (self-rated by team members). The four items capturing job complexity at the team level were adapted from Madrid et al. (2015). Team members rated the extent to which their team “is required to deal with problems which are difficult to solve,” “has to solve problems which have no obvious correct answer,” “comes across problems in job that we have

not met before,” and “needs to use knowledge of the work process to help prevent problems arising in our job.” Cronbach’s alpha was .90. I aggregated team member responses to the team level based on the following values for interrater agreement and interrater reliability (mean $r_{WG(j)}$, with a uniform null distribution = .86; ICC(1) = .36; ICC(2) = .63; $F(171, 356) = 2.74, p < .01$.

Task interdependence (self-rated by team members). I used five items from Kiggundu’s (1983) scale. Team members rated the extent to which their individual task is dependent on other team members such as “I work closely with others in my team in doing my work,” “I frequently must coordinate my efforts with others in my team,” “My own performance is dependent on receiving accurate information from others in my team,” “My work requires me to consult with others in my team fairly frequently,” and “The way I perform my job has a significant impact on others in my team.” Cronbach’s alpha was .95. We aggregated team member responses to the team level based on the following values for interrater agreement and interrater reliability (mean $r_{WG(j)}$, with a uniform null distribution = .92; ICC(1) = .55; ICC(2) = .79). ANOVA result for task interdependence scale was $F(171, 356) = 4.77, p < .01$.

Empowering leadership (rated by team members). I measured empowering leadership with an 8-item scale from Kearney et al. (2019). Team members rated the extent to which the leader “involves me in important decisions,” “shares power and responsibility with me,” “gives me important tasks,” “gives me great freedoms in regard to how I can work on my tasks,” “allows me to make many decisions on my own,” “lets me define some goals all by myself,” “expresses confidence that I can handle challenging tasks,” and “tells me and shows me that he/she trusts me.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .97. I aggregated team member responses to the team level based on the following values for interrater agreement and interrater reliability

(mean $r_{WG(j)}$, with a uniform null distribution = .95; ICC(1) = .61; ICC(2) = .82; $F(171, 356) = 5.70, p < .01$).

Team reflection (self-rated by team members). To measure followers' reflection, I used six items based on West (1996) measured the extent to which team members collectively reflected on the team's objectives, strategies, and processes. Team members rated the extent to which in the team, team members "always look for different interpretations and perspectives to confront a problem," "criticize each other's work in order to improve team effectiveness," "are prepared to reflect on the way we act," "engage in evaluating our weak points in attaining effectiveness," "openly challenge each other's opinions," and "reassess any proposed solution." Cronbach's alpha was .94. I aggregated team member responses to the team level based on the following values for interrater agreement and interrater reliability (mean $r_{WG(j)}$, with a uniform null distribution = .92; ICC(1) = .41; ICC(2) = .68; $F(171, 356) = 3.16, p < .01$).

Withdrawal (self-rated by team members). The five items capturing workload were adapted from Kearney et al. (2022). Team members rated the extent to which some members of their team "do not contribute fully to our team work," "withdraw somewhat from working on our tasks," "are not actively contributing to our work," "are somewhat passive," and "are oftentimes not fully engaged." This scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .97. I aggregated team member responses to the team level based on the following values for interrater agreement and interrater reliability (mean $r_{WG(j)}$, with a uniform null distribution = .88; ICC(1) = .58; ICC(2) = .81; $F(171, 356) = 5.22, p < .01$).

Leader emotional exhaustion (self-rated by leader). Emotional exhaustion was measured using four items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Leader rated the extent to which he or she feel "emotionally drained from my work," "used up at the end of

the workday,” “burned out from my work,” and “frustrated by my job.” Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

TABLE 2
Scores for Aggregating Data to the Team-Level

Keys	RWGj	ICC1	ICC2	Raw Alpha
Task Complexity	0.86	0.36	0.63	0.90
Task Interdependence	0.92	0.55	0.79	0.95
Empowering Leadership	0.95	0.61	0.82	0.97
Team Reflection	0.92	0.41	0.68	0.94
Withdrawal	0.88	0.58	0.81	0.97
Emotional Exhaustion				0.82

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. I conducted a set of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to check for potential common method bias, such that all constructs that were assessed by team members on scales are distinct constructs. My proposed five-factor model with all constructs, namely task complexity, task interdependence, empowering leadership, reflection, and withdrawal - yielded a good fit: $\chi^2(340) = 960.74$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .04. This model was a significantly better fit ($p < .01$) than an alternative four factor model with $\chi^2(344) = 1882.24$, CFI = .86, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .09, a three-factor model with $\chi^2(347) = 3893.25$, CFI = .67, RMSEA = .14, SRMR = .13, a two-factor model with $\chi^2(349) = 6270.27$, CFI = .46, RMSEA = .18, SRMR = .19, and a one-factor model $\chi^2(350) = 7116.10$, CFI = .38, RMSEA = .19, SRMR = .19 where I combined all scales into one factor.

5. RESULTS

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability of the study variables. Empowering leadership was positively related to follower reflection ($r = .33, p < .01$) and negatively related to follower withdrawal ($r = -.46, p < .01$) and emotional exhaustion ($r = -.19, p < .05$). Moreover, follower reflection was negatively related to follower withdrawal ($r = -.38, p < .01$) and unrelated to leader emotional exhaustion ($r = -.06, n.s.$). Finally, follower withdrawal was positively related to leader emotional exhaustion ($r = .24, p < .01$).

Correlations among study variables. Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among my study variables. The controlled variables except task interdependence, namely team size ($M = 7.90, SD = 4.43$) and task complexity ($M = 3.66, SD = 0.58$) were non-significantly related to empowering leadership ($r = .02, n.s.$ and $r = -.07, n.s.$) whereas task interdependence ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.67$) was significantly and positively related to empowering leadership ($r = .23, p < .01$). On the other hand, empowering leadership was significantly correlated with team reflection and withdrawal ($r = .33, p < .0001$ and $r = -.46, p < .0001$). There was no statistically significant relationship between leader's emotional exhaustion and any other variable, namely team size, task complexity, task interdependence, empowering leadership, team reflection, but follower withdrawal ($r = -.02, n.s.$; $r = .14, n.s.$; $r = .05, n.s.$; $r = -.19, n.s.$; $r = -.06, n.s.$ and $r = .24, p < .01$)

TABLE 3
Correlations, Descriptive Statistics, and Reliability

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Team Size	7.90	4.43						
2 Task Complexity	3.66	0.58	.00					
3 Task Interdependence	3.69	0.67	.11	.20**				
4 Empowering Leadership	3.76	0.68	.02	-.07	.23**			
5 Team Reflection	3.36	0.58	.01	.14	.29***	.33****		
6 Withdrawal	2.65	0.82	.14	.10	-.27***	-.46****	-.38****	
7 Leader Emotional Exhaustion	2.68	0.85	-.02	.14	.05	-.19*	-.06	.24**

Note: Coefficient alphas are bold on the diagonal. * $p < .05$ and ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. **** $p < 0.001$

For the analysis of mediation, I used PROCESS (version 3.0) with R (IBM Corp., 2017/2019), which is based on ordinary least squares regression (OLS) and applies bootstrapping for generating confidence intervals to make inferences about the indirect effect (Hayes, 2018). I conducted a serial mediation analysis using PROCESS model 6 (Hayes 2018). I used 95% confidence intervals and 50,000 boot-strap samples throughout the analyses and report unstandardized regression coefficients.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that empowering leadership ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.68$) is positively related to reflection within the team. In line with my expectations, the results from the

correlation ($r = .33, p < .01$) and regression analysis ($b = .25, SE = .06, p < .01$) showed a positive effect of empowering leadership on reflection. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

Hypothesis 2 estimates that team reflection ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.58$) is negatively related to followers' withdrawal. In line with my expectations, the results from the correlation ($r = -.38, p < .01$) and regression analysis ($b = -.35, SE = .10, p < .01$) showed a negative effect of team reflection on followers' withdrawal. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

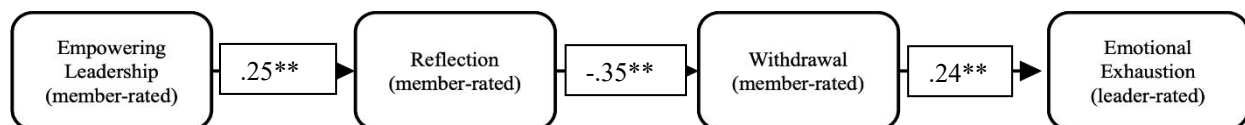
Hypothesis 3 suggests that followers' withdrawal ($M = 2.65, SD = 0.82$) is positively related to leader's emotional exhaustion. In line with my expectations, the results from the correlation ($r = .24, p < .01$) and regression analysis ($b = .24, SE = .09, p < .01$) showed a positive effect of followers' withdrawal on leader's emotional exhaustion. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was confirmed.

Hypothesis 4 posits that there is a negative indirect effect of empowering leadership on leader emotional exhaustion ($M = 2.68, SD = 0.85$) via team reflection and withdrawal. The mediation analysis showed that this indirect effect was significant, as its 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero ($b = -.02, SE = .01, 95\% CI [-.053, -.002]$). Hence, Hypothesis 4 was confirmed.

Figure 2 depicts a summary of these results, which support Hypothesis 1, 2, 3, & 4.

FIGURE 2

Theoretical Model and Summary of Results



Indirect effect = -.02 (BootCI = -.053, -.002)

Note: Figure 2 shows the model including unstandardized path coefficients on arrows as well as indirect effects in italics above and below paths. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Together, empowering leadership and followers' reflection and followers' withdrawal explained 10% of the variance in leaders' emotional exhaustion when controlling for team size, task complexity and task interdependence ($F[6, 165] = 2.92, p < .01$).

6. DISCUSSION

“The first wealth is health.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1860

This effort has been motivated by the controversy about the sustainability of empowering leadership behavior: do leaders who empower others by sharing their own resources at the cost of self-comfort and -success raise their risk of emotional exhaustion? To answer this question, I examined the relationship between empowering leadership and leader emotional exhaustion. My proposition that empowering leadership is, on the contrary, negatively related to emotional exhaustion has found empirical support. I further explored mechanisms that explain this link between empowering leadership and leader emotional exhaustion. The results of my study confirm that follower reflection *and* withdrawal *serially mediate* the relationship between empowering leadership and leader fatigue. Findings indicate that leader emotional exhaustion decreases when empowering leadership yields a rise in team reflective attitudes that lead to a drop in team withdrawal at work.

The urgent search for strategies that support staff and promote positive mental health in the workplace emerged with the industrial revolution, gaining pace in the modern era (Milleer et al., 2008). Employee well-being is a most popular research topic in organizational psychology as documented urgency of such a need in the data and facts has merited academic attention (Kang, Ji, Baek, & Byon, 2020; Li, Li, Liu, 2021). This study advances scholarly understanding on how empowering leadership shapes leader well-being by integrating a variety of theoretical concepts from organizational psychology. Findings have suggested that empowering leadership correlates

with leader emotional exhaustion through *a serial mediation process* with two mediators: team reflection and follower withdrawal. By addressing the salience of workplace mental health, organizations can engage the leader in best-practices for curbing risks and raising worker productivity. The ability to maintain mental health at work can be regarded as a critical element of work-related performance (Chopra, 2009).

Foremost, this study is the first to investigate the joint effect of two particular mediators in an effort to broaden prior research, as the effect of team reflection on follower withdrawal had defied scrutiny. However, direct linkage among empowering leadership, follower withdrawal, and leader-follower well-being have already been examined, absent mediating effect, but *without* statistical significance. Here, I have referred to a multitude of theories available in psychology that may explain the causal relationships from a new perspective. Among these, Hobfoll's (1989) *conservation of resources* theory inspired me most for this study, its second principle stating that to recover from loss or to gain resources, one must invest resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

At this point, team reflection can be cast as an effort to question what went wrong and to learn what can be done to avoid repeated resource loss, to enhance relationships within the team, or to improve cognition of work, as well as to increase workplace resources and soften job stress (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012). The results of the serial model support the idea that follower team reflection tends to favor a proactive approach that seeks feedback, learns new skills, cuts bureaucracy, or optimizes the workflow and environment as advised by *demand-resource* theory (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2017). Here, empowering strategies dissolve bureaucratic constraints and enhance work meaningfulness, thereby saving employees a descent into withdrawal pitfalls as they work confidently with high performance that, in return, refreshes team mental health.

6.1. Summary of Findings and Contributions

To broaden our knowledge as to the empowering leadership issues raised above, I have added an empirical study to the growing body of research on leader well-being. I conclude that empowering leadership seems to enhance leader well-being. I found support for this by analyzing data of 700 participants comprising 172 actual work teams: 172 leaders and 528 team members. Results from my study suggest that empowering leadership may enhance leader well-being without the potential drawbacks for leaders raised in the sustainability question, as empowering leadership proved directly related to greater team reflection and indirectly related to less follower withdrawal that, in turn, exerted a positive relationship with leader well-being. Various theories in the literature solidify my argument that the positive effect of empowering leadership owes to the resource-sharing and empowerment features of leaders – *team reflection is one such resource* that empowering leaders enhance, if not inaugurate, for followers. I found further support for my central assumptions in empowering leadership theory (Manz et al., 1990; Pearce et al., 2003).

6.2. Theoretical Implications

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes emotional exhaustion or workplace stress as a global occupational phenomenon (www.WHO.int). Also, the U.S. National Institute for Mental Health has defined any mental, behavioral or emotional disorder – including emotional exhaustion – as a mental illness (www.nimh.nih.gov) that one out of every five Americans suffers from.

Mind the Workplace survey by Mental Health America explains that research has shown one's ability to have satisfaction in life hinges on opportunities to experience satisfaction at work. Considering that individuals will spend a third of their life working, the work environment and its impact on the workforce's mental and physical health is an area that merits research (Harter, 2003).

According to a recent study, leader-induced stress has been linked to adverse individual health outcomes at psychological (poor emotional and mental health) and physiological levels (poor physical health) (Jacobs, 2019).

Gallup's *State of the American Manager Report* that surveyed U.S. turnover has observed one in two subordinates quitting because of leader-induced problems, with 70 percent planning for or actively seeking a new job due to lack of work support and recognition (www.gallup.com). Empowering Leadership can change this! The consequences of struggling with these issues can impact an employee's whole life and incur a range of physiological and psychological effects such as fatigue, irritability, anger, lack of motivation, headaches, and heart attacks. In fact, one U.S. study examining the relationship between fatigue factors and mortality has estimated that more than 120,000 annual deaths and that 5–8 percent of healthcare costs may be attributable to how employers and leaders manage their workforce (Goh, Pfeffer, & Zenios, 2016).

Moreover, due to devastating effects on the leader and followers' well-being, there has emerged a rising rate of resignation followed by mass exodus from the workforce – the Great Resignation. As a result, employers now face rising difficulties in attracting and retaining high-performance followers and leaders that have been well-documented. This matter becomes more even complex considering the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the four generations currently in the workforce: baby boomers and subsequent Generations X (1965-1980), Y (1981-1996), and especially Z (1997-2012), who have sought meaning and balance in their lives. They are more selective about their work and how it aligns with their personal values. In addition, the willingness to leave a job that imposes undue stress has been extensively reported (www.nimh.nih.gov).

According to a survey result published in the Harvard Business Review, 60% of people have experienced symptoms of mental health issues within the last 12 months (<https://hbr.org/>). Furthermore, 50% of Generation Y and 75% of Generation Z respondents have left a job at least partially due to health-related causes versus just 10% of baby boomers for mental health reasons, yielding a survey average of 20% for the entire population. Generations Y and Z were three and four times more likely to *experience symptoms* of anxiety, respectively, than were baby boomers. Results further indicate younger generations are *more aware* of mental health symptoms than the older cohort. Not surprisingly, the survey marked Generation Y as 63% more likely to seek “company support” such as counseling or mental health training versus baby boomers. Therefore, survey results indicated for employers a higher cost for employee retention and even more costly employee turnover consequences due to increased health awareness.

Beyond the age factor, emotional health has exerted increasing concern among different demographic groups. Afro-American or South American respondents have indicated a 50% more likelihood of workforce withdrawal for mental health concerns versus Caucasians. For under-represented employees, this creates additional challenges for employers on top of those facing the majority in the workforce. Type of industry employment has also been a factor as 55% of those working in *technology* had cited job resignation under mental health struggles.

Emotional health as a component of mental health has also affected work performance (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Halbesleben, & Bowler, 2007; Halbesleben, & Buckley, 2004; Wright, & Cropanzano, 1998). One recent survey has shown 61% of employees reporting mental health impacts on productivity – a majority citing team and supervisor relations as exerting the largest toll on well-being (<https://hbr.org/>). Consequences of mental health awareness for employers include the need to offer solid a mental-health benefits that employees feel comfortable using,

starting with mental-health employee-group prevention strategy. For further intervention, leaders and followers can also be trained to engage in sensitive conversations to identify general signs and symptoms of mental health issues. Identifying remedial resources such as therapy must be visited.

Recent survey and research results are in line with calls for more emphasis on the role of leadership in follower well-being (Inceoglu, Thomas, Chu, Plans, & Gerbasi, 2018). I here argue that empowering leadership is particularly relevant to both leader and follower emotional fatigue because of its strong emphasis on resource-sharing per *Conservation of Resources* theory (Schermyly et al., 2011). This aligns with Schermuly's idea that empowering leaders can make a significant contribution to the maintenance of follower health.

As extant literature has mainly examined empowering leadership effects on performance-related processes and outcomes, not leader well-being (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Halbesleben, & Bowler, 2007; Halbesleben, & Buckley, 2004; Wright, & Cropanzano, 1998), my focus on the well-being of an empowering leader represents a key extension of the literature, especially since poor mental health often results from emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben, & Buckley, 2004; Schaufeli, & Greenglass, 2001) and impairs performance. Hence, one of my main contributions is to provide a theory on the relationship between empowering leadership and a leader's emotional exhaustion subject to follower attributes – follower reflection and withdrawal as indicators of the resources dedicated by empowering leadership toward followers. Beyond resource-sharing, empowering leadership also features follower autonomy, participation in decision-making, and delegation processes that may also incur resource spending. By showing empowering leadership *negatively* related with follower withdrawal and emotional exhaustion,

my findings suggest that resource benefits under empowering leader outweighs losses from follower resource spending.

My first research question asks how empowering leadership relates to leader exhaustion since it requires leaders to share their resources with followers in order to achieve common goals (Vecchio et al., 2010). In studying how empowering leadership affects follower withdrawal and leader well-being, I have found empowering leadership to negatively and indirectly relate through team reflection to follower withdrawal that, in turn, correlates with leader emotional exhaustion. Moreover, my results show that empowering leadership incurs emotional exhaustion for leaders unable to prevent follower withdrawal. I hope that the findings of this study inspire and encourage researchers to develop further understanding of the effects of empowering leadership and, in particular, explore how leadership impacts not only followers, but leaders too. Furthermore, I hope that my research motivates practitioners to experiment more with empowering leadership given the beneficial effects on both leader and follower well-being documented in this study. On the other hand, practitioners should also identify possible circumstances where empowering leadership may yet incur emotional fatigue versus those not. Inspired by *conservation of resources* (Halbesleben et al., 2009) and “when empowering employees works, and when it doesn’t” (Lee et al., 2018), I reason that exhaustion may unfold when followers exploit their leaders’ resources or when leaders fail to access vital resources.

My research on empowering leadership and exhaustion is also of broader interest from an occupational health perspective. I reported earlier that emotional exhaustion, mood swings and depression are known to be caused by chronic stress (Halbesleben, & Buckley, 2004; Schaufeli, & Greenglass, 2001) that incur massive healthcare costs on society. Notably, depression comprises a continuum of emotional exhaustion, whether work-related or for any other reason. In

addition to healthcare costs, depression is also the major contributor to suicides totaling 800,000 per year (World Health Organization, 2017). The American Psychiatric Association Foundation estimates the economic cost of major depressive disorders as exceeding \$200 billion in the U.S. alone (<https://www.workplacementalhealth.org/>). For organizations and society at large, nearly 50% of these costs are linked to some types of follower withdrawal and turnover (Greenberg, Fournier, Sisitsky, Pike, & Kessler, 2015). Hence, the inverse relationship of empowering leadership on exhaustion highlights a great potential for organizations and for the public not only to secure members' psychological health, but also for significant cost savings.

This study allows conclusions with regard to alternative explanations and solutions that may mitigate, if not prevent, follower withdrawal and fatigue. While finding that empowering leadership directly correlates with less withdrawal, my overall results unveil positive *indirect* effects of servant leadership beyond the benefits of team reflection. Empowering leadership boosts support behavior, and it may protect followers from the negative emotional consequences related to resource scarcity subject to competition. Conservation of resources (COR) theory calls this phenomenon "*resource caravans*" where, according to Hobfoll (2011), a combination of handy resources in an environment can merge to form a caravan of resources. Moreover, I note that what holds back followers from withdrawal, and a leader from consequent emotional exhaustion, is not support, but simply a team-reflection process. Since this does not involve the allocation of any resources, how team reflection interacts and relates to the COR theory that has inspired my study *remains open for future research*.

Moreover, I see two important entry points for future research when examining leader and follower exhaustion under empowering leadership. On the one hand, I have found that empowering leadership, *when it triggers team reflection*, further enhances follower engagement.

Yet, mere verbal encouragement and physical allocation of resources, which would already qualify as a great deal of empowerment, *may not suffice* to start a chain reaction of positive effects in teams. Depending on the personal attributes or experience levels of followers, a leader may be expected to perform “coaching” as documented in *situational leadership* theory (Hersey et al., 1979). Moreover, when empowering leadership gestures fail to initiate a series of positive effects – or even when positive effects lag – due to reasons mentioned earlier, potential criticism of others may create additional stress for the empowering leader. On the other hand, such efforts of the empowering leader – before or without any benefits of empowerment – may be both physically and psychologically observable to followers in ways that trigger extra team efforts that yield positive effects. Such a psychological phenomenon, called *self-fulfilling prophecy* (Biggs, 2013), explains that the prediction or expectation of something may transpire simply because the people believe or anticipate it will, and a person's resultant conduct aligns to fulfill the belief. The “self-fulfilling prophecy” phenomenon suggests that people's beliefs influence their actions, and this implies that people create consequences regarding people or events based on prior knowledge of the subject (Biggs, 2013). As the identifier of this phenomenon stated: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas, & Thomas, 1928: 571–572).

Over a longer period of time, the empowerment efforts of a leader may lead to extended efforts that cannot be sustained in a healthy manner, eventually leading to emotional exhaustion of the leader, the followers, or both. Therefore, I contend from my research that owing to various styles of empowering leadership and different aspects of well-being, there seems to be a multitude of ways how these two concepts interact – a matter still open for future research.

On the leader's side, my research broadens the understanding of the relationship between empowering leadership and its effects on leaders themselves. Here, the chief contribution is the identification of the empowering leader's focus on creating a *trust* environment and promoting behavioral control as a catalyst of team reflection for desired empowering-leadership outcomes. Empowering followers is also associated with resource-sharing, such as authority delegation and emotional support for followers in terms of encouragement. These resources seem to merit investment for leaders who expect positive returns on their efforts regarding team performance.

Sharma, D'Innocenzo & Kirkman (2021) recently noted that empowering leadership might be hard to implement when leaders either exhibit or lack certain characteristics, such as lack of motivation, perceived lack of control, risk-aversion, laziness, or even procrastination. My work thus raises questions pertaining to the degree to which empowering leadership is sustainable across all situations and for all leaders. *In itself*, however, empowering leadership did not impose strong enough impact to incur significant increases in emotional exhaustion for leaders.

Leadership studies in general, and empowering leadership in particular, have originated in Western cultures that are *low-distance*. Since a limited number of such examples exist in Eastern cultures where power distances are higher, the strength of empowering leadership effects remain relatively hidden (Thomas, & Rahschulte, 2018; Subhash , Kumar, & Nahlawat, 2019). However, my study is also useful as it indicates that the empowering leadership style applies not only to Western culture, but is also very effective in Asia's high power-distance cultures such as China's, thus offering new insights into workable forms of leadership for international development organizations operating worldwide.

6.3. Practical Implications

A plethora of research has argued the need to discover strategies for supporting people and promoting positive mental health at work (Millear, Liossis, Shochet, Biggs, & Being, 2008). Workplace mental health is a condition of mind regarding how leaders and followers think and feel daily on the job (Tsutsumi, Takao, Mineyama, Nishiuchi, Komatsu, & Kawakami, 2005). Addressing the importance of well-being in the workplace, organizations can engage leaders and followers in best practices for overcoming risks and raising employee productivity through stress and absenteeism reduction, workplace and life satisfaction, as well as job-specific effectiveness (Czabala, Charzynska, & Mroziak, 2011). Here, the ability to maintain mental health yields a beneficial effect on employee behavior at work and can rightly be deemed a key component of work-related performance (Chopra, 2009). As competition increases, every resource merits value toward employee well-being and organizational success in its maintenance, including followers. Where followers can take the initiative to help their organizations identify and solve problems, enterprises can effectively face threats and challenges posed by the environment (Crant, 2000).

One recent study has demonstrated that empowering leadership exerts positive effects on job characteristics and proactive work behavior as job characteristics and embeddedness *each* mediate the effect of empowering leadership on proactive work behavior. These *jointly* mediate the influence of empowering leadership on proactive work behavior (Wang, & Yang, 2021). In other words, this study suggests that to promote follower well-being, sustainable collaboration is needed from followers *themselves*, which then enables empowering leadership to improve proactive work behavior through job characteristics and job embeddedness (Wang, & Yang, 2021).

There are a few reasons why most leadership literature has focused on either performance outcomes or organizational citizenship behavior, but not well-being. Historically, the prerequisite

of well-being for performance has been a relatively new research idea (Daniels, & Harris, 2000). The utilitarian holdup stems from practicality, since empowering leadership's primary features of sharing resources and empowering others (Pearce et al., 2003) seemed to need justification and proof of efficacy in competitive business models where empowerment and rivalry must coexist. Hence, I assess that long-held reactions against empowering leadership's benefits on followers reflect an intuitive, healthy skepticism that may attract even more attention for further research that, in turn, could also benefit society.

Since empowering leadership features resource-sharing and *de facto* power-sharing, I too doubted how sustainable and realistic this type of leadership would be. Empowering leadership has appeared too challenging to implement, let alone sustain. This enigma was one of the major motivations for launching my research on empowering leadership. During my research, I observed I was neither the first nor the only one to address the sustainability question, and I was relieved to find studies on sustainable empowering leadership. One recent work documented the significance of empowering leadership as a sustainable type that raises positive attitudes and behavior toward organizational change from followers, thus leading to sustainable development of the firm (Jung, Kang, Choi, & Suk, 2020). Results from this same study further showed *risk-taking* behavior as positively mediating the relationship between empowering leadership and a commitment toward organizational change – thus casting empowering leadership as a key psychological mechanism favoring organizational-change commitment (Jung, Kang, Choi, & Suk, 2020).

Moreover, empowering leadership enjoys charm serving its noble ideals. As of this study's writing, an armed conflict envelops two countries, one being a nuclear power on the most eastern border of continental Europe. The West has presented the main cause as one superpower's act of

war against a much weaker, peaceful country – waged by a destructive leader who dismisses the lives of others for ambition, ego and greed (e.g., Schyns, & Schilling, 2013). Thus, the idea of raising empowering leaders that would truly serve society seems to be a vision worth exploring, perhaps serving as one ingredient in a peaceful world recipe. However, to be convinced of the vision's applicability, I have reasoned that empowering leadership needs further investigation with regard to potential threats, limitations, strengths, weaknesses, and sustainability factors of practical relevance in tough business and political situations.

One special reason further emphasizing the urgency of research on empowering leadership is the fact that typical leaders are known to assume control, take charge, make decisions, and reward, or punish when necessary (see Durham et al., 1997; Manz, & Sims, 1991; Pearce et al., 2003), while empowering leaders are known to take care of people in their charge, share resources and power, and engage followers in decision-making. The soft skills and indirect approach here lure my attention toward empowering leadership as a field of research since I am amazedly pondering how working under the leadership of an empowering figure would actually feel, how the leader would truly be perceived in terms of quality, and whether empowering leaders could ably guide followers to reach common goals better than most who use power, direction and orders to do so. Here, empowering leadership also raises the question as to what extent followers would accept and embrace an empowering leader versus other types (such as transformational or directive).

According to *Business Insider* (February 2022), four of the five most valuable companies in the world have very modest balance-sheet inventories or fixed assets. What makes them the most valuable companies in the world? Their *human capital* (<https://www.businessinsider.com/>). Seeing that people have become the most valuable asset for organizations, employee engagement

and well-being are now regarded as core factors in sustainable workplace mental health (Wang, & Yang, 2021). Not surprisingly, front-line workers who interact directly with end users are those bringing customers the most intuitive, subjective feelings vital to business success. Even though back-office employees may never meet a customer, they form an essential part of the business and its success, being responsible for the delivery of products based on the communication and understanding with the front-line. In the end, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, implying that organization-wide success depends on the performance of each individual unit. Leader-follower well-being as a prerequisite of organizational success applies to all employees.

In general, since empowering leadership enables a leader to share power with followers, followers should then also be trained to manage their job efforts using high-performance work practices in a sustainable way. In other words, as much as follower under-performance will incur resource wastage for an organization, follower *over-performance* might, too, incur destructive effects on a team. Despite team reflection's considerable advantages and superior work results, reflective behavior at work may not always be useful, at times imposing negative consequences. Particularly in reference to the "too-much-of-a-good-thing" effect, excessive reflection has been documented as destructive at the team level, with disproportionate reflection habits and attitudes toward productive effort even being known to boomerang. Therefore, employees must be trained on *how and when* to engage in reflection, such as for task and strategy viewpoints, supervisor reactions, and self-regulation.

My research aims to help leaders navigate a daunting task: empowering followers while retaining one's own well-being. Weighing the tolls and benefits of empowering leadership, I have found that empowering leadership leads to drops in levels of emotional exhaustion via

follower cognitive engagement through its reflective mindset. At the same time, empowering leadership does elevate follower workloads under delegation, but not emotional fatigue since this leadership style also provides resources to manage workloads. Leaders control many resources that affect follower well-being: they can directly influence leader-follower relations (e.g., through support), craft their followers' work environment (e.g., by listening to their needs and granting autonomy), and enhance follower competencies (e.g., through training). Given the concern of increasingly challenging tasks in most modern work environments, empowering leadership offers a way for leaders and followers to cope with mounting demands. Therefore, empowering leadership could be a means to foster well-being for both leaders and followers.

On the other hand, a leader's emotional well-being is not an invulnerable resource, and it is essential that organizations and leaders themselves ably identify situations where empowering leadership will emotionally *deplete* leaders. The promotion of empowering leadership and its empowered workplace is generally applicable and wise. Yet, for empowering leaders – perhaps most leaders – and their organizations, the well-being of followers and specific leadership traits that favor such must be monitored. From historical teachings of eastern philosophies to the new theory of *six degrees of separation*, there are lines of thought envisioning all people as connected, and even interacting subconsciously in the sense of well-being affecting each other, as opposed to a group of “loners” working on the same team under the supervision of the same leader.

Evidence of this paradox may provide organizations with more cues for preventing burnout, since support for such a moderating effect implies that employee well-being may be maintained not only through strengthened social bonds in the workplace, but also through developing and sustaining optimal work motivation.

6.4. Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

The major strength of this research is that my model considers serial mediation with two mediators to explain the relationship between empowering leadership and emotional exhaustion. I enlisted single-wave data from two sources, followers and leaders, to curtail measurement bias. My study also benefits from sample diversity as to the occupational background of participants.

Despite the strengths, my research incurs several limitations. Data were collected in a single (not multiple) waves, thus reducing relative reliability owing to the lack of repetition. Moreover, some variables tapped the same source (e.g., follower reflection *and* withdrawal), likely biasing data to some extent. My research design also precluded causal inference. It may be that empowering leadership was tainted by pre-measurement exhaustion, where less-tired leaders may have had more resources to share with followers while managing their own workloads. Further research, preferably longitudinal survey studies and field experiments that include the collection of baseline data on emotional exhaustion I was unable to obtain, would be preferable.

Another shortfall in my work is its one-dimensional treatment of empowering leadership, while a recent study proposing a multilevel model has examined the manifestation of *two* types of empowering leadership: individual- versus team-oriented (Lin, Zhang, Ng, & Zhong, 2020). This study analyzed dual-level processes on follower knowledge-hiding to show differentiated empowering leadership positively relating to such concealment via group relational conflict, with individual-focused empowering leadership negatively relating to follower knowledge-hiding via psychological safety. Results are especially salient showing each of two dimensions exerting a distinct, converse correlation with the consequent variable. These distinct dimensional effects of empowering leadership elude my work as to yield converse effects on the emotional fatigue of leaders. Therefore, further study is necessary to measure such effects.

One more drawback in my study stems from its narrow, specific industrial environment supplying the survey results. Another study on empowering leadership has detected in *dynamic* industry environments that *heterogeneous* leadership performs best when led by *directive* leaders, while *homogeneous* leadership prevails under empowering leaders (Hmieleski, & Ensley, 2007). Conversely, *stable* industry environments with heterogeneous leadership outperformed when led by empowering leaders, as homogeneous leadership proved best when led by directive leaders. These findings suggest that leadership under significantly different backgrounds and patterns of thought and behavior will *delay reaching a consensus* on goals in business environments that demand rapid action, thus missing critical windows of opportunity. These results were consistent across both samples in confirming the value of a contextual approach toward leadership that considers adjusting leadership behavior according to factors both internal and external to the firm. Such findings also suggest that leadership is contextual and highly complex, with different styles of leadership featuring pros and cons depending on internal team variables subject to the external condition of industry dynamism. Most strikingly, empowering leadership – commonly *assumed* most effective for heterogeneous teams in rapidly changing landscapes – was clearly shown to be *less effective* in these circumstances under certain conditions.

Another limitation is my reliance on *self-reported* measures. Followers with better leader-member relationships might have rated their leaders as being more empowering. Controls for the leader-member relationship in the survey results would help alleviate relationship-bias concerns. I also failed to examine potential moderators of the relationship between empowering leadership and follower reflection. Some followers may dislike certain empowering leadership features and experience stress, i.e., leaders providing autonomy to some followers that hypothetically prefer to receive directions. Also, while empowering leaders tend to build personal relationships and

provide emotional support, some followers may prefer more of a task- versus people-oriented leadership approach (Panaccio et al., 2015a). Likewise, *Situational Leadership Theory* (Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979) which marks no leadership style as best, but different types and strategies as optimal for the task, advises adaptation after a thorough analysis by a leader.

Situational Leadership methodology is based on the leader-follower relationship to offer a framework that analyzes each situation for the performance-readiness level that followers exhibit (from low to high) when engaging in a certain task, function or goal. Based on a leader's diagnosis, the necessary relationship and task gestures are applied and transmitted to a follower (among telling, selling, participating, and delegating) in order to support personal needs and development. The success of flexible leadership styles that adapt to external and internal variables in the field, such as Situational Leadership Theory, well proves that a "one-approach-fits-all" does not work.

Reflecting complicated, multi-dimensional implications of empowering leadership effects, limitations apply to my study since the degree of empowerment was not measured, assuming a linear relationship between empowering leadership and follower reflection. Researchers have pointed out over the years that the inconsistent effects of employee empowerment may have been signaling a curvilinear pattern (Bowen, & Lawler, 1992; Eccles, 1993; Forrester, 2000; Honold, 1997; Lazear, 1998; Polley, & Van Dyne, 1994; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). In other words, too much or little empowerment may prove sub-optimal or even dysfunctional (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000). Various studies have partially supported this idea, demonstrating the classic, inverted U-shaped relationship between the degree of decision-latitude granted by leaders and the perceived leadership effectiveness by their followers (Chua, & Iyengar, 2011), or between empowering leadership and employee task performance as moderated by learning orientation

(Lee, Cheong, Kim, & Yun, 2016). Among their findings, they observed that “giving employees unfettered freedom at work might backfire” (Chua, & Iyengar, 2011: 879). Therefore, there is a call for empowering leadership scale studies to find the potential nonlinear or curvilinear nature of the relationship subject to mediators excluded from my study. Finally, I was unable to sample entire leader work groups for testing within- versus between-leader effects.

As another limitation, my study’s findings must be interpreted cautiously with its positive outcomes of empowering leadership examined exclusively apart from other leadership styles and what team-reflection behavior can be further attributed to a specific style. More studies may thus weigh multiple leadership styles to ensure the uniqueness of antecedent variables, replacing team reflection with other valued outcomes linked to follower withdrawal. Beyond team reflection, other *untested* byproducts of empowering leadership at the individual level may also be curbing follower withdrawal *in parallel*. Discovering other variables moderating the relationship between empowering leadership and team reflection would invaluablely complement my study. Since team reflection is the desired behavior that emerges from conscious efforts of followers, further desired behavior on their part could be a focus of contemporary organizations.

With respect to future research, examining the effects that established leadership styles impose on the leaders themselves remains a relatively new research topic. Among studies on the health impacts of established leadership styles, most of the harmful effects on leaders have been documented in *transformational* leadership studies (Diebig, Poethke, & Rowold, 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Seltzer, Numerof, & Bass, 1989). Leadership styles generally exerting positive effects on followers, including empowering leadership, prove unsustainable when positive effects are follower-only with adverse effects on leaders themselves. Therefore, to determine how leaders

benefit from or are harmed by practicing certain leadership styles, as well as the conditions where a leader's well-being may improve or deteriorate, there remains a call for further research.

The detection of follower withdrawal *cross-effect* on leader emotional fatigue fills the gap in the literature on follower impact on leader outcomes. As to interpreting this link, future studies should consider *within-team differences* in emotional exhaustion consistency among followers as emotional exhaustion is idiosyncratic, implying that emotional exhaustion climate may fail generalization. Further research is needed to identify boundary conditions, determinants of crossover in different contexts, and the underlying mechanisms of crossover processes.

An evidence-based approach solidifies cultural and organizational change by instilling the *meaning* behind the change (Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2006). Among a plethora of established leadership approaches (Dinh et al., 2014), a field experiment may be most informative when empowering leadership is compared against a dominant style such as *transformational* leadership (Muchiri, McMurray, Nkhoma, & Pham, 2019), as well as with other moral approaches such as *ethical* (Hassan, Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia, 2013) or *visionary* leadership (Kearney, Shemla, van Knippenberg, & Scholz, 2019). Moreover, I suggest focusing on the unique dimensions and key principles associated with empowering leadership to avoid overlapping constructs as reported among *responsible* leadership and other *transformational*, *ethical*, and *servant* leadership styles (Waldman, & Balven, 2014). Specifically, I propose testing distinct empowering leadership traits and behavior, interacting them with potential moderators and mediators. I hope that my research will stimulate such efforts and help further clarify the potential psychological impact of empowering leadership on individuals, organizations, and society.

6.5. Conclusions on Empowerment

Scholz (2019) has noted that scholars who argue that organizations pay followers for mere work time where followers are strictly obligated to engage by cooperating and communicating with others *largely miss the follower perspective*. Followers often find themselves in situations where there is the freedom to decide whether to make a contribution *beyond* what is formally required. Empowering and providing autonomy (Thomas, & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995) have become ever more dominant in leading followers in the post-modern world (Cheong et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018; Sharma, & Kirkman, 2015). A risk looms in the human condition for withholding support where a lack-of-reciprocity concern may limit organizational success as documented in theory on *social exchange* (Blau, 1964). Yet, this limitation offers an enormous advantage for leaders who know how to trigger reciprocity among team members and prevent failing relationships that gravitate toward win-lose defaults. Here, my study features empowering leadership as creating environments where reflection occurs among team members to unleash the above potentials.

Looking back at my experiment, I notice several interesting conclusions and routes for future research. First of all, a future study might compare the effects of other leadership styles, in the experimental setting such as *servant* leadership which supports but does not empower, or *visionary* leadership, which guides but does not empower. Such studies, when completed, would complement my work by hypothetically confirming or disproving the *impacts of other factors* affecting team reflection directly and follower withdrawal indirectly.

While my study has focused on follower withdrawal and empowering leaders' emotional exhaustion, I have noticed that much less is known about the effects of empowering leadership on leaders than on followers. Therefore, an alternative experiment that spotlights other aspects of leader burnout and well-being might provide important new insights. My intuition is that such

experiments might encourage leaders by providing options in situations where empowering leaders need not choose between self-career advancement versus those of their followers where such leaders develop certain skills or assimilate particular leadership traits. Here, studies need only stimulate state-of-art implementations and applications of empowering leadership.

Another important conclusion and implication that I derive from my research is that a leader's *ability to tap into team reflective skills* affects a leader's exhaustion. However, what about leaders not being able to stimulate team reflection for various reasons? I conclude that as long as leaders unable to stimulate team reflection are still allowed to determine the amount of empowerment for followers, then leaders will be able to maintain their own psychological health. Here, such leaders would tend to *either* reduce the amount of empowerment offered in line with the conservation of resources theory, *or* increase empowerment to unsustainable levels for a *temporary* period to overcome bottlenecks.

Naturally, one would next ask: what happens when leaders unable to spark team reflection are encouraged to demonstrate even more empowering leadership? Since my field study did not account for organizational culture or voluntary selection of leadership styles, an experimental research design for a second study could focus on leaders and their preferences for empowering followers in an effort to predict leaders' emotional responses to different modes and levels of empowering followers.

The fact that followers vary in terms of individual self-reflection skills and behavior also raises an important question from an organizational perspective. Not all individuals are capable of self-reflection or cooperation skills that arguably comprise the precursors for team reflection. Some followers are by nature quite individualistic and ill-suited as team players. These situations require extra consideration as to when it is healthier to *reduce efforts* to tap into team reflection to prevent leader emotional fatigue, if not for followers, too. Identifying cues and skills that help leaders recognize situations where it is proper to curtail team reflection merits special attention.

6.6. Conclusions on Empowering Leadership

I noticed that the six-factor empowering leadership model defined by Pearce et al. (2003) that underlies my study has favored empowering followers by encouraging opportunity thinking, self-leadership, self-award, participative goal-setting, and teamwork. Yet, Arnold et al. (2000) have reported results showing *five* factors (Coaching, Informing, Leading by Example, Showing Concern/Interacting with the Team, and Participative Decision-Making) as adequately describing the data, cross-validating the scale in a sample from five organizations under the factor analysis confirming the five-factor model. There are *striking differences* in how two benchmark studies defined the *same* empowering leadership: Pearce et al. (2003) defined a *six-factor* empowering leadership model that emphasizes resource-sharing characteristics versus Arnold et al. (2000) specified *five factors* that spotlight guiding and setting-the-example traits as possibly explaining follower cooperation among peers. Kirkman and Rosen (1999) notably detected empowering leadership as distinctly affecting *individual* followers versus *teams* of followers, and they thus developed a *four-factor* model (potency, meaningfulness, autonomy, impact) for team studies.

In this regard, diverse factors from distinct empowering leadership models not covered in my study may affect team reflection and thus follower withdrawal differently. Yet, additional contribution of my research is twofold. On the one hand, I identify an important mediator that transmits the effects of empowering leadership (i.e., team reflection). On the other hand, I advance current knowledge on the influence of empowering leadership on follower withdrawal and well-being: empowering leadership directly and positively relates to team reflection. In terms of correlation effect size, empowering leadership exerted medium-strong relationships with team member reflection and withdrawal ($r = .33$ and $r = -.38$). When considering the indirect effect with team reflection, empowering leadership offers a significant increase in

variance explained. This finding adds important knowledge to the literature on empowering leadership.

Already, a few studies have noted overlapping factors in a growing number of leadership styles and have proposed distilling the large variety of leadership styles into truly distinct traits without constraining leader behavior (Anderson, & Sun, 2015). Likewise, a few empowering leadership questionnaires have been used in leadership studies. In view of the rising popularity of empowerment and empowering leadership, I call for a revision of the disparate empowering leadership questionnaires to unify the definition scales toward highlighting the more distinctive characteristics by eliminating the overlapping factors.

Moreover, this study has presumed a *linear* relationship between empowering leadership and its effects where increasing leader traits of empowering leadership exert more observable, effective impacts. As to empowering leadership effects, however, a recent finding has indicated a *nonlinear* relationship between empowering leadership and its impact. This “too-much-of-a-good-thing” effect refers to antecedent variables that normally yield desirable consequences as *incurring eventual negative outcomes* beyond a “tipping point” that peaks in the classic, inverted U-shaped relationship (Pierce, & Aguinis, 2013). More than sufficient number of studies have documented positive outcomes for *structure behavior* where leaders define their roles and those of followers to set up specified patterns and channels of communication, and for *consideration* behavior where leaders show concern for followers, seeking their welfare and expressing appreciation (Fleishman, 1953; Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004). While empirical data have supported both structure and consideration styles, applications at *extreme* frequency or intensity have amplified turnover intentions in followers, as well as adverse structure- and consideration-trait *side effects* among them (Ames, & Flynn, 2007; Fleishman, 1998; Pierce, & Aguinis, 2013).

Evidence has shown that leaders must understand the right practical balance in approach to circumstances at hand, as well as the consequences of mismatch (Kaplan, & Kaiser, 2003). Another study's data analyses recently indicated that any misfit between needed and supplied empowering leadership positively and significantly correlated to follower emotional exhaustion. Even more striking than these former findings is that follower emotional exhaustion *escalates* when followers receive excessive, rather than insufficient, empowerment (Song, & Chen, 2021). Therefore, this "too-much-of-a-good-thing" effect can serve as functional guidance for future empowering leadership research.

"Too-much-of-a-good-thing" effect findings indicate several avenues for future research (Pierce, & Aguinis, 2013). Despite empowering leadership's linkage with motivational effects, one possibility is that empowering behavior of leaders may fatigue followers over time (Maslach, & Schaufeli, 1993). Pierce & Aguinis (2013) have advised treating the possibility of an inverted U-shaped relationship between empowering leadership and positive employee outcomes, as well as for negative employee outcomes such as well-being for future assessment. I argue that for U-shaped relationships tying empowering leadership and its effects, understanding of independent-variable effects would conceptually change, whether these effects prove positive or negative.

First, instead of analyzing the independent variable assuming "more input, more output," researchers could hypothetically focus on the tipping point of a curvilinear correlation beyond which the effects would ebb. Furthermore, where a U-shape relationship is accepted, researchers may possibly unveil positive correlations between empowering leadership and various follower outcomes otherwise hidden by a linear presumption blind to weakening or inverting relationships with the dependent variable.

A second major possibility for future research may test *uneven distributions* of leader empowerment of followers where empowered followers might be perceived negatively by non-empowered followers. Indeed, negative feedback from non-empowered followers toward those empowered comprises a very practical phenomenon as positive effects on empowered followers suffice to trigger a highly observable, hard-to-conceal *boomerang* (Pierce, & Aguinis, 2013). Knowing that individuals favor others for different reasons, some leaders may prefer to empower followers having similar characteristics and behavior as themselves that, in turn, may imply that other followers may not be empowered equally or sufficiently, if at all (Pierce, & Aguinis, 2013)!

Uneven distribution of empowerment is more likely to emerge in teams *nonhomogeneous* in follower characteristics. Research thus remains open here to investigate whether uneven empowerment by a leader might trigger negative outcomes of tension, interpersonal friction, or animosity among followers. Leader-member exchange research has also shown leaders to craft distinct, uneven relationships with in- and out-group followers (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012). Here, a leader's well-intended empowering behavior when implemented *unevenly* to followers may signal favoritism within the team. Depending on the urgent need for empowerment to succeed, as well as its necessity as a resource to thrive, such bias may trigger a resource contest eliciting perceptions of unfairness, resentment, or even ill-will among followers.

Empowering leadership research at the team level normally assesses group agreement among followers toward leader behavior (Kirkman, & Rosen, 1999; Srivastava et al., 2006). Subject to the group-thinking phenomenon, however, when individual observations converge to the dominant observation in the group, variation in individual follower perception then disappears (Pierce, & Aguinis, 2013). One study addressing this issue of differentiated leadership behavior in groups has found that when leaders treat individual followers within the

groups differently, total team effectiveness erodes owing to divergent levels of follower identification with leaders, feelings of self-efficacy, or trust in self-abilities (Wu, Tsui, & Kinicki, 2010). Leader-member exchange research has also detected various effects as leaders establish relationships with each follower at differentiated depths within teams (Schyns, & Day, 2010). Due to the behavioral differentiation toward each individual follower, one study focusing on empowering leadership effects on followers predicted a positive relationship with *follower narcissism* over time (Sharma, & Kirkman, 2015). Both theory and empirical evidence indicate that disparities in empowering leadership behavior toward followers are more likely *perceived* than real (Schyns, & Day, 2010). I argue based on my study that differentiated leader behavior may serve as an important toehold for future work to better understand consequential outcomes for teams and individuals.

Implications for uneven distribution of empowering leadership behavior among followers for my study would predict those not receiving (enough) within-team empowerment to withdraw, likely wishing to conserve resources. I argue hypothetically that such non-empowered follower withdrawal would also lead to dropping out of the questionnaire where only empowered ones would volunteer for the survey to yield *survivorship bias* – a logical error that over-weights individuals making it past some selection process and overlooks those failing, typically from a lack of visibility due to elimination. To mitigate survivorship bias, I advise working with groups offering participation from a full set of members instead of just a majority of the group.

A related but separate issue concerns the time-dependent side effects of empowering leadership and any future research that could test whether empowered followers may, over time, exaggerate a leader's empowerment and thus develop ultra-positive views of themselves and their self-abilities (Sharma, & Kirkman, 2015). Despite empowering leadership being one of the

most popular established leadership styles in terms of well-documented research completed on motivational effects and impacts on followers, there is yet no scrutiny of the temporal effect of empowering leadership on follower development toward unwelcome narcissistic tendencies.

There have been both advocates and opponents of *meeting follower needs* theory in terms of evenly distributed empowerment. Opponents claim satisfaction can induce self-absorption and “contented cows,” implying a downside to “good management” (Koprowski, 1981: 459). However, recent developments in organizational psychology have identified “contented-cow” companies that focus on low turnover and high engagement of employees as *outperforming* others as average annual total stock return for contented cows (such as Google, Nestle, Roche, Starbucks, Disney, etc.) have surpassed the S&P by 9.7% annually (<https://www.asppa.org/>). Therefore, I argue that the research void as to the *temporal* effect of empowering leadership to be fertilized toward findings on leadership productivity and effectiveness.

In terms of industrial implications, I noticed throughout my research that empowerment and empowering leadership is most needed and effectively used for the benefit of the society in the *healthcare* industry since research has documented this style as enhancing autonomy in the workplace and as fostering participation in decision-making (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005). Moreover, empowering leadership is crucial for any organization because of its association with many positive individual-, team-, and organization-level outcomes that literally save lives in the healthcare setting. Such targeted research has confirmed statistically significant relationships between empowering leadership and employee proactivity mediated by the commitment to the manager and company (Singh, & Rangnekar, 2020).

6.7. Final Conclusion

Dictatorial, controlling, or even destructive leaders (Scott, Hui, & Campbell, 2013; Schyns, & Schilling, 2013) able to attain top positions in society confuses, if not smothers extrovert individuals who love to share, support and help others as empowering leaders. The seeming success of less extroverted leaders may set a wrong example for people who possess supportive, caring and empowering attitudes: “Be more self-centered or quit leadership outright if your personality clashes with perceived requirements based on those engaged in unethical power-play behavior.” The consequences of such self-elimination by a person having the right skills and characteristics are unfortunate. But for an entire skilled, educated generation to forfeit key leadership positions in favor of abusive, unethical leader candidates would be catastrophic for society and organizations of all kinds. Even in the best case where especially people-oriented, sharing, and empowering individuals *intentionally* duck the contest for leadership positions, then only less qualified leaders will eventually be promoted. This highlights the practical relevance of further research on empowering leadership and how to cultivate prosocial, empowering, and supportive behavior for leadership positions.

Research on empowering leadership would particularly benefit from testing with randomized, controlled field experiments where subjects are assigned (or other sampling units) to either treatment or control groups in order to test claims of causality. In contrast to laboratory experiments that enforce scientific control by testing a hypothesis in the artificial and highly controlled setting of a lab, field experiments reflect contextual differences as well as naturally-occurring experiments, thus allowing a better sense of how empowering leadership transpires in the workplace. Moreover, field experiments enhance the external validity of findings obtained from lab and cross-sectional studies. I consider this an essential step when the goal is to further establish empowering leadership as an evidence-based type that is designed to hardwire behavior

confirmed as yielding superior impact. “Hardwiring behavior” means behavior becoming second nature so that people continue to act comfortably and automatically.

My proposition that empowering leadership is negatively related to emotional exhaustion has found empirical support. I further explored mechanisms that explain this link between empowering leadership and leader emotional exhaustion: follower reflection *and* withdrawal *serially mediate* the relationship between empowering leadership and leader fatigue. Results from my study suggest that empowering leadership may enhance leader well-being without the potential drawbacks for leaders, as empowering leadership proved directly related to greater team reflection and indirectly related to less follower withdrawal that, in turn, exerted a positive relationship with leader well-being. To summarize, the results of my study confirm that leader emotional exhaustion decreases when empowering leadership yields a rise in team reflective attitudes that lead to a reduction in team withdrawal at work. This study advances scholarly understanding on how empowering leadership shapes leader well-being by integrating a variety of theoretical concepts from organizational psychology. Findings indicate that empowering leadership correlates with leader emotional exhaustion through *a serial mediation process* with two mediators: team reflection and follower withdrawal. The results of the serial model support the idea that follower team reflection tends to favor a proactive approach that seeks feedback, learns new skills, cuts bureaucracy, or optimizes the workflow and environment. At this point, team reflection can be interpreted as an effort to question what went wrong and to learn what can be done to avoid repeated resource loss, enhance relationships within the team, or improve cognition of work, as well as increase workplace resources and soften job stress (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012). Foremost, this study is the first to investigate the joint effect of two particular mediators in an effort to broaden prior research, as the effect of team reflection on follower

withdrawal had not been examined previously. Here, empowering leader behaviors overcome bureaucratic constraints and enhance immersion and reflection, thereby preventing employees' withdrawal, so that they can work confidently with high performance that, in turn, enhances leader mental health.

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Eidesstattliche Erklärung

und Einverständniserklärung

nach § 6 Abs. 2 Nr. 5, 6 und 7 der Promotionsordnung der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Potsdam vom 13.09.2022

Von:

Name: Gulsen

Vorname(n): Ali

Hiermit versichere ich an Eides statt, dass

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