

Empowerment, passion and job performance: implications from Ghana

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing upon the “too-much-of-a-good-thing (TMGT)” effect and conservation of resources (COR) theory, the purpose of this paper is to examine the mediation mechanism between empowering leadership and employee job performance. Specifically, the authors propose a curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance, and also suggest that employee harmonious and obsessive work passions mediate the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. Further the moderation role of collectivism orientation (CO) in the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance is also examined.

Design/methodology/approach – Questionnaires are used to obtain survey data from 256 supervisor–subordinate dyads in three companies in the communication sector of Ghana. A follow-up interview was also conducted to enhance explanation of research findings. Hierarchical regression analysis is used to analyze the associations among the variables.

Findings – The results revealed that the significant inverted U-shaped relationship between empowering leadership and subordinate job performance is mediated by both harmonious and obsessive passion for work. A significant moderation effect of CO in the empowering leadership–job performance relationship could not be established.

Originality/value – This study adapts the “TMGT” effect and COR theory in the explanation of an integrated model including empowering leadership, job performance, employee passion for work, and CO in the Ghanaian context.

Keywords Ghana, Job performance, Empowering leadership, Curvilinear, Work passion, Collectivism orientation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The modern era of global competitiveness requires organizational managers to adopt empowering leadership style that gives employees autonomy, intrinsic motivation, responsibility and independence (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Li *et al.*, 2017; Cheong *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, empowering leadership signals that managers respect employees’ abilities, trust that their work is significant, are willing to involve them in decision making and to remove bureaucratic constraints (Cheong *et al.*, 2016; Li *et al.*, 2015; Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Zhang and Zhou, 2015). This leadership style has also been identified with the leadership factors of support, interaction facilitation, goal emphasis and work facilitation (Bowers and Seashore, 1966) as well as the traditional and modern human resource approaches (Cohen, 2015; Dubois and Dubois, 2012).



Empowering leadership has been shown to positively affect job-related outcomes, for example, by enhancing job self-efficacy (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005), through psychological empowerment (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015; Zhang and Bartol, 2010), and by providing positive work-related cognitions, loyalty and performance (Fong and Snape, 2015). Its characteristics can also be identified as an effective human resource management (HRM) practice that promotes employee retention (George, 2015; Kroon and Freese, 2013).

However, some researchers argue that empowering leadership can adversely affect job performance, for example, by arousing employee resistance at both individual and collective levels (Maynard *et al.*, 2007), causing role ambiguity (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013) and cognitive distraction (Langfred and Moye, 2004). These contradictory outcomes from empirical studies suggest that a comprehensive consideration of empowering leadership and its effects cannot be accomplished without considering its positive and negative aspects (Cheong *et al.*, 2016). Specifically, the positive and the negative aspects of empowering leadership might cause disturbances or instability in its linear effects with work-related outcomes such as work passion and job performance.

To address those inconsistencies, some researchers suggest examining whether empowering leadership has a non-linear or curvilinear relationship with work outcomes (e.g. Humborstad *et al.*, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2016), but many empirical studies have failed to follow up on the suggestion and rather relied on linear logic (Maynard *et al.*, 2012). Following this relevant but virtually unattended research problem, we draw on management research that discusses the “too-much-of-a-good-thing” (TMGT) effect (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013) to investigate a curvilinear inverted U-shaped relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. The TMGT effect arises when popular antecedents like empowering leadership in relation to organizational outcomes like job performance reaches an inflection or optimal point at which their association will no more be linear and positive. Specifically, empowering leader behavior which is generally regarded as good and positive in its excessive form may exhibit negative work-related outcomes.

Earlier theoretical perspectives employed in explaining the relationship between empowering leadership and job-related outcomes failed to recognize that workers’ job resources greatly influence how they will respond to empowering leader behaviors. Guided by this lapse, we employ the conservation of resources (hereafter, COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) in our study framework to enhance explanation of the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance as well as the associated dual mediation of harmonious and obsessive work passions.

COR theory suggests that people actively maintain, protect and construct their valuable resources such as mastery, self-esteem, learned resourcefulness, socioeconomic status and employment (Hobfoll, 1989). On the one hand, COR theory is established as a motivational theory that guides individuals in rational decision making when these resources are gained, conserved and reinvested for survival (Hobfoll, 2001) and provides them with emotional comfort against stress (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). On the other hand, it is regarded as a stress theory when individual resources are lost or threatened with loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, people employ key resources not only to build a reservoir of sustaining resources for future needs but also to minimize or curb stress situations (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Based on COR theory, we argue that empowering leadership can initially increase employees’ psychological resources and improve their passion and job performance up to an optimal point. However, excessive use of leader empowerment beyond the optimal point can result in adverse consequences such as employee resistance and role ambiguity (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013; Maynard *et al.*, 2007), and can turn into a kind of stressor caused by a decrease in psychological resources of the employees’ and a subsequent decline in passion and job performance. Consequently, the curvilinear relationship between empowering

leadership and job performance as well as job passion can be explained by both the motivational (positive) and the stress (negative) aspect embedded in COR theory.

Empirical research has confirmed an association between empowering leadership and work passion (Hao *et al.*, 2017; Gao and Jiang, 2019) as well as job performance (Astakhova and Porter, 2015; Ho *et al.*, 2011; Kong and Ho, 2018). Thus, work passion should mediate the empowering leadership–job performance relationship. Despite wide explorations and conceptualization of passion (e.g. Carbonneau and Vallerand, 2013; Vallerand *et al.*, 2003), the focus has been on single-factor passion model rather than a harmonious–obsessive factor model (e.g. Li *et al.*, 2017; Perrewe *et al.*, 2014), so that researchers have failed to consider that each passion type may have different effects. Harmonious and obsessive work passions have been shown to have separate effects on work performance (Ho *et al.*, 2011) but not on empowering leadership effects. Hence, it is paramount to consider the separate mediation effects of harmonious and obsessive passion in our study framework.

The dual model of work passion has been studied in relation to western and eastern philosophies (e.g. Ho *et al.*, 2011; Hao *et al.*, 2017), but not in relation to African values. Basing our argument on the popular cultural dimension of collectivism developed by Hofstede (1980, 2001), western nations are characterized by low collectivism, while eastern countries such as China and Korea are characterized by high collectivism with Africa not being an exception (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). For example, the traditional chieftaincy system in Africa including Ghana supports deep respect and higher collectivism geared toward achieving group goals rather than individual ambitions. Traditionally, the Ghanaian would therefore not want to be empowered but will prefer to follow orders from leaders. However, the recent rapid development of modern economic systems also requires people to learn western management styles. The cultural orientations of new generations have changed. Subjects may now require equality and empowerment. Consequently, we establish that employees are likely to exhibit differential patterns of harmonious and obsessive passion for work in Ghana.

The proponents of the TMGT effect (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013) recommended the consideration and expansion of the role of moderation effects for theory development in management research. We follow up on the suggestion to examine the possibility that employees' collectivism orientation (CO) values may moderate the curvilinear empowering leadership–job performance relationship in our study framework. Collectivism values are known to predict empowering leadership (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015). Ghana supports a higher collectivism geared toward achieving group goals rather than individual ambitions (Hofstede, 1980). The choice of the moderator is therefore particularly important in the collectivistic context of Ghana.

The overall purpose of the study is to investigate the curvilinear inverted U-shaped link between empowering leadership and subordinate job performance by drawing on the “TMGT” effect and COR theory. We also draw on COR theory to examine harmonious and obsessive work passions as dual and separate mediators in the empowering leadership–job performance relationship. Finally, the moderation role of CO in the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance is also examined.

Theoretical development and hypotheses

Empowering leadership, leadership factors and human resources management approaches
Empowering leadership studies emerged out of empowerment literature in the 2000s (e.g. Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Arnold *et al.*, 2000), and the introduction of the empowering leadership scale (ELS) by Amundsen and Martinsen (2014) in addition to that of Arnold *et al.* (2000) has opened prospects for effective research on this potent form of leadership. Although cross-cultural research in organizational leadership has grown significantly since Hofstede (1980) introduced the measurement of cultural values, some researchers have

observed that about more than 95 percent of leadership theories and empirical research have been prevalent in western cultures (Maynard *et al.*, 2012). Amundsen and Martinsen (2014), the authors of the new ELS, also recommended further research that investigates the impact of culture on empowering leadership and outcome variables. The above recommendation also informed the inclusion of CO in our study framework. Empowering leadership dimensions developed by Arnold *et al.* (2000), comprising of leading by example, participative decision making, coaching, informing and showing concern/interacting are in conformity with the leadership factors of support, interaction facilitation, goal emphasis and work facilitation (Bowers and Seashore, 1966). Empowering leadership behavior appears to be more oriented to the modern HRM approaches. The traditional HRM approaches focused on establishing policies, procedures, contracts and guidelines in an attempt to initiate employee performance to achieve organizational goals (Cohen, 2015). Employees were made to follow designed policies and functional activities such as human resource planning, job analysis, recruitment and selection, maintaining employee relations, performance appraisals, compensation management and training and development. The routine nature of the traditional HRM approach which was controlled by authoritarian and abusive leaders has now evolved into a more humanitarian leadership style comparable to empowering leadership. Now, managers have developed interest in the “human factor” in the development of organizations, and have moved from the traditional approach to the modern “strategic human resource management” (Dubois and Dubois, 2012). Investment in human resources is now recognized as a strategic approach to be optimized. Organizational objectives can be met only if it has the necessary human resources and competencies. The basis of competitive advantage has shifted from tangible and physical resources to a more focus on intangible and knowledge assets (Minbaeva, 2013; Guest, 2017). Consequently, empowering leadership which signifies care and knowledge-based leadership style forms the foundation of our hypotheses development.

The curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance

The empirical relationship between empowering leadership and job-related outcomes has been contradictory. Researches have established both positive (Fong and Snape, 2015; Kim and Beehr, 2018, Rao Jada *et al.*, 2019) and negative (Langfred and Moya, 2004; Maynard *et al.*, 2007) outcomes. These contradictory outcomes indicate that studies on both the positive and the negative aspects of empowering leadership and related outcomes are necessary for effective conclusion and generalization (Cheong *et al.*, 2016). Following these ambiguities, some researchers have suggested a non-linear or curvilinear investigation between empowering leadership and work outcomes (e.g. Humborstad *et al.*, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2016). Based on the suggestion, this study adopts the TMGT effect (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013) to investigate a curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance (Lee *et al.*, 2016). The TMGT effect demonstrates how key predictor variables reach their optimal or inflection points after which they diverge from projected outcomes (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013). In this study, we relate the TMGT effect to our research model and posit that empowering leaders’ behavior will increase job performance to a maximum or optimal point of inflection, after which its excessive use will decrease job performance to demonstrate an inverted U-shape relationship.

COR theory can similarly be used to support explanation of the empowering leadership–job performance curvilinear relationship. We relate COR theory to the proposed curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance and argue that, on the one hand, empowering leadership behavior will initially increase employees’ cognitive, social and financial resources with subsequent increase in job performance up to an optimum point. On the other hand, excessive use of empowering leader behavior could trigger stress as individuals lose resources owing to factors such as role uncertainty,

cognitive interference and extreme autonomy, with a consequential decline in job performance. Accordingly, both the positive and negative arguments of empowering leadership relationship with work-related outcome like job performance are established to confirm the inverted U-shape relationship. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

- H1.* Empowering leadership has a curvilinear inverted U-shaped relationship with employee job performance; that is, empowering leadership positively impacts job performance to a specific inflection point beyond which the relationship becomes negative.

Harmonious and obsessive work passions as mediators of the curvilinear empowering leadership–job performance relationship

Harmonious passion shows a self-directed engagement of an activity, for example, the interest of the activity, whilst obsessive passion denotes a controlled internalization of an activity. Individuals will participate in the activity due to some social influence or external guidelines attached to the activity (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003; Hao *et al.*, 2017). The dual mediation relationships are formed by four main theoretical interactions: first, the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and harmonious work passion; second, the linear relationship between harmonious work passion and job performance; third, the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and obsessive work passion; and fourth, the linear relationship between obsessive work passion and job performance. We follow COR theory and posit that empowering leader behavior will guarantee employees' cognitive, social and financial resources. In alignment with COR tenets those who have more resources can gain more through resource investment (Hobfoll, 2001). Consequently, autonomous employees will develop harmonious passion toward their work by engaging themselves freely in their favorite activities (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003) coupled with their induced retention on the job (George, 2015). However, the positive relationship between empowering leadership and harmonious work passion is unsustainable. The negative effects of empowering leadership can lead to stress due to resource loss and a subsequent decline in harmonious passion for work to establish the curvilinear relationship. A linear relationship between harmonious work passion and job performance is further required to finalize the mediation. Based on COR theory, harmonious passion will motivate enthusiastic and pleasurable involvement of employees in performing work task due to attainment of desirable resources (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003; Hao *et al.*, 2017).

The mediation argument is extended to encompass a curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and obsessive work passion. Following COR theory, we establish that empowering leaders support independent initiatives (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005) and assist their subordinates to acquire resources and invest them for future use. This will activate their controlled internalization of work (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003) as they engage in work activity because of some improvement in resources such as social acceptance and self-esteem (Vallerand *et al.*, 2014). However, the positive relationship cannot be endlessly sustainable. Empowering leaders' behavior beyond optimal levels can trigger cognitive distraction of employees in the performance of work tasks (Langfred and Moye, 2004), a subsequent loss of resources and a decline in their controlled internalization of work (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). The mediation condition will require an additional positive linear relationship between obsessive work passion and job performance. External and internal pressures evoke obsessive work passion (Burke *et al.*, 2014; Vallerand *et al.*, 2014). COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001) explains that employees who have obsessive work passion advance their self-esteem and gain desired resources by performing well and drawing organizational rewards and acceptance. Thus, we suggest that empowering leadership has inverted U-shaped relationships with harmonious/obsessive work passion, while the two forms of

passion have positive linear relationships with job performance. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

- H2. Harmonious work passion mediates the curvilinear inverted U-shaped relationship between empowering leadership and job performance.
- H3. Obsessive work passion mediates the curvilinear inverted U-shaped relationship between empowering leadership and job performance.

The moderating role of collectivism orientation

A major implication of the TMGT effect for theory development concerns a reconsideration and expansion of the role of moderating effects in management research (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013, p. 325). Empowering leader initiatives might lack effectiveness because of inability to recognize the cultural orientations of employees and their desire to be empowered (Maynard *et al.*, 2012). We suggest that employees' CO would be a potential moderator that can influence the inflection point of the curvilinear relation between empowering leadership and job performance (Lee *et al.*, 2016). We therefore use CO to "assess the impact of the slope in relation to the left and to the right of the inflection point along empowering leadership and job performance continuum" (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013, p. 326).

COR theory postulates that individuals will invest resources in those areas where they can gain extra resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Since in-group welfare is of great importance to individuals with high collectivistic values, these individuals are likely to reinvest their extra resources for the benefit and care of their in-group (Triandis, 1995). High collectivistic individuals may therefore respond positive to empowering leadership behaviors, share and invest their resources to enhance job performance as they operate on the positive portions of the inverted U-shaped curve toward the optimal or inflection point (Lee *et al.*, 2016).

Conversely, their counterparts lower in collectivism may show less concern for mutual support and consideration for their in-group members and the organization (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015). They will prefer to work in an individualistic environment where they will follow less orders, and rather appreciate the characteristics of delegation, power sharing, self-direction and autonomy of their empowering leader (Arnold *et al.*, 2000). This might result in lower job performance as they move away from the inflection or optimal segments of the inverted U-shaped curve (Lee *et al.*, 2016). Overall, the above arguments suggest that collectivistic orientation values will interact with empowering leadership behavior in terms of regulating individuals' efforts in ways that will maximize their job performance. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

- H4. CO will moderate the curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) relationship between empowering leadership and job performance such that empowering leadership will lead to higher job performance when employees' CO is higher rather than lower.

Method

Sample and procedure

The sample was taken from three privately owned companies operating in the communication sector of Ghana. The sample was obtained from the communication sector in Ghana because employees in this sector are generally well educated and they need to be empowered by their leaders to cope with the high technology and intellectual demands of their work. First, we sent letters to human resource managers (HRs) of each of the three companies. In approval, the HRs assisted us to identify work departments, units, supervisors and subordinates, and to schedule dates for conducting the survey. We also requested for the opportunity to come back for further interviews after the study to enable

us to give practical explanations and confirmation to our findings. This opportunity was granted. To guarantee quality, we met with participants and explained that the surveys were for academic research only. To avoid common method bias, we collected data on separate questionnaires from subordinates and their immediate supervisors. The supervisors reported their demographics and evaluated their subordinates' job performance. The subordinates also reported their demographics, the extent of their harmonious and obsessive passion for work, and their perceptions of their supervisor's empowering leadership behaviors. Each questionnaire was coded with a unique identification number so we could easily match subordinate responses with supervisor assessments. Completed responses were sealed in envelopes and returned directly to the researchers. We initially distributed matching surveys to 280 employees and 80 supervisors, and received usable responses from 256 employees (a response rate of 91.4 percent) and 64 supervisors (a response rate of 80 percent), comprising of 256 matched supervisor-subordinate dyads. Responding subordinates averaged 35.39 years old ($SD = 8.96$), average company tenure of 4.71 years ($SD = 3.25$), were mostly men (66 percent) and well educated (67.6 percent held bachelor's degrees or higher). Participating supervisors were primarily men (70 percent) and highly educated (82.4 percent held bachelor's degrees or higher). Their mean age was 40 years ($SD = 7.61$); mean corporate tenure was 5.2 years ($SD = 2.86$).

After completion of the data analyses, we conducted a follow-up interview to confirm our results and to offer a better discussion of the research findings. Following Gong *et al.*'s (2013) procedures, we selected the three HR executives of the three companies and five employees randomly from each of the three communication companies for this purpose due to resource and time constraints. The interview procedures were structured. Interview questions on empowering leadership were directed toward the HR executives to find out the general performance of the company, the characteristics of immediate supervisors in terms of flexibility, autonomy, independence, power sharing and motivation. Interview questions concerning work passion were directed to the employees to find out whether they enjoyed the work they do based on the nature of the work itself or whether they think they like the job because of some external motivators or influences. To find out the CO of employees, questions were asked if they enjoyed working individually or in groups. The interview questions are placed in the Appendix for ease of presentation. Two of the HR executives interviewed were men and one was a woman. Their average age was 42 years. They were highly educated as they all held master's degrees or higher with a mean tenure of 6.5 years. Responding interviewed subordinates averaged 36 years old, with average company tenure of 4.2 years, were mostly men (73.3 percent) and 60 percent held bachelor's degrees or higher.

Measures

For all study measures, we used a six-point Likert-type scale: 1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree.

Empowering leadership. To measure empowering leadership, we used a 12-item scale developed by Ahearne *et al.* (2005), comprising a multi-item subscale conforming to four dimensions: enhancing the meaningfulness of work; fostering participation in decision making; expressing confidence in high performance; and providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints. A sample item for enhancing the meaningfulness of work was "My supervisor helps me understand why my work is important to the overall effectiveness of the company." A sample item for fostering participation in decision making was "My supervisor makes many decisions together with me." A sample item for expressing confidence in high performance was "My supervisor believes that I can handle demanding tasks." A sample item for providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraint was "My supervisor allows me to do my job my way." Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that the fit indices for a single second-order factor were within acceptable range

($\chi^2 = 346.14$, $df = 92$, $p < 0.01$; normed fit index = 0.91, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.94; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06) indicating that empowering leadership is a single overall construct including four distinct sub-dimensions. All scales were combined into a single empowering leadership measure and revealed a Cronbach's α reliability of 0.88.

Work passion. Passion for work was measured with a 14-item scale developed by Vallerand *et al.* (2003). Seven items represented harmonious work passion, for example, "My job allows me to have a variety of experiences." Seven additional items represented obsessive work passion, for example, "I cannot live without my job." Cronbach's α reliabilities for both harmonious and obsessive work passions were 0.77 and 0.71, respectively.

Collectivism orientation. CO, an eight-item scale made up of two components, horizontal and vertical collectivism, was adapted from Triandis and Gelfand (1998). Four items measured horizontal collectivism with sample item "If a coworker gets a prize, I would feel proud." The other four items measured vertical collectivism with sample item of "Leaders and subordinates stay together as much as possible." The combined eight-item collectivism scale showed a coefficient α reliability of 0.80.

Job performance. Supervisors rated their subordinates' job performance on a four-item scale developed by Babin and Boles (1998). This scale was adapted based on our research context. For example, "My employee is a top performer"; "My employee is in the top 10% of frontline employees." Cronbach's α reliability was 0.75.

Control variables. Participants' age, gender, education level and tenure were used as control variables because of their implicit link with job performance (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Humborstad *et al.*, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2016; Zhang and Zhou, 2015). Age was self-reported in years. Gender was coded as a dichotomous variable of 0 for woman and 1 for man. Education corresponded with the highest academic qualification: 1 = high school diploma, 2 = college diploma, 3 = bachelor's degree, 4 = master's degree and 5 = doctorate. Tenure was recorded as the number of years worked with the company.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table I provides descriptive statistics, correlations and scale reliabilities for the variables.

Preliminary analyses

We executed a sequence of CFAs using AMOS 23 software to scrutinize the construct distinctives of the study variables (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The CFA results revealed that the hypothesized five-factor model (i.e. empowering leadership, harmonious work passion, obsessive work passion, CO and subordinate job performance) provided satisfactory model fit to the data ($\chi^2(94) = 276.42$, IFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.06) and yielded a better model fit than alternative models, including a four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df) = 78.22(4)$, $p < 0.001$), a three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df) = 125.82(9)$, $p < 0.001$), two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df) = 319.62(14)$, $p < 0.001$) and a one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df) = 422.50(20)$, $p < 0.001$). The detailed fit indices for all five models are represented in Table II. These CFA results provided support for the distinctiveness of the five study variables for further analyses.

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity denotes the extent to which the measures of different latent constructs are distinct from those of other constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2010). In order to establish discriminant validity, the appropriate average variance extracted (AVE) analysis was conducted. The AVE measured the explained variance of the constructs. The AVE analysis

Table I.
Means, standard
deviations and
correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Subordinates' age ^a	35.39	8.96													
2. Subordinates' gender ^a	0.66	0.48	0.14*												
3. Subordinates' education level ^a	2.88	0.92	0.03	-0.07											
4. Subordinates' tenure ^a	4.71	3.25	0.52**	-0.03	0.05										
5. Leaders' age ^b	40.00	7.61	0.00	-0.03	0.01	0.00									
6. Leaders' gender ^b	0.70	0.46	-0.03	-0.06	-0.02	0.01	0.22**								
7. Leaders' education level ^b	3.46	0.88	-0.09	0.00	0.07	-0.11	-0.14*	-0.19**							
8. Leaders' tenure ^b	5.20	2.86	-0.01	-0.03	-0.08	-0.07	0.11	0.15*	-0.18**						
9. Empowering leadership ^a	4.17	0.61	0.11	0.03	-0.03	0.16*	0.11	0.03	-0.09	-0.06	(0.88)				
10. Harmonious work passion ^a	2.91	0.69	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.09	0.02	-0.01	-0.09	0.31**	(0.77)			
11. Obsessive work passion ^a	3.01	0.75	-0.01	-0.06	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.00	0.37**	0.33**	(0.71)		
12. Collectivism orientation ^a	4.30	0.70	0.07	-0.03	-0.08	0.12	0.07	0.05	-0.09	0.06	0.46**	0.41**	0.42**	(0.80)	
13. Job performance ^b	5.00	0.93	-0.10	0.00	0.03	-0.04	0.09	0.13*	-0.02	-0.03	0.28**	0.43**	0.33**	0.27**	(0.75)

Notes: *n* = 256. Internal reliabilities (Cronbach's α coefficients are indicated in parentheses). ^aThese variables were measured from employees; ^bleader rating. **Correlation is significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively (two-tailed)

Models	Factors	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	IFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model 1 (baseline model)	Five factors: empowering leadership, harmonious work passion, obsessive work passion, collectivism orientation and job performance	276.42	94	2.94	0.93	0.90	0.94	0.06
Model 2	Four factors: harmonious and obsessive work passions combined into one factor	354.64	98	3.61	0.83	0.89	0.81	0.12
Model 3	Three factors: harmonious work passion, obsessive work passion and job performance combined into one factor	402.24	103	3.90	0.72	0.78	0.68	0.14
Model 4	Two factors: harmonious work passion, obsessive work passion, collectivism orientation and job performance combined into one factor	596.04	108	5.52	0.68	0.67	0.63	0.18
Model 5	One factor: all variables combined into one factor	698.92	114	6.13	0.60	0.63	0.58	0.20

Notes: $n = 324$. IFI, incremental fit index; CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation

Table II.
Comparison of
structural models

test was to verify if the square root of every AVE value belonging to each latent construct is much larger than any correlation among any pair of latent constructs. Based on Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) criterion, the square root of the AVE of each construct should be much larger than the correlation of the specific construct with any of the other constructs, and the value of AVE for each construct should be at least 0.50. As shown in Table III, all the AVEs are greater than 0.50, and the square root of all AVE values is much larger than any correlation among any pair of latent constructs. Hence, all constructs in the measurement model were demonstrated as having satisfactory discriminant validity.

Analysis strategy

We adopted steps recommended by Muller *et al.* (2005) and used hierarchical multiple regression analyses to test the curvilinear, mediation and the moderation hypotheses. In Step 1, we included control variables of both leaders and subordinates age, gender, education and tenure. We included the independent variable (empowering leadership), the mediation variables (harmonious and obsessive work passions) as well as the moderator variable (CO) in Step 2, in order to ascertain their linear effects on job performance. In Step 3, we included the quadratic term, a squared value of the independent variable (EL^2), to determine the curvilinear effects of empowering leadership on job performance, harmonious work passion and obsessive work passion. Finally, we entered the linear interaction effects (empowering leadership ($EC \times CO$) as well as the curvilinear interaction effect (empowering leadership squared ($EC^2 \times CO$) in order to determine the curvilinear moderation effect. *H1*, which was proposed to test the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and

Constructs	EL	HWP	OWP	CO	JP
EL	(0.85)				
HWP	0.31	(0.82)			
OWP	0.37	0.33	(0.79)		
CO	0.46	0.41	0.42	(0.75)	
JP	0.28	0.43	0.33	0.27	(0.83)

Notes: AVE, average variance extracted; EL, empowering leadership; HWP, harmonious work passion; OWP, obsessive work passion; CO, collectivism orientation. AVEs are shown in parenthesis

Table III.
Discriminant validity
assessment

job performance, required a regression of job performance on the squared value of empowering leadership (EL^2). $H2$ and $H3$, which were proposed to test the mediation roles of harmonious and obsessive passion, respectively, on the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance, also required a regression of both harmonious and obsessive passion on the squared value of empowering leadership (EL^2), as well as a linear regression of job performance on both harmonious and obsessive work passions. Finally, $H4$ which was proposed to test the moderation effect of CO on the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance required a regression of job performance on the interaction term of the squared value of the independent variable and the moderator ($EL^2 \times CO$). The independent variables and moderators were mean-centered before creating the interaction terms.

Hypotheses testing

The results of the regression analysis testing $H1$ – $H4$ are presented in Table IV. As expected, the quadratic term of empowering leadership had incrementally explained variance on job performance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $p < 0.05$). The coefficient of the quadratic term was significant and negative (Model 4: $\beta = -0.12$, $p < 0.05$). We graphed the results following Aiken and West (1991). Figure 1 shows that as empowering leadership increased, so did job performance increased, but once both reached a certain maximum level, job performance declined, as empowering leadership increased further, establishing the curvilinear relationship and supporting $H1$.

The mediation hypotheses tests

The quadratic term of empowering leadership had incrementally explained variance on both harmonious and obsessive work passions ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03$, $p < 0.05$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $p < 0.05$). The coefficients of the quadratic terms were significant and negative (Model 8: $\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$; and Model 11: $\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$). Again, the linear associations of harmonious and obsessive work passions on job performance were both significant (Model 3: $\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$; and $\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$). We graphed the results following Aiken and West (1991). Figures 2 and 3 show that as empowering leadership increased, so did harmonious and obsessive work passions increased, but once all reached a certain maximum level, harmonious and obsessive work passions declined as empowering leadership increased further. A further analysis was conducted to ascertain the mediation roles of harmonious and obsessive work passions in the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance (Hayes and Preacher, 2010). Using 5,000 bootstrap samples, we computed the instantaneous indirect effects of empowering leadership on job performance through harmonious and obsessive work passions at different values of empowering leadership (-1 SD, $+1$ SD). For harmonious passion, the instantaneous indirect effect was significant at both lower (bias corrected bootstrap CI = 95% [0.10, 0.40]) and higher levels of empowering leadership (bias corrected bootstrap CI = 95% [-0.60, -0.09]). For obsessive passion, the instantaneous indirect effect was also significant at both lower (bias corrected bootstrap CI = 95% [0.15, 0.55]) and higher levels of empowering leadership (bias corrected bootstrap CI = 95% [-0.75, -0.15]). These results gave support to $H2$ and $H3$.

The moderation hypothesis test

The moderation hypothesis test is shown in Table IV. We introduced the relevant quadratic curvilinear interactions term (empowering leadership squared \times CO) on job performance ($EL^2 \times CO$). However, the curvilinear interaction term was not significant (Model 5: $\beta = 0.11$, ns). Consequently, $H4$ was not supported.

Variables	Job performance			Harmonious work passion			Obsessive work passion				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
<i>Step 1: control variables</i>											
Subordinates' age	-0.11*	-0.12*	-0.09	-0.10*	-0.10*	-0.02	-0.04	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	-0.03
Subordinates' gender	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.04	-0.05	-0.06	-0.06
Subordinates' education	0.03	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.02
Subordinates' tenure	0.01	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.05	-0.01	-0.01
Leaders' age	0.07	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.10*	0.06	0.06	0.01	-0.03	-0.03
Leaders' gender	0.12*	0.12*	0.12*	0.12*	0.12*	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
Leaders' education	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.02	-0.00	0.02	0.02
Leaders' tenure	-0.05	-0.03	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.10*	-0.07	-0.07	0.00	0.03	0.03
<i>Step 2: main effects (linear)</i>											
Empowering leadership (EL)		0.29**	0.06	0.02	-0.01		0.40***	0.36***		0.38***	0.38***
Harmonious work passion (HWP)			0.49***	0.48***	0.48***						
Obsessive work passion (OWP)			0.33***	0.33***	0.33***						
Collectivism orientation (CO)			-0.12	-0.12	-0.13						
<i>Step 3: main effect (curvilinear)</i>											
Empowering leadership squared (EL ²)				-0.12*	-0.23*			-0.14*			-0.19*
<i>Step 4: interaction effects</i>											
EL × CO (linear)					0.02						
EL ² × CO (curvilinear)					0.11						
R ²	0.03	0.12	0.48	0.50	0.50	0.05	0.18	0.21	0.07	0.14	0.16
ΔR ²		9**	36***	0.02*	0.00		0.13**	0.03*		0.07**	0.02*
F	1.10	3.76	19.24	18.67	16.03	3.73	5.84	5.29	2.14	4.60	4.12

Notes: n = 256. Standardized regression values are reported for analysis. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Table IV.
Results of hierarchical
regression analysis of
curvilinear
relationships

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate a curvilinear inverted U-shaped relationship between empowering leadership and subordinates' job performance in the communication sector of Ghana, as well as the separate mediation effects of harmonious and obsessive work passions in the empowering leadership–job performance curvilinear relationship. Further, the moderation role of CO in the curvilinear empowering leadership–job performance relationship was also examined. To appreciate our findings in a better way our survey results were integrated with the follow-up interviews results for discussion.

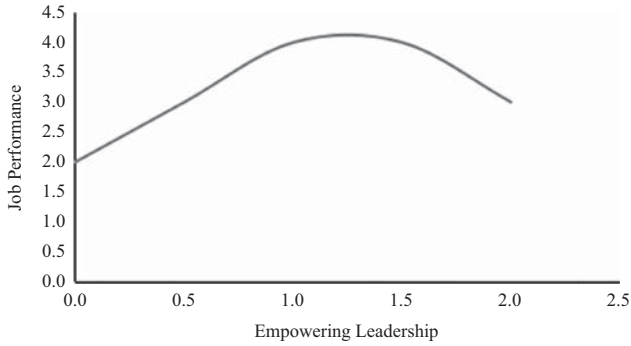


Figure 1.
The curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance

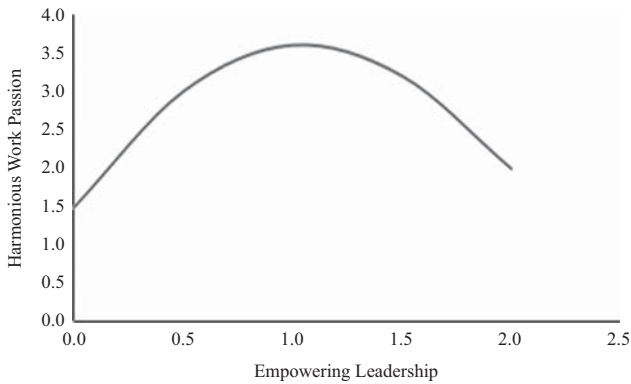


Figure 2.
The curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and harmonious work passion

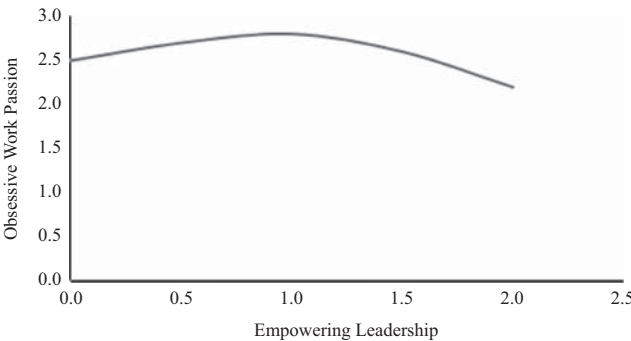


Figure 3.
The curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and obsessive work passion

First, our empirical results supported our proposition that empowering leadership has a significant curvilinear relationship with subordinate job performance. This finding was in conformity with Lee *et al.*'s (2016) results where they used the TMGT effect to test a curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and task performance. Our interview results confirmed the survey results by revealing that the unit supervisors of the firms were flexible in their dealings with subordinates.

As the HR executive from one of the firms commented:

"We have experienced improved job performance continuously over the past five years. Generally, our unit supervisors share information, allow subordinates to participate in decision making, and allow them to be as free as possible for independent work. Although the general trend of job performance has improved, we sometimes experience some periodic declines. I believe the role of the leaders is a major reason for our improved job performance. The issue of periodic low performance has been identified as too much freedom and independence given by some unit supervisors to the employees. We are working on this issue." The improvement in job performance and the periodic decline confirmed the curvilinear association between empowering leadership and job performance.

Second, our empirical results supported our anticipation that harmonious and obsessive work passions mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. These results were confirmed during the follow-up interview.

An employee from one of the firms commented:

We attribute our success to the profound enjoyment and satisfaction of our job. We are taken up completely by our job. Our emotions are dependent on our job and we cannot live without our job. We like our leaders and we have no reasons to leave this job immediately. Our income is enough to maintain this job.

This result confirms the proposition that empowering leadership is a significant contextual determinant of individual passion for work, and provide empirical evidence on the effects of harmonious and obsessive passion on employee job performance (Hao *et al.*, 2017) including task performance (Lee *et al.*, 2016).

Third, our empirical data analysis did not demonstrate significant moderation effect of CO in the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and subordinates job performance. This result was also consistent with the outcome of the follow-up interview results.

An employee from one of the firms commented:

Many people in this organization prefer to work alone and independently. It is due to how we have been trained by our leaders. Our leaders give us independence and freedom to work alone as much as possible.

This result seems to be contrary to the traditional Ghanaian and the entire African values. Traditionally the African and likewise the Ghanaian is collectivist in nature, and place higher emphasis on group goal as against individual ambitions. Traditionally, the Ghanaian would therefore not want to be empowered but will prefer to follow orders from their leaders. Interestingly, the recent rapid development of modern economic systems has necessitated the learning of western management styles. The cultural orientations of new generations have been altered. Subordinates now require individual ambitions, independence, autonomy and equality through leader empowerment.

Theoretical implications

Our findings exhibit several theoretical implications and contributions by challenging suppositions that empowering leadership is linearly related to job performance. Leader empowerment which is characterized by autonomy, intrinsic motivation, responsibility and

independence has been associated with outcomes that are more desirable (Li *et al.*, 2015; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Instead, we find an inverted U-shaped relationship, which strengthens leadership studies that apply the TMGT effect (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013) as a principle that permeates all physical, social, political and organizational facets of human life. That is, major predictor variables are assumed to reach optimal or inflection points after which they are no longer linearly and positively related with predicted outcomes. Any points above the optimal or inflection points usually lead to decreased or negative consequences, such as decreased job performance. The underlying theoretical principle is that too much of any good thing eventually leads to negative consequences. For example, all inputs of human efforts, being physical, socio-cultural, political, economic and organizational endeavors may have their highest possible outputs. However, high outputs may not be experienced indefinitely but will definitely decline at some point in time. In terms of leadership, for example, the desirable or positive effects of empowering leadership might occur only up to an ideal point after which we should expect undesirable results due to factors such as employee or personnel resistance role ambiguity and cognitive distraction (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013; Langfred and Moye, 2004; Maynard *et al.*, 2007). The curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance also agrees with empirical results showing that empowering leadership both positively (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015; Li *et al.*, 2015) and negatively (Langfred and Moye, 2004) affects work-related outcomes. Consistent with the above discussions, our interview results confirmed both increases and periodic decline in job performance.

Second, we use COR theory perspectives (Hobfoll, 1989) to support arguments on the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance, as well as the mediation effects of harmonious and obsessive work passions in the curvilinear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. The significant curvilinear association between empowering leadership and job performance can be attributed to the resource gain and resource loss portions of COR theory and their conformity with the positive and adverse effects of empowering leadership (e.g. Cheong *et al.*, 2016). The significant mediation occurs because empowering leadership grants subordinates higher sovereignty and freedom. The increased opportunities to take initiative and to assume responsibility are likely to increase both harmonious and obsessive passions for work. Empowering leadership conveys cognitive, social and financial resources that evoke both harmonious and obsessive work passions, which then give employees resources to reinvest for future use (Hobfoll, 2001). Although both harmonious and obsessive passions have been shown to significantly mediate the linear relationship between empowering leadership and job performance (Hao *et al.*, 2017), our results demonstrate more complexity than a simple linear approach suggests. Rather, our results demonstrate that harmonious and obsessive work passions both mediate the curvilinear relationship. The successful mediation relationship was attributed to profound enjoyment and satisfaction of employees on their job, their inability to live without their job and their emotional dependence on their job as confirmed by our interview results. Previous studies that investigated linear relationships of empowering leadership and related outcomes failed to specify whether they also tested for curvilinear effects (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015; Cheong *et al.*, 2016; Hao *et al.*, 2017). We are confident that our findings will encourage researchers to theorize and examine more non-linear effects in relation to similar outcomes.

Third, our study also advances suggestion by Pierce and Aguinis's (2013) TMGT effect for theory development concerning a consideration and expansion of the role of moderating or interaction effects in management research, as moderator variables are indicators of a theory's boundary conditions. Although CO as a moderator was not significant in our study framework, its positive association with empowering leadership has been established (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015). The insignificant moderator in our study might be attributed

to the low level of CO of individual employees identified in our interview. Indigenous Ghanaian culture was high in collectivism. Individuals were more committed to the in-group and were more willing to follow instructions from their leaders. However, the recent speedy advancement of modern economic systems also requires people to learn western organizational procedures. The cultural alignments of new generations have been transformed. Subjects now want self-direction, autonomy, independence and empowerment as established by our interview results.

Managerial/Practical implications

The current study has relevant practical implications for leadership development and employee inspiration to accomplish improved job performance. First, our results demonstrate that empowering leadership outcomes cannot be always desirable (Lee *et al.*, 2016). Thus, managers should be aware that empowering leadership has both potentially positive and negative effects on performance. Indeed, excessive empowerment forces employees to assume additional burdens, and may cause them to feel they have lost control or that leaders are relinquishing their responsibilities and will blame employees for failures. Consequently, empowered employees may have higher job stress, with negative effects on job performance. Thus, empowering leaders are advised to ensure that empowerment occurs at ideal levels to minimize losses of employees' performance and ensure efficiency.

Second, leaders must recognize differences between harmonious and obsessive work passions. Managers can enhance harmonious passion by engaging employees in activities that will enhance autonomous motivations, for example, by assigning challenging tasks that will encourage curiosity, competition, cooperation and recognition (Li *et al.*, 2015). In addition, leaders can develop obsessive passions by stimulating external motivations through rewards such as increased wages, bonuses and allowances (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003), so that employees will have a sense of obligation to work harder for social recognition, promotion and self-esteem.

Limitations and future research direction

Although our study provides interesting revelations, future researchers must be aware of some limitations. First, time could influence the relationships between all study variables (Hao *et al.*, 2017). Future research can test the model using longitudinal data to improve confidence in our theoretical relationships. Second, the study was conducted only in the capital city of Ghana in a single industry and may not apply universally to other industries, cities, regions, countries and cultural backgrounds. Future researchers are encouraged to collect samples from multiple industries, cities, regions, countries and diverse cultural backgrounds to authenticate and improve generalizability of research findings. Third, we treated empowering leadership effects on subordinate job performance as a unified construct, without considering the effect of other antecedents such as structural and psychological empowerment. Future research can consider the separate effects of these antecedents on subordinate job performance. In addition, we examined only the mediation effect of employees' work passions. Future research can examine other potential mediators such as voice behavior and trust in the leader. Moreover, although CO as a moderator proved insignificant in our study framework, we believe that answer to this relationship cannot be generalized on a smaller sample of a capital city of a country. We therefore make recommendation for future researchers to investigate our research model and especially the CO variable on larger space and samples to enhance generalizations of research findings. In addition, future research may explore the possibility of some other moderators between empowering leadership and job performance that causes instability in its linear relationship.

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Appendix

Interview questions for HR executives

- (1) What has been the general trend of job performance of employees and the company for the past five years?
- (2) Are your immediate supervisors flexible in the delivery of their leadership task?

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- (3) How do you assess your immediate supervisors in terms of granting autonomy and independence to subordinates?
 - (4) How do you evaluate your immediate supervisors in terms of sharing power with subordinates?
 - (5) Are your immediate supervisors able to motivate the subordinates to carry out useful task?

Empowerment,
passion and
job
performance

Interview questions for subordinates

- (1) Do you like and enjoy what you do on this job?
- (2) Do you think you like the job based on the nature of the job itself?
- (3) Do you think you like this job because of incentives or benefits received on the job?
- (4) Do you like working alone or in group?

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