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# Role of empowering leadership in improving faculty engagement and motivation in higher education institutions

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**ABSTRACT**

Higher education institutions face challenges in maintaining faculty motivation and engagement. Leadership empowerment is usually perceived as an important factor in fostering employee outcomes. This study intended to examine the effect of leadership empowerment on employee engagement and motivation at higher education levels. It was a quantitative study and a survey was used to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of 59 items, regarding three variables i.e., leadership empowerment (leading by example, participative decision-making, coaching, informing, and interaction with team), motivation (intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation), and employee engagement (affective engagement, intellectual engagement). Data were collected from a sample of 200 teachers (130 males, 70 females) from the University of Sargodha. The data was analyzed using Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The study concluded that leadership empowerment significantly affected employee engagement and motivation. Leading by example significantly affected intellectual and affective engagement and both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, whereas only participative decision-making affected extrinsic motivation. It is suggested that leaders should create a supportive and empowering environment by setting examples, recognizing efforts, and providing growth opportunities. They should empower employees to feel valued and motivated to contribute to the organization's success.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study focuses on the concept of leadership empowerment, which involves the delegation of authority, responsibility, and decision-making autonomy to team members, enabling them to take charge of their tasks and contribute actively to organizational objectives. Empowering leadership (EL) is characterized by distributing power, granting autonomy, and assigning responsibilities to followers, which fosters an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, and ownership within organizations. This approach is particularly relevant in educational settings, where effective leadership empowerment can enhance employee engagement, motivation, and satisfaction. The research aims to examine the impact of leadership empowerment on employee engagement and motivation among university teachers, highlighting the importance of understanding this relationship in higher education institutions where differences in motivation are evident. The findings are expected to provide insights into how empowering behaviors of leaders can improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness in educational contexts.

Higher education institutions face grave challenges in maintaining and boosting faculty motivation and engagement due to excessive workload, increasing administrative burdens, and very less professional development opportunities for teachers. Leaders' empowering behaviors may offer a solution by increasing autonomy and fostering intrinsic motivation among faculty members, leading to enhanced engagement and work motivation. Leadership empowerment involves the process in which leaders delegate authority, responsibility, and decision-making autonomy to their team members, enabling them to take charge of their tasks, make independent choices, and actively contribute to organizational objectives. It challenges our preconceived notions and beliefs about power [1]. EL entails the process of distributing power, granting autonomy, and assigning responsibilities to followers [2]. Empowered leaders provide their teams with the requisite resources, guidance, and support to develop their abilities, foster innovation, and attain success [3]. This approach nurtures an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, and ownership within the organization, resulting in improved employee engagement, motivation, and satisfaction [4]. Effective leadership empowerment enables individuals to unleash their potential, increase organizational advancement, and adapt skillfully to changing circumstances with resilience and agility [5].

The theory of empowerment, which emerged in the 1980s, has gathered support from scholars [6] and gained power amidst technological advancements, as digital technologies enhance employees' sense of empowerment in the business landscape [7]. Initially focused on enhancing staff efficiency [8], the concept of empowerment has since evolved, especially in response to the increasingly individualized and intellectually demanding nature of modern work. Unlike traditional leadership styles, EL emphasizes power-sharing and self-efficacy, granting subordinates autonomy and intrinsic incentives related to their tasks [9]. EL significantly impacts employees' work situations by providing resources for job performance, encouraging motivation, and enhancing their ability to succeed in their roles [10]. EL is seen as more supportive, nurturing, and focused on education, involving coaching and mentoring for subordinates [11]. In the face of rapid changes in work environments, EL has become a valuable approach that caters to the evolving needs of the workforce. Leadership empowerment has traditionally been valued for its role in fostering employee engagement and motivation, despite often being viewed as demanding and challenging [12].

Employee engagement, characterized by a positive, satisfying, and work-related mindset, has recently received significant attention in research due to its proven importance for organizational outcomes [13]. Ben-Eliyahu *et al.* [14] defined engagement in terms of the level of active and productive involvement with an activity, indicating the intensity of one's participation. Many studies have established a strong link between work engagement and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance [15]. Leadership emerges as a critical factor driving work engagement, with various leadership behaviors such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, charismatic leadership, and EL consistently showing associations [16]. While servant and transformational leadership focus on motivating through service and vision, EL offers a distinct approach by decentralized decision-making and increased autonomy.

Soane *et al*. [17] suggested three dimensions of engagement: affective, intellectual, and social engagement. They further suggested that each facet of engagement requires three conditions: focus, activation, and positive affect. Intellectual engagement involves directing cognitive effort toward achieving a goal or solving a challenge, requiring activation and focus. Affective engagement includes emotional reactions and positive/negative attitudes toward the job and the task. Increased employee engagement and a sense of personal growth from the work both lead to higher levels of motivation among employees [18].

Motivation is the core driving force behind an individual's pursuit of success, driving them toward achieving desired goals. It is pivotal in initiating, expressing, and sustaining behavior, reflecting a strong belief in attaining specific objectives that may lead to rewards or consequences [19]. The concept of motivation involves intrinsic and extrinsic factors, with intrinsic motivators arising from within the workplace, including development opportunities, increased responsibilities, and recognition from peers or management. Conversely, extrinsic motivators stem from external factors like salary, and work environment. Effective leaders recognize the critical role of motivating their staff, as underscored in research by Morris *et al.* [19], which highlights that well-managed organizations consider their human resources as invaluable assets. Employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment are deemed essential for effective organizational management. Managers strive to understand how to effectively motivate their employees, aligning with organizational goals to create a more efficient workplace. Gagné and Deci [20] advocated for grounding conceptualizations of engagement in motivation theory. They proposed that a motivation-based approach, as proposed in self-determination theory, can enhance engagement by underscoring the importance of having a specific focus for engagement.

In higher education, faculty members typically prioritize intrinsic motivation over external incentives, placing importance on factors such as recognition, autonomy, and professional growth [21]. While financial rewards are acknowledged, they are considered less significant compared to non-monetary benefits. Effective leaders are those who understand their employees' needs and tailor motivation strategies

accordingly [22]. Faculty members report higher job satisfaction and fulfillment when they have opportunities for professional development, feel appreciated by peers and superiors, and granted autonomy in their work. To ensure satisfaction in their roles, it is essential to strike a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic factors that cater to individuals' needs and preferences. In academic settings, effective leaders utilize motivational and influencing abilities to guide organizations through various changes. Academic institutions are under pressure to maintain quality, handle routine management tasks, and continuously improve, all while respecting the academic independence of faculty members [23].

EL can be evaluated as effective academic management since research by Morris *et al.* [19] involves employees in important decisions, encourages open dialogue, and fosters the collective intelligence of a group of people [2]. Previous research reveals that EL enhances job performance through shared power and autonomy [24] and positively influences motivation in employees [25]. Conides [26] also confirms that EL positively affects employee engagement, motivation, and well-being, and can have enabling effects on employees. Research also suggests that EL positively influences job satisfaction, job autonomy, creativity, affective commitment, and work engagement, leading to increased academic success [26].

Tuckey *et al.* [16] stated that empowering leaders need followers' input for problem-solving, so they encourage employees to participate in decision-making. While delegating managerial tasks to team members, they encourage them to work independently and in teams without direct control. This leadership approach, when implemented effectively, can positively influence employee behaviors, leading them to increased commitment, motivation, and productivity [27]. Harjanti *et al.* [28] asserted that EL increases organizational commitment as delegation of power and authority promotes job responsibility and autonomy. Motivated employees, driven by empowerment, autonomy, and job satisfaction, demonstrate higher productivity and contribute considerably to organizational success [29]. Overall, effective leadership empowerment strategies can significantly impact employee motivation, engagement, and organizational effectiveness.

While a lot of research has been conducted on various leadership styles, the focus on leadership empowerment in higher education adds a novel angle. Leadership empowerment emphasizes shared decision-making, autonomy, and employee professional development, specifically relevant in higher education institutions. The relationship between leadership empowerment, employee engagement, and motivation has attracted significant attention [12], [30]. While existing studies mainly explore how different levels of leadership empowerment affect employee attitudes and behaviors, there is a notable gap in understanding the potential consequences of having both high and low empowerment levels coexisting within a team. Recognized as a critical factor in enhancing organizational performance, fostering employee engagement is a primary focus of research and practice. Despite extensive research on motivation, the specific link between empowering efforts of heads, motivation, and employee engagement remains understudied.

Acknowledging the diverse motivational and engagement levels among individual employees, where some are inherently more motivated than others, leadership empowerment emerges as a potential strategy to bridge these differences. Despite this recognition, there has been limited exploration of the relationship between empowered leadership and the work engagement of motivated teachers in Pakistan. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine how leadership empowerment impacts teachers' engagement and motivation, specifically within higher education institutions. Understanding this relationship is vital, particularly in higher education, where differences in motivation are evident. This research is relevant because empowering the behavior of leaders is considered a crucial factor in improving employee motivation and engagement in educational settings. At the higher education level, where intellectual and emotional engagement is critical for improved faculty performance, understanding the interplay among leadership empowerment, engagement, and motivation can help design strategies to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

This empirical investigation offers a novel contribution by studying the specific dimensions of leadership empowerment, such as leading by example, participative decision-making, informing, coaching, team interaction, and their differential impact on both employee motivation (extrinsic and intrinsic) and engagement (intellectual and affective) within the context of higher education institutions in Pakistan. While leadership empowerment has been studied in corporate and business sectors, its direct effects on academic staff in universities remain underexplored. This study not only contextualizes the relationship within the unique institutional and cultural dynamics of an underdeveloped country but also offers insights into how distinct empowering behaviors impact specific facets of employee outcomes. The use of a multi-dimensional approach and the focus on the motivation and engagement of academia staff together make this study a pioneering step in bridging educational leadership theory and practice in higher education settings. Thus, the research questions in the study are:

- How does EL influence employee motivation and engagement among university faculty members?
- What is the relationship between leadership empowerment, motivation, and engagement?
- How does leadership empowerment impact both affective and intellectual engagement as well as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation?

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Design

The researchers used a quantitative approach, using a survey method to collect data from sampled teachers at the University of Sargodha. A questionnaire was adopted covering three main variables: leadership empowerment, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and affective and intellectual engagement of employees. Due to the focus on measuring the relationship between EL, engagement, and motivation, a quantitative approach was considered suitable for assessing these constructs.

### 2.2. Population and sample

The population of the study comprised all university teachers in different departments of the University of Sargodha. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. A total of 200 teachers (130 males, 70 females) from eight departments of the Faculty of Science and Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Sargodha were contacted for data collection. Only regular faculty members who had served for more than one year were considered for inclusion in the study, and all visiting teachers were excluded as they were not a permanent part of the teaching faculty.

### 2.3. Research instrument

To compute the variables, data was collected with the help of questionnaires. Three questionnaires were used in the study for the collection of data from participants. A empowering leadership questionnaire (ELQ) with a 5-point Likert scale was adopted [31] to measure five dimensions of EL i.e., leading by example, participative decision-making, coaching, informing, and interacting with the team. Motivation was measured using six items from two parts of the work extrinsic and intrinsic motivation scale (WEIMS), a 5-point Likert scale that measured intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation/external regulations [32]. Two dimensions of the engagement questionnaire i.e., intellectual, social, affective (ISA) engagement scale, were taken to measure affective engagement and intellectual engagement [17]. To investigate the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha coefficient values were considered. The values indicated that reliability was high. The reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha of all sub-scales, is presented in Table 1. All sub-factors have reliability values ranging from .773 to .931, which falls into an acceptable range.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and reliability of sub-scales of leadership empowerment, engagement, and motivation

| Sr. no | Variables | Mean | Std | α | Affective engagement | Intellectual engagement | Extrinsic motivation | Intrinsic motivation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leadership empowerment | | 4.389 | .388 | | | | | |
| 1 | Leading by example | 4.431 | .499 | .838 | .468** | .482** | .368** | .422** |
| 2 | Participative decision making | 4.328 | .515 | .773 | .231** | .286** | .350** | .307** |
| 3 | Coaching | 4.403 | .483 | .894 | .168** | .231** | .336** | .289** |
| 4 | Informing | 4.352 | .609 | .907 | .156** | .163 | .270** | .228** |
| 5 | Interacting with team | 4.449 | .557 | .931 | .102** | .090 | .237** | .117 |
| Engagement | | 4.508 | .389 | | | | | |
| 1 | Affective engagement | 4.555 | .406 | .839 | - | .827** | .378** | .482** |
| 2 | Intellectual engagement | 4.458 | .406 | .755 | .827** | - | .381** | .498** |
| Motivation | | 4.336 | .443 | | | | | |
| 1 | Intrinsic motivation | 4.346 | .461 | .716 | .482** | .498** | - | .685** |
| 2 | Extrinsic motivation | 4.329 | .512 | .705 | .374** | .381** | .685** | - |

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

### 2.4. Data collection

Data was collected using a quantitative approach, through a survey technique. A questionnaire consisting of 59 items was utilized to gather information regarding three main variables: leadership empowerment, motivation, and employee engagement. The research instruments included an ELQ and scales for measuring motivation and engagement. The data collection process involved administering these questionnaires to the sample, which consisted of 200 teachers from the University of Sargodha, selected using a stratified random sampling technique.

### 2.5. Data analysis

The collected data were coded and tabulated for statistical analysis. There were no negative statements in the questionnaires, so no reverse coding was needed. The data were examined using descriptive statistics, Pearson product correlation coefficient, and regression analysis through IBM SPSS statistics version 23.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Descriptive statistics and Pearson r for leadership empowerment, engagement, and motivation

Table 1 shows factor-wise means and standard deviations of all the variables. The motivation factor indicate that extrinsic motivation has a slightly higher mean (M=4.346, Std=.512) than intrinsic motivation (M=4.329, Std=.461). Affective engagement (M=4.515, Std=.406) slightly outpaces intellectual engagement (M=4.498, Std=.406). Coaching exhibits the highest mean (M=4.373, Std=.483) among leadership empowerment sub-factors, followed closely by leading by example (M=4.431, Std=.499) and interacting with the team (M=4.449, Std=.557). Conversely, participating in decision-making (M=4.328, Std=.515) demonstrates the lowest mean within this category.

Table 1 also presents the results of the Pearson correlation coefficient analysis, which aimed to examine the relationship between engagement, motivation, and the factors of leadership empowerment. Positive and statistically significant correlations were found between intrinsic motivation and intellectual engagement (r=.498) and extrinsic motivation and intellectual engagement (r=.381). Leading by example had the strongest relationship with affective engagement (r=.468), intellectual engagement, (r=.482), extrinsic motivation (r=.368), and intrinsic motivation (r=.422), followed by participative decision-making correlating with extrinsic motivation (r=.350), and intrinsic motivation (r=.307). All other relationships were weak, and some of them were insignificant.

### 3.2. Linear regression analysis for the effect of leadership empowerment on motivation and engagement

Table 2 provides the results of a linear regression analysis aimed at investigating the connection between leadership empowerment, motivation, and engagement. The analysis revealed a significant relationship, with an R-value of .345 and an R-squared value of .119, indicating that intrinsic motivation accounts for a significant variance in leadership. The regression equation was also significant, with an F-value of 26.6 (p=.000). Consequently, the null hypothesis (H0) suggesting a relationship between leadership empowerment and employee intrinsic motivation was accepted. The regression coefficient (β) for intrinsic motivation was .345, with a t-value of 5.166 (p<.000), signifying a significant impact. This suggests that for every one standard deviation increase in intrinsic motivation, employee intrinsic motivation increases by .345.

Likewise, Table 2 illustrates the outcomes of a linear regression analysis examining the association between extrinsic motivation and leadership empowerment. The findings indicated a significant relationship, with an R-value of .415 and an R-squared value of .172. The regression equation was also significant, with an F-value of 41.1 (p=.000). Consequently, the H0 proposing a connection between leadership empowerment and employee extrinsic motivation was accepted. The regression coefficient (β) for extrinsic motivation was .415, with a t-value of 6.41 (p<.000), indicating a significant impact. This suggests that for every one standard deviation increase in extrinsic motivation, employee extrinsic motivation increases by .415.

Table 2 also displays the findings for the effect of leadership empowerment on affective engagement. The analysis yielded a significant R-value of .270 and an R-squared value of .073. The significant regression equation with an F-value of 15.6 (p=.000), aimed to elucidate the connection between affective engagement value and leadership empowerment. The H0 proposing a relationship between the affective engagement value of leadership empowerment and employee engagement was accepted. It was determined that the leadership empowerment value (β=.270, $t(10.3)=3.945$, p<.000) significantly impacted affective engagement. Specifically, an increase in the leadership empowerment value by 1 standard deviation resulted in a .270 increase in employee affective engagement.

Table 2. Regression analysis for the effect of leadership empowerment on motivation and engagement

| Dependent variables | Leadership empowerment | B | Std. Error | β | *T* | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intrinsic motivation | Constant | 15.1 | 2.096 | | 7.244 | .000 |
| | Leadership empowerment | .068 | .013 | .345 | 5.166 | .000 |
| | F=26.691 | | | | | |
| | R=.345, R2=.119 | | | | | |
| Extrinsic motivation | Constant | 7.77 | 1.50 | | 5.17 | .000 |
| | Leadership empowerment | .061 | .009 | .415 | 6.41 | .000 |
| | F=41.173 | | | | | |
| | R=.415, R2=.172 | | | | | |
| Affective engagement | Constant | 26.2 | 2.52 | | 10.3 | .000 |
| | Leadership empowerment | .063 | .016 | .270 | 3.94 | .000 |
| | F=15.567 | | | | | |
| | R=.270, R2=.073 | | | | | |
| Intellectual engagement | Constant | 15.5 | 1.56 | | 9.933 | .000 |
| | Leadership empowerment | .044 | .010 | .303 | 4.482 | .000 |
| | F=20.086 | | | | | |
| | R=.303, R2=.092 | | | | | |

The results in Table 2 also show the effect of leadership empowerment on intellectual engagement. The analysis yielded a significant R-value of .303, along with an R-squared value of .092. Due to the significant regression equation with an F-value of 20.0 (p=.000), aimed at explaining the effect of leadership empowerment on the intellectual engagement of teachers, the H0 suggesting a connection between the intellectual engagement value of leadership empowerment and employee engagement was accepted. It was observed that leadership empowerment (β=.303, $t$(9.933)=4.482, p<.000) significantly influenced the intellectual engagement of employees. Specifically, an increase in leadership empowerment value by 1 standard deviation resulted in a .303 increase in employee intellectual engagement.

### 3.3. The multiple regression for facets of leadership empowerment and intrinsic motivation

Table 3 displays the outcomes of a multiple regression analysis aimed at assessing the impact of various facets of leadership empowerment on intrinsic motivation. The analysis yielded a noteworthy R=.472, indicating a substantial relationship, while $R^2$=.223 suggests that approximately 22% of the variation in intrinsic motivation can be explained by leadership empowerment. The statistically significant regression equation ($F$=11.18, p=.000) underscores the influence of leadership empowerment on intrinsic motivation. Notably, the analysis revealed that leading by example had a significant effect on intrinsic motivation (β=.338, $t$(5, 195)=4.713, p=.000), while the other sub-scales of leadership empowerment did not show significant associations.

### 3.4. The multiple regression for facets of leadership empowerment with extrinsic motivation

The multiple regression analysis investigated the effect of leadership empowerment on employee extrinsic motivation. The findings revealed a moderate positive correlation ($R$=.462) among facets of leadership empowerment and extrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination ($R^2$=.214) suggested that 21.4% of the variance in extrinsic motivation could be explained by these factors. The regression equation indicated significant effects of specific aspects of leadership empowerment on extrinsic motivation. Notably, the $F$-statistic test yielded a significant result ($p$=.003), affirming the overall relevance of the regression model. Among the leadership empowerment factors examined, leading by example and participating in decision-making emerged as the most influential, evidenced by their low p-values. The null hypothesis, which posited no significant relationship between leadership empowerment and extrinsic motivation, was rejected. This implies a meaningful association between these variables. Beta coefficients (β) elucidated the extent of change in intrinsic motivation corresponding to variations in leadership empowerment factors. Notably, leading by example, participating in decision-making, and coaching displayed statistically significant effects. $t$-tests further supported these findings, indicating the significance of leading by example, participating in decision-making, and coaching on extrinsic motivation. However, informing and interacting with the team did not demonstrate significant effects, as presented in Table 4.

Table 3. The regression coefficient for leadership empowerment and intrinsic motivation

| Leadership empowerment[a] | B | Std. Error | β | $t$ | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 12.5 | 2.15 | | 5.852 | .000 |
| Leading by example | .375 | .080 | .338 | 4.713 | .000 |
| Participating decision making | .094 | .080 | .087 | 1.170 | .243 |
| Coaching | .080 | .044 | .140 | 1.814 | .071 |
| Informing | .104 | .073 | .137 | 1.413 | .159 |
| Interacting with the team | -.080 | .051 | -.145 | -1.558 | .121 |

a. Dependent variable: intrinsic motivation. F=11.177, R=.473, $R^2$=.223

Table 4. Regression coefficient analysis of leadership empowerment with extrinsic motivation

| Leadership empowerment[a] | B | Std. Error | β | $t$ | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 5.912 | 1.595 | | 3.707 | .000 |
| Leading by example | .178 | .059 | .216 | 3.007 | .003 |
| Participating decision making | .151 | .060 | .188 | 2.524 | .012 |
| Coaching | .063 | .033 | .150 | 1.934 | .055 |
| Informing | .017 | .054 | .030 | .309 | .758 |
| Interacting with the team | .026 | .038 | .063 | .676 | .500 |

a. Dependent extrinsic motivation. F=10.924, R=.462, $R^2$=.214

### 3.5. Multiple regression analysis for facets of leadership empowerment with affective engagement

Table 5 outlines the outcomes of a multiple regression analysis aimed at exploring the link between sub-scales of leadership empowerment and affective engagement. The results indicated a significant correlation coefficient (R=.472), suggesting a substantial linear association between sub-scales of leadership

empowerment and affective engagement. Moreover, the coefficient of determination ($R^2$=.223) implied that only 22.3% of the variability in affective engagement could be accounted for by the variables examined. The regression equation revealed a significant F-statistic (F=11.160), indicating that the overall model holds explanatory power. However, upon scrutinizing individual predictors, only leading by example exhibited a statistically significant effect (β=.449, p=.000), while the other factors (participating in decision-making, coaching, informing, and interacting with the team) did not achieve statistical significance.

Table 5. Regression coefficient analysis of leadership empowerment with affective engagement

| Leadership empowerment[a] | B | Std. Error | β | *t* | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 22.169 | 2.525 | | 8.780 | .000 |
| Leading by example | .585 | .094 | .449 | 6.258 | .000 |
| Participating decision making | .056 | .095 | .044 | .591 | .555 |
| Coaching | .005 | .052 | .008 | .104 | .917 |
| Informing | .044 | .086 | .049 | .505 | .614 |
| Interacting with the team | -.040 | .060 | -.062 | -.666 | .506 |

F=11.160, R=.472, $R^2$=.223

a. Dependent variable affective engagement, predictor: affective engagement.

### 3.6. Multiple regression coefficient for effect of facets of leadership empowerment on intellectual engagement

In Table 6, the results of a multiple regression analysis examining the relationship between sub-scales of leadership empowerment and intellectual engagement are presented. The correlation coefficient (R=.499) indicates a significant linear relationship between sub-scales of leadership empowerment and intellectual engagement. Similarly, the coefficient of determination ($R^2$=.231) suggests that only 23.1% of the variance in intellectual engagement can be explained by the variables studied, implying a limited explanatory power. The regression equation yielded a significant F-statistic (F=12.944), suggesting that the overall model possesses explanatory strength. Among the individual predictors, only leading by example showed a statistically significant effect (p=.000), while the other factors (participating in decision-making, coaching, informing, and interacting with the team) did not reach statistical significance. Beta coefficients (β) revealed the magnitude and direction of the relationship between leadership empowerment factors and intellectual engagement. Notably, leading by example exhibited the most substantial effect (β=.435), followed by participating in decision-making (β=.084). However, coaching, informing, and interacting with the team had minimal effects on intellectual engagement.

Table 6. Regression coefficient analysis of leadership empowerment with intellectual engagement

| Leadership empowerment[a] | B | Std. Error | β | *t* | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 12.758 | 1.551 | | 8.225 | .000 |
| Leading by example | .355 | .057 | .435 | 6.173 | .000 |
| Participating decision making | .067 | .058 | .084 | 1.155 | .249 |
| Coaching | .034 | .032 | .080 | 1.054 | .293 |
| Informing | .023 | .053 | .042 | .438 | .662 |
| Interacting with the team | -.042 | .037 | -.103 | -1.128 | .261 |

F=12.944, R=.499, $R^2$=.249

a. Dependent variable intellectual engagement.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Higher education institutions operate with a highly educated and autonomous workforce. These highly qualified professionals prioritize intellectual freedom, autonomy, and personal development over financial rewards such as pay and promotion. Consequently, traditional leadership styles may not be as effective and engaging for faculty members. The study was intended to discover the role of empowering leaders in enhancing university teachers' work engagement and motivation by emphasizing decision-making participation and autonomy. The results indicated that intrinsic motivation slightly surpasses extrinsic motivation, suggesting that internal drives hold slightly more control over employee behavior than external rewards. This result coincides with Manzoor *et al.* [33] elaborating a positive and significant impact of intrinsic rewards on the performance of the employee, as recognizing employees' accomplishments can lead to enhancing intrinsic drives, thereby motivating them to perform to their fullest potential.

Similarly, the marginally higher score for affective engagement indicates a tendency for employees to prioritize emotional connection and enjoyment in their work over intellectual stimulation. Research by Barreiro and Treglown [34] indicated that workers who have a higher level of dispositional happiness

experience higher levels of engagement. Organizations, when acknowledging the significance of nurturing emotional connections and offering enjoyable work experiences for their employees, become more effective. Although intellectual stimulation remains important, prioritizing affective engagement can lead to increased overall satisfaction and commitment among employees. Moreover, within the realm of leadership empowerment, the high mean scores for coaching, leading by example, and interacting with the team underscore the pivotal role of these leadership behaviors in shaping employee engagement and motivation. Leaders inspire work engagement through role-modeling and play a crucial role in providing essential support, giving autonomy, and feedback, which enable employees to become more engaged in their work [35], [36]. Conversely, the lower mean score for participative decision-making suggests potential room for improvement in fostering employee involvement in decision-making processes.

The Pearson correlation analysis offers valuable insights into the intricate relationships among employee engagement, motivation, and leadership empowerment. Significant positive correlations emerged between both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with intellectual engagement. These findings suggest that both internal and external motivational factors contribute to employees' cognitive engagement with their work tasks. These results have important implications for leadership at the higher education level, seeking to improve faculty productivity and motivation. Furthermore, the strong correlations between leading by example and various aspects of engagement and motivation highlight the influential role of leadership behavior. Leaders who exemplify commitment to their work can significantly impact employee engagement and motivation levels. A leader who empowers their followers grants them autonomy, demonstrates confidence in their abilities, and highlights the significance of their roles. These factors directly contribute to enhancing the intrinsic motivation of the employees [37]. A strong positive correlation between EL and intrinsic motivation suggests that empowering behavior fosters a sense of purpose and autonomy, aligning with the theory of self-determination. This finding supports the research by Gagné and Deci [20], which asserts the role of autonomy in improving employee engagement.

Similarly, the correlations between participative decision-making and motivation variables underscore the importance of involving employees in decision-making processes to enhance their motivation and engagement levels. This aligns with the findings of Tuckey *et al.* [16] who established a positive link between EL and work engagement. The observed relationships suggest its emphasis on delegating authority and responsibility, empowering individuals to navigate their roles effectively [38]. The EL behaviors serve as an acknowledgment of employees' efforts and contributions [39]. However, it is essential to acknowledge that while some correlations are strong and significant, others are weak or insignificant. This variability suggests that the relationships between engagement, motivation, and leadership empowerment may be nuanced and context-dependent, influenced by factors such as organizational culture and individual differences among employees. These findings underscore the complex interplay between engagement, motivation, and leadership empowerment in the workplace. Understanding and leveraging these relationships can empower organizations to create environments conducive to employee engagement, motivation, and ultimately, organizational success.

The significant impact of leadership empowerment on both affective and intellectual engagement underscores the multifaceted nature of employee engagement. Leaders who empower their teams by offering support, autonomy, and skill development opportunities are more likely to foster emotional connection and intellectual stimulation among employees. Leadership has consistently been found to be an essential factor in fostering engagement. EL emerges as an approach crucial for effective academic management, allowing participation in key decisions. Moreover, it acknowledges contributions, preserves autonomy, and addresses the diverse tasks faced by academics, thereby enhancing motivation and educational efficiency [24].

The research question regarding the impact of leadership empowerment on intrinsic motivation was addressed by finding a significant positive effect (Table 2) of EL on intrinsic motivation suggests that employees who feel internally driven are more likely to perceive their leaders as empowering. This emphasizes the importance of cultivating intrinsic factors like personal fulfillment and passion to shape employees' perceptions of their work environment positively. Organizations should prioritize fostering a culture that nurtures intrinsic motivation, as it correlates with higher levels of engagement and productivity. Amin *et al.* [40] reported that the consideration dimension has been found to effectively promote empowerment practices, subsequently leading to increased staff motivation. Similarly, the significant effect of leadership empowerment on extrinsic motivation highlights the impact of external rewards on employees' perceptions of their leaders. While extrinsic motivation can drive short-term performance, leaders must also focus on empowering employees through meaningful work and growth opportunities. Striking a balance between extrinsic rewards and intrinsic motivation factors is crucial for sustaining long-term engagement and commitment. In a recent study, it was found that only 20% of employees feel assured that they are being managed in a motivating manner [41]. Various studies consistently underscore the positive impact of leadership empowerment, particularly its motivational dimension, which encourages proactive workplace behavior [18], [40]. This motivational aspect encompasses both emotional and cognitive factors.

Leading by example as the facet of leadership empowerment significantly predicts intrinsic motivation among employees and emerges as a crucial component, with a significant positive effect on intrinsic motivation. This suggests that when leaders demonstrate behaviors consistent with organizational values and expectations, it positively influences employees' intrinsic motivation. These results emphasize the effectiveness of leading by example as a leadership strategy to enhance intrinsic motivation levels within the workplace. Notably, leading by example and participative decision-making emerged as particularly influential factors in extrinsic motivation. This implies that employees tend to be more extrinsically motivated when leaders exhibit exemplary behavior and involve them in decision-making processes. The findings highlight the critical role of leadership empowerment, particularly in terms of leading by example and involving employees in decision-making processes, in fostering employee motivation [37]. Ye *et al.* [42] confirm the predictive effect of leading by example on organizational identification, which enhances employees' psychological belonging, and changes their work attitude and behavior. Organizations can leverage these insights to create a supportive and empowering work environment conducive to enhancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among employees, ultimately leading to increased job satisfaction, engagement, and productivity, by employees being self-motivated and engaged in their work, ultimately contributing to organizational success and effectiveness. It is evident that self-motivated employees do not solely need external motivation, such as monetary rewards, and this internal drive to complete tasks for their own sake is a personal resource that facilitates employee engagement [34]. Employees who are motivated by an internal need for achievement rather than external rewards experience higher levels of engagement at work.

The results provide valuable insights into the relationship between sub-scales of leadership empowerment and engagement among employees. The analysis indicates a meaningful linear connection between leadership empowerment sub-scales and affective and intellectual engagement. Upon closer examination of individual predictors, it is evident that only leading by example emerges as a statistically significant factor influencing affective and intellectual engagement. This underscores the crucial role of leadership behavior in shaping employees' emotional attachment and engagement with their work and the organization. Organizations should prioritize cultivating EL practices that inspire and motivate employees intellectually, ultimately contributing to enhanced performance and innovation. The findings emphasize the importance of leadership behavior, particularly leading by example, in fostering positive affective and intellectual engagement among employees. Organizations should prioritize cultivating EL practices that inspire and motivate employees emotionally, thereby contributing to a more engaged and productive workforce. Barreiro and Treglown [34] provide evidence that leaders can enhance engagement levels in diverse organizational settings by designing work roles that enable employees to apply their expertise and skills to meaningful tasks.

### 4.1. Implications

These results have practical implications for management and leadership practices. Leaders should try to build an empowering and supportive work environment that encourages both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of workers, predominantly those who lead by example, as a tool to motivate and inspire employees. Recognition of achievements, effective communication, and involvement in decision-making processes are the best means to achieve it. A conducive and supportive work environment can be achieved by setting a positive example for team members and promoting autonomy in their work. Leaders may attempt to demonstrate behaviors that are aligned with organizational values. They must promote a sense of purpose and encourage autonomy among team members. Leaders can create a work environment that cultivates intrinsic motivation, leading to increased engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity.

Furthermore, leaders must prioritize career advancement through professional development to enhance both the intellectual and affective engagement of employees. This professional growth of employees would increase intellectual engagement, resulting in a more satisfied workforce. The broader implication of the findings is that educational organizations can improve their effectiveness by implementing EL practices. While leadership empowering behavior encourages autonomy, it is indispensable to prevent faculty members from feeling overworked by augmented responsibility. Higher education institutions may notify policies and establish procedures that ensure workload balance to avoid stress and burnout among teaching faculty who exercise more autonomy. The findings also suggest that higher education institutions may shift from traditional leadership styles and models toward empowering and collaborative leadership styles. By adopting EL, institutions may nurture innovation, creativity, and better faculty engagement, for a more dynamic academic environment.

### 4.2. Limitations of study

This research was conducted with only a sample of 200 teachers from the University of Sargodha, therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other higher education institutions due to its unique

administrative and cultural environment. A cross-sectional survey design was used, this makes it hard to find how leadership empowerment affects employee outcomes over time. The study employed a quantitative approach using the survey method, as qualitative techniques can provide deeper insights into the phenomenon. Due to resource constraints and time limitations data was collected only from the University of Sargodha which may restrict the study's generalizability.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It was concluded that EL practices significantly impact employee motivation and engagement within educational settings. Specifically, leadership empowerment through leading by example and participative decision-making, enhances both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, leading to improved employee satisfaction and productivity. This study highlights the vital role of EL practices in nurturing employee engagement and motivation within educational settings. Leaders and managers who lead by example and are involved in participative decision-making can significantly improve employee satisfaction, engagement, and overall productivity. Effective empowering strategies, clear communication, and encompassing managerial support are essential for cultivating a positive organizational culture and achieving desired outcomes. While employee empowerment has validated its potential for improving overall productivity, it also poses many challenges for organizations that need to be addressed. Therefore, assuming a well-balanced approach that takes advantage of empowerment while alleviating potential drawbacks is crucial for sustaining managerial effectiveness and stimulating organizational progress in educational contexts. In conclusion, this study advocates that leaders in higher education should adopt empowering practices such as role modeling and participative decision-making to enhance faculty engagement.

Future research may explore the impact of EL in multiple universities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how organizational factors influence the effectiveness of EL in higher education. Longitudinal research may be conducted to examine the long-term effects of EL by tracking changes in motivation, and engagement over time. To gain a more in-depth understanding and richer insights into how EL is implemented in educational settings, future research could use a mixed-methods approach. Interviews, case studies, and focus groups can complement the quantitative findings and provide triangulation. Further research may explore the challenges and barriers that leaders and institutions face when implementing EL practices and may offer strategies to overcome these challenges for effectively implementing EL.

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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
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E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors state no conflict of interest.

## INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was attained from all respondents before data collection.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The researchers followed institutional policies and it was approved by the ethical review committee of the Institution of Education.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [ZF] on request.

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