

## Linking Empowerment-Oriented Leadership to Work Engagement in Nepalese Commercial Banks

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the relationship between empowerment-oriented leadership and work engagement in the banking sector. This study employed a quantitative based cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 412 banking professionals representing four private, two joint venture, and two public limited commercial banks. Respondents were chosen using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across job levels, HR departments of commercial banks. The data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed in person. Ethical approval was obtained from employees and consent was secured from all the respondents. The data and hypothesized relationships were analyzed and tested using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, confirming the internal consistency of the measures. The results show that there is positive and significant relationship between leadership empowerment and work engagement. Similarly, there is positive and significant relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. However, there is insignificant and negative relationship between affective commitment and work engagement. This study contributes to the academic literature by providing empirical evidence on the influence of empowerment-oriented leadership in fostering work engagement, addressing a notable gap in prior studies that have not yet explored this relationship in the banking context. The results hold practical implications for bank managers and policymakers, suggesting that exposing empowerment-oriented leadership can serve as a strategic approach to enhance work engagement and, consequently, improve organizational performance and employee well-being.*

**Keywords:** Affective commitment, commercial banks, leadership empowerment, psychological empowerment, work engagement

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## INTRODUCTION

Work engagement involves exhibiting strong energy and enthusiasm, deep commitment, and full immersion in one's tasks. (Bakker & Albrecht, 2021; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Vigor represents an individual's energetic involvement in their work and their internal drive to put effort into tasks. Dedication is demonstrated when people feel inspired by their work, take pride in it, and perceive it as meaningful. Absorption describes being deeply focused, fully immersed in work, and sometimes losing awareness of time much like the notion of "flow." Studies indicate that work engagement is positively associated with overall life satisfaction (Mauno *et al.*, 2018) and is taken as a fulfilling psychological state (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). Genuine leadership among nurse managers influences work engagement, underscoring the value of a supportive work environment (Assi *et al.*, 2024). Empowering leadership can shape psychological empowerment, defined as an individual's drive to actively participate in their work. This connection has been documented in diverse settings, including private hospitals (Alotaibi *et al.*, 2020; Kundu *et al.*, 2019). Compared to those who rigidly adhere to standard procedures, empowered employees are more likely to demonstrate stronger trust in leadership, heightened work engagement, and greater motivation (Moura *et al.*, 2015).

Empirical research on empowering leadership and work engagement have been numerous (Kwon & Kim, 2020; Wen *et al.*, 2023). Previous empirical research (e.g. (Saks, 2022; AlShamsi *et al.*, 2025; Nasidi *et al.*, 2020) studied the relationships between various organizational practices and engagement often highlighting managerial initiatives and engagement. Globalization has progressively diminished culturally specific management practices, removing geographical boundaries to boost business efficiency and enhance customer service quality. Central to this transformation is employee empowerment, which entails giving employees increased autonomy and authority over their daily tasks and responsibilities (Yin *et al.*, 2019).

Extensive research in the service-oriented sector has empirically demonstrated the positive influence of empowering leadership on a range of employee work-related outcomes (Tsaur *et al.*, 2019). High affective commitment tend to perceive their roles more positively, devote greater effort to their tasks, and maintain long-term enthusiasm, driven by a sense of belonging and alignment with the organization's values (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Individual-level assessments may not fully reflect how people perceive situations in this cultural context. In China, the emphasis on harmony and collective achievement significantly shapes workplace dynamics (Earley, 1993). Empowering behaviors enhance psychological safety and perceived organizational support, further strengthening employees' emotional attachment to their work. This reciprocal dynamic leads to higher levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption core dimensions of work engagement (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Empowering leadership involves sharing power, encouraging participation in decision making, expressing confidence in employees and promoting autonomy (Arnold *et al.*, 2000). So, this study offers a unique contribution by examining the role of empowering oriented leadership to work engagement. Unlike prior research conducted predominantly in Western contexts and general organizational settings (e.g. Wen *et al.*, 2023; Alotaibi *et al.*, 2020), this study specifically investigates how empowering oriented leadership influences work engagement in Nepalese commercial banks.

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## REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

### ***Leadership Empowerment and Work Engagement***

Empowering leadership refers to the behavior whereby power is shared with subordinates that raises their level of intrinsic motivation (Srivastava *et al.*, 2006). This style of leadership emphasizes delegating authority to employees, allowing independent decision-making and has been linked to customer-empowering behavior, knowledge management adoption, OCB, creativity, and proactive initiative (Li *et al.*, 2013). Many scholars found that empowering leadership is the key driver of employees' work engagement (Arshad *et al.*, 2022; Wen *et al.*, 2023). However, there may not always be positive relationship between leadership empowerment and work engagement. According to Zhang & Bartol (2010), empowering leadership may backfire in some cases where employees lack skills or confidence to handle increased autonomy, leading to reduced performance and potentially lower engagement. Another study also posits insignificant association between leadership empowerment and work engagement. According to the study, empowering leadership could have a negative influence on employees' experience and create it as burdensome, that amplifies role overload, create stress, and lower engagement among those leaders who are not ready for employee autonomy (Cheong *et al.*, 2016). However, there is no consensus among researchers on the association between leadership empowerment and work engagement. In specific context like Nepalese commercial banks and developing economies, these studies have not been conducted. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis to address this gap:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Leadership empowerment positively relates to work engagement*

### ***Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement***

Psychological empowerment refers to motivational construct manifested in cognition: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Fock *et al.*, 2013). There is a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and its impact on employees' work performance in the West (Fong & Snape, 2015). Numerous previous studies found positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement (Saleem *et al.*, 2017; Moura *et al.*, 2015). Another study, which claims that psychological empowerment reflects an employer's sense of meaning, autonomy, impact at work, and competence reflecting a perceived investment of trust and support from the leadership or the organization (Spreitzer, 1995). The relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement is not always positive and consistent in all the contexts and environments. According to Fock et al. (2013), managers in Chinese organizations found to be unfamiliar with psychological empowerment and mentioned uncertainty about empowering their subordinates. However, the research between psychological empowerment and work engagement is widely linked and studied in various contexts, (e.g., Western and developed economies contexts) but there are limited such studies in underdeveloped economies like Nepal. So, this study tries to address this gap by proposing the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Psychological empowerment positively relates to work engagement*

### ***Affective Commitment Positively Relates to Work Engagement***

Affective commitment, or employees' emotional connection and involvement with their organization, is strongly associated with higher work engagement, as it fosters positive role perception, increased effort, and sustained enthusiasm (Meyer & Allen, 1997). As opined by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), affectively committed employees show greater vigor, absorption, and

dedication, the key elements of work engagement that amplify employees' internal motivation tied to the success of organization. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2008), the emotional link of employees also promotes extra efforts, resilience, and going beyond their assigned job duties. As opined by Saks (2006), employees' affective commitment not only serve as a direct predictor but also as an indirect enhancer of work engagement by strengthening psychological safety, trust, and job satisfaction. Another study by Yalabik et al. (2013), focusing on service sectors characterized by high emotional labor, affective commitment enhances employee's sense of purpose thereby helping them maintain engagement though they may be in stressful situation. Despite the studies claimed positive relationship between affective commitment and work engagement, a few studies suggest that in certain cases, very high levels of affective commitment could produce unintended disadvantages, though these effects do not represent a direct relationship with work engagement. Supporting the statements, Meyer and Maltin (2010) noted that employees who have strong commitment towards organization may appear engaged externally but can face stress and strain when faced with excessive demands despite insufficient resources. However, affective commitment is widely known as a predictor of work engagement, the contextual research such as Nepalese commercial banks, particularly in developing economies remains limited. We propose the following hypothesis to address this gap:

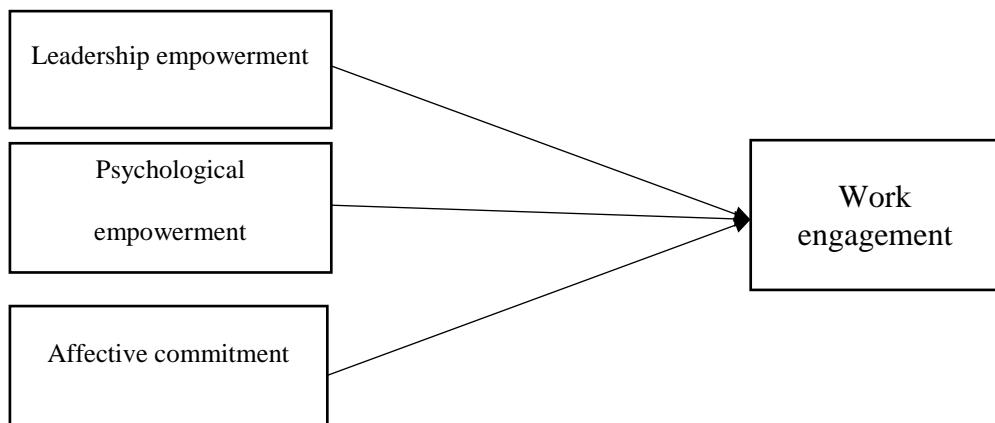
*H<sub>3</sub>: Affective commitment positively relates to work engagement*

**Figure 1**

*Research Framework*

Independent variables

Dependent variable



## METHODS

### Research Design

There are 20 commercial banks in Nepal three public limited, five joint venture, and 12 private commercial banks. The commercial banking sector employs more than 80% of total capital invested in the financial sector (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2024). This study adopted cross-sectional, descriptive and analytical research design which allows the researchers to study variables across a population at a single point in time to make efficiency for identifying relationships, prevalence, and patterns in the particular time period. According to Creswell (2013), cross-sectional research

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design provides a snapshot of key characteristics and outcomes of population at a single point in time.

### **Population and Sampling Procedures**

Nepal Rastra Bank serves as the central regulatory authority for the banking sector in the country. To ensure diverse representation of the banking industry and to capture variations in organizational practices and employee experiences across different ownership structures, a sample of eight banks was selected, comprising four private, two joint venture, and two public limited banks. This study uses stratified random sampling focusing on stratification by age, gender, job position, and experience to include of the key subgroups within the population. The stratified random sampling technique enhances the precision and reliability of the findings by reducing sampling bias and increases the sample diversity of the various groups. The researchers collected data from the respondents of Nepali commercial banks employed at various branches using the standard structured questionnaires which were distributed personally. The study applies carefulness to take ethical approval from the respondents ensuring consent, confidentiality, and compliance with legal and institutional standards of the organization.

A total of 412 questionnaires were received and analyzed after treating for missing data through imputations out of the total population of 41552 (Nepal Bankers' Association, 2024). The researchers administered the questionnaires in English, as it was believed that the respondents were proficient in the language. The total questionnaires distributed were 480, only 412 respondents returned and were retained for analysis. The response rate was 85.83 percent, as opined by Bougie and Sekaran (2019), a response rate of 30 percent is considered substantial for analysis in quantitative research, the response rate in this study was satisfactory and adequate for analysis. Moreover, the ten times rule introduced by researchers Hair et al. (2019) asserts that the minimum sample size of the study should be at least ten times the maximum number of items used to measure the construct or the highest number of structural paths employed at a specific construct in the framework. The researchers used 4 variables and 29 items which satisfies the sample size recommended by the authors. We used a five-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. Supporting the Likert scale researchers Joshi et al. (2015) argues that the five-point Likert scale is a widely used measuring tool in survey research, which is valued for its use, and sound psychometric validity.

The Table 1 presents age distribution of the 412 respondents varied across groups. Notably, 74.80 percent were aged 35-44, 21.80 percent were 25-34, 25.20 percent were above 45, and 11.90 percent were below 25 years. Gender representation showed 36.90 percent female and 63.10 percent male, indicating a skewed sample likely due to lower participation of female workers in banks' branches. In terms of job experience, 41 percent had 11-15 years of experience, 11.90 percent had less than 5 years, 25.20 percent had more than 16 years, and 21.80 percent had 6-10 years of experience. Regarding job positions, 12.60% were executive and managers, 27.90 percent were branch managers, 33.70 percent were senior assistants/officers, and 25.70 percent were assistants and junior assistants (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Demographic Profiles of Respondents*

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency	%
Age group	Below 25 years	49	11.90
	25-34	90	21.80
	35-44	169	74.80
	45 and above	104	25.20
Gender	Male	260	63.10
	Female	152	36.90
Job position	Executive and manager	52	12.60
	Branch manager	115	27.90
	Senior assts. /officers	139	33.70
	Assts. and junior assts.	106	25.70
Experience	Less than 5 years	49	11.90
	6-10	90	21.80
	11-15	169	41.00
	16 year and above	104	25.20

Source: Field survey, 2025

### **Measures**

**Work Engagement:** The work engagement scale comprises 15 items adapted from Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), such as, "At my work, I always persevere, even when things do not go well". The items in the constructs show a good internal consistency, the Cronbach's alpha of the dependent variable is 0.937, which shows that the items in the variable reliably measure the work engagement even in the developing economies. The items in the constructs maintain robust psychometric properties in Nepali context as well.

**Empowerment-Oriented Leadership:** The study examines the relationship between leadership empowerment dynamics and work engagement. There are three dimensions used in the leadership empowerment dynamics leadership empowerment, psychological empowerment, and affective commitment. We use leadership empowerment scale, which has five items, and the example of the items is "Complete freedom is allowed by supervisors in employees' work", adapted from the study by Cook *et al.* (1981). Similarly, the variable psychological empowerment is measured by five items such as "The work I do is very important to me", adapted from the study by Spreitzer (1995). Similarly, the variable affective commitment is measured by five items, example of items include "I would be more than happy to continue working with organization in the future", adapted from the study by Allen and Meyer (1990). The constructs of leadership empowerment dynamics show strong psychometric validity, reliability in the context of developing countries. The Cronbach's alpha values are— 0.861 for leadership empowerment, 0.872 for psychological empowerment, and 0.852 for affective commitment.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

This study analyzed data using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). According to Pallant (2020), SPSS is a widely recognized statistical tool in the social sciences. In this study

descriptive statistics are applied to present the characteristics of the sample. As opined by Field (2018), descriptive statistics explains characteristics of samples and correlation analysis explore relationships among variables. To validate the impact of relationships, multiple regression analysis has been used to determine the extent to which independent variable predict dependent variable precisely. The researchers set level of significance at 5 percent ( $p<0.05$ ) as recommended by Hair et al. (2019). The statistical assumptions were assessed before conducting this analysis to ensure robustness of the results.

### **Model Specification**

This study identifies the impacts of leadership empowerment dynamics on work engagement in Nepalese commercial banks. Consequently, the following regression model serves as a basis for analysis.

Work engagement =  $f$  (leadership empowerment, psychological empowerment, and affective commitment)

So, the equation,

$$WE = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LE + \beta_2 PE + \beta_3 AC + e_i \dots \dots \dots$$

Where,

WE = work engagement

$e_i$  = Error term

$\beta_0$  = Intercept of dependent variable

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$  are beta coefficients of the independent variables to be estimated

## **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **Relationship between Empowerment-Oriented Leadership and Work Engagement**

Correlation helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of the data by revealing patterns and relationships between variables that might otherwise go unnoticed, thereby supporting the development of stronger hypotheses in empirical studies (Field, 2018).

**Table 2**

*The Relationship between Independents and Dependent Variables*

Constructs	WE	LE	PE	AC
WE	1			
LE	0.533**	1		
PE	0.460**	0.500**	1	
AC	-0.044	0.043	0.025	1

*Note:* \*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

Table 2 shows correlation coefficients of constructs. The correlation between leadership empowerment and work engagement is 0.533, the correlation between psychological empowerment and work engagement is 0.460, and the correlation between affective commitment and work engagement is -0.044. The Table 2 shows that there is positive correlation between of the independent's variables LE and PE however, insignificant relationship between AC to WE.

## Impact of Empowerment-Oriented Leadership on Work Engagement

The threshold value for tolerance is 0.10, all the variables under studies shows the tolerance values more than 0.10, which confirms that the predictor is largely independent than other predictors in the study. The value of  $R^2$  shows that leadership empowerment, psychological empowerment, and affective commitment collectively explain 33.90% of the variance in work engagement whereas the remaining 66.10 is attributed to other circumstances. The variance inflation factors (VIF) value of 3.3. According to Kock and Lynn (2012), the VIF values of below 3.3 shows there is no issue of multicollinearity which supports the validity about results. Overall, these findings indicate a positive outlook for the future performance of the banks.

Regression analysis assesses whether independent variables exert statistically significant effects on the dependent variable, thereby supporting the process of hypothesis testing. According to Hair et al. (2010), regression is a powerful approach which can play a crucial role in decision making of organizations. According to Table 3, the beta coefficients value, t-value, and p-value of the variable affective commitment are -0.066, -1.688, and  $0.092 > 0.05$  respectively. Since, all the values are negative and p-value exceeds the 5% level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted, which indicates that affective commitment insignificantly affects work engagement. However, rest two variables leadership empowerment demonstrates a beta coefficient of 0.415, t-value 8.756, and p-value  $0.000 < 0.05$ , similarly, psychological empowerment shows beta value of 0.267, t-value 5.557, and p-value  $0.000 < 0.05$ . Both of the variables show positive association with work engagement, leading to acceptance of alternative hypotheses and confirming positive and significant relationships with work engagement.

**Table 3**

*Impact of empowerment-oriented leadership on work engagement*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.275	.218		5.851	.000		
AC	-.066	.039	-.068	-1.688	.092	.998	1.002
LE	.415	.047	.407	8.756	.000	.749	1.335
PE	.267	.048	.258	5.557	.000	.750	1.333

$R^2 = 0.339$

F-Statistic = 69.778; Sig. value of F-Statistic = 0.01

## DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study is to examine the association between empowerment-oriented leadership and work engagement in Nepali commercial banks. The results of the study reveal that empowerment-oriented leadership and psychological empowerment found to be positive and significantly associated with work engagement. The findings are in line with the existing studies of Arshad et al. (2022), Wen et al. (2023), Saleem et al. (2017) and Moura et al. (2015), who

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support that effective empowerment-oriented leadership can foster work engagement when the organization properly manage leader member relationships. Divergent views were presented by Zhang and Bartol (2010), Cheong et al. (2016), and Fock et al. (2013), who argued that the strength and nature of associations between empowerment-oriented leadership and work engagement depend on various circumstances such as environment, leadership styles, and peer relationship.

The findings further demonstrate that the variable affective commitment found to be insignificant with work engagement. This result is in line with the studies by Meyer and Maltin (2010), arguing that affective commitment does not necessarily achieve a positive and significant relationship with work engagement. The researchers suggested that excessive workload of employees, lack of resources or misalignment between personal and organizational goals in certain context, and employees with strong emotional attachment may still experience reduction in engagement, which may create a sense of obligation leading to strain rather than increased motivation. However, the finding contradicts with the studies by Meyer and Allen (1997), Schaufeli et al. (2002), and Bakker and Demerouti (2018), who consistently argued that affective commitment enhances and maintains higher levels of engagement in an organization. The researchers maintains that employees of the organization who feel emotionally associated to workplace are more likely to show vigor, dedication, and absorption in performing their roles, which can contribute to organizational success. The employees may demonstrate commitment, strengthens intrinsic motivation, discretionary efforts, and fosters resilience even in challenging situations.

This study shows contrasting finding on the relationship between affective commitment and work engagement. As opined by Bakker and Demerouti (2017) and Saks (2022), who suggest that this relationship can be contingent on several contextual factors such as leadership styles, job resources, organizational culture which are provided to employee's overall satisfaction. So, understanding the situations on which affective commitment fosters or hinders engagement, it is essential to design result oriented human resource strategies which promotes both organizational performance and employees' satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that empowerment-oriented leadership plays a vital role in enhancing work engagement in Nepali commercial banks. The positive and significant association between empowerment-oriented leadership, psychological empowerment, and work engagement indicates that leaders who delegate authority, encourage participation, and build trust can effectively stimulate employees' vigor, dedication, and absorption at work. These findings largely line up with prior empirical studies, suggesting that well-managed leader-member relationships create a supportive environment where employees feel valued and motivated to engage more deeply in their roles. However, the presence of divergent views in the literature highlights that the effectiveness of empowerment-oriented leadership may vary depending on contextual factors such as organizational environment, peer relationships, and complementary leadership styles.

In contrast, the study finds that affective commitment does not have a significant relationship with work engagement, revealing a context-specific dynamic within Nepali commercial banks. This contrasting result suggests that emotional attachment to the organization alone may not be

sufficient to sustain high engagement, particularly in situations characterized by heavy workloads, resource constraints, or misalignment between individual and organizational goals. While previous studies argue that affective commitment enhances engagement through intrinsic motivation and resilience, the current findings imply that commitment can, in some contexts, create a sense of obligation that leads to stress rather than motivation. Therefore, the study emphasizes the importance of adopting balanced and context-sensitive human resource strategies that not only substitute emotional attachment but also ensure adequate job resources, supportive leadership, and a healthy work environment to promote sustainable work engagement.

The focus of this study is to examine the critical role of leadership empowerment dynamics leadership empowerment, psychological empowerment, and affective commitment with work engagement among banking employees in Nepali commercial banks. When the organization provides training to higher managers, it should aim at developing autonomy, supportive, and participative practices. Only empowerment initiatives do not work, it should be paired with substantial job resources to make sustainable engagement. While the study found insignificant effect of affective commitment to work engagement, so, the engagement strategies adopted by banks should be culturally oriented, effective leadership styles, and overall employee wellbeing. While designing the performance evaluation mechanism, the two-way communication should be established, which could incorporate empowerment related metrics to reinforce desired behaviors of the employees, since for high work engagement, an integrative approach on empowerment, support, and resources is necessary. Moreover, while formulating the banking sector policies, empowerment-based leadership model should be considered for sustainable engagement results.

Future research should examine the moderating and mediating roles of contextual factors such as job resources, organizational culture, leadership styles, and work stress in shaping the relationship between affective commitment and work engagement.

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