ICEBEF · CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

# Strategic Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

A Hybrid Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis (2001–2026)

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BACKGROUND

# Executives rarely move outcomes by their own hand

Upper-echelons theory holds that organizations come to reflect their top managers (Hambrick & Mason, 1984).

Yet that influence travels **at one remove**: through the structures leaders build, the climate they set and, above all, the psychological states they develop in employees.

So the real question is **how** strategic leadership reaches people, not only **whether** it correlates with performance.

### The gap

**Psychological empowerment is the strongest theoretical answer to the "how".**

Prior reviews focus on lower-order styles (transformational, servant, empowering). No review has combined systematic screening with bibliometric mapping of this specific intersection.



FOCAL CONSTRUCT

# Psychological empowerment: four cognitions

### Meaning

Work fits one's values and purpose

### Competence

Belief in one's capability to do the work

### Self-determination

Autonomy in how work is initiated and done

### Impact

Felt influence on organizational results

**Adjacent traditions sit at other levels of analysis and are often conflated:**

**Structural** — access to resources and information (Kanter, 1977)

**Empowering leadership** — leader behavior (Arnold et al., 2000)

**Employee empowerment** — applied HR umbrella term

Spreitzer (1995); Thomas & Velthouse (1990)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

# Four questions, two kinds of evidence

**Performance analysis · retrieved corpus, n = 59**

## RQ1

How has the theme developed across 2001–2026?

## RQ2

How is it distributed across countries, institutions, journals and authors?

**Qualitative synthesis · included studies, n = 12**

## RQ3

Which mechanisms link the two, and why is psychological empowerment under-researched?

## RQ4

What integrative model explains the SL → PE → outcome pathway?

SL = strategic leadership · PE = psychological empowerment

METHOD

# Systematic Literature Network Analysis

A **PRISMA 2020** systematic review combined with **bibliometric network analysis** (Colicchia & Strozzi, 2012).

**Source** · Scopus, all years 2001–2026, extracted 17 Sept 2026

**Query** · (“strategic leadership” OR “upper echelons”) AND (empowerment and its four canonical variants)

**Mapping** · VOSviewer; 555 keywords → 65 in the connected network

**n = 59**

Retrieved corpus → performance and keyword analyses

**n = 12**

Included studies → joint-display synthesis

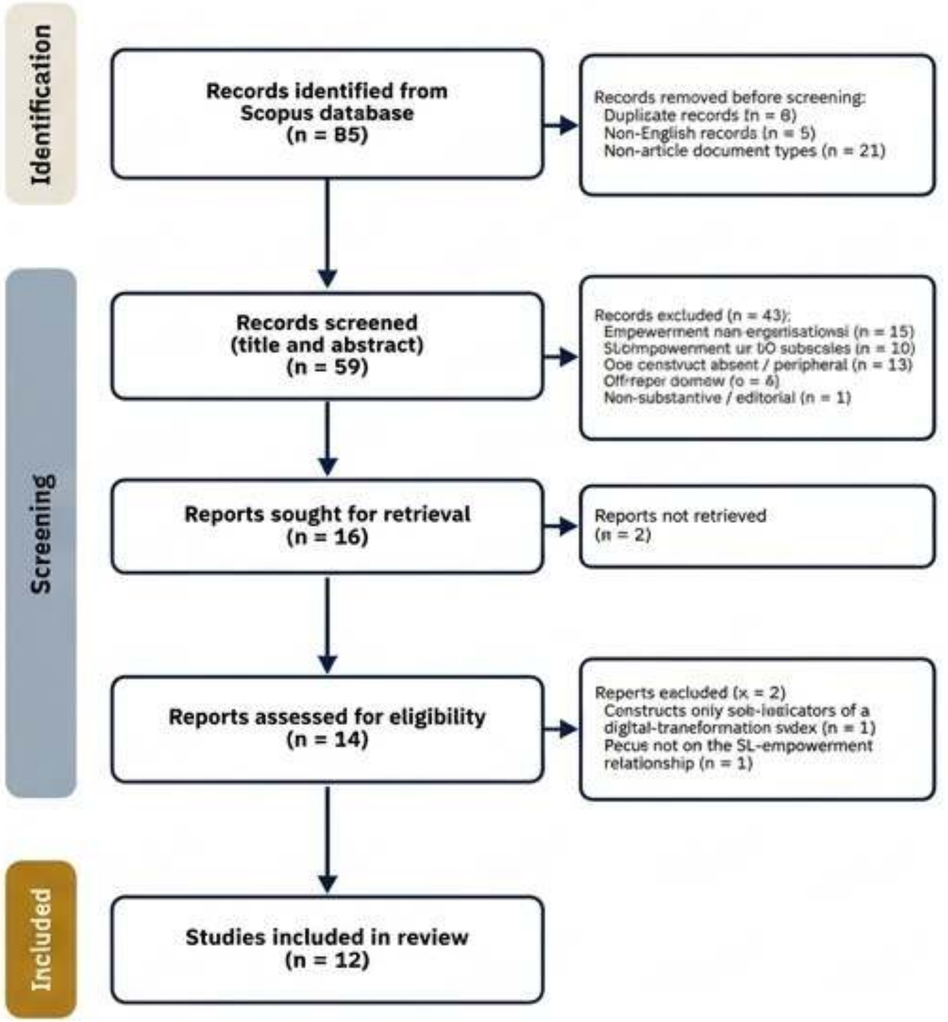
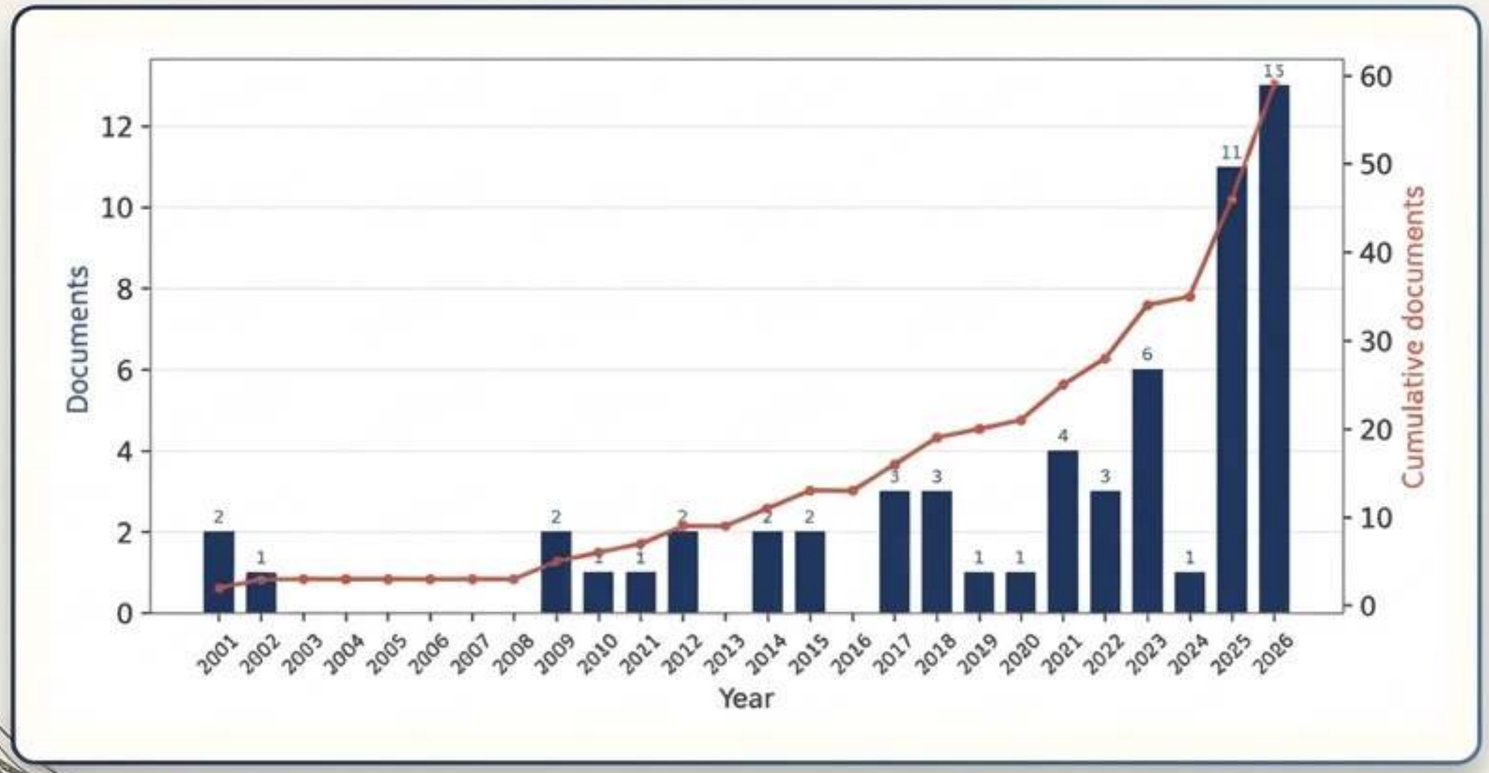



Figure 1 of the paper · Page et al. (2021)

RQ1 · DEVELOPMENT

# A young field that has just accelerated




**41%**

of the 59 documents appeared in 2025–2026

Only 21 documents in 2001–2020

886 citations, mostly to older work; one 2011 article alone holds 183

Figure 2 of the paper · Scopus data, n = 59

RQ2 · DISTRIBUTION

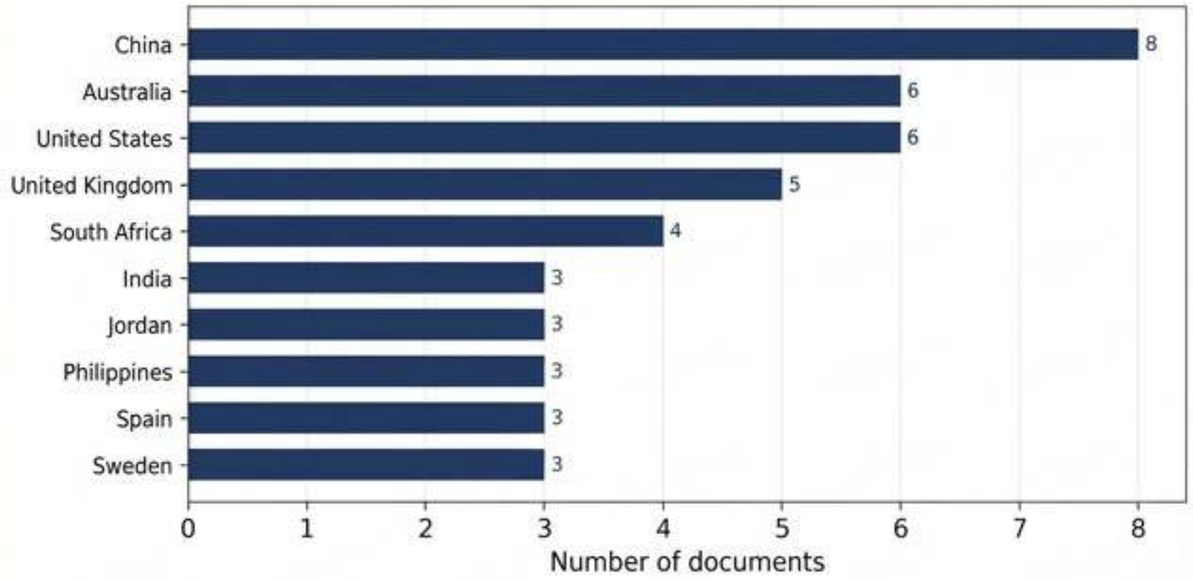
# Broad, dispersed and without a core

**38**
countries

**51**
source journals

**104**
institutions

**180**
authors

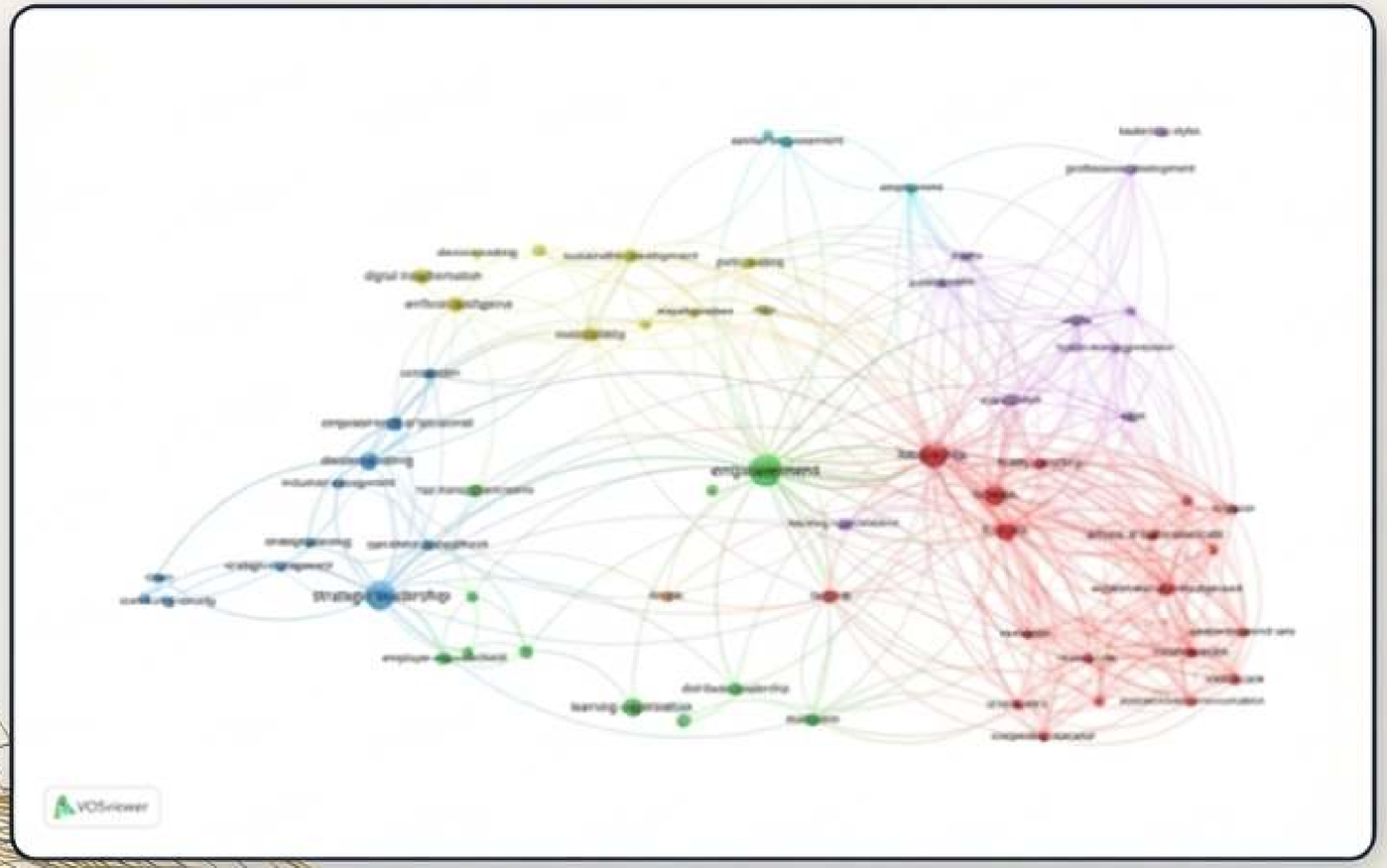



Top journals hold only 3 articles each; only 2 institutions appear twice; no author has more than 2 documents.

Figures 3–6 of the paper · full counting · Scopus data, n = 59

RQ3 · KEYWORD NETWORK

# The field talks about empowerment in general



**“Empowerment” (umbrella term)**

**61**

total link strength · highly central

**“Psychological empowerment”**

**0**

total link strength · never co-occurs with strategic leadership

Figure 7 of the paper · map of the broad corpus (n = 59), incl. peripheral health and community clusters

RQ3 · CONSTRUCT SPACE

# Four ways of measuring “empowerment”

**3**

**Psychological empowerment**

Employee state (focal). Lin & Rababah, 2014 (TMT level); Xu et al., 2022; Feng et al., 2025

**5**

**Employee empowerment**

Omnibus construct or dynamic capability (e.g., Muafi et al., 2018; Quansah et al., 2022)

**3**

**Empowering leadership**

Executive behavior on the leader’s side (Carmeli et al., 2011; Ling et al., 2015)

**1**

**Leadership skill**

Empowerment as a competence of leaders (Hamidi, 2009)

The construct with the strongest theoretical claim is the **least examined**: most evidence speaks to it only indirectly.

Full-text coding of the 12 included studies

RQ3 · MECHANISM

# Strategic leadership works through empowerment




### ✓ Two full-mediation results

Muafi et al. (2018): no direct effect on business success (β = 0.068, n.s.). Quansah et al. (2022): SL → performance fully mediated by dynamic capabilities.

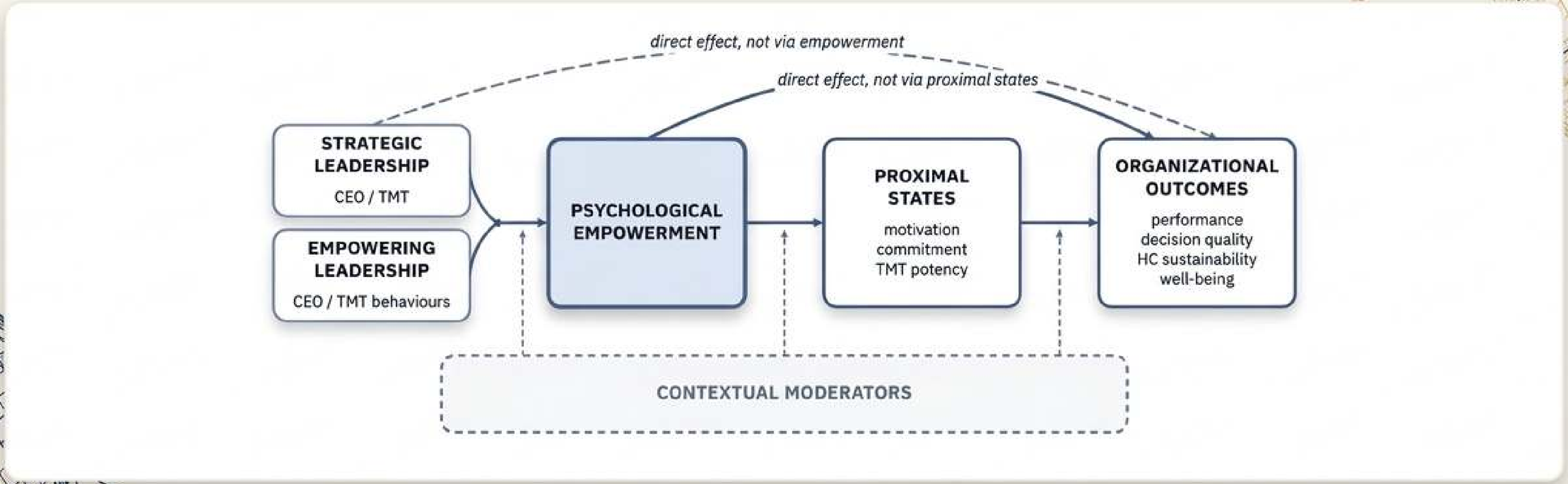
### ⚠ But the focal path is untested

Only Lin & Rababah (2014) mediate through psychological empowerment, and at TMT level. The individual-level pathway remains open.

Boundary conditions: environmental uncertainty · CEO–TMT dissimilarity · CEO tenure and age

RQ4 · INTEGRATIVE MODEL

# Psychological empowerment at the center




**Well supported** · mediation spine, k = 5 per link

**Provisional** · PE-specific path, moderators, emerging outcomes (1–3 studies each)

Figure 8 of the paper · a research map, not a confirmed structural model

RESEARCH AGENDA

# Three directions for future work

### Test the missing mechanism

Model the four cognitions of psychological empowerment as individual-level mediators of strategic leadership.

### Specify boundary conditions

Only 3 of 12 studies model moderators: we know more about whether leaders empower than when.

### Widen the outcome space

Move beyond firm and SME performance to employee well-being and human-capital sustainability.

**Design priority:** 11 of 12 studies are cross-sectional. Longitudinal, experimental and multi-source designs come first.

CONCLUSIONS

# What the review shows

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 | **An emerging field** | Sparse for two decades; 41% of output in 2025–2026 |
| 02 | **Broad but unconsolidated** | 38 countries, 51 journals, no core of institutions or authors |
| 03 | **A fragmented construct** | Psychological empowerment measured directly in only 3 of 12 studies |
| 04 | **A consistent mechanism** | Leadership acts through empowerment; two full-mediation results |

⚠ **Limitations** · Scopus only, English only; small included corpus; mostly cross-sectional evidence; no formal inter-rater reliability testing.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

# Strategy reaches performance only when people experience meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.

Genuine delegation, transparent information and roles where individual contribution is visible are not a complement to strategy. They are its channel.

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**Thank you** · Questions and discussion are welcome

