

# **Exploring the Influence of Leadership-Oriented Liberation on Employee Job Satisfaction and Performance: A Quantitative Study of Mid-Sized Enterprises in North Kerala**

**Deon Bablu Thomas**

**Narasimha Murthy H**

## **Abstract**

Liberation leadership as the intentional cultivation of freedom, participation, and empowerment in the workplace has become a dominant approach in contemporary management literature. In the fast-changing organizational contexts of medium-sized enterprises, such liberator leadership practices are being recognized as having the power to impact the experiences and outcomes of employees. This study investigates the impact of liberation leadership on worker satisfaction and performance, targeted at organizations in North Kerala. As business organizations deal with changing employee needs and competitive pressures, liberation-based leadership can be utilized as a strategic tool to construct employee participation and productivity. Through an empirical investigation of the relationship between liberation leadership and the major employee outcomes, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge that speaks to liberation as not only a theoretical, but also an operational and quantifiable element of successful management. The findings are intended to inform leadership development programs, organizational policymaking, and the general conception of empowerment in regional and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Leadership-Oriented Liberation, Job Satisfaction, Employee Performance

## **Introduction**

In today's dynamic, employee-centric work environments, traditional command-and-control models of leadership are giving way to leadership models that prioritize autonomy, inclusivity, and empowerment. Liberation-oriented leadership is one such emergence, which is understood as leadership styles that specifically reduce hierarchical constraints and maximize employee agency. Based on participative leadership, empowerment, and decentralization principles, this form of leadership promotes psychological freedom and allows employees to take responsibility for their work. With organizational success depending more and more on human capital, it has become theoretical and practical necessity to comprehend the effects of liberating leadership on employee experiences and outcomes.

While empowering leadership itself has increasingly been the subject of academic interest, contextual and region-specific research on the same is surprisingly absent, particularly in the case of mid-sized organizations in semi-urban and emerging regions like North Kerala. While international studies connect empowering leadership with higher employee motivation and innovation, its immediate and indirect effects on job satisfaction and performance remain unexplored in the India-specific local organizational contexts. The current study attempts to fill this research gap by studying the extent to which leadership-driven empowerment affects employee satisfaction and performance and therefore offers insightful viewpoints for academic research as well as productive

leadership training in the region.

## **Review of literature**

In modern terminology, leadership styles emphasizing employee empowerment have become very significant due to their potential to nurture innovation, trust, and organizational performance as a whole. Specifically, empowering leadership, as closely tied to the theory of liberation towards leadership, has been found to increase employees' intrinsic motivation and interest [1]. This form of leadership minimizes hierarchical constraints and stimulates independence, decision-making, and psychological safety, which are all essential for the success of the modern workforce [2]. Research has found that leadership styles that emphasize liberation lead to work environments in which employees feel esteemed and self-directed, thereby significantly enhancing job satisfaction [3], [4].

Job satisfaction, a long-standing outcome of organizational behavior, is fostered by leadership behaviors that result in participation and shared purpose [5]. For example, in decentralization and mid-sized companies, liberatory and empowerment-oriented leadership styles have been associated with higher satisfaction and reduced turnover [6]. In addition, satisfied employees are often found to exhibit improved performance, indicating that job satisfaction is not only a desirable outcome but also mediates the leadership-performance relationship [7], [8].

Empirical data also attest to the fact that psychological empowerment facilitative leadership leads to performance improvement, especially when job satisfaction is the mediating variable [9]. Empowering leadership was positively related to better performance by the mediating influence of satisfaction in IT professionals [10]. Liberating leadership also assists in the development of affective commitment and trust, which consequently lead to better task performance and goal achievement [11].

While empowering leadership has been extensively researched in Western settings, its application and impact in regional Indian settings are relatively less researched. Mid-sized firms in regions such as North Kerala, which operate by hybrid leadership models, are a particularly interesting setting in which to examine leadership liberation [12]. Regionally situated cultural and organizational norms will be likely to moderate or mediate the impact of liberating leadership on consequences, necessitating localized empirical data [13].

Researchers also contend that liberating leadership is more effective in lower hierarchies and participative cultures [14] common in most Indian SMEs moving from conventional management styles. In addition, the combination of psychological empowerment, autonomy, and purpose through liberating leadership enhances individual performance as well as enhances teams' cohesion and innovation [15]. Notwithstanding this emerging evidence, little quantitative simulation of job satisfaction

mediation between liberation leadership-oriented and employee performance in mid-sized firms, particularly in the Indian context, has been carried out.

## **Research Gap**

While prior research has extensively investigated relationships between liberating and transformational leadership, employee performance, and job satisfaction, the majority of the research has been completed in Western or metropolitan organizational contexts and has left scope for region-specific dynamics in India. Importantly, few empirical explorations of leadership-based liberation as a distinct construct, in the context of mid-sized companies in semi-urban regions like North Kerala, exist. Moreover, while traditionally, job satisfaction has been considered a dependent variable, its mediator influence in the relationship between liberating leadership and employee performance is poorly understood in the context of emerging economies. This study attempts to fill these gaps by investigating liberating leadership-based practices and their influence on employee performance in a region-specific context that is differentiated both economically and culturally.

## **Problem Statement**

In today's organizational contexts with change, empowerment, and autonomy-promoting leadership referred to as leadership-oriented liberation has been recognized as a major force

behind workers' behavior and organizational performance. Yet, amid rising international interest in liberating leadership, there is a lack of empirical research examining its impact in certain contexts of mid-size organizations in non-metropolitan regions like North Kerala. Furthermore, the mediating influence of job satisfaction in the relationship between leadership liberation and worker performance has also not been explored in a satisfactory manner. This lack of localized, evidence-based knowledge is a serious concern for managers and policymakers with a view to developing leadership strategies that are both organizational and culturally apt.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the nature and strength of the relationship between employee job satisfaction and employee performance?
2. Does employee performance vary significantly among employees with different levels of job satisfaction?
3. To what extent does leadership-oriented liberation predict employee performance in mid-sized enterprises?
4. Does job satisfaction mediate the relationship between leadership-oriented liberation and employee performance?

### **Objectives**

1. To examine the relationship between employee job satisfaction and employee performance

2. To determine whether employee performance significantly differs across different levels of job satisfaction
3. To assess the extent to which leadership-oriented liberation predicts employee performance
4. To evaluate the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between leadership-oriented liberation and employee performance.

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant relationship between employee job satisfaction and employee performance.
2. There is no significant difference in employee performance across different levels of job satisfaction.
3. Leadership-oriented liberation does not significantly predict employee performance.
4. Job satisfaction does not mediate the relationship between leadership-oriented liberation and employee performance.

### **Research Methodology**

This study uses quantitative research to examine the impact of leadership-centered emancipation on the job satisfaction and performance of employees among medium-sized businesses based in the North Kerala region.

A standardized questionnaire was created to gather primary data, and it consisted of known scales, which were modified from existing validated scales. Items measuring leadership-based liberation were taken from the Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ), job satisfaction was assessed using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ), and employee performance was assessed using a self-rated performance scale created by Williams and Anderson. Responses were noted on a five-point Likert scale of strongly disagrees to strongly agree.

The target population consists of employees of medium-scale firms in the manufacturing, service, and technology industries of districts such as Kannur, Kozhikode, and Malappuram. To ensure sufficient representation of industries, stratified random sampling was used, and the sample of 373 participants was drawn. Traditional and electronic data collection methods were used to maximize response rates, and anonymity and confidentiality of all participants were maintained.

## **Data Analysis**

Data collected in this study was compared with the stipulated research aims. For the purpose of meeting the first aim, which concerns investigating the connection between employees' satisfaction and performance, correlation analysis was employed whether there exist any statistical connection between employees' satisfaction levels and the efficiency of their performance within particular job descriptions. In connection with the second aim,

which investigates differences in employee performance in terms of varying levels of satisfaction, employees are categorized according to the satisfaction levels they expressed. Univariate Analysis of variance was then being conducted to investigate performance measures across categories to determine any differences. The third aim is to explain the effect of liberation-based leadership on employees' performance. In this regard, the regression analysis used to determine whether employees whose leaders are viewed as more liberating are likely to exhibit improved performance in their operations.

To achieve the fourth objective of determine the degree to which job satisfaction acts as a mediator between workers' performance and emancipation mediation analysis used. This analysis checks if the impact of leadership on performance is direct or indirect via how it influences job satisfaction.

**Table 1: Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.742	3

Source: SPSS Output

**Interpretation:** The test for reliability produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.742 for the scale of 3 items. This is a satisfactory measure of internal consistency of the items to measure the construct. According to generally accepted standards, a Cronbach's

alpha of over 0.70 is satisfactory for exploratory studies, and this means that the items consistently measure the same construct.

**Table 2: Correlations**

		Job Satisfaction	Employee Performance
Job Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	.660**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	373	373
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	.660**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	373	373
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: SPSS Output

**Interpretation**

Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant positive correlation between employee job satisfaction and employee performance, with correlation coefficient,  $r = 0.660$  and p-value ( $N = 373$ ). Since the p-value  $< 0.01$ , the result is significant at the 1% level, i.e., the chance of such an association occurring by mere chance is very small. Given this result, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ )—that there is no significant relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance—is thus rejected. This result implies that increased levels of job satisfaction are strongly associated with increased levels of employee performance among the population under study.

**Table 3: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Employee Performance					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	119.777a	4	29.944	73.192	.000
Intercept	691.048	1	691.048	1689.117	.000
Job Satisfaction	119.777	4	29.944	73.192	.000
Error	150.555	368	.409		
Total	7991.000	373			
Corrected Total	270.332	372			
a. R Squared = .443 (Adjusted R Squared = .437)					

Source: SPSS Output

**Interpretation**

The Univariate Analysis of Variance table shows that job satisfaction statistically significantly affects employee performance, as evidenced by an F-value of 73.192 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is below 0.01, the outcome is significant at the 1% level, which means there are significant differences in employee performance across different levels of job satisfaction. The R-squared is 0.443, which implies that variations in levels of job satisfaction account for about 44.3% of variations in employee performance. That is a very large effect. The null hypothesis (H<sub>02</sub>) is thus rejected. These results are in favour of the contention that varying levels of job satisfaction are associated with significantly varying levels of employee performance.

**Table 4: Coefficientsa**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	3.071	.182		16.899	.000
1	Leadership Oriented Liberation	.331	.040	.398	8.347	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance						

Source: SPSS Output

**Interpretation**

The regression analysis suggests that leadership-driven liberation is a significant predictor of employee performance, as evidenced by a standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.398 and a t-value of 8.347, which is significant at  $p = 0.000$ . This suggests that employee empowerment and liberation styles of leadership are positively and significantly associated with employee levels of performance. The unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.331$ ) suggests that with each one-unit rise in leadership-driven liberation, there is a predicted rise of 0.331 units in employee performance, everything else being equal. Because the p-value is significantly lower than the traditional cut-off of 0.05, this finding is statistically significant. The null hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ) is therefore rejected, and it can be concluded that leadership-driven liberation is a significant predictor of employee performance in mid-sized firms.

## Mediation Analysis

PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 5.0

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. - [www.afhayes.com](http://www.afhayes.com)

Documentation available in Hayes (2022). -

[www.guilford.com/p/hayes3](http://www.guilford.com/p/hayes3)

Model: 4

Y: Employee

X: Leadersh

M: Job\_Sati

Sample Size: 373

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Outcome Variable: Job\_Sati

Model Summary

<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>MSE</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df1</b>	<b>df2</b>	<b>p</b>
0.4481	0.2008	0.6490	93.1857	1.0000	371.0000	.0000

Model

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Coeff</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>
Constant	2.7425	0.1869	14.6730	.0000	2.3750	3.1101
Leadersh	0.3933	0.0407	9.6533	.0000	0.3132	0.4734

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Outcome Variable: Employee

Model Summary

<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>MSE</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df1</b>	<b>df2</b>	<b>p</b>
0.6694	0.4481	0.4032	150.1985	2.0000	370.0000	.0000

Model

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Coeff</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>
Constant	1.5061	0.1852	8.1317	.0000	1.1419	1.8703
Leadersh	0.1062	0.0359	2.9574	.0033	0.0356	0.1769
Job_Sati	0.5706	0.0409	13.9426	.0000	0.4901	0.6511

**Direct and Indirect Effects of X on Y**

Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
0.1062	0.0359	2.9574	0.0033	0.0356	0.1769

**Indirect Effect(s) of X on Y (via Job\_Sati)**

Mediator	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Job_Sati	0.2244	0.0402	0.1543	0.3091

**Analysis Notes and Errors**

Description	Value
Confidence level for all confidence intervals	95.0000
Number of bootstrap samples (percentile bootstrap confidence intervals)	5000

**Interpretation**

The mediation test based on PROCESS Model 4 reveals that job satisfaction is a strong mediating variable in the relationship between employee performance and liberating leadership. The results show that liberating leadership is a strong predictor of job satisfaction ( $B = 0.3933, p < .001$ ), while liberating leadership ( $B = 0.1062, p = .0033$ ) and job satisfaction ( $B = 0.5706, p < .001$ ) are strong predictors of employee performance. Importantly, the indirect effect of liberating leadership on employee performance through job satisfaction is estimated as  $B = 0.2244$ , with the bootstrap 95% confidence interval of 0.1543 to 0.3091. Since the confidence interval does not include zero, the indirect effect is

found to be statistically significant. The null hypothesis ( $H_{04}$ ) is therefore rejected, which implies that job satisfaction is a significant mediator in the relationship between liberating leadership and employee performance. The implication is that part of the positive effect of liberating leadership on performance is through its effect in improving employees' job satisfaction.

### **Findings and Suggestions**

The study found that job satisfaction and performance among employees were very connected. Employee performance improves when employees are more satisfied in the workplace. Additionally, performance levels were also discovered to shift significantly with the degree of satisfaction of employees. This suggests that even slight boosts in job satisfaction can lead to huge boosts in the volume of work employees accomplish and how engaged they become. Supportive and empowering leadership and autonomy-supportive leadership was discovered to be critical in shaping employee performance. The study also confirmed that job satisfaction is a key vehicle through which effective leadership improves performance. This suggests that not only do leadership practices directly affect performance but also change the workplace in ways that make employees feel better, which, in turn, indirectly affect outcomes.

The research reveals that mid-sized businesses must adopt leadership practices that enhance employees' autonomy, involve

them in decision-making, and offer them psychological support. Leaders must take steps to foster an environment of employee autonomy, recognition, and trust since they highly enhance job satisfaction and performance. Businesses must keep checking the levels of employee satisfaction and utilize their feedback to enhance leadership training programs. Job satisfaction links leadership style to employee performance, thus leadership behavior and employee well-being must be addressed. Leadership training and company policies must tackle open communication, inclusive practices, and emotional intelligence to create a more engaged and high-performing workforce.

### **Conclusion and Scope of Future Research**

The current research probed the effect of liberating leadership on North Kerala's mid-sized companies' employees' job satisfaction and performance. The results clearly demonstrate that when employees perceive their leaders to be facilitating and empowering, there is a striking increase in their job satisfaction and performance levels. Job satisfaction was also revealed as an important variable explaining how liberating leadership leads to better performance outcomes. The results highlight the importance of leadership styles that emphasize employee autonomy, inclusiveness, and respect in developing an active and productive workforce. Through the synthesis of leadership behaviors with psychological factors such as job satisfaction, the research contributes to better understanding the performance dynamics in

regional and organizational contexts that are typically not considered in leadership research. It lends support to the view that effective leadership is greater than direction and control, rather emphasizing positive employee experience that in turn leads to organizational effectiveness.

While this research provides valuable insights, it also raises many avenues for continued inquiry. First, future research can examine the interaction between liberating leadership and other mediating or moderating variables such as organizational culture, employee resilience, or psychological safety. Second, longitudinal studies would be valuable in tracing the impact of liberating leadership over time and its implications for long-term performance results. Third, extending the research to a broader population outside of mid-sized companies and North Kerala would provide greater generalizability. Fourth, comparative studies across various regions, industries, or leadership styles may uncover a more nuanced understanding of the settings under which liberating leadership is most effective. Fifth, qualitative research—through interviews or case studies—may provide richer insight into employees' lived experiences under different leadership conditions to balance this study's quantitative findings.

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