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# The Moderating Effects of Power Distance and Individualism/Collectivism on Empowering Leadership, Psychological Empowerment, and Self-Leadership in International Development Organizations

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# ARTICLES

## The Moderating Effects of Power Distance and Individualism/Collectivism on Empowering Leadership, Psychological Empowerment, and Self-Leadership in International Development Organizations[*]

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**The importance of finding appropriate leadership styles to use in cross-cultural situations is paramount. Development organizations and multinational organizations both struggle to find forms of leadership that are effective in mobilizing the workforce in highly diverse cultural contexts. In this article, the effects of empowering leadership on psychological empowerment and self-leadership are measured in two cultural contexts—Rwanda and the United States, representing both high and low power distance and individualism/ collectivism—to explore how empowering leadership behaviors affects the empowerment of subordinates. First, hierarchical regression analysis shows that empowering leadership has a significant positive effect on both psychological empowerment and self-leadership in both cultural contexts. Second, hierarchical regression analysis with tests for moderation shows that power distance moderates these relationships, especially in high power distance cultures, while individualism/collectivism moderates these relationships only occasionally. This article provides evidence that empowering leadership is an effective form of leadership that produces employee empowerment in diverse cultural contexts. It also provides new insights into appropriate forms of leadership for international development organizations when working in different countries.**

**Key words: cross-cultural leadership, empowering leadership, empowerment, leadership in Africa, psychological empowerment**

Empowering leadership holds promise as a type of leadership that encourages autonomy, develops subordinates' ability to work autonomously, and increases psychological empowerment, which is linked to a myriad of positive work outcomes (Maynard, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Although cross-cultural research in organizational leadership has grown considerably since Hofstede (1980) introduced the measurement of cultural values, some researchers have observed that about 98% of leadership theories and empirical evidence are American or Western in character (House & Aditya, 1997). In a review of two decades of empowerment research, Maynard et al. (2012) note the lack of cross-

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cultural research and call for research that considers two or more cultures. Amundsen and Martinsen (2014a), the authors of the Empowering Leadership Scale (ELS), also request further research that investigates the impact of culture on empowering leadership and outcome variables. Furthermore, Walumbwa, Avolio, and Aryee (2011) found that little empirical or theoretical work addresses leadership in Africa. Numerous African leadership authors have proposed that leadership research in Africa needs to identify appropriate forms of leadership for Africa to combat the economic difficulties it faces (Edoho, 2001; Kuada, 2010; Muchiri, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2011). This study ascertains if empowering leadership is as powerful in non-Western cultures as it is in Western cultures. For this reason, this study addresses the effects of empowering leadership on psychological empowerment and self-leadership in two cultural contexts—Rwanda and the United States—that differ in the cultural values of power distance and individualism/collectivism.

## Empowering Leadership

Empowerment theory originated in the 1970s (Kanter, 1977) and has continued to be relevant and generate considerable research interest today (Kim, Beehr, & Prewett, 2018). Empowered employees positively affect organizational commitment, job performance, job satisfaction, affective commitment, creative process engagement, as well as other positive work and organizational factors (Dewettinck & van Ameijde, 2011; Hill, Kang, & Seo, 2014; Maynard et al., 2012; Schermuly, Schermuly, & Meyer, 2011; Spreitzer, 2008; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). As the field of empowerment research matured, the leader behaviors associated with creating empowerment became known as *empowering leadership* (Arnold, Arad, & Rhoades, 2000; Konczak, Stelly, & Trusty, 2000).

*Empowering leadership* is defined as "leader behaviors directed at individuals or entire teams and consisting of delegating authority to employees, promoting their self-directed and autonomous decision making, coaching, sharing information, and asking for input" (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015, 194). It is unique in that it transfers power to subordinates while providing the necessary support to be sure employees

are capable of taking on new responsibilities (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). Previous studies have confirmed that empowering leadership is distinct from other forms of leadership such as leader-member exchange (LMX), transformational, transactional, and situational, with a specific focus on sharing power with subordinates through collaborative decision making and the promotion of autonomy and interdependence (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014b; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015).

**Psychological Empowerment and Self-Leadership**

Leadership as an antecedent to employee psychological empowerment has been examined by researchers more than any other antecedent (Seibert et al., 2011). The rich stream of research linking various forms of leadership to positive effects on psychological empowerment has supported leadership behaviors as strong, positive antecedents to employee empowerment. Empowering leadership has the explicit purpose of creating empowerment amongst employees and the potential for an even greater impact on employee empowerment than other forms of leadership (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a).

Amundsen and Martinsen (2014a) identify the "be and do" characteristics of empowered subordinates as psychological empowerment and self-leadership (491). *Psychological empowerment* is increased intrinsic task motivation that is exhibited in four cognitions: sense of impact, competence, meaningfulness, and choice (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). When these cognitions are internalized, the person is actively oriented toward the work role (Spreitzer, 1995). If empowering leadership has had its effect, the affected person should experience high psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment alone, however, is not sufficient evidence of an empowered person (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a).

While psychological empowerment is the *being* state of empowerment, self-leadership is the *doing* state of empowerment. The self-leadership literature precedes empowering leadership theory, and the basis of empowerment is derived from the concept of helping subordinates to become self-led (Manz & Sims, 2001). A subordinate who is capable of self-leadership behaviors has been empowered to perform his or her work autonomously. Together, psychological empowerment

and self-leadership measure the true and complete state of follower empowerment.

Numerous studies have considered the effects of transformational leadership (see Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Jung & Sosik, 2002; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; Martin, 2006; Özaralli, 2003; Pieterse, van Knippenberg, Schippers, & Stam, 2009) and LMX (see Aryee & Chen, 2006; Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007; Collins, 2007; Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2009; Hill et al., 2014; Keller & Dansereau, 1995; Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000) as well as authentic leadership, participative leadership, ethical leadership, and managerial use of power bases (see Emuwa, 2013; Huang, Iun, Liu, & Gong, 2009; Randolph & Kemery, 2011; Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004) on psychological empowerment and found a positive effect. Although each of these forms of leadership have positive effects on the empowerment of employees, there is evidence that empowering leadership is a more significant contributor (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a). Self-leadership has also been linked to empowering leadership, although not as frequently and consistently as psychological empowerment (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a; Yun, Cox, & Sims, 2006). Empowering leader behaviors facilitate follower self-leadership through a modeling process whereby the leader models all forms of self-leadership and followers grow in self-leadership as a result (Houghton & Yoho, 2005; Manz & Sims, 2001). Amundsen and Martinsen (2014a) assert that further research "should investigate the impact of culture on the relationship between empowering leadership and outcome variables, since previous studies (Robert, Probst, Martocchio, Drasgow, & Lawler, 2000) have suggested such coherence" (507).

**Cross-Cultural Research on Empowerment**

Previous research has indicated that the two cultural measures with the greatest impact on leadership variables are individualism/collectivism and power distance. Triandis and Gelfand (1998), after many years of conducting cultural research, argue that individualism/collectivism is perhaps the most impactful dimension of culture in regards to leadership. In a review of 25 years of cultural research that utilize Hofstede's (1980) measures, Kirkman, Lowe, and Gibson (2006) note that

most cross-cultural research only considers individualism/collectivism. Although they agree that this is an important variable, they discovered that power distance has a stronger effect on variables in some instances. Tsui, Nifadkar, and Ou (2007), while reviewing cross-cultural organizational behavior research, found that individualism/collectivism and power distance are the two cultural variables that have the most impact on leadership studies. Finally, in a review of two decades of empowerment research, Maynard et al. (2012) note the lack of cross-cultural research and call for more research on empowerment that considers at least two cultures and measures both individualism/collectivism and power distance. For these reasons, both individualism/collectivism and power distance are measured in relation to the empowerment variables.

*Individualism/collectivism* are seen as opposites on one continuum and measure the degree to which individuals "express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations, families, circle of close friends, or other such small groups" (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007, 3). In an individualist society, each person is defined by personal characteristics and expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivist societies, on the other hand, encourage strong cohesive group environments in which self-identity is found in the group and relationships are mutually dependent and loyal (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

*Power distance* can be measured as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede et al., 2010, Chapter 3, "Power Distance Defined," para. 5). High power distance cultures differentiate between people of differing power status and tend to create hierarchical organizational relationships. Low power distance cultures create less distinction between people of different power levels and encourage consultation between superiors and subordinates, flattening hierarchical relationships.

This study considers individualism/collectivism and power distance in two dissimilar cultures to obtain a wide variability in culture scores. General statistics from the GLOBE study (Chhokar et al., 2008) and Hofstede (1984) indicate that

African countries have high collectivism (GLOBE scores of 5 to 6 out of 7), while the United States has one of the lowest scores in collectivism (4.3). The GLOBE study also indicates that Africa is one of the highest in preference for power distance (up to 5.9), while America has a low to medium power distance score (4.8).

Previous research on empowering leadership and culture has indicated that culture has an impact on empowerment, but mixed results as well as unreliable and inconsistent measurements of culture do not create a clear picture of how culture affects empowering leadership. For example, Robert et al. (2000) found that empowerment had a positive effect on high and low collectivism countries except for India (high collectivism). Chen, Sharma, Edinger, and Shapiro (2011) found that Americans, high in individualism and low in collectivism, reported higher levels of empowerment than their Chinese counterparts and found collectivism to be positively related to psychological empowerment, although no statistically significant relationship was found. These studies do not offer clear conclusions as to how culture influences these variables. In a recent literature review on empowering leadership, Sharma and Kirkman (2015) propose that high power distance will be negatively associated with empowering leadership while collectivism will be positively associated with empowering leadership and call for further research to explore these cultural effects.

**African Context**

Although empowering leadership has been studied extensively in Western societies, the question remains if empowering leadership is equally effective in other societies. This study tests the effects of empowering leadership on employee empowerment (self-leadership and psychological empowerment) in an African context in development organizations. In cross-cultural development work, the aim is to empower native people through the development process. International development efforts are only successful if they are able to empower and motivate the national population to take part in their development efforts.

Deciphering the preferred leadership style in the Sub-Saharan context is an important first step in determining if empowering leadership is appropriate in that

context. The GLOBE study, the largest cross-cultural leadership research to date, sheds light on African forms of leadership (Chhokar et al., 2008; House, 2004). In measuring culture and leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa, the GLOBE study discovered high collectivism and high power distance (Chhokar et al., 2008; House, 2004). Wanasika, Howell, Littrell, and Dorfman (2011) propose that African history has shaped the forms of leadership that are seen as culturally appropriate. A combination of tribal society, scarce resources, and highly collectivistic values results in an autocratic style of leadership that is tempered by a leader's sense of duty to care for family and group needs (Wanasika et al., 2011). This creates a kind of paternalism that Kauda (2010) calls "autocratic-benevolence" (18). Other authors have observed that the default leadership styles in Africa tend toward autocratic, directive, and hierarchical leadership that increases dependence in followers (Bolden & Kirk, 2009; Kuada, 2010).

The normative leadership styles in Africa have strengths and weaknesses. Kuada (2010) articulates a balanced view of African leadership when he argues "there are elements of African culture that promote unique and positive leadership behaviors. But some of the cultural rules of behavior tend to act as drags on effective leadership and management practices and thereby constrain entrepreneurship and economic growth" (15). There are problems that ensue from traditional forms of leadership in Africa, including the misappropriation of resources by leaders, followers who are disempowered and motivated to cover up their own and leaders' mistakes, and a tendency toward unproductive organizational structures (Kuada, 2010). Taking this view—that there are elements of African preferred leadership styles that are positive and worth supporting and others that hinder economic growth and needed change—allows space for suggesting alternate styles of leadership. Kuada (2010) calls for African leadership research that can identify leadership styles that help boost organizational performance and enhance employee empowerment. Poverty breeds in situations of dependence. For Africa to move from poverty toward economic growth, new, more appropriate forms of leadership are needed. Empowerment of employees is central to addressing the issues that Africa faces, and Kuada (2010) calls for further study of

empowering leadership in the African context. The continued empirical study of leadership in Africa is imperative for Africa to move out of economic despair. Empowering leadership offers an alternative style of leadership that may be acceptable and effective in the African context, offering a tool to deal with some of the challenges facing African leaders.

Empowering leadership is different from the preferred African leadership styles, but at the same time it overlaps with some widely held leadership values. In the Sub-Saharan sample of the GLOBE study (House, 2004), participative leadership was one form of leadership that was seen as universally contributing to outstanding leadership. The GLOBE study defines *participative leadership* as a form of leadership that involves others in making and implementing decisions and was measured by reverse scoring non-participative leadership and autocratic leadership. Empowering leadership shares some characteristics with participative leadership, and therefore may be aligned with the espoused values of participative leadership, even though it differs significantly from paternalistic leadership. Empowering leadership uses the sharing of power as well as the development of individuals' capabilities to influence subordinates, while paternalistic leadership holds power with a top few leaders who are responsible for taking care of those they are responsible for leading. The sharing of power in empowering leadership involves individuals more directly in leadership and helps them to participate in the leadership process, enabling them to grow and develop and take on some parts of leadership themselves.

Empowering leadership also meets the needs of sustainable development in Africa, which require leadership that empowers the population. African leadership research needs to identify leadership styles that help boost organizational performance and enhance employee empowerment, according to Kuada (2010). He argues that autocratic leadership styles impinge on organizational learning and employee creativity, both of which are needed to enact sustainable development. Empowering leadership can help development organizations put the power back into the hands of nationals while making sure they have the knowledge and skills to take the work forward in a meaningful way.

## Hypotheses

This study measures empowering leader behaviors—autonomy support and development support—and the effect these behaviors have on the psychological empowerment and self-leadership of subordinates in development organizations in African and U.S. contexts. In this way, the leadership side of empowerment and the felt and experienced side of empowerment are measured together.

Although some research has examined empowering leadership in various cultural contexts, this research is scant and does not involve any African countries (Kim et al., 2018). This study hypothesizes that empowering leadership positively affects both psychological empowerment and self-leadership. Many previous studies have provided support for the relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment (e.g., Albrecht & Andreetta, 2011; Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a, 2015; Auh, Menguc, & Jung, 2014; Houghton & Yoho, 2005; Randolph & Kemery, 2011; van Dierendonck & Dijkstra, 2012). Konczak et al. (2000) created a measure for empowering leadership and found that empowering leadership had a positive effect on psychological empowerment, which fully or partially mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and the subordinate outcomes of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Raub and Robert (2010) found that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and challenging extra-role activities in a sample population from Middle Eastern and Asian countries. Chen et al. (2011) found that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and team members' innovative behaviors, teamwork behaviors, and turnover intentions. In a study conducted by Auh et al. (2014), psychological empowerment partially mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and citizenship behaviors for individuals. These studies are a sampling of the empirical research that demonstrates a strong positive connection between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment and establishes psychological empowerment as the mediating variable between empowering leadership and other positive outcomes. This study proposes to test

the effect of cultural values on this established relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment.

Self-leadership has often been presented as a primary mechanism for facilitating empowerment (Houghton & Yoho, 2005; Prussia & Anderson, 1998; Shipper & Manz, 1993). Self-leadership is a distinct concept from psychological empowerment, although both can be seen as outcomes of empowering leadership and signs of an empowered employee (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a). While psychological empowerment is the psychological state of a subordinate including four specific cognitions, *self-leadership* refers to a subordinate's perception of being competent, self-determined, and affecting the meaningfulness of his or her work (Lee & Koh, 2001). Self-leadership is a process of using a set of strategies that empower personal achievement (Houghton & Yoho, 2005). This study considers both psychological empowerment and self-leadership to be foundational conceptions of employee empowerment. The following hypotheses test the perceived empowering leadership of leaders (including the two dimensions of autonomy support and development support) and the psychological empowerment and self-leadership of followers in Rwanda and the United States:

*Hypothesis 1: The autonomy support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to (a) psychological empowerment and (b) self-leadership in the Rwandan sample.*

*Hypothesis 2: The autonomy support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to (a) psychological empowerment and (b) self-leadership in the U.S. sample.*

*Hypothesis 3: The development support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to (a) psychological empowerment and (b) self-leadership in the Rwandan sample.*

*Hypothesis 4: The development support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to (a) psychological empowerment and (b) self-leadership in the U.S. sample.*
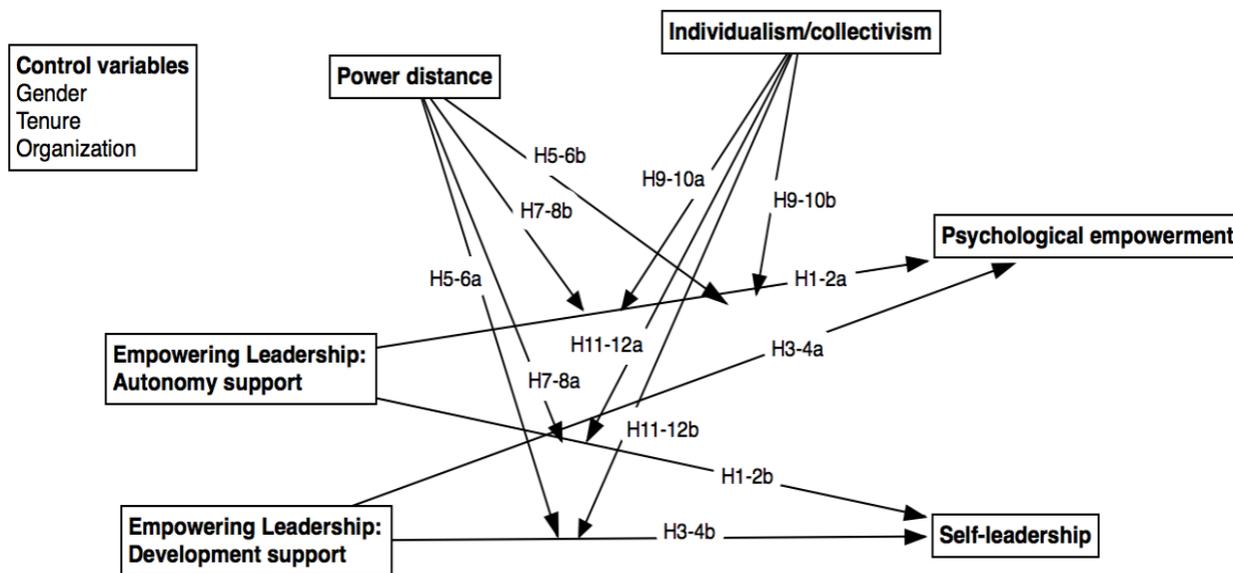
Figure 1. A model representing the hypotheses

This study also seeks to ascertain the effects of individualism/collectivism and power distance on the relationship between empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, and self-leadership. To explore these relationships, this study measures the two cultural dimensions of individualism/collectivism and power distance in two highly variable cultural contexts (Rwanda and the United States) to ascertain the moderating effect of these two cultural aspects on the effects of empowering leadership on subordinates' psychological empowerment and self-leadership. The following hypotheses guide this portion of the study:

*Hypotheses 5/6: Power distance moderates the relationship between the (a) autonomy support and (b) development support factors of empowering leadership and psychological empowerment in such a way that high power distance decreases the positive relationship in the Rwandan sample (Hypothesis 5) and low power distance increases the positive relationship in the U.S. sample (Hypothesis 6).*

*Hypotheses 7/8: Power distance moderates the relationship between the (a) autonomy support and (b) development support factors of empowering leadership and self-leadership in such a way that high power distance decreases*

*the positive relationship in the Rwandan sample (Hypothesis 7) and low power distance increases the positive relationship in the U.S. sample (Hypothesis 8).*

*Hypotheses 9/10: Individualism/collectivism moderates the relationship between the (a) autonomy support and (b) development support factors of empowering leadership and psychological empowerment in such a way that high collectivism increases the positive relationship in the Rwandan sample (Hypothesis 9) and high individualism in the U.S. sample decreases the positive relationship (Hypothesis 10).*

*Hypotheses 11/12: Individualism/collectivism moderates the relationship between the (a) autonomy support and (b) development support factors of empowering leadership and self-leadership in such a way that high collectivism increases the positive relationship in the Rwandan sample (Hypothesis 11) and high individualism in the U.S. sample decreases the positive relationship (Hypothesis 12).*

The literature has shown that the relationships between these variables are likely to vary by country. For this reason, the model is tested by country to ascertain the differences. Furthermore, the following research question addresses the country differences in the studied concepts:

*Research Question: Is there a difference in autonomy support, development support, psychological empowerment, self-leadership, power distance, and individualism/collectivism as perceived by U.S. and Rwandan employees?*

## Method

This study utilized a quantitative, nonexperimental research design with a cross-sectional approach. Participants completed a series of validated research measurement instruments in a single session in their work environment. Self-report data are preferred for this research since the perception of empowering leadership behaviors, as well as the perception of personal psychological empowerment and self-leadership, are measured with regard to the individual's personal cultural values.

**Participants and Design**

The sample population consisted of employees of nonprofit and aid organizations operating in Rwanda and in U.S.-based offices. Many of these organizations are led by Americans or other expatriates who are likely to have an empowering leadership style, so the sample provides a large population of Rwandans who are experiencing some form of empowering leadership. Employees of World Relief ($n$ = 66), World Vision ($n$ = 21), Compassion International ($n$ = 90), Hope International ($n$ = 37), ALARM ($n$ = 6), and Navigators ($n$ = 25), all located in Rwanda, took part. The sample population included the Rwandan offices' employees (high power distance and collectivism; $n$ = 121), and the main U.S. offices' employees (low power distance and high individualism; $n$ = 124) to best compare a wide variation of power distance and individualism/collectivism and their correlation with the other variables in two different cultural contexts. Surveys were provided in English and Kinyarwanda, in both paper copy and an Internet survey. Each individual chose the most convenient survey format. Translation of the survey into Kinyarwanda was accomplished using a back-translation process, as outlined by Brislin (1970). A small group of Rwandans, including the two translators, also met to discuss the actual meaning of each question, ensuring that this was maintained in the Kinyarwanda survey instrument. Forty of the 121 Rwandan participants used the Kinyarwanda version of the survey. Table 1 shows the demographics of the Rwandan and American participants.

*Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants*

| Variable | Combined *N* | U.S. *n* | Rwanda *n* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | | |
| Female | 122 | 80 | 42 |
| Male | 123 | 44 | 79 |
| **Organization** | | | |
| World Relief | 66 | 19 | 47 |
| World Vision | 21 | 0 | 21 |
| Compassion Int. | 90 | 48 | 42 |
| Hope Int. | 37 | 34 | 3 |
| ALARM | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| Navigators | 25 | 19 | 6 |
| Total *N* | 245 | 124 | 121 |

**Measures**

Empowering leadership was measured using the 18-item ELS (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a). The scale is two-dimensional, including autonomy support and development support. The ELS study went through three rounds of rigorous testing in a *Leadership Quarterly* article and was shown to be valid each time. The coefficient alpha was .94 for both culture samples in this study. Answers were rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

Psychological empowerment was measured using Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item, four-dimensional scale. The four cognitions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact were each measured with three questions on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). According to a review of literature on psychological empowerment, the scale has been scrutinized in many studies, and both convergent validity and discriminate validity have been found in many samples, including multiple international samples (Maynard et al., 2012). Through a meta-analytic review of the antecedents and consequences of psychological empowerment, Seibert et al.'s (2011) results provided strong support for using psychological empowerment's unitary construct, or *gestalt,* that reflects the four specific cognitions. The coefficient alpha was .88 for both culture samples in this study.

Self-leadership was measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always) using the Abbreviated Self-Leadership Questionnaire (ALSQ; Houghton & Dawley, 2012), an abbreviated version of the widely used Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ; Houghton & Neck, 2002). Houghton and Dawley (2012) encourage the use of this instrument when researchers "wish to measure self-leadership as one variable of interest in the context of a larger model and who therefore find it impractical to use the full 35-item RSLQ" (227). The coefficient alpha was .80 in the Rwandan sample and .78 in the U.S. sample in this study.

Power distance and individualism/collectivism were measured using Dorfman and Howell's (1988) cultural values scale—a version of Hofstede's (1980) cultural values scale that has been calibrated for measuring culture individually. It includes

six questions for each scale and had a reliability of .86 (power distance) and .74 (individualism/collectivism; Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a; Brown & Fields, 2011; Eom & Yang, 2014; Fock, Hui, Au, & Bond, 2013; Hui, Au, & Fock, 2004; Lee, Scandura, & Sharif, 2014). The coefficient alpha for power distance was .62 in the Rwandan sample and .57 in the U.S. sample; for collectivism, it was .77 in the Rwandan sample and .71 in the U.S. sample in this study. Answers were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Control variables are gender, years worked for a leader, and organization.

   Measurement equivalence was established for the two sample populations in this study by conducting an exploratory factor analysis and a reliability analysis for each scale on the two different samples. The rotated factor matrix, which contains the correlations of each of the items with the extracted factors, was used to test for significant differences between the two subsamples by using the $r$ to $Z$ transformation. Furthermore, the factors were then built using the actual factor loadings as weights, creating separate scales for each culture group.

**Procedure**

Relative to data analysis, hierarchical regression was used to test the first four hypotheses, while hierarchical regression with tests for moderation was used to test Hypotheses 8 through 12. The procedure of testing for moderation includes the control variables, the independent variable, the dependent variable, and the interaction of the product of these two (Baron & Kenny, 1986). A $t$-test was used to compare the variables as measured in each of the two cultural samples. The differences between variables in the two cultures were compared and analyzed to gain insight into the way culture affects these variables.

## Results

**Hierarchical Regression Analysis (Hypotheses 1–4)**

Correlation coefficients were computed between the independent variables, the dependent variables, and the control variable of years worked for supervisor. The results of correlation analysis are shown by culture group in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation for Rwanda**

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | Years | PE | SL | EL/AS | EL/DS | COL | PD |
|----------|-----|------|-------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-----|-----|
| Years | 5.92 | 5.21 | – | | | | | | |
| PE | 6.02 | .65 | .18* | – | | | | | |
| SL | 5.86 | .71 | .04 | .74** | – | | | | |
| EL/AS | 5.45 | .97 | .16 | .63** | .47** | – | | | |
| EL/DS | 4.48 | 1.36 | .17 | .34** | .30** | .69** | – | | |
| COL | 4.28 | .86 | .07 | .18 | .19* | .11 | .06 | – | |
| PD | 2.41 | .69 | -.00 | .05 | .03 | .05 | .11 | -.07 | – |

Note: *n* = 121. PE = psychological empowerment; SL = self-leadership; EL-AS = empowering leadership autonomy support; EL-DS = empowering leadership development support; COL = individualism/collectivism; PD = power distance.
*$p$ < .05 level, two-tailed. **$p$ < .01 level, two-tailed.

**Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation for the United States**

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | Years | PE | SL | EL/AS | EL/DS | COL | PD |
|----------|-----|------|-------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-----|-----|
| Years | 3.35 | 3.44 | – | | | | | | |
| PE | 5.47 | .87 | .25** | – | | | | | |
| SL | 4.95 | .95 | -.07 | .55** | – | | | | |
| EL/AS | 5.65 | 1.04 | .13 | .66** | .41** | – | | | |
| EL/DS | 4.30 | 1.48 | .10 | .33** | .24** | .65** | – | | |
| COL | 3.86 | .72 | .01 | .12 | .09 | .19* | .22* | – | |
| PD | 1.86 | .41 | -.19* | -.11 | .19* | -.01 | .09 | .22* | – |

Note :*n* = 124. PE = psychological empowerment; SL = self-leadership; EL-AS = empowering leadership autonomy support; EL-DS = empowering leadership development support; COL = individualism/collectivism; PD = power distance.
*$p$ < .05 level, two-tailed. **$p$ < .01 level, two-tailed.

Testing autonomy support and psychological empowerment (Hypotheses 1–2a) with multiple regression analysis on the Rwandan sample ($p$ = .00) and the U.S. sample ($p$ = .00) shows the relationship between autonomy support and psychological empowerment is significant in both cultures. Similarly, testing autonomy support and self-leadership (Hypotheses 1–2b) with multiple regression analysis on the Rwandan sample ($p$ = .00) and the U.S. sample ($p$ = .00) shows the relationship between autonomy support and psychological empowerment is significant in both cultures.

Testing the second factor of empowering leadership, development support, and psychological empowerment (Hypotheses 1–2b) with multiple regression analysis on the Rwandan sample ($p = .001$) and the U.S. sample ($p = .000$) shows the relationship between development support and psychological empowerment is significant in both cultures. Similarly, testing development support and self-leadership (Hypotheses 3–4a) with multiple regression analysis on the Rwandan sample ($p = .00$) and the U.S. sample ($p = .01$) shows the relationship between development support and psychological empowerment is significant in both cultures, although less significantly in the U.S. sample. The results of multiple regression analysis indicate that both factors of empowering leadership had a significant effect on both psychological empowerment and self-leadership in both cultures, indicating acceptance of the hypotheses.

### *Table 4: Summary of Hypotheses' Significance*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1a: The autonomy support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment and in the Rwandan sample. | Supported: relationship is significant ($p = .00$). |
| 2a: The autonomy support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment and in the U.S. sample. | Supported: relationship is significant ($p = .00$). |
| 1b: The autonomy support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to self-leadership in the Rwandan sample. | Supported: relationship is significant ($p = .00$). |
| 2b: The autonomy support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to self-leadership in the U.S. sample. | Supported: relationship is significant ($p = .00$) |
| 3a: The development support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment in the Rwandan sample. | Supported: relationship is significant ($p = .00$) |
| 4a: The development support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment in the U.S. sample. | Supported: relationship is significant ($p = .00$) |
| 3b: The development support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to self-leadership in the Rwandan sample. | Supported: relationship is significant ($p = .00$) |
| 4b: The development support factor of empowering leadership is positively related to self-leadership in the U.S. sample. | Supported: relationship is significant ($p = .01$) |

**Tests of Moderation of Power Distance and Collectivism (Hypotheses 5–12)**

These hypotheses, based on a recent literature review on empowering leadership (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015), propose that high power distance will be negatively

associated with empowering leadership while collectivism will be positively associated with empowering leadership. Table 5 gives a synopsis of the results.

*Table 5: Summary of the Moderating Hypotheses*

| Hypothesis | Country | Independent | Dependent | Hypothesis Supported? | Direction of Moderation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Moderator Power Distance** | | | | | |
| 5a | Rwanda | AS | PE | Yes | Increase |
| 5b | Rwanda | DS | PE | No | |
| 6a | United States | AS | PE | Yes | Increase |
| 6b | United States | DS | PE | No | |
| 7a | Rwanda | AS | SL | Yes | Increase |
| 7b | Rwanda | DS | SL | Yes | Increase |
| 8a | United States | AS | SL | No | |
| 8b | United States | DS | SL | No | |
| **Moderator Collectivism** | | | | | |
| 9a | Rwanda | AS | PE | Yes | Decrease |
| 9b | Rwanda | DS | PE | No | |
| 10a | United States | AS | PE | No | |
| 10b | United States | DS | PE | Yes | Increase |
| 11a | Rwanda | AS | SL | No | |
| 11b | Rwanda | DS | SL | No | |
| 12a | United States | AS | SL | No | |
| 12b | United States | DS | SL | No | |

Note: AS = autonomy support; DS = development support; PE = psychological empowerment; SL = self-leadership

When considering power distance as a moderator, for the hypotheses to be supported, the higher power distance of Rwanda should moderate the relationship in the Rwandan sample so as to decrease the relationships (Hypotheses 5, 7). The findings show an increase in three of the four tested relationships for the Rwandan sample. This finding indicates that high power distance has a positive effect on employees' experiences of empowering leadership and its effect on their

psychological empowerment and self-leadership; thus, the hypothesis is not supported.

In the U.S. sample, the hypotheses state that the low power distance should increase the relationships in the model (Hypotheses 6, 8). This is true in one out of four of the tested relationships, and so the hypotheses are supported for one relationship (autonomy support and psychological empowerment) and not supported for the other three.

In considering individualism/collectivism as a moderator, the hypotheses state that the higher collectivism of Rwanda should moderate the relationships in the Rwandan sample so as to increase the relationships (Hypotheses 9, 11). The findings show a decrease in one of the relationships (autonomy support and psychological empowerment) and no significant effects on the other relationships. The hypotheses are not supported, and the opposite effect in one relationship indicates that collectivism actually has a slightly negative effect on the impact of empowering leadership.

In the U.S. sample, the hypotheses state that high individualism (low collectivism) should moderate the relationships so as to decrease the relationships (Hypotheses 10, 12). The results show an increase in one relationship (development support and psychological empowerment) and no other significant results. The hypotheses are not supported, and the opposite effect in one relationship indicates that individualism actually has a positive effect on the impact of empowering leadership.

**Research Question**

The research question inquires if there is a difference in autonomy support, development support, psychological empowerment, self-leadership, power distance, and individualism/collectivism between the two cultures. Table 6 on the next page summarizes these differences.

***Table 6: t-Test Results Showing Differences by Country on All Variables (Research Question)***

| | *M* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Variable** | **Rwanda** | **United States** | *t* |

| Autonomy Support | 5.45 | 5.65 | -1.61 |
| Development Support | 4.48 | 4.30 | .99 |
| Psychological Empowerment | 6.03 | 5.47 | 5.72*** |
| Self-Leadership | 5.86 | 4.95 | 8.54*** |
| Power Distance | 2.41 | 1.86 | 7.60*** |
| Individualism/Collectivism | 4.28 | 3.86 | 4.11*** |

*$p$ < .05. **$p$ < .01. ***$p$ < .001.

There is a significant difference in autonomy support between the Rwandan and U.S. samples ($p$ = .04), with the U.S. sample having a higher score than the Rwandan sample. Americans experienced higher autonomy support from their leaders than did their Rwandan counterparts. However, both scores are still high and show that employees in both countries perceived a high level of autonomy support from their leaders. There was no significant difference found for the experience of the development support factor of empowering leadership between the cultures.

There was a significant difference between the cultures in both psychological empowerment and self-leadership, with the Rwandan sample showing higher levels than their American counterparts. The overall experience of psychological empowerment and self-leadership were greater for Rwandans than for Americans.

There was also a significant difference in power distance and individualism/collectivism. Both cultural measures were higher in the Rwandan sample, which reflects the expected higher power distance and collectivism in the Rwandan culture as well as the lower power distance and higher individualism in the American culture.

## Discussion

The first four hypotheses produced significance levels of $p$ = .000, except for development support and self-leadership in the U.S. sample, which produced a significance level of $p$ = .01. These significance levels, along with large percentages of variability, show that both factors of empowering leadership significantly affect both psychological empowerment and self-leadership in both culture samples. It is also evident that the impact of autonomy support accounted

for more of the variance on both dependent variables in both samples (between 18% and 39%) than the variable of development support (between 6% and 10%).

These results support a number of premises set up in this study. The Empowering Leadership Scale (ELS) is shown to be valid and reliable in this study in two separate cultures. Furthermore, the assertion that empowering leadership may be a powerful and effective form of leadership that produces empowerment in the African and U.S. contexts is confirmed. An extrapolation from these results is that empowering leadership may also be an effective form of leadership in other countries with high power distance and high collectivism.

Power distance is a moderator in some of these relationships but does not consistently moderate them across both cultures. While three of the four relationships were moderated by power distance in the Rwandan sample, only one of the four was moderated by power distance in the U.S. sample. This indicates that power distance has a stronger effect in the Rwandan sample than it does in the U.S. sample. This may indicate that with individuals who have higher power distance preferences, power distance is more likely to moderate the relationship between empowering leadership and employee empowerment.

In this study, the individual measure of individualism/collectivism was found to moderate one of the four relationships between the two factors of empowering leadership and the two dependent variables in each culture group. In the Rwandan sample, higher collectivism decreased the relationship between empowering leadership and employee empowerment, as the hypothesis suggested. In the U.S. sample, the moderation effect of individualism increased the relationship between development support and psychological empowerment. Although individualism/collectivism has some moderation effect on these relationships in both cultures, individual levels of collectivism cannot be generally seen as consistently moderating the effects of empowering leadership.

The literature has shown that the relationships between the variables in the current study are likely to vary by country. Although both cultures saw a high level of autonomy support in their leaders, the U.S. sample was significantly higher in reporting autonomy support in their leaders than those in the Rwandan sample.

The development support factor of empowering leadership did not vary significantly by culture. Generally, both cultures saw a high level of autonomy support in their leaders and fairly high levels of development support. This indicates that empowering leadership is being enacted by leaders and perceived by employees in both cultures in the development organizations that took part in the study. Psychological empowerment and self-leadership were both significantly higher in the Rwandan population, and both samples experienced high levels of these qualities in themselves. This is a surprising difference between cultures since it was hypothesized that while empowering leadership may have a positive impact on Rwandans, it may be less positive than the impact that it had on Americans. Conversely, empowering leadership had a stronger effect on Rwandan's psychological empowerment and self-leadership, even though they experienced less autonomous support from their leaders.

One possible reason for this surprising finding is that an authoritarian or paternalistic form of leadership is most common in the Rwandan context (e.g., Kirk & Bolden, 2006; Kuada, 2010). When employees are expecting these forms of leadership and instead experience empowering leadership, their levels of psychological empowerment and self-leadership increase dramatically. While the U.S. sample likely expects a certain level of empowering leadership and reacts positively to it, the Rwandan population reacts significantly more positively because it is less expected.

Another explanation for these surprising results comes from Peterson (2009), who notes that positive responses are generally higher in high power distance countries than in lower power distance countries. Peterson believes that the concept of *saving face* or making oneself and one's organization look good may cause an inflation of scores in the high power distance country of Rwanda. This score inflation in high power distance cultures may be the cause of the significantly higher scores in the Rwandan sample. The important finding is that in both countries, employees experienced high levels of psychological empowerment and self-leadership, which are related to the high levels of empowering leadership they experienced from their leaders. Also, the Rwandans' experience of high levels of

psychological empowerment is a significant finding, showing empowering leadership to be highly effective in producing psychological empowerment in the Rwandan sample.

The Rwandan sample was found to be significantly higher in individual levels of power distance and collectivism than the U.S. sample, which was the hypothesized outcome. African countries tended to be higher in power distance and higher in collectivism in both Hofstede's (1984) studies and the GLOBE studies (Chhokar et al., 2008; House, 2004). The current research confirmed these previous findings for a sample of the Rwandan and U.S. population, although the cultural values of this study cannot be applied to the whole country population of either culture.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study makes numerous theoretical contributions to the field of empowering leadership, empowerment studies, cross-cultural studies, and African leadership studies. The authors of the ELS (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014a) requested further testing of their instrument with diverse populations, including cross-cultural research involving more than one culture. This study tested the ELS on a unique set of participants and found the scale to be reliable and valid in two separate culture samples. The ELS is a reliable instrument for measuring empowering leadership in various cultural contexts and should be used in further cross-cultural studies. Through factor analysis and *Z*-tests, this study found that there were few significant differences by culture in the factor loadings of the ELS.

This study also tested the premise that Amudsen and Martinsen (2014a) set forth: that an employee's personal empowerment is made up of both psychological empowerment and self-leadership and that empowering leadership will have a positive effect on both of these variables. This study indicates that empowering leadership has a significant and positive effect on both the psychological empowerment and the self-leadership of employees in both culture samples. Measuring personal empowerment through the two variables of psychological empowerment and self-leadership is supported in this study.

This study establishes empowering leadership as an effective producer of empowerment in employees in the United States and Rwanda, which represent

both high and low power distance and individualism/collectivism values. This is a significant finding since the GLOBE study (Chhokar et al., 2008) found that leadership preferences vary by culture and that some forms of leadership are only effective in a portion of countries. This study shows that empowering leadership may be a form of leadership that is acceptable in multiple cultures. Although this study does not prove that empowering leadership is appropriate and effective in all cultures, it does indicate that it may be effective in cultures that vary significantly on the cultural values of power distance and individualism/collectivism. Empowering leadership is established from this study as a set of leadership behaviors that consistently produce empowerment in subordinates with differing individual cultural values.

Numerous authors have proposed that leadership research in Africa needs to identify appropriate forms of leadership for Africa to combat the economic difficulties that it faces (Edoho, 2001; Kuada, 2010; Muchiri, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2011). Kuada (2010) proposes that empowerment of employees is central to addressing the issues that Africa faces and calls for further study of empowering leadership in the African context. This study's results show that empowering leadership is indeed an effective form of employee empowerment in one African culture and suggests it may be a form of leadership that can be implemented in other African contexts to increase the empowerment of employees. Walumbwa et al. (2011) argue that a country's economic performance is largely contingent on the effectiveness of the leaders' ability to "unlock the potential of its workforce to effectively implement the strategic goals of organizations" (425). Empowering leadership offers an organizational tool that can unlock the potential of the workforce by producing psychologically empowered employees, which could have a positive impact on fighting poverty in the African context.

**Future Research**

This study contributes to the research of empowerment and empowering leadership by measuring perceptions of these concepts in employees who vary in levels of power distance and individualism/collectivism. Further research needs to consider the effectiveness of empowering leadership in producing empowerment

in different African cultural contexts as well as in other diverse cultural contexts, including Asian and other cultures that are high in power distance and collectivism.

In this study, the U.S. sample perceived a significantly higher level of autonomy support in their leaders than the Rwandan sample. The education level of employees may be a factor influencing employees' perception of empowering leadership qualities. Since the Rwandan employees likely have a much lower education level than the U.S. employees, and education level may affect the perception of leadership, it is possible that education level influences this variable. In future studies, the education level of the employees should be considered as a covariate to ascertain if education levels affect employee perception of empowering leadership.

This study tested the two factors of empowering leadership separately on each of the dependent variables. In future studies, both factors of empowering leadership could be considered simultaneously as independent variables. This may reveal further insights into how empowering leadership effects psychological empowerment and self-leadership in the two culture samples.

Now that empowering leadership is firmly established as an antecedent to both psychological empowerment and self-leadership, the effects of these two *be and do* aspects of personal empowerment on other work and organizational outcomes should be researched more thoroughly. Use of these two aspects of empowerment as antecedents to various work outcomes should also be considered in further studies.

This study highlighted the need for more highly reliable scales of individually measured cultural values. Many other studies have reported low reliability in all of the variations of individual measure of cultural value scales as well. Individual measurement of cultural values in cross-cultural studies is widely encouraged (Culpepper & Watts, 1999; Scandura & Dorfman, 2004; Schaffer & Riordan, 2003; Tsui et al., 2007), and yet the scales that measure cultural values at an individual level suffer from low reliability. New cultural value scales need to be created to measure values individually. Further study needs to create scales that have consistently reliable alpha measurements. For example, research that converts the

GLOBE study scales into a reliable measure of individual cultural values would add value to the field of cross-cultural research. Valid and reliable scales of individual measure of culture are much needed in the further research of leadership and culture.

Further research is needed in the area of measurement equivalence in studies that involve more than one culture to determine if the alternative method utilized in this study is acceptable and produces similar results to the method set forth by Riordan and Vandenburg (1994). When structural equation modeling is not a viable option, the methods of establishing measurement equivalence in this study may be considered as a viable option.

**Limitations**

The GLOBE study (Chhokar et al., 2008) measured nine aspects of culture, and Hofstede (1980) measured five. Only two aspects of culture were measured in this study—the two that the literature has shown are the most impactful for leadership: individualism/collectivism and power distance. It is possible that other aspects of culture also affect empowering leadership.

Rwandan and American participants indicated their individual cultural preferences. The results of cultural preferences may not be typical of the general Rwandan population since many participants will have a higher level of education, speak English, and work for an international organization. Although the results cannot be generalized to the overall Rwandan culture, they may be generalized to other contexts in which aid organizations work in a culture with high collectivism and high power distance.

Organizational culture may influence the results of this study. The study specifically measures cultural variables, but the culture of the organization may affect the individuals' experience of culture. This study proposes that employees will reflect many aspects of their national culture and is not interested in organizational culture. For this reason, multiple organizations with different organizational structures and organizational cultures are studied and organization is included as a control variable.

Another limitation to this study is its cross-sectional design, which does not allow for direct causality to be determined. Further research could improve on this design by gathering data before and after an empowering leadership training program. This would increase the possibilities of identifying the effects of empowering leadership on self-leadership and psychological empowerment.

In a study design such as this one, in which data are collected by self-report questionnaires, there may be a question of internal validity. Podsakoff and Organ (1986) propose that common method variance can be a serious threat to internal validity and occurs when all data are gathered from the same subjects. However, Conway and Lance (2010) found that using self-report data from one source does not inflate common method correlations through common method bias. In a review of research with various research designs, Lance, Dawson, Birkelbach, and Hoffman (2010) found that although common method variance does inflate observed relationships, the effect is almost completely offset by the effect of measurement error. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) suggest techniques for controlling for common method bias, some of which are employed in this study. This study protects respondent anonymity and reduces evaluation apprehension, which reduces common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The instructions to the survey assure anonymity as well as request honest answers from respondents. Also, the questions are counterbalanced, as suggested by Podsakoff et al., to offset common method bias. Questions relating to each variable are mixed together in the survey so that respondents are not likely to answer similar questions in a similar manner when they are grouped together. This ensures that respondents consider each question individually and are more likely to offer an honest response rather than answering automatically.

## Conclusion

This study suggests that empowering leadership can be effective in cultures like Rwanda with high power distance and high collectivism. The experience of having an empowering leader has a powerful effect on employees in both Rwanda and the United States. Rather than exercising caution implementing empowering

leadership in foreign countries with high power distance and collectivism, or adopting a more culturally appropriate form of leadership, empowering leadership should be practiced vigorously and taught outright in development organizations. This will greatly increase empowerment in the workforce, which has been shown to have many positive organizational and work outcomes. As noted previously, a country's economic performance is largely contingent on the effectiveness of the leaders' ability to "unlock the potential of its workforce to effectively implement the strategic goals of organizations" (Walumbwa et al., 2011, 425). Empowering leadership offers an organizational tool that can unlock this workforce potential by producing psychologically empowered and self-led employees, which could have a positive impact on fighting poverty in the African context.

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