

**From Words to Deeds: The Moderating Role of Leader Decision-Making Autonomy in the
Link Between Visionary Leadership, Follower Extra Effort, and Follower Innovation**

Martin Buss*

University of Potsdam
mabuss@uni-potsdam.de

Eric Kearney

University of Potsdam
kearney@uni-potsdam.de

Daan van Knippenberg

Rice University
dvanknippenberg@rice.edu

* Corresponding author

<https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518261469605>

From Words to Deeds: The Moderating Role of Leader Decision-Making Autonomy in the Link Between Visionary Leadership, Follower Extra Effort, and Follower Innovation

Abstract

Scholars have proposed that visionary leadership can be a particularly effective tool to motivate follower innovation. However, while they have also long recognized that autonomy is essential for individuals engaged in innovative activities, the role of autonomy for those who aim to guide others toward innovation has thus far been overlooked. In this research, we draw on the respective literatures on visionary leadership and innovation to argue that the extent to which leaders can use visionary leadership to motivate innovation depends on the leader's decision-making autonomy—that is, the leader's latitude to make important decisions. In a three-wave, supervisor-employee field study and an experimental vignette study, we find support for our prediction that visionary leadership is positively related to follower extra effort and, in turn, innovation, but that these links are contingent on the leader's decision-making autonomy. Overall, our research identifies an important contingency factor for visionary leadership's ability to motivate follower innovation by showing that such leadership is more effective when leaders have higher, rather than lower, decision-making autonomy.

Keywords: visionary leadership; leader decision-making autonomy; follower extra effort; follower innovation

Organizations heavily depend on innovation—that is, the introduction and application of ideas, processes, products, services, or procedures that are new to the respective unit of adoption (West & Farr, 1990)—to remain competitive in today’s uncertain and volatile business environment (N. Anderson et al., 2014; Zhang & Zhou, 2014). Because innovation requires considerable extra effort from employees to generate, experiment with, promote, and implement new ideas (Agarwal et al., 2012; Björklund et al., 2023; Janssen, 2004; Montani et al., 2020), one of the most important responsibilities of leaders within organizations is to ensure that employees are motivated to engage in these efforts (Hughes et al., 2018). Scholars have argued that visionary leadership—that is, the communication of a future image for a collective to persuade followers to contribute to its realization (van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014)—is one of the most powerful tools for this purpose (Halbesleben et al., 2003; Mascareño et al., 2020; Sarros et al., 2011; van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014). Visionary leadership and innovation are linked in that both demand change to realize a desired, but uncertain future outcome (Mascareño et al., 2020). Visionary leaders articulate an image of the future to motivate followers to expend effort to bring about change (Venus et al., 2019), while innovation can be viewed as a means for followers to enact change and contribute to the realization of the envisioned future state (Mascareño et al., 2020).

Previous work has also pointed to the important role of autonomy in innovation processes. Extant theory proposes that autonomy not only allows employees to leverage resources with flexibility but also fosters a sense of ownership over their tasks, thereby facilitating and motivating their engagement in innovative activities (Amabile et al., 1996). However, while studies have generally affirmed the importance of autonomy for employees engaged in innovation activities (Hammond et al., 2011; Orth & Volmer, 2017), an important yet

unexplored question is whether those who aspire to guide others toward innovation similarly require autonomy to be effective in this role. This is surprising when considering that scholars have conceptualized innovation processes as complex, adaptive systems of decisions rather than easily controllable processes (McCarthy et al., 2006; Song et al., 2010) and that the pursuit of innovation requires that followers believe that the leader can actually make it possible to pursue innovation (Amabile et al., 2004). Especially because innovation demands considerable extra effort from followers (Agarwal et al., 2012; Björklund et al., 2023; Janssen, 2004; Montani et al., 2020), it seems plausible that followers may exert less effort in response to a vision if they perceive the leader as lacking the autonomy to support its pursuit. While this suggests that studying leader autonomy is important in understanding the influence of visionary leadership on innovation, previous research investigating contingency factors in the visionary leadership-innovation link has only focused on follower attributes—such as neuroticism (J.-K. Chen & Chen, 2013), regulatory focus (Stam et al., 2010), and learning goal orientation (Zhou et al., 2018)—as potential moderators.

In this research, we build on the notion in the visionary leadership literature that visions can be an effective tool to motivate followers to expend effort toward change and innovation (Mascareño et al., 2020; Sarros et al., 2011; van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014; Venus et al., 2019). However, by drawing on the idea from the innovation literature that leaders need to make many decisions throughout the innovation process (Mainemelis et al., 2015; McCarthy et al., 2006; Song et al., 2010), we argue that visionary leadership's ability to motivate follower innovation is not only contingent on follower characteristics (J.-K. Chen & Chen, 2013; Stam et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2018), but also on the leader's decision-making autonomy—that is, the degree to which a leader has the freedom to make work-related decisions (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

We propose that followers of leaders with higher decision-making autonomy will be more confident that the leader has greater say in making the various decisions that are needed on the path to realizing the vision. Consequently, they will exert more effort to generate, experiment with, promote, and implement new ideas to contribute to the vision of such leaders (Janssen, 2004; Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). By contrast, when visionary leaders have less decision-making autonomy, followers will be less likely to exert the extra effort required for innovation. In sum, we propose that the indirect effect of visionary leadership via follower extra effort on follower innovation is more strongly positive when leader decision-making autonomy is higher (Figure 1). We tested and found support for this idea in a three-wave, two-source field study and an experimental vignette study.

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

Our research makes important contributions to the literature on visionary leadership and innovation. Innovation is the foundation of organizations' competitive advantage and enables their long-term survival (N. Anderson et al., 2014). Scholars have argued that visionary leadership in particular has the potential to drive innovation (Mascareño et al., 2020; Sarros et al., 2011; van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014). Therefore, it is important to deepen our understanding of which conditions are conducive to the visionary leadership-innovation link. Our research advances this understanding by identifying leader decision-making autonomy as a key contextual factor that influences the effect of visionary leadership on follower extra effort and, in turn, innovation. In doing so, we also contribute to the broader visionary leadership literature by complementing previous studies that have explored how (e.g., Carton et al., 2014), to whom (e.g., Griffin et al., 2010), and in conjunction with what (e.g., Kearney et al., 2019) visions should be communicated. Specifically, while prior research on contingency factors in visionary

leadership has focused on follower attributes and complementary leader behaviors, our research is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to examine a structural characteristic of the leader's job as a boundary condition. Drawing on expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), we propose that leader decision-making autonomy shapes followers' confidence that their effort toward the vision can translate into successful innovation, thereby influencing the motivational potential of visionary leadership. In this way, our work extends the visionary leadership literature (Stam et al., 2026; Zhao & Lian, 2025) from a focus on "what leaders say and do" to "what leaders' structural conditions allow."

Theory and Hypotheses

Visionary Leadership, Follower Extra Effort, and Follower Innovation

Because innovation helps organizations to remain competitive by adapting to the changing needs of their environment, scholars have argued that it is important that leaders motivate employees to engage in innovation activities (N. Anderson et al., 2014; Hughes et al., 2018). This task, however, is challenging because innovation often requires employees to go beyond daily task routines and invest considerable extra effort in the different activities of the innovation process (i.e., idea generation, adaptation, promotion, and implementation; Hughes et al., 2018; Montani et al., 2020). To generate new ideas, employees often need to engage in extensive and effortful cognitive thought processes to identify relevant problems and to gather and process sufficient information (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). As most initial ideas have significant shortcomings when applied to the requirements of the situation, employees need to expend considerable effort to experiment with their ideas and adapt them to the actual needs of their organization (Hughes et al., 2018; Mainemelis, 2010). When an idea finally seems to work, employees often need to convince others to support and go along with the implementation of

their ideas (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Because people are often resistant to change and might be inclined to reject new ideas as impractical, not feasible, or too risky (Agarwal et al., 2012; Mainemelis, 2010; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017), such employees need to act as idea champions and exert considerable amounts of effort to develop compelling arguments to sell their ideas (Hughes et al., 2018; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

We ground our theoretical reasoning in expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), which proposes that individuals' motivation to exert effort depends on their belief that effort will lead to successful performance (expectancy), that successful performance will result in desired outcomes (instrumentality), and that these outcomes are personally valued (valence). Applied to the visionary leadership-innovation link, we argue that visionary leadership primarily operates through the valence and instrumentality components by articulating an attractive future state and framing innovation as a valued means to realize it. However, followers' willingness to exert the effort required for innovation also depends on their expectancy beliefs—that is, their confidence that their effort will ultimately lead to successful innovation outcomes. It is here that leader decision-making autonomy becomes critical—followers are more likely to believe that their innovative efforts can succeed when they perceive that their leader has the structural latitude to support these efforts through resource allocation, protection from organizational constraints, and decision-making throughout the innovation process. Thus, leader decision-making autonomy strengthens the expectancy component that visionary leadership alone may not sufficiently address.

More specifically, visionary leaders communicate an image of the future to emphasize that change is important and worthwhile (Venus et al., 2019). By creating a mental representation in followers' minds of what could be achieved in the future, such leaders increase

followers' willingness to expend effort toward contributing to the proposed change. In turn, innovation can be seen as followers' contribution to realizing the leader's vision and as the successful enactment of change (Mascareño et al., 2020).

Although the study of visionary leadership has only recently gained momentum—prompted by scholars recognizing that examining visionary leadership within the charismatic-transformational leadership framework offers only limited insight into the specific and unique effects of leader vision communication (Stam et al., 2026; van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; Zhao & Lian, 2025)—it has become increasingly clear that visionary leadership deserves examination as a distinct construct. Vision communication is a component of broader constructs such as transformational and charismatic leadership, but these umbrella constructs conflate several conceptually distinct behaviors (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). By isolating vision communication, researchers can identify its specific antecedents, outcomes, and boundary conditions without the confounding influence of co-occurring behaviors. This distinction is particularly relevant for our research because the moderating role of leader decision-making autonomy may be specific to the visionary component of leadership rather than to aspects such as, for example, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

Some evidence supports this line of theorizing. Research has shown that visionary leadership is positively associated with follower extra effort (Sully De Luque et al., 2008) and support for change (Venus et al., 2019). However, few studies have investigated the relationship between visionary leadership and follower innovation. While scholars typically distinguish between creativity, which involves the generation of ideas, and innovation, which includes both idea generation and implementation, the two concepts often overlap in research practice (Acar et al., 2019; van Knippenberg, 2017). When considering the evidence for relationships with both

creativity and innovation, research largely supports a positive association with visionary leadership (AlKayid et al., 2023; Bataineh & Saleh, 2021; Cai et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2018). Together, prior theory and evidence suggest that visionary leadership could be an effective tool for leaders to motivate follower extra effort and, in turn, foster innovation.

We acknowledge that the relationship between visionary leadership and innovation may not be uniformly positive across all aspects of the innovation process. By articulating a specific image of the future, visionary leaders may primarily stimulate followers' motivation to implement ideas aligned with the vision rather than to generate entirely novel ideas of their own (an argument that is in line with, for example, Mainemelis, 2010). Moreover, a compelling vision could, in principle, create competitive dynamics among followers eager to contribute to the vision's realization, potentially undermining collaborative idea development. Despite these considerations, we focus on the overall relationship between visionary leadership and innovation because prior empirical evidence largely supports a positive association (AlKayid et al., 2023; Cai et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2018) and because existing measures of innovation—including ours—capture the full innovation process rather than distinguishing its individual phases. Moreover, an integration of the innovation evidence suggests that focusing on a more specific objective (as per vision) may increase rather than reduce innovation, as it makes efforts in pursuit of innovation more efficient (Acar et al., 2019).

The Moderating Role of Leader Decision-Making Autonomy

Innovation scholars have argued and shown that the motivation to invest effort in innovation depends not only on the perceived value of innovation but also on individuals' belief in the feasibility of achieving successful innovation (Amabile, 1983; Liu et al., 2016). Innovation is typically not a simple, linear process; instead, it involves managing a complex, adaptive

system of decisions (McCarthy et al., 2006; Song et al., 2010). Idea generation involves that employees identify relevant problems and generate new ideas (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). For these activities, they require time and an environment that promotes cognitive flexibility (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Therefore, a crucial determinant of followers' engagement in these activities is the decision about how much autonomy and time for divergent thinking are granted to them (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Idea adaptation requires employees to systematically evaluate, develop, and tailor their initial ideas to fit situational demands (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Success in these activities relies on having sufficient time and resources for further idea development. Given that organizations typically lack resources to support the elaboration of all proposed ideas, they must decide which ideas to advance and support with resources (Mainemelis, 2010; Mainemelis et al., 2015; McCarthy et al., 2006). Finally, for idea promotion and implementation, employees must secure resources to finalize and implement their ideas, as well as gain organizational support to ensure adoption across units (Mainemelis et al., 2015; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). A crucial decision here is determining whether the idea warrants significant investment and adoption across the organization (Mainemelis et al., 2015).

Organizational leaders differ in their latitude to make important job-related decisions (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Both internal and external constraints can restrict leaders' decision-making autonomy. As part of the organizational hierarchy, leaders may have their decision-making autonomy limited by internal constraints such as the need to align with strategies and decisions from higher managerial levels (Clark et al., 2014; Lund, 2020). Structural elements, such as matrix organizational models that distribute decision-making authority across various functions or the necessity to coordinate with departments like HR, can

further impose constraints. Leaders' decision-making autonomy may also be restricted by external factors, including government regulations or the demands from trade unions, the board of directors, shareholders, or other external stakeholders (Liao & Zhang, 2020; Lythreathis et al., 2022; Tsui et al., 2006).

It is important to distinguish the role of leader decision-making autonomy as a moderator of visionary leadership from the related concept of empowering leadership. Prior research has shown that visionary leadership is most effective when paired with empowering leadership behaviors that grant followers autonomy (Kearney et al., 2019). While empowering leadership captures a set of deliberate leader behaviors directed at followers (e.g., delegating authority, encouraging independent decision-making; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), leader decision-making autonomy refers to a structural characteristic of the leader's own job—the extent to which the leader has the latitude to make important work-related decisions (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Conceptually, these operate at different levels—empowering leadership describes what leaders choose to do in leading their followers, whereas leader decision-making autonomy describes the structural conditions that shape what leaders are able to do. A leader may wish to empower followers but lack the decision-making autonomy to allocate resources, approve projects, or shield followers from organizational constraints. Conversely, a leader with high decision-making autonomy may choose not to empower followers. Although leader decision-making autonomy may enable empowering leadership, the two constructs are neither redundant nor interchangeable. Our focus on leader decision-making autonomy thus shifts the lens from interpersonal leader behavior to the structural job conditions that shape the credibility and feasibility of a leader's vision—a perspective that is theoretically distinct from, and complementary to, the empowering leadership perspective.

When conceptualizing innovation as a complex, adaptive system of decisions (McCarthy et al., 2006; Song et al., 2010), it seems plausible that followers of leaders with higher decision-making autonomy are more confident that their leader can facilitate their pursuit of innovation. When leaders possess greater discretion over job decisions, followers are more likely to believe that such leaders can provide them with more autonomy and time for divergent thinking and idea generation. Additionally, followers will expect that such leaders have increased control over resource distribution, allowing them to allocate resources strategically to support followers through experimentation, development, and testing, even when encountering setbacks. Due to this increased discretion over resources, followers will also be more confident that such leaders can ensure that their ideas are not only acknowledged but also implemented. Furthermore, followers are more likely to believe that such leaders have more influence in securing the adoption of their ideas by other units or the organization as a whole, as they expect that such leaders can make more decisions independently and require less approval from other organizational stakeholders (Lythreathis et al., 2022).

Building on these ideas, we propose that the effect of visionary leadership on follower extra effort and, in turn, innovation is more strongly positive when leaders have higher decision-making autonomy. Followers of leaders with greater decision-making autonomy are more likely to expect that their leader can better influence their work environment so that it is conducive to innovation, provide the necessary resources for idea development and implementation, and more readily ensure the adoption of their ideas. When such leaders engage in visionary leadership to highlight the need for change, followers are more motivated and confident that their effort and innovation can contribute to the leader's vision. Consequently, these followers are likely to exert higher levels of extra effort, which is positively associated with innovation. By contrast, when

leaders have lower decision-making autonomy, followers will believe that they have less control over providing them with the resources necessary for the innovation process, as well as over which ideas are implemented and adopted. When such leaders engage in visionary leadership, followers may recognize the value of innovations aligned with the vision. However, because followers believe that these leaders lack the autonomy to make the many decisions required to facilitate innovation, they are likely to expend less extra effort, ultimately leading to lower levels of innovation. Hence, we posit:

Hypothesis 1: Leader decision-making autonomy moderates the relationship between visionary leadership and follower extra effort such that this relationship is more strongly positive when leader decision-making autonomy is higher, rather than lower.

Hypothesis 2: There is a conditional indirect effect such that leader decision-making autonomy moderates the indirect effect of visionary leadership via follower extra effort on follower innovation. This indirect effect is more strongly positive when leader decision-making autonomy is higher, rather than lower.

Overview of the Present Research

We conducted two studies to test our hypotheses. In Study 1, we conducted a lagged-design field study to establish the external validity of our model. In Study 2, we used an experimental vignette study to provide evidence for the internal validity of our findings.

Transparency and Openness

Sample characteristics, data exclusions, and measures are described below. We provide data and analysis code in an online appendix (https://osf.io/9syv2/overview?view_only=d2f9d5869a2c44d8b3990990baeb42aa). We used R to conduct our analyses (Version 4.3.3; R Core Team, 2024). We tested our hypotheses with

Model 7 of Hayes' (2022) PROCESS macro (Version 4.3.1). To make inferences about indirect effects, we calculated 95% confidence intervals based on 50,000 bootstrap samples. To translate the original English scales to German, we used Brislin's (1980) translation-back translation method.

Study 1: Field Study

Sample and Procedure

We conducted a lagged-design field study with 246 leader-follower dyads. These dyads were mainly located in Germany and worked in several different industries such as healthcare, information technology and communication, public administration, trade, manufacturing, finance and insurance, education, construction, and others. Participants in this study were recruited with the aid of students from different classes on organizational behavior who received partial course credit in exchange for their recruitment efforts. Students contacted either the leader or the follower, who then invited the respective counterpart to participate (leaders were asked to randomly select one follower). In exchange for their participation, participants received access to a platform providing insights into recent, unpublished research findings on leadership.

We collected the data in three waves between November 2019 and January 2020. Prior to each wave, we sent participants a link to an online platform where they received general information about the study and were assured anonymity. At time 1 (T1), followers rated their leader's visionary leadership behavior and completed measures capturing demographics and control variables (described below). Leaders filled out a questionnaire in which they provided information about their decision-making autonomy and demographics. At time 2 (T2), one month after T1, leaders assessed the level of follower extra effort. Finally, at time 3 (T3), one

month after T2, leaders rated follower innovation. Participants could complete these surveys in English or German.

A total of 737 dyads were contacted, of which 303 agreed to participate (41%). To be included in our final sample, we required complete data from leaders and followers at T1 and from leaders at T2 and T3, which resulted in 246 leader-follower dyads. Of these, 239 were located in Germany and one dyad each in France, Italy, Belgium, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, China, and the Philippines. All leader-follower dyads interacted at least several times per month. There was no overlap among our dyads and each participating leader and follower was part of only one dyad. Leaders were on average 46.39 years old ($SD = 11.51$). 154 of them were male (63%) and 92 were female (37%). Followers were on average 38.13 years old ($SD = 12.35$). 92 of them were male (37%) and 154 were female (63%).

Measures

We measured all survey items with 7-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Visionary Leadership (T1). Followers assessed their leader's visionary leadership with Kearney et al.'s 5-item scale (2019). Followers rated the extent to which their leader "talks about the future," "communicates a clear idea about what could be accomplished," "has a clear idea about what the future should look like," "communicates his/her vision of the future," and "states clearly where we are going" ($\alpha = .91$).

Leader Decision-Making Autonomy (T1). Leaders rated their decision-making autonomy with three items from Morgeson and Humphrey's (2006) Work Design Questionnaire. Leaders were asked about the extent to which their job "gives me a chance to use my personal initiative

or judgment in carrying out the work,” “allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own,” and “provides me with significant autonomy in making decisions” ($\alpha = .71$).

Follower Extra Effort (T2). We measured extra effort adapting the 4-item scale from Sully de Luque et al. (2008). Leaders rated the degree to which the follower “makes efforts that are above and beyond what is required of him/her,” “contributes 100% of his/her ability,” “is engaged above and beyond the call of duty,” and “does much more than what is expected of him/her” ($\alpha = .93$).

Follower Innovation (T3). Leaders assessed follower innovation with six items based on Scott and Bruce (1994) and Anderson and West (1998) adapted to the individual level. They rated the extent to which the follower “often develops new and useful ideas,” “is quick at trying new methods,” “puts good new ideas into practice,” “uses new approaches to solve problems,” “masters challenges by trying new ways of completing tasks,” and “is innovative” ($\alpha = .95$).

Control Variables. We included the followers’ number of actual working hours at T1 as a control variable because they varied considerably in our sample ($M = 37.17$, $SD = 9.87$). The number of actual working hours at the beginning of the study could conceivably influence the degree to which followers have the capacity to expend extra effort during the course of the study. We also controlled for the followers’ task complexity because the dyads in our sample came from a wide range of different industries and thus work on different tasks. Moreover, previous research has suggested that especially high-complexity contexts can be a stimulus for innovation (Ohly et al., 2006). We measured task complexity with a 3-item scale developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006); sample item: “My tasks on the job are complex; $\alpha = .86$). Finally, we controlled for leader-member exchange (LMX) to address the concern that much of the effects of leadership can be attributed to liking of the leader (Yammarino et al., 2020). We measured LMX

with Thiel et al.'s (2018) abbreviated 9-item version of the scale originally developed by Liden and Maslyn (1998); sample item: "I like my manager very much as a person;" $\alpha = .91$). We report our regression results with (Table 2, Model 1, 2, and 4) and without control variables (Model 3 and 5).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. To ensure the validity of our measures, we conducted several confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). Our proposed six-factor model for all the constructs rated on scales—visionary leadership, leader decision-making autonomy, follower extra effort, innovation, task complexity, and LMX—yielded a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(390) = 907.87$, CFI = .905, RMSEA = .073, SRMR = .051 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). This model was a significantly better fit ($p < .001$) than all alternative five-factor, four-factor, three-factor, two-factor, or one-factor models (e.g., a five-factor model where we combined follower extra effort and innovation into one factor: $\chi^2(395) = 1505.98$, CFI = .797, RMSEA = .107, SRMR = .082).

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among our variables are presented in Table 1.

----- Insert Table 1 about here -----

Hypothesis 1 posits that leader decision-making autonomy moderates the relationship between visionary leadership and follower extra effort such that this relationship is most strongly positive when leader decision-making autonomy is higher, rather than lower. In support of Hypothesis 1, the interaction of visionary leadership and leader decision-making autonomy was significant ($b = .14$, $SE = .05$, $p = .010$; Table 2, Model 2) and explained a significant amount of incremental follower extra effort variance ($\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p = .010$). In line with our expectations, a simple slopes test revealed that the effect of visionary leadership on follower extra effort is

significant and positive when leader decision-making autonomy is higher (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean; $b = .20$, $SE = .08$, $p = .016$) and non-significant when decision-making autonomy is lower (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean; $b = -.06$, $SE = .07$, $p = .452$).

These results are shown in Table 3 and Figure 2.

----- Insert Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 2 about here -----

Hypothesis 2 posits a conditional indirect effect (first-stage moderated mediation; Edwards & Lambert, 2007) such that the indirect effect of visionary leadership via follower extra effort on follower innovation is moderated by leader decision-making autonomy. The results are shown in Table 3. In support of Hypothesis 2, the index of moderated mediation was significant, as its bootstrap confidence interval excluded zero (index of moderated mediation = $.07$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI $[.012, .133]$). The indirect effect of visionary leadership via extra effort on follower innovation was significant and positive at higher levels of leader decision-making autonomy (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean; $b = .10$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI $[.002, .200]$) and non-significant at lower levels of decision-making autonomy (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean; $b = -.03$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI $[-.112, .043]$).

As a robustness check, we reran our analyses without controls and after excluding the seven dyads not located in Germany as well as the eight dyads in which either the leader or the follower completed the surveys in English rather than German. Neither set of analyses meaningfully affected the results, providing further evidence of their robustness.

To rule out the possibility that the moderating effect of leader decision-making autonomy is reducible to empowering leadership, we tested a three-way interaction of visionary leadership, leader decision-making autonomy, and empowering leadership (measured with Kearney et al.'s, 2019, 8-item scale, $\alpha = .88$) on follower extra effort. This interaction was not significant ($b = .06$,

$SE = .08, p = .463$). This suggests that the moderating role of leader decision-making autonomy is independent of empowering leadership.

In Study 1, we found that leader decision-making autonomy moderates the link between visionary leadership and follower extra effort (Hypothesis 1) and confirmed the indirect effect of visionary leadership via follower extra effort on follower innovation (Hypothesis 2). As predicted, these effects were more strongly positive when leader decision-making autonomy was higher, rather than lower. One main limitation of Study 1 is that due to its correlational nature, it does not provide evidence of causality (Shadish et al., 2002). We address this limitation with an experimental vignette design in Study 2.

Study 2: Experimental Vignette Study

Sample

For this study, we recruited 217 undergraduate students from a German university. Data were collected in November and December 2024, and participants received partial course credit for their participation. Following recommendations and precedent (Aguinis et al., 2021; Burgess et al., 2022; G. Chen et al., 2019; Meade & Craig, 2012), we excluded 12 participants that failed our two attention check items or indicated in a question at the end of the survey that they did not read all the materials with care. This resulted in final sample of 205 participants, of whom 95 characterized themselves as male (46.3%), 109 as female (53.2%), and 1 as non-binary (0.5%). Participants were, on average, 22.02 years old ($SD = 2.74$). We used a 2 (visionary leadership: high vs. low) $\times$ 2 (leader decision-making autonomy: high vs. low) between-subject factorial design ($Ns = 47-56$).

Procedure

We followed Greenberg and Eskew's (1993) recommendations to craft a scenario that

was both realistic and easily imaginable. First, participants were asked to imagine that they were a member of the marketing team in a public transportation company that operates the city's subways system but also focuses on developing innovative infrastructure programs to enhance urban transport. They were also told that their role involves marketing these new infrastructure programs. Next, they were told that they have a meeting today, in which their leader says the following (i.e., our visionary leadership manipulation):

[High visionary leadership condition] *"As you know, we conducted a small-scale simulation to test my idea for a shared taxi service over the past few weeks. This simulation was successful. Therefore, it is my vision to use this AI-based algorithm to provide an environmentally sustainable service that significantly reduces city traffic. I envision that we will provide an affordable, comfortable, and safe transportation option that benefits all."*

[Low visionary leadership condition] *"As you know, we conducted a small-scale simulation to test my idea for a shared taxi service over the past few weeks. This simulation was successful. It showed that the app interface for ordering rides performed effectively. The AI-based ride-pooling algorithm successfully minimized driving distances. We found during this simulation that operating costs were low. Moreover, no safety-related incidents occurred during this simulation."*

We ensured that the high visionary leadership condition aligned with our construct definition of visionary leadership by including more references to the future, while keeping the topics discussed consistent across both conditions. Next participants received additional information about their leader (i.e., our decision-making autonomy manipulation). Participants in the high [low] decision-making autonomy conditions received the following information:

Your leader has high [low] autonomy to make important job-related decisions him-/herself.

This means that your leader has a lot of [little] say in deciding who receives time and resources to pursue his/her initiatives and ideas.

Moreover, your leader can make many [few] decisions him-/herself about which ideas will be pursued further and implemented by the organization.

We developed this manipulation based on our survey measure of decision-making

autonomy in Study 1 and minimized potential confounds by varying only words such as 'high' and 'low' between the respective conditions. Following our manipulations, participants completed a survey. We first administered the manipulation checks for visionary leadership and leader decision-making autonomy, followed by our measures of follower extra effort and innovation as well as questions pertaining to demographics. Because this ordering places the manipulation checks before the focal outcome measures, we discuss its implications in the Limitations and Future Research section.

Measures

We used 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

Follower Extra Effort. We used the 4-item scale from Study 1, asking participants to imagine working with this leader for a longer period of time (e.g., “I would make efforts that are above and beyond what is required of me”; $\alpha = .90$).

Follower Innovation. We used the 6-item scale from Study 1, asking participants to imagine working with this leader for a longer period of time (e.g., “I would put good new ideas into practice”; $\alpha = .93$).

Manipulation Check Measures. Participants indicated their level of agreement with items about the leader’s visionary leadership and level of decision-making autonomy. As a manipulation check for visionary leadership, we used the same 5-item scale as in Study 1 (e.g., “This leader talked about the future.”; $\alpha = .92$). As a manipulation check for leader decision-making autonomy, we used the 3-item scale from Study 1, adapted to the experimental setting (e.g., “This leader has significant autonomy in making decisions.”; $\alpha = .96$).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Table 4. A two-factor CFA with follower extra effort and innovation as separate factors yielded an adequate fit to the data: $\chi^2(34) = 102.09$, CFI = .956, RMSEA = .099, SRMR = .057 (Hu and Bentler 1999). This model was a significantly better fit ($p < .001$) than a one-factor model where we combined all items into one factor: $\chi^2(35) = 323.59$, CFI = .813, RMSEA = .201, SRMR = .098).

----- Insert Table 4 about here -----

The effectiveness of our visionary leadership manipulation was confirmed as participants in the high visionary leadership conditions ($M = 5.37$; $SD = 1.07$) scored higher on our visionary leadership measure than participants in the low visionary leadership conditions ($M = 3.35$; $SD = 1.36$; $t(203) = -11.89$, $p < .001$). Likewise, the effectiveness of our decision-making autonomy manipulation was confirmed as participants in the high decision-making autonomy conditions ($M = 6.08$; $SD = 0.93$) scored higher on our decision-making autonomy measure than participants in the low decision-making autonomy conditions ($M = 2.17$; $SD = 1.15$; $t(203) = -26.73$, $p < .001$).

In support of Hypothesis 1, the visionary leadership $\times$ leader decision-making autonomy interaction term was significant ($b = .83$, $SE = .35$, $p = .020$) and explained a significant amount of variance over and above the variance explained by the main effects of visionary leadership and leader decision-making autonomy ($\Delta R^2 = .02$; $p = .020$). A simple slopes test showed that the effect of visionary leadership on follower extra effort was significant and positive at higher levels of leader decision-making autonomy ($b = .81$, $SE = .25$, $p = .001$) and non-significant at lower levels ($b = -.01$, $SE = .25$, $p = .965$; Figure 3).

In support of Hypothesis 2, leader decision-making autonomy moderated the indirect effect of visionary leadership through follower extra effort on innovation as the index of moderated mediation was significant (index of moderated mediation = .51, $SE = .22$, 95% CI

[.081, .944]). The indirect effect of visionary leadership via extra effort on follower innovation was significant and positive when leader decision-making autonomy was high ($b = .50$, $SE = .16$, 95% CI [.179, .824]) and non-significant when it was low ($b = -.01$, $SE = .15$, 95% CI [-.296, .272]).

----- Insert Figure 3 about here -----

In Study 2, we tested our hypotheses with an experimental vignette design. Results aligned with those of Study 1. We found that leader decision-making autonomy moderated the effect of visionary leadership on follower extra effort (Hypothesis 1) and the indirect effect of visionary leadership via follower extra effort on follower innovation (Hypothesis 2). This study provided evidence for the internal validity of our findings.

General Discussion

In a lagged design field study and an experimental vignette study, we found that the indirect effect of visionary leadership on follower innovation—mediated by follower extra effort—was more strongly positive when leader decision-making autonomy was higher, rather than lower. Thus, our research identifies leader decision-making autonomy as an important leader job characteristic that influences the relation between visionary leadership and follower extra effort and, in turn, innovation.

Theoretical Implications

Our work makes significant contributions to the literature on visionary leadership and innovation. It is widely argued that autonomy is crucial for employee innovation, as it allows individuals to exercise flexibility and develop a sense of ownership over their tasks, thereby motivating them to exhibit higher levels of innovative behavior (Amabile et al., 1996). Indeed, prior research has consistently demonstrated that autonomy is positively associated with

employee innovation (Hammond et al., 2011; Orth & Volmer, 2017). Our research highlights an additional, previously overlooked role of autonomy in the innovation process. By identifying leader decision-making autonomy as a critical contingency factor in the relationship between visionary leadership, extra effort, and innovation, we show that leader decision-making autonomy plays an important role in shaping followers' responses to visionary leadership, suggesting that followers attend not only to their own autonomy but also to their leader's structural latitude when deciding how much effort to invest in pursuing a vision.

Arguably, higher levels of autonomy might be beneficial for various leadership behaviors. Research has consistently shown that greater discretion gives leaders more room to exert influence over their followers and organizations (Wangrow et al., 2015). However, leader decision-making autonomy may be particularly critical for the relationship between visionary leadership and innovation. Visionary leadership involves articulating an image of the future that is not yet realized, often very different from the status quo, and highly ambitious (van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014). Thus, there is an inherent risk that visionary leadership may sometimes be perceived as mere rhetoric, detached from the present, and implausible. Innovation, by its nature, requires followers to invest significant effort toward uncertain and risky outcomes (Agarwal et al., 2012; Björklund et al., 2023; Janssen, 2004; Montani et al., 2020). Moreover, both vision and innovation imply novelty and change (Mascareño et al., 2020). While leaders may have sufficient autonomy to make routine or incremental decisions, followers may be skeptical if lower levels of decision-making autonomy are sufficient to support the transformative changes that vision and innovation require. Our findings are consistent with these ideas—the positive association between visionary leadership and follower effort and innovation

was evident primarily among leaders with higher decision-making autonomy and was weak or absent among leaders with lower decision-making autonomy.

Moreover, studying leader decision-making autonomy as a moderator also enhances our knowledge of the effects of visionary leadership. Previous research on the effects of visionary leadership has addressed *how* visions should be communicated (e.g., Carton et al., 2014), *to whom* (e.g., Griffin et al., 2010), *when* (e.g., Buss & Kearney, 2024; Venus et al., 2019), and *in combination with what* other leadership behaviors (e.g., Kearney et al., 2019). Our study is the first to examine leader job characteristics as a contingency factor. With this, our research makes an important contribution to the literature by clarifying which job conditions influence the link between visionary leadership and effort and, in turn, innovation. Developing these ideas further, this raises the question of whether there are other leader job characteristics that could enhance leadership effectiveness in fostering innovation. For example, it would be interesting to examine whether a leader's level of task significance—and followers' perceptions of it—affect the extent to which visionary leadership inspires follower innovation. It seems plausible that higher levels of leader task significance, such as when a vision is communicated by the CEO of an NGO rather than by a shop-floor manager at a cardboard box company, may more strongly impact the motivation for innovation.

Relatedly, recent work on meaning-based and charismatic leadership has emphasized the role of leader-follower value congruence as an important mechanism in leadership effectiveness (van Knippenberg et al., 2025; Wilms et al., 2025). Value alignment between leaders and followers may influence how followers interpret and respond to a leader's vision, and it is likely that leader decision-making autonomy is especially impactful when followers share the values embedded in the vision. When followers are aligned with the leader's values, higher leader

decision-making autonomy may further reinforce their confidence that the leader will pursue a vision that resonates with their own goals and priorities. Future research could explore how leader decision-making autonomy and leader-follower value congruence jointly shape the effects of visionary leadership on follower motivation and innovation.

Limitations and Future Research

Like all empirical research, our work is subject to several limitations that could serve as starting points for future research. First, most of the dyads in Study 1 (239 of 246) and all participants in Study 2 were located in Germany. Research has shown mixed results for whether the degree to which autonomy influences an individual's ability to perform effectively—which in a leader's case could also mean to effectively lead followers—is stable across cultures (Oldham & Fried, 2016). Hence, it would be important to examine whether our results can be replicated in other cultural settings.

Second, we assessed followers' extra effort and innovative performance in Study 1 using subjective leader ratings. We used subjective ratings because objective and comparable measures for these constructs were not available for our dyads as they came from a wide range of different industries. Moreover, previous findings have shown that subjective performance-related measures can be of high validity (Bommer et al., 1995; Wall et al., 2004). We obtained ratings of follower extra effort and innovation from the leader and not from the follower to avoid a social desirability bias. Concerns regarding this measurement approach were mitigated by the replication of results in Study 2, where followers provided ratings of their extra effort and innovation. Our concerns about potential common-method bias were partly alleviated by our measurement approach, which temporally separated the assessment of extra effort and innovation (thereby reducing consistency motifs and transient mood effects as sources of bias; Podsakoff et

al., 2003), and by confirmatory factor analyses indicating good absolute and superior relative model fit. Nevertheless, common-method bias cannot be ruled out, and future research should examine whether these findings replicate using more objective measures of extra effort and innovation. In addition, dyads in Study 1 were recruited via a two-step procedure in which one party invited the other to participate, which may have increased the likelihood of including higher-quality relationships.

Third, although our measure captures innovation as an overall construct, visionary leadership may have differential effects on the distinct phases of the innovation process. By defining a clear direction for the future, visionary leaders may be particularly effective at motivating followers to promote and implement ideas that are aligned with the vision. However, the same directional clarity may constrain divergent thinking and the generation of ideas that fall somewhat outside the scope of the articulated vision. Future research could benefit from distinguishing between idea generation, idea development, idea promotion, and idea implementation to examine whether visionary leadership is more strongly related to some phases of the innovation process than to others.

Fourth, a central premise of our theorizing is that leader decision-making autonomy strengthens the motivational impact of visionary leadership by fostering followers' expectancy beliefs—that is, their confidence that the effort they invest in pursuing the leader's vision will lead to successful innovation (Vroom, 1964). Although our results are consistent with this expectancy-based account, we did not directly measure these expectancy beliefs in either study. Our data therefore cannot establish whether followers actually interpret leader decision-making autonomy through the proposed expectancy-related cognitions, and alternative interpretations of the observed moderation remain plausible. For instance, followers may respond more strongly to

the visions of highly autonomous leaders not because they expect their own effort to be more instrumental for innovation, but because they perceive such leaders as more credible, powerful, resourceful, or politically influential more generally—broader perceptions that could shape follower effort and innovation through mechanisms other than the specific expectancy process we propose. We therefore encourage future research to measure followers' expectancy beliefs directly—for example, by assessing followers' confidence that their innovative efforts will succeed under leaders with differing levels of decision-making autonomy—and to test this mechanism against plausible alternatives such as perceived leader credibility, power, or influence. Relatedly, although we argue that followers attend to their leader's decision-making autonomy, our studies did not measure followers' own job autonomy. It is therefore also possible that followers' own autonomy, or its interaction with leader decision-making autonomy, plays a role in shaping responses to visionary leadership. Future studies could include followers' autonomy as a control or examine the interplay between leader and follower autonomy to better understand their respective contributions to the visionary leadership-innovation link.

Finally, while Study 1 enabled us to examine our model in a real-world setting, its observational design does not allow for causal conclusions. Study 2 replicated our model with an experimental vignette design and supported the internal validity of our results, though concerns remain about its generalizability given the hypothetical nature of the experiment, the reliance on hypothetical innovation intentions rather than behaviorally consequential measures, and the use of a student sample. Because Study 1 is observational and Study 2 relies on hypothetical responses, we have been cautious in our use of causal language and describe our results in correlational terms (Lonati et al., 2018; Wulff et al., 2023). A further consideration specific to Study 2 is that the manipulation checks preceded our outcome measures, which may prime

participants or introduce demand effects (Ejelöv & Luke, 2020; Hauser et al., 2018). While this is a limitation, we are confident in our findings given that Study 1 included no manipulation checks and yielded the same moderated pattern using temporally separated, leader-provided ratings. Nevertheless, we encourage future experimental work to administer such checks after the focal outcomes or to validate manipulations in a separate pretest (Hauser et al., 2018; Wulff et al., 2023). Despite these limitations, we believe the strengths of our two studies complement each other, addressing their respective limitations.

Practical Implications

Employees are often the driving force behind innovation, making it crucial to identify strategies that encourage them to engage in innovative behavior (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Our research suggests that visionary leadership can be an effective tool that leaders can use to strengthen follower motivation and, in turn, innovative performance. However, we find that this effect is contingent on the extent to which leaders have decision-making autonomy. Given that innovation is critical for maintaining profitability, particularly in volatile and competitive environments (Khanagha et al., 2022), we recommend that those leaders who have higher levels of decision-making autonomy should enact visionary leadership and that organizations should support their leaders in doing so, for example by providing training in this regard.

However, our findings also suggest that visionary leadership is less effective for leaders with lower levels of decision-making autonomy. This insight is important because the extensive evidence supporting the positive effects of visionary leadership (e.g., Kearney et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2023; Kipfelsberger et al., 2022), its frequent mentioning in leadership self-help books (e.g., Cheung, 2024; Hyatt, 2020; McKeown, 2019), and the celebrated examples of extraordinarily successful visionaries like Steve Jobs (Schlender & Tetzeli, 2015) could lead

practitioners to assume that all leaders should enact visionary leadership. In contrast, our research indicates that not all leaders stand to benefit from visionary leadership, but that it is more effective for leaders whose followers can be confident that they have the decision-making autonomy to actively pave the road towards realizing the vision. Based on these findings, we suggest that organizations encourage leaders with lower levels of decision-making autonomy to focus less on visionary leadership and more on other leadership approaches that might require less decision-making autonomy.

If organizations nevertheless wish that leaders utilize visionary leadership to avail themselves of the innovation-promoting potential that visionary leadership entails, they could think about ways to enhance the decision-making autonomy of these leaders. For example, organizations could try to free leaders of unnecessary bureaucratic constraints and thus increase the range of decisions they are able to make on their own. Another option could be that organizations train their leaders to better leverage the decision-making autonomy they already have by increasing awareness of what is possible and by promoting decisiveness.

Conclusion

Our research provides important insights into the question of what leaders need to do to effectively promote follower innovation through visionary leadership. Biographies of successful business leaders as well as self-help leadership books often state or imply that, to be successful, leaders should always try to be more visionary. Our work shows that this may not be the best advice for all leaders. Instead, visionary leadership seems to be more effective when leaders possess higher levels of decision-making autonomy, thus enabling followers to trust that the leader can facilitate the vision's success. Considering leader decision-making autonomy as a contingency factor for the effects of visionary leadership is an important step towards developing

realistic expectations about how visionary leadership can help leaders become more effective and how it can be employed in the most favorable circumstances to unlock its full potential for facilitating innovation.

References

- Acar, O. A., Tarakci, M., & van Knippenberg, D. (2019). Creativity and innovation under constraints: A cross-disciplinary integrative review. *Journal of Management*, 45(1), 96–121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318805832>
- Agarwal, U. A., Datta, S., Blake-Beard, S., & Bhargava, S. (2012). Linking LMX, innovative work behaviour and turnover intentions: The mediating role of work engagement. *Career Development International*, 17(3), 208–230. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620431211241063>
- Aguinis, H., Villamor, I., & Ramani, R. S. (2021). MTurk research: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Management*, 47(4), 823–837. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206320969787>
- AlKayid, K., Selem, K. M., Shehata, A. E., & Tan, C. C. (2023). Leader vision, organizational inertia and service hotel employee creativity: Role of knowledge-donating. *Current Psychology*, 42(4), 3382–3394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02743-6>
- Amabile, T. M. (1983). The social psychology of creativity: A componential conceptualization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(2), 357–376. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.2.357>
- Amabile, T. M., Conti, R., Coon, H., Lazenby, J., & Herron, M. (1996). Assessing the work environment for creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(5), 1154–1184. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256995>
- Amabile, T. M., Schatzel, E. A., Moneta, G. B., & Kramer, S. J. (2004). Leader behaviors and the work environment for creativity: Perceived leader support. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(1), 5–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.12.003>

- Anderson, N., Potočnik, K., & Zhou, J. (2014). Innovation and creativity in organizations: A state-of-the-science review, prospective commentary, and guiding framework. *Journal of Management*, 40(5), 1297–1333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314527128>
- Anderson, N. R., & West, M. A. (1998). Measuring climate for work group innovation: Development and validation of the team climate inventory. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 19(3), 235–258. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1379\(199805\)19:3<235::AID-JOB837>3.0.CO;2-C](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1379(199805)19:3<235::AID-JOB837>3.0.CO;2-C)
- Bataineh, M. T., & Saleh, A. A. (2021). The effect of visionary leadership on employee's innovation in King Abdullah University Hospital, Jordan. *International Journal of Innovation*, 15(2).
- Björklund, T. A., Gilmartin, S. K., & Sheppard, S. D. (2023). The dynamics of innovation efforts in the early career. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 32(1), 80–99. <https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12534>
- Bommer, W. H., Johnson, J. L., Rich, G. A., Podsakoff, P. M., & Mackenzie, S. B. (1995). On the interchangeability of objective and subjective measures of employee performance: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 48(3), 587–605. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1995.tb01772.x>
- Brislin, R. W. (1980). Translation and content analysis of oral and written materials. In H. C. Triandis & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 389–444). Allyn & Bacon.
- Burgess, R., Colquitt, J. A., & Long, E. C. (2022). Longing for the road not taken: The affective and behavioral consequences of forgone identity dwelling. *Academy of Management Journal*, 65(1), 93–118. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2019.0746>

- Buss, M., & Kearney, E. (2024). Navigating the unknown: Uncertainty moderates the link between visionary leadership, perceived meaningfulness, and turnover intentions. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 97(3), 776–782.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12500>
- Cai, W., Fan, X., & Wang, Q. (2023). Linking visionary leadership to creativity at multiple levels: The role of goal-related processes. *Journal of Business Research*, 167, 114182.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114182>
- Carton, A. M., Murphy, C., & Clark, J. R. (2014). A (blurry) vision of the future: How leader rhetoric about ultimate goals influences performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(6), 1544–1570. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2012.0101>
- Chen, G., Smith, T. A., Kirkman, B. L., Zhang, P., Lemoine, G. J., & Farh, J.-L. (2019). Multiple team membership and empowerment spillover effects: Can empowerment processes cross team boundaries? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 104(3), 321–340.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000336>
- Chen, J.-K., & Chen, I.-S. (2013). Don't worry, I'm with you: Can visionary leadership release neurotic employees for more perceived innovative interactions? *Innovation*, 15(2), 215–223. <https://doi.org/10.5172/impp.2013.15.2.215>
- Cheung, D. A. (2024). *Lead with vision: Mastering leadership and personal growth for high-performance career women*. Amazon Digital Services LLC.
- Clark, J. R., Murphy, C., & Singer, S. J. (2014). When do leaders matter? Ownership, governance and the influence of CEOs on firm performance. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(2), 358–372. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.09.004>

- Edwards, J. R., & Lambert, L. S. (2007). Methods for integrating moderation and mediation: A general analytical framework using moderated path analysis. *Psychological Methods*, 12(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.12.1.1>
- Ejelöv, E., & Luke, T. J. (2020). "Rarely safe to assume": Evaluating the use and interpretation of manipulation checks in experimental social psychology. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 87, 103937. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.103937>
- Greenberg, J., & Eskew, D. E. (1993). The role of role playing in organizational research. *Journal of Management*, 19(2), 221–241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639301900203>
- Griffin, M. A., Parker, S. K., & Mason, C. M. (2010). Leader vision and the development of adaptive and proactive performance: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(1), 174–182. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017263>
- Halbesleben, J. R. B., Novicevic, M. M., Harvey, M. G., & Buckley, M. R. (2003). Awareness of temporal complexity in leadership of creativity and innovation: A competency-based model. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14(4–5), 433–454. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(03\)00046-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00046-8)
- Hammond, M. M., Neff, N. L., Farr, J. L., Schwall, A. R., & Zhao, X. (2011). Predictors of individual-level innovation at work: A meta-analysis. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 5(1), 90–105. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018556>
- Hauser, D. J., Ellsworth, P. C., & Gonzalez, R. (2018). Are manipulation checks necessary? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, Article 998. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00998>
- Hayes, A. F. (2022). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (3rd ed.). Taylor & Francis.

Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis:

Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A*

Multidisciplinary Journal, 6(1), 1–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118>

Hughes, D. J., Lee, A., Tian, A. W., Newman, A., & Legood, A. (2018). Leadership, creativity,

and innovation: A critical review and practical recommendations. *The Leadership*

Quarterly, 29(5), 549–569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.03.001>

Hyatt, M. (2020). *The vision driven leader: 10 questions to focus your efforts, energize your team, and scale your business*. Baker Books.

Janssen, O. (2004). How fairness perceptions make innovative behavior more or less stressful.

Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25(2), 201–215. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.238>

Kearney, E., Shemla, M., van Knippenberg, D., & Scholz, F. A. (2019). A paradox perspective

on the interactive effects of visionary and empowering leadership. *Organizational*

Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 155, 20–30.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.01.001>

Khanagha, S., Volberda, H. W., Alexiou, A., & Annosi, M. C. (2022). Mitigating the dark side of agile teams: Peer pressure, leaders' control, and the innovative output of agile teams.

Journal of Product Innovation Management, 39(3), 334–350.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12589>

Kim, J. (Jenny), Waldman, D. A., Balthazard, P. A., & Ames, J. B. (2023). Leader self-

projection and collective role performance: A consideration of visionary leadership. *The*

Leadership Quarterly, 34(2), 101623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2022.101623>

- Kipfelsberger, P., Raes, A., Herhausen, D., Kark, R., & Bruch, H. (2022). Start with why: The transfer of work meaningfulness from leaders to followers and the role of dyadic tenure. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 43(8), 1287–1309. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2649>
- Liao, Z., & Zhang, M. (2020). The influence of responsible leadership on environmental innovation and environmental performance: The moderating role of managerial discretion. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 27(5), 2016–2027. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1942>
- Liden, R. C., & Maslyn, J. M. (1998). Multidimensionality of leader-member exchange: An empirical assessment through scale development. *Journal of Management*, 24(1), 43–72. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-2063\(99\)80053-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-2063(99)80053-1)
- Liu, D., Jiang, K., Shalley, C. E., Keem, S., & Zhou, J. (2016). Motivational mechanisms of employee creativity: A meta-analytic examination and theoretical extension of the creativity literature. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 137, 236–263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2016.08.001>
- Lonati, S., Quiroga, B. F., Zehnder, C., & Antonakis, J. (2018). On doing relevant and rigorous experiments: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Operations Management*, 64, 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2018.10.003>
- Lund, A. K. (2020). Constrained leader autonomy: You are the stoker in hell—No matter what you do, you are wrong! *Leadership*, 16(3), 364–384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715019890381>
- Lythreathis, S., El-Kassar, A.-N., Smart, P., & Ferraris, A. (2022). Participative leadership, ethical climate and responsible innovation perceptions: Evidence from South Korea. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 41, 1285–1312. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-022-09856-3>

- Mainemelis, C. (2010). Stealing fire: Creative deviance in the evolution of new ideas. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(4), 558–578. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.4.zok558>
- Mainemelis, C., Kark, R., & Epitropaki, O. (2015). Creative leadership: A multi-context conceptualization. *Academy of Management Annals*, 9(1), 393–482. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2015.1024502>
- Mascareño, J., Rietzschel, E., & Wisse, B. (2020). Envisioning innovation: Does visionary leadership engender team innovative performance through goal alignment? *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 29(1), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12341>
- McCarthy, I. P., Tsinopoulos, C., Allen, P., & Rose-Anderssen, C. (2006). New product development as a complex adaptive system of decisions. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 23(5), 437–456. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5885.2006.00215.x>
- McKeown, L. (2019). *Do lead: Share your vision. Inspire others. Achieve the impossible*. Chronicle Books.
- Meade, A. W., & Craig, S. B. (2012). Identifying careless responses in survey data. *Psychological Methods*, 17(3), 437–455. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028085>
- Montani, F., Vandenberghe, C., Khedhaouria, A., & Courcy, F. (2020). Examining the inverted U-shaped relationship between workload and innovative work behavior: The role of work engagement and mindfulness. *Human Relations*, 73(1), 59–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718819055>
- Morgeson, F. P., & Humphrey, S. E. (2006). The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ): Developing and validating a comprehensive measure for assessing job design and the nature of work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(6), 1321–1339. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.6.1321>

- Ohly, S., Sonnentag, S., & Pluntke, F. (2006). Routinization, work characteristics and their relationships with creative and proactive behaviors. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27(3), 257–279. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.376>
- Oldham, G. R., & Fried, Y. (2016). Job design research and theory: Past, present and future. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 136, 20–35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2016.05.002>
- Orth, M., & Volmer, J. (2017). Daily within-person effects of job autonomy and work engagement on innovative behaviour: The cross-level moderating role of creative self-efficacy, 26(4), 601–612. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2017.1332042>
- Perry-Smith, J. E., & Mannucci, P. V. (2017). From creativity to innovation: The social network drivers of the four phases of the idea journey. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(1), 53–79. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2014.0462>
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879–903. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879>
- R Core Team. (2024). R (Version 4.3.3) [Computer software]. *R Foundation for Statistical Computing*. <https://www.r-project.org/>
- Reiter-Palmon, R., & Illies, J. J. (2004). Leadership and creativity: Understanding leadership from a creative problem-solving perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(1), 55–77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.12.005>

- Sarros, J. C., Cooper, B. K., & Santora, J. C. (2011). Leadership vision, organizational culture, and support for innovation in not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 32(3), 291–309.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731111123933>
- Schlender, B., & Tetzeli, R. (2015). *Becoming Steve Jobs: The evolution of a reckless upstart into a visionary leader*. Crown.
- Scott, S. G., & Bruce, R. A. (1994). Determinants of innovative behavior: A path model of individual innovation in the workplace. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(3), 580–607. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256701>
- Shadish, W. R., Cook, T. D., & Campbell, D. T. (2002). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Song, M., Kawakami, T., & Stringfellow, A. (2010). A Cross-National Comparative Study of Senior Management Policy, Marketing-Manufacturing Involvement, and Innovation Performance. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 27(2), 179–200.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5885.2010.00709.x>
- Stam, D., van Knippenberg, D., Kearney, E., & Zhang, Q. (2026). Formulating future selves: A review of the visionary leadership literature. In O. Epitropaki & R. Kark (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership, Followership, and Identity* (pp. 484–509). The Oxford Psychology Series. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197822357.001.0001>
- Stam, D., van Knippenberg, D., & Wisse, B. (2010). Focusing on followers: The role of regulatory focus and possible selves in visionary leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(3), 457–468. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.03.009>

- Sully De Luque, M., Washburn, N. T., Waldman, D. A., & House, R. J. (2008). Unrequited profit: How stakeholder and economic values relate to subordinates' perceptions of leadership and firm performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53(4), 626–654. <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.53.4.626>
- Thiel, C. E., Hardy III, J. H., Peterson, D. R., Welsh, D. T., & Bonner, J. M. (2018). Too many sheep in the flock? Span of control attenuates the influence of ethical leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 103(12), 1324–1334. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000338>
- Tsui, A. S., Zhang, Z.-X., Wang, H., Xin, K. R., & Wu, J. B. (2006). Unpacking the relationship between CEO leadership behavior and organizational culture. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(2), 113–137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.12.001>
- Unsworth, K. L., & Clegg, C. W. (2010). Why do employees undertake creative action? *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 83(1), 77–99. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317908X398377>
- van Knippenberg, D. (2017). Team Innovation. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4(1), 211–233. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113240>
- van Knippenberg, D., & Sitkin, S. B. (2013). A critical assessment of charismatic—transformational leadership research: Back to the drawing board? *Academy of Management Annals*, 7(1), 1–60. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2013.759433>
- van Knippenberg, D., & Stam, D. (2014). Visionary leadership. In D. V. Day (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of leadership and organizations* (pp. 241–259). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199755615.013.013>

- van Knippenberg, D., Wu, J., van Bunderen, L., & de Haas, M. (2025). Meaning-based leadership, empowering leadership, and team strategy implementation. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 98(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.70044>
- Venus, M., Stam, D., & van Knippenberg, D. (2019). Visions of change as visions of continuity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 62(3), 667–690.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.1196>
- Vroom, V. H. (1964). *Work and motivation*. Wiley
- Wall, T. D., Michie, J., Patterson, M., Wood, S. J., Sheehan, M., Clegg, C. W., & West, M. (2004). On the validity of subjective measures of company performance. *Personnel Psychology*, 57(1), 95–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2004.tb02485.x>
- Wangrow, D. B., Schepker, D. J., & Barker, V. L. (2015). Managerial discretion: An empirical review and focus on future research directions. *Journal of Management*, 41(1), 99–135.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314554214>
- West, M. A., & Farr, J. L. (1990). Innovation at work. In M. A. West & J. L. Farr (Eds.), *Innovation at work: Psychological and organizational strategies* (pp. 3–13). Wiley.
- Wilms, R., Bastardo, N., Seif el Dahan, C., & Jacquart, P. (2025). Are we on the same page? Leader-follower value congruence as a boundary condition in the emergence of charismatic effects. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 36(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2024.101839>
- Wulff, J. N., Sajons, G. B., Pogrebna, G., Lonati, S., Bastardo, N., Banks, G. C., & Antonakis, J. (2023). Common methodological mistakes. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 34(1), 101677.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2023.101677>

- Yammarino, F.J., Cheong, M., Kim, J. and Tsai, C.-Y. (2020). Is leadership more than “I like my boss”? In M. R. Buckley, A. R. Wheeler, A.R., J. E. Baur, J.& J. R. B. Halbesleben (Eds.), *Research in personnel and human resources management* (Vol. 38, pp. 1–55). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0742-730120200000038003>
- Zhang, X., & Bartol, K. M. (2010). Linking empowering leadership and employee creativity: The influence of psychological empowerment, intrinsic motivation, and creative process engagement. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(1), 107–128.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.48037118>
- Zhang, X., & Zhou, J. (2014). Empowering leadership, uncertainty avoidance, trust, and employee creativity: Interaction effects and a mediating mechanism. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 124(2), 150–164.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2014.02.002>
- Zhao, Q., & Lian, H. (2025). Vision communication: A systematic review. *Journal of Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063251390851>
- Zhou, L., Zhao, S., Tian, F., Zhang, X., & Chen, S. (2018). Visionary leadership and employee creativity in China. *International Journal of Manpower*, 39(1), 93–105.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-04-2016-0092>

Table 1*Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Follower working hours	37.17	9.87							
2. Follower task complexity	5.01	1.26	.34***	(.86)					
3. LMX	5.58	0.99	.00	.12	(.91)				
4. Visionary leadership	4.82	1.26	-.02	.04	.45***	(.91)			
5. Leader decision-making autonomy	5.42	0.95	-.02	.04	.08	.17**	(.71)		
6. Follower extra effort	5.21	1.10	.04	.05	.24***	.16*	.04	(.93)	
7. Follower innovation	5.03	0.97	-.01	.04	.08	.02	.08	.55***	(.95)

Note. $N = 246$ dyads. Cronbach's alphas are shown in the diagonal in parentheses.

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

Table 2*Study 1: Regression Analysis*

		DV: Follower extra effort			DV: Follower innovation	
	Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Intercept</i>		3.70*** (0.53)	3.58*** (0.52)	5.19*** (0.07)	2.61*** (0.44)	2.45*** (0.25)
<i>Controls</i>	Follower working hours	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)		-0.00 (0.01)	
	Follower task complexity	0.01 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)		0.02 (0.04)	
	LMX	0.23** (0.08)	0.25** (0.08)		-0.03 (0.06)	
<i>Predictors</i>	Visionary leadership	0.05 (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)	0.16** (0.06)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.04)
	Leader decision-making autonomy	0.02 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)		
<i>Interaction</i>	Visionary leadership × leader decision-making autonomy		0.14* (0.05)	0.12* (0.05)		
<i>Mediator</i>	Follower extra effort				0.50*** (0.05)	0.50*** (0.05)
	<i>F</i>	3.22**	3.86**	3.81*	21.71***	54.44***
	<i>R</i> ²	.06	.09	.05	.31	.31

Note. *N* = 246 dyads. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Visionary leadership and leader decision-making autonomy were mean-centered prior to the regression analysis. DV = Dependent variable. Models 3 and 5 are reported as robustness checks without controls. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3*Study 1: Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects of Visionary Leadership*

Conditional effects of visionary leadership on follower extra effort				
Leader decision-making autonomy	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Low (-0.95)	-.06	.07	-0.75	.452
Mean (0.00)	.07	.06	1.20	.231
High (0.95)	.20	.08	2.42	.016
Conditional indirect effects of visionary leadership on follower innovation				
Leader decision-making autonomy	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>Boot LLCI</i>	<i>Boot ULCI</i>
Low (-0.95)	-.03	.04	-.112	.043
Mean (0.00)	.04	.03	-.033	.103
High (0.95)	.10	.05	.002	.200
Index of moderated mediation	.07	.03	.012	.133

Note. $N = 246$ dyads. *Boot CI* = 95% bootstrapped confidence interval. Bootstrap sample size = 50,000. Visionary leadership and leader decision-making autonomy were mean-centered prior to the regression analysis.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP AND LEADER AUTONOMY

Table 4

Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Visionary leadership	0.53	0.50				
2. Leader decision-making autonomy	0.49	0.50	.00			
3. Follower effort	3.83	1.34	.15*	.30***	(.90)	
4. Follower innovation	4.50	1.28	.16*	.36***	.65***	(.93)

Note. $N = 205$ individuals. Cronbach's alphas are shown in the diagonal in parentheses. Both condition dummies were coded 0 = low, 1 = high. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

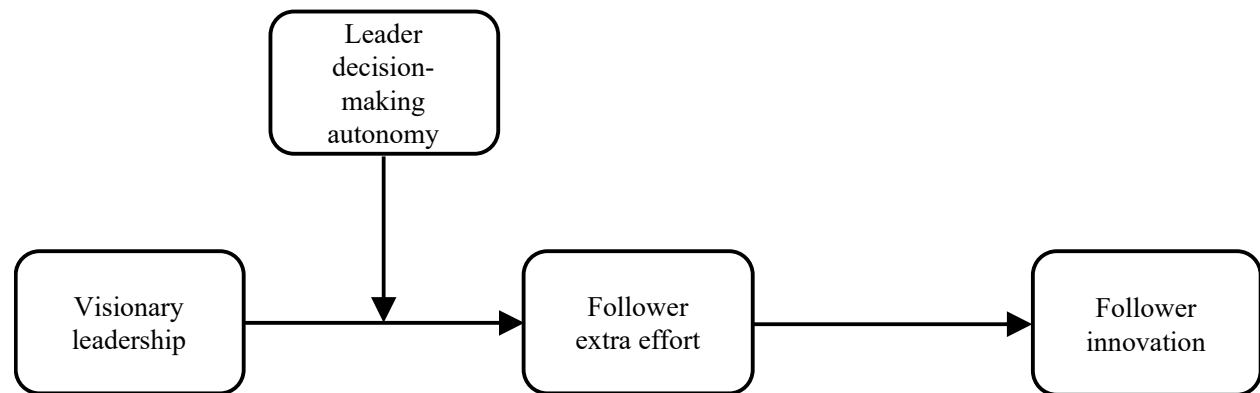
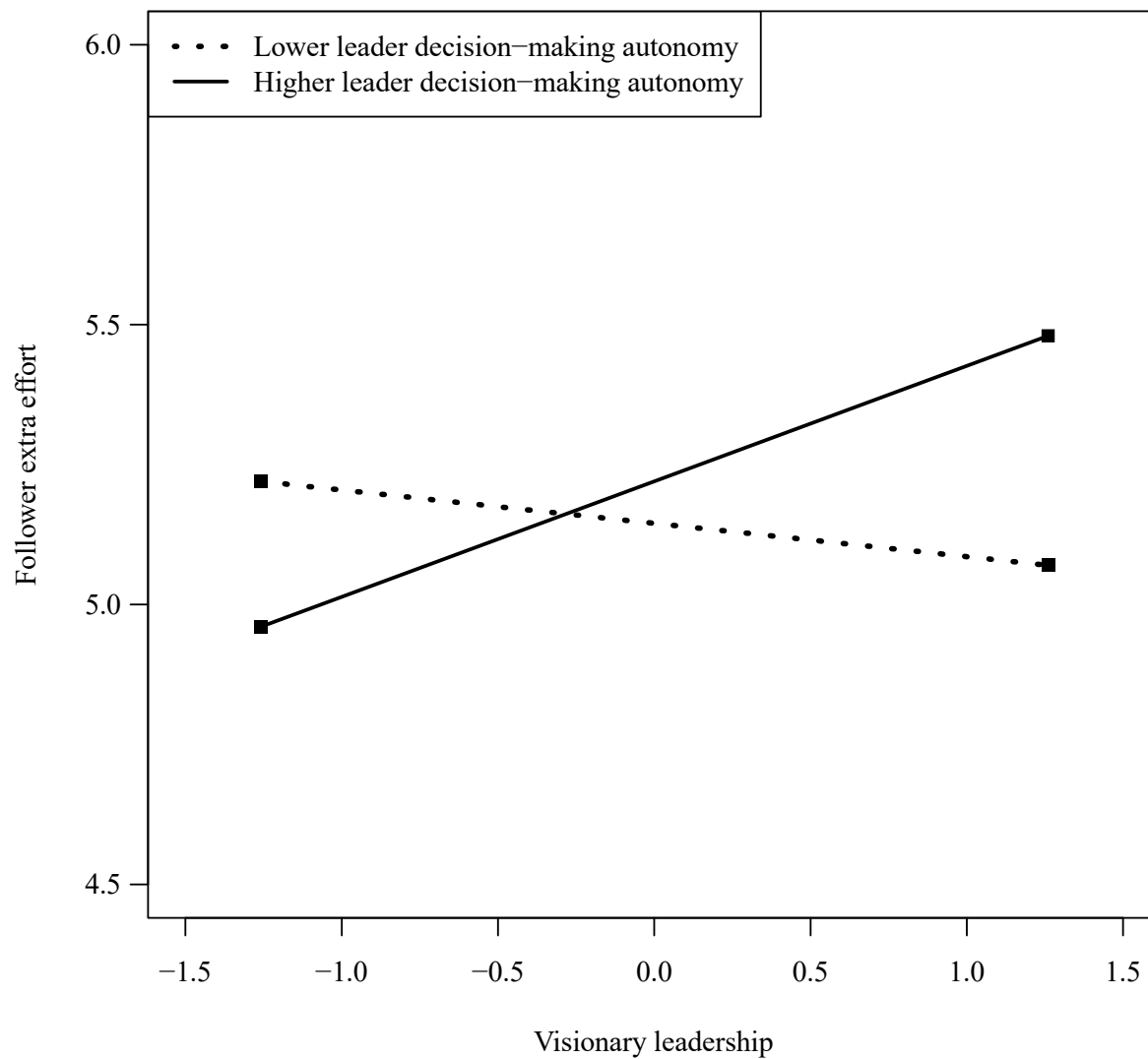
Figure 1*The Conceptual Model*

Figure 2

Study 1: The Interactive Effect of Visionary Leadership and Leader Decision-Making Autonomy on Extra Effort



Note. Visionary leadership and leader decision-making autonomy were mean-centered prior to the regression analysis.

Figure 3

Study 2: The Interactive Effect of Visionary Leadership and Leader Decision-Making Autonomy on Extra Effort

