



Catalyzing Success: How Enthusiastic Leaders Drive Performance through Group Satisfaction and Positive Emotions

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Abstract

Effective leaders employ a blend of transformational and transactional leadership styles to collaborate with their employees, working towards achieving organizational objectives. While the significance of enthusiasm in leadership is acknowledged, its specific role remains largely unexplored within the realm of leadership studies. We contend that enthusiasm assumes a pivotal and influential role in successful leadership, ultimately enhancing overall productivity. This study is dedicated to investigating how leader enthusiasm impacts perceived performance among team members and examine the mediation of group satisfaction and positive emotions in the relationship between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance. By analyzing data collected from a participant pool of 311 individuals, our research yields compelling evidence that leader enthusiasm exerts a positive influence on perceived performance. A noteworthy revelation emerging from our research is found in the mediation analysis. This analysis sheds light on the pivotal roles of group satisfaction and positive emotions as key mediators in the link between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance. This underscores the concept that leader enthusiasm indirectly shapes how employees perceive their own performance, primarily through its profound impact on group satisfaction and the positive emotions experienced by individual team members. In summary, our study underscores the vital and transformative role of leader enthusiasm in cultivating a rewarding and fulfilling work environment. This, in turn, exerts a positive influence on follower emotions and their perceptions of performance. Our findings shed light on the intricate mechanisms through which leader enthusiasm contributes to shaping employees' perceptions of their performance.

Keywords Leadership · Leader enthusiasm · Group satisfaction · Positive emotions · Perceived performance

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Introduction

The real secret of success is enthusiasm.

Walter Chrysler

The volatile and ever-changing environment that characterizes the world of work requires the development of new insights into leadership and its potential (Dubey, Pathak, and Sahu 2023). In this dynamic landscape marked by rapid technological advancements, globalization, economic uncertainty, diverse workforces, and shifting employee expectations, leaders must adapt to emerging challenges. They must navigate global interconnectivity, economic volatility, and the need for sustainability, while fostering inclusivity and addressing the demands of remote and hybrid work models. Traditional top-down leadership approaches are giving way to more agile, empathetic, and technologically savvy leadership styles. Continuous learning, adaptability, and the ability to inspire and engage teams have become critical elements of effective leadership in this ever-evolving work environment (Northouse 2018).

A leader motivates people to achieve a goal, influencing them to fulfil the organization's objectives (e.g. Chen and Lin 2018). According to Cheung and Wong (2011), when effective leadership is present, employees are motivated to go beyond their own capabilities, striving for higher levels of performance. Leadership is not just a matter of giving orders and expecting others to follow (Dubey et al. 2023). It involves inspiring and influencing people to achieve an organization's goals in the best possible way (Singh and Sharma 2005). Today, leaders, more than authority and influence, should seek to collaborate with their employees (Maesaroh et al. 2020). Leadership literature has shown that transformational and transactional leadership styles are considered highly significant and are the most widely used in organizations (Marasinghe and Anusha 2018).

Givens (2008) states that the behaviour of followers can be influenced by the type of leadership. Furthermore, although there are no universal traits of great leaders, there are some relevant attributes that cut across different contexts (e.g. charisma, emotional intelligence, vision, integrity, confidence).

Enthusiasm, a valuable leadership trait, remains underexplored alongside other attributes. It holds the potential to enhance motivation, cultivate a positive work environment, and drive innovation and engagement. It's an essential quality for leaders looking to inspire their teams and achieve success. Being a leader can be rewarding and challenging at the same time, and enthusiasm is a fundamental characteristic for a successful leader because it plays a crucial role in motivating and inspiring team members. Enthusiasm not only fosters a positive work environment, boosting morale and productivity but also enhances a leader's approachability and relatability, facilitating improved communication and teamwork. This, in turn, leads to higher job satisfaction among team members, making enthusiasm a vital component of effective leadership, empowering leaders to inspire and guide their teams in achieving organizational goals. Enthusiasm facilitates increased productivity, so leaders should strive to structure work environments and interactions among colleagues in such a way that everyone's enthusiasm can be harnessed and applied for the benefit of all (Russell 2008).

Liu, Cui, and Nanyangwe (2023) noted that while many studies have traditionally relied on linear models to understand the antecedents of employee performance, it is essential to recognize that leadership styles and HRM practices can interact in diverse and complex ways, encompassing complementary, synergistic, and substitutive interactions (Chuang et al. 2016; Leroy et al. 2018). Thus, investigating a combination of potential mediators between the leadership attribute of enthusiasm and perceived performance can provide new theoretical perspectives for research related to potential factors that hinder the development of followers' performance. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the influence of leader enthusiasm on perceived performance, and to test the mediating effect of group satisfaction and positive emotions on the relationship between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance.

We examine the mediation of group satisfaction and positive emotions in the relationship between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance due to their significant roles in understanding the impact of leadership on organizational outcomes. Group satisfaction is pivotal in shaping team dynamics and workplace performance, as it fosters effective collaboration and mutual support among team members, creating a more cohesive work environment. Moreover, it acts as a powerful motivator, driving team members to strive for excellence. Positive emotions, such as enthusiasm, is instrumental in enhancing productivity by stimulating creativity and concentration. Additionally, when the work environment is characterized by positive emotions, it contributes to higher team morale, and increased job satisfaction, ultimately cultivating a more enjoyable and motivating atmosphere (Fredrickson 2003).

In summary, our study seeks to delve deeper into the pivotal and transformative role of leader enthusiasm in creating a fulfilling work environment, subsequently enhancing follower emotions and performance perceptions. Our findings provide valuable insights into the intricate mechanisms through which leader enthusiasm shapes employees' perceptions of their own performance, shedding light on the dynamics at play within organizations.

Leader Enthusiasm

Leadership, an enduring human phenomenon, has spanned the annals of history from ancient times to the modern era (Madlock 2008). Its study is marked by a rich tapestry of theories, models, and approaches (Bass 1990; Van Wart 2003; Yukl 2002). Indeed, the number of definitions of leadership rivals the diversity of individuals who have sought to define it. House et al. (1999, 184) offer one such definition, describing leadership as “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members.” In essence, leadership emerges from a leader's capacity to rally a group through their personality, enthusiasm, motivation, and their dedication to enhancing others, becoming a wellspring of inspiration for those in their orbit (Bass 1999). Gina, Maria, and Henry (2018) posit that numerous definitions are rooted in the fundamental concept of an individual or group's power to guide activities toward a shared goal.

The hallmark of a leader is their attentiveness to the individuality of each team member, a concern for their growth and improvement, and a readiness to offer support and encouragement through task allocation that fosters development (Bass 1999). According to the

behavioral approach, leadership styles exert a direct influence on employee reactions and organizational behavior within the workplace (Al-maaitah et al. 2021). Leadership styles play a pivotal role in shaping the goals, direction, and objectives of employees in any organization, ranging from authoritarian, paternalistic, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, to transformational styles (Jabbar et al. 2020). Despite the growing interest in diverse leadership styles and the influence of personality traits, emotions, behaviors, and attitudes on leadership (e.g., Li and Zhou 2023; Shahzad, Raja, and Hashmi 2021; Wan et al. 2022), the concept of leader enthusiasm remains relatively uncharted.

While studies on enthusiasm are few and far between, they provide compelling evidence of its significance (Glassman and McAfee 1990) across various contexts. For instance, in the realm of recruitment and selection, Atkins and Kent (1988) surveyed a group of recruitment professionals to gauge the importance of various candidate characteristics, revealing that enthusiasm ranked second among 60 surveyed attributes. In education, where teachers assume a leadership role, research on teacher enthusiasm has shown a positive impact on student learning (e.g., Buric and Moè 2020; Jungert, Levine, and Koestner 2020). Consequently, we propose transplanting the attribute of enthusiasm into the realm of leadership. It is posited that enthusiasm constitutes a state of interest and pleasure (e.g., Kunter et al. 2008) in engaging in a particular task, significantly contributing to follower satisfaction and the experience of positive emotions, thus making enthusiasm a distinctive and crucial attribute of a leader.

Enthusiasm appears to support enhanced productivity (Rusell, 2008). Performance is a complex concept that can be defined as a set of complementary parameters or indicators that describe the evaluation process through various types of achieved outcomes (Lebas and Euske 2006). The term “performance” should be used to represent the sum of all processes that lead to a potential or future sequence of results (Dias and Borges 2007). Job performance is one of the key criteria for an overall individual performance evaluation in an organization, allowing employees with a high perception of performance to be more likely to see themselves as examples of their organization (Peng, Lee, and Lu 2020), and consequently more productive, motivated, and satisfied. Achieving this, however, is no simple task and requires collective effort from all members of an organization, extending beyond formal leaders. Leaders are urged to structure work environments and interpersonal interactions in a way that harnesses the enthusiasm inherent in each individual for the collective benefit. While finding the intersection of enthusiastic leadership, a strong work ethic, and alignment with the organizational mission can be challenging, the outcomes justify the investment of effort. Thus, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1 Leader enthusiasm positively influences perceived performance of the employees.

Group Satisfaction

Despite the extensive literature in this area, job satisfaction has consistently been treated as an individual-level variable, although there are theoretical reasons and empirical evidence to suggest that individuals working in groups should develop a shared attitude towards work and their environment (Mason and Griffin 2002). According to Li and Zhou (2023), the

extensive research on the effects of leadership style on employees' job satisfaction has led to increased interest in the exploration and research of worker groups. For instance, Sfakianaki et al. (2018) demonstrated a significant positive correlation between leadership style and the work attitude, work behaviour, and organizational performance of worker groups. This correlation can be achieved by encouraging employees to shift their interests toward organizational interests.

Furthermore, Gao (2021) examined the impact of leadership style, noting that it can prompt worker group managers to recognize their responsibilities, thus stimulating their pursuit of work, social status, and self-worth. This, in turn, enhances the overall development of worker organizations, resulting in leadership behaviours that exceed the originally expected outcomes.

Group satisfaction can be defined as the group's shared attitude towards their task and the associated work environment (Mason and Griffin 2002). In this study, we assume group satisfaction as a variable that captures aspects related to socio-affective and task-related elements (Dimas and Lourenço 2015). According to Foels et al. (2000), there are reasons to believe that group members will be more satisfied when they have a strong leader who guides their group. Leaders not only affect the emotional and mental states of followers but also have a significant impact on their behaviours and motivation to achieve organizational goals (Burns 2007).

Several studies have observed that leadership is a variable that impacts not only productivity and performance but also job satisfaction (e.g. Dubey et al. 2023; Sani et al. 2018). Our expectation is that leader enthusiasm plays a crucial role in boosting group satisfaction. This is achieved by fostering a positive work environment, encouraging team cohesion, and motivating team members. As a result, it creates a more enjoyable and engaging workplace, ultimately leading to elevated levels of group satisfaction.

Positive Emotions

Recognizing that emotions significantly influence employees' workplace behaviours, it is essential to consider them as valuable data for comprehending employees' motivations and factors that foster their sense of value and enthusiasm in the workplace (Osorio, Madero, and del Castillo 2023). The well-established concept that leaders' emotions can impact both individual and group emotions is supported by numerous studies (e.g., Bono and Ilies 2006; Ilies et al. 2013). Furthermore, emotions are characterized by their dynamic nature, featuring notable variations within an individual, and their high susceptibility to external stimuli, underscoring the importance of their regular examination (e.g., Griep et al. 2022). One mechanism for such influence is emotional contagion (Hatfield et al. 1993), which involves one person's emotions being transmitted to another. Hatfield et al. (1993) posit that this occurs because people naturally synchronize and mimic the facial expressions, movements, and posture of those they interact with, leading them to share in the emotional experiences of others. Consequently, the connection between leader enthusiasm and the expression of positive emotions can offer insight into followers' affinity for their leaders.

Emotions have a significant role in both personal life and organizational outcomes, given that organizations consist of individuals working independently or in teams. Studies on emotions in organizational settings have revealed that negative emotions, like frustration

and anxiety, are linked to burnout, turnover, and task-related errors (Rausch et al. 2017; Szczygiel and Mikolajczak 2018). Conversely, positive emotions, such as work passion and professional satisfaction, have positive effects on outcomes like engagement and commitment (Ćulibrk et al. 2018). Emotions, however, do not exist in isolation; they have a ripple effect on others. According to the Emotions as Social Information (EASI) theory, emotional expressions can trigger the same emotions in others through two simultaneous mechanisms: inferential processes and affective reactions (Van Kleef et al. 2012). Inferential processes involve evaluating the situation that triggered the emotion (Van Kleef 2009). Affective reactions encompass processes like emotional contagion (Hatfield et al. 1992), which operates mainly on an automatic and non-conscious level, resulting in a convergence of emotional states (Lishner et al. 2008) or other affective responses, such as interpersonal attraction (Hareli and Hess 2010). For instance, a person's happiness or joy can induce similar feelings in others and foster appreciation for that person (Hess et al. 2000). Conversely, the expression of anger can trigger anger in others and reduce interpersonal liking (e.g. Cheshin et al. 2011). In a leadership context, some studies illustrate this process; Bono and Ilies (2006) observed that leaders' emotional states led to similar emotional states in their team members. Other studies have shown emotional convergence between leaders and followers, as well as additional effects of leaders' positive emotions, such as improved follower performance (e.g. Gaddis, Connelly, and Mumford 2004; George and Bettenhausen 1990), enhanced leader efficacy perception (e.g. Damen, Van Knippenberg, and Van Knippenberg 2008), and better mental health among followers (Junça-Silva and Caetano 2023). Enthusiasm, being a positive emotional state, is expected to positively affect the motivation, emotions, and social consequences of followers (Peng et al. 2021). The literature strongly suggests that the expression of emotions significantly impacts individuals' attitudes, cognitions, emotional states, and behaviours in the workplace (e.g., Griep et al. 2022; Osorio et al. 2023; Van Kleef et al. 2012; Wan et al. 2022), particularly when these emotions are expressed by leaders (e.g. Ho and Astakhova 2020; Koning and Van Kleef 2015).

The Mediator Role of Group Satisfaction and Positive Emotions on Perceived Performance

Several studies have shown a direct relationship between satisfaction and performance. According to Mason and Griffin (2002), this relationship can also be observed at the group level. Job satisfaction is a well-being-related variable that is related to individual behavioural outcomes and organizational performance (e.g. Harter et al. 2002; Hartog et al. 2013; Judge et al. 2001). Satisfaction can influence performance because groups with a positive attitude towards their tasks are more likely to expend more effort in accomplishing them and therefore achieve higher levels of performance (Peng et al. 2020). For example, Purwanto et al. (2021) and Ridlwan et al. (2021) observed that leadership style affects performance through job satisfaction, and that good leadership enables increased satisfaction and performance. Thus, it is expected that group satisfaction will be positively related to employee performance. In fact, several investigations (Bass et al. 2003; Carron 1982; Spink 1998) provide empirical support for the mediating effect of group processes between leadership and outcomes. Therefore, with group satisfaction being a significant indicator of group processes, we propose that it may have a role in mediating between enthusiastic leadership

and perceived performance. It is our expectation that group satisfaction can influence perceived performance by shaping an individual's self-assessment and confidence. A satisfied and high-performing group can create a supportive and positive environment that encourages individuals to perceive their own performance more favourably. This positive influence on perceived performance can be attributed to the social and psychological dynamics that occur within a content and successful group. Successful leaders can stimulate employee performance through the effective influence of job satisfaction (e.g., Rawashdeh et al. 2020; Shahab and Nisa 2014). Several studies have shown a significant effect of leadership in supporting employee performance through job satisfaction (e.g., Atmojo 2012; Iman and Lestari 2019; Siswanto et al. 2020). Thus, group satisfaction is expected to mediate the effect of leadership on employee performance.

H2 Group satisfaction mediates the relationship between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance of the employees.

On the other hand, there is a growing body of work supporting the positive effects of positive emotions on the work environment and outcomes. The effects of positive emotions on performance have been studied across various fronts, resulting in several reviews and meta-analytic articles (Diener et al. 2020). Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) found that converging cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies demonstrated the potential causal effects of positive emotions on job performance and career success. According to Diener and colleagues (2020), performance may not always be mediated by enduring resources, suggesting that reciprocal effects between performance and positive emotions may also exist.

Therefore, it is believed that positive emotions can lead to enhanced performance, partly due to positive interpersonal dynamics (e.g. affect-to-affect channel of emotional contagion and liking). Research has shown that individuals inclined toward positive affectivity perform better in decision-making and interpersonal task assessments (Staw and Barsade 1993). Constructs relevant to task performance, such as judgment and decision-making, are directly affected by the induction of positive emotions, so that those in induced positive emotional states make more accurate choices, take more time to gather information, and process larger amounts of information than those in negative emotional states (Chuang 2007). We consider that positive emotions can have a profound impact on an individual's perceived performance by enhancing cognitive abilities, motivation, self-confidence, resilience, and overall outlook. They create a more boosting internal environment that encourages individuals to evaluate their performance in a positive and self-affirming manner. For instance, some studies suggest that the emotional labor performed by employees is an intrinsic aspect of their job, and their emotions are linked to their attitudes toward work, job performance, and job satisfaction, underscoring the importance of considering emotions when examining the relationship between leadership and performance (Bitner 1992; Kelley and Hoffman 1997; Lee et al. 2011; Wan et al. 2022). On other hand, the importance of positive emotions in the organizational context is widely recognized. Fredrickson (2001) proposes the "Broaden-and-Build Theory," which suggests that positive emotions not only broaden attention and cognition but also build lasting personal resources essential for work performance. Isen (2000) highlights that these emotions can enhance creativity and flexibility, crucial factors in leadership environments. Research indicates that leader enthusiasm significantly influences team dynamics and perceived performance. When leaders exhibit

enthusiasm, it fosters a positive emotional climate within the team, leading to increased motivation and engagement among team members (Bakker et al. 2008). This heightened engagement is often mediated by the positive emotions that arise from the leader's enthusiasm, creating a ripple effect throughout the organization. Moreover, positive emotions can enhance interpersonal relationships and communication within teams. According to George (2000), leaders who express positive emotions can inspire similar feelings in their followers, thereby improving collaboration and reducing conflict. This emotional contagion not only boosts morale but also enhances overall team performance, as members feel more connected and motivated to achieve common goals.

In light of the above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3 Positive emotions mediate the relationship between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance of the employees.

Method

Sample

The sample was collected using non-probability sampling methods, i.e. convenience sampling (Hill and Hill 2009) and the snowball technique, which allow for increased efficiency, identification, and the inclusion of hidden populations (Erickson 1979; Kendall et al. 2008). In terms of inclusion criteria, participants had to be native and employed in Portugal. A total of 311 individuals voluntarily participated in the study, with 65.6% ($n=204$) identifying as female ($M_{age}=36.44$; $SD_{age}=11.42$) and 34.1% ($n=106$) as male ($M_{age}=37.13$; $SD_{age}=10.08$), while 0.3% ($n=1$) chose not to respond to the question. The educational qualifications of the participants mainly consisted of secondary education ($n=128$, 41.2%) and a bachelor's degree level ($n=122$, 39.2%). Regarding employment status, 188 participants (60.5%) had permanent employment contracts, 87 (28.0%) had fixed-term contracts, 8 (2.6%) are self-employed and 28 (9.0%) refers not applicable or were missed. The sample included participants from various professional activities: higher-level professionals (e.g. lawyers, doctors, teachers, 21.5%), administrative staff (18.6%), operational staff (e.g. workers, waiters, 18%), retailers (15.1%), and salespersons (e.g. insurance, medical representatives, 9.6%), with the remaining participants choosing not to respond.

Measures

The participants responded to a self-reported questionnaire that includes measurements of variables, all applied at an individual level, regarding their leader's enthusiasm (LE), self-assessment of their performance (PP), satisfaction with the group/team they are part of (GS), and the extent to which they experience positive emotions (PE) during work.

Leader Enthusiasm

The instrument adapted by Sousa et al. (2023) was used based on the Teacher Enthusiasm Scale (TES) developed by Jungert et al. (2020). Participants rate the extent to which leaders/bosses portray work as an exciting and stimulating effort for subordinates (e.g. item 2: My science teacher was enthusiastic about his/her subject [TES, Junger et al. 2020]/My boss gets excited about tasks and procedures [adapted Portuguese version]). It is a one-dimensional scale consisting of six items operationalized through a five-point increasing Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). In this study, the obtained adjustment values allowed for the use of the one-dimensional structure ($\chi^2/df=4.178$; $p<0.01$; CFI=0.983, TLI=0.971; SRMR=0.018; RMSEA=0.101).

Perceived Performance

The scale created by Rego and Cunha (2008) based on the instrument by Staples, Hurland, and Higgins (2015) was used. This is not about performance indicators, but rather about how the participants assess their own performance. It is a scale consisting of four items (e.g. item 1: I consider myself an effective employee) operationalized in the form of an ordinal Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not applicable) to 7 (completely applicable). The version by Rego and Cunha (2008) was used in this study and has acceptable psychometric indicators. In this study, the adjustment value of this structure was acceptable ($\chi^2/df=9.359$, $p<0.00$; CFI=0.808, IFI=0.809; RMSEA=0.254; SRMR=0.144).

Positive Emotions

This variable was measured by items relating to positive emotions included in the Affective Well-Being at Work Scale (PJAWS-N, Van Katwyk et al. 2000). The Portuguese adaptation of Monteiro (2007) and Ramalho et al. (2008) was employed for group use. The Portuguese version was adapted, for our study, for individual use (Currently, in relation to my work, I feel...). This scale is composed of 28 items, 13 of which correspond to verbal expressions of positive emotions (e.g. excited). Participants must respond on a five-point Likert scale (1=never to 5=always). In this study, the bifactor structure had the following psychometric indicators: $\chi^2/df=7.061$; $p<0.01$; CFI=0.900, TLI=0.880; SRMR=0.052; RMSEA=0.139.

Group Satisfaction

The Group Satisfaction Scale (GSS), which was developed by Dimas and Lourenço (2015) based on previous work by Dimas (2007), was used. It is a one-dimensional self-report scale composed of seven items that capture aspects related to the socio-affective dimension (e.g. item 1: Existing climate in the work team) and aspects related to the task (e.g. item 3: How the leader organizes and coordinates the team's activities). The items are operationalized in the form of an increasing Likert scale comprising seven values (1=totally dissatisfied to 7=totally satisfied). In this study, the bifactor structure had the following psychometric indicators: $\chi^2/df=7.141$; $p<0.01$; CFI=0.812, TLI=0.790; SRMR=0.067; RMSEA=0.141.

Procedures

Collecting Data

The study complied with the ethical criteria on research with human beings and was approved by the Scientific Committee (entity responsible for monitoring the procedures and ethical safeguards of research) of a Public Higher Education Institution. Upon approval, potential participants were invited, by email, to respond to a self-reported online questionnaire developed through Google Forms and to forward it to other working people and natives of Portugal. Participants gave informed consent after having been told about their right to personal data protection and guarantees of anonymity and privacy, non-discrimination, and the possibility of leaving the study at any stage. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that there were no rewards for participation, monetary or otherwise. The questionnaire was active between October 2022 and November 2022, with the application of the instrument lasting an average of 12 min. The subject of the study was not disclosed and only those questionnaires completed correctly were considered (4 questionnaires were discarded).

Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analysed using the IBM SPSS program (version 29.0) and JAMOVI (version 2.3.21.0). The results were analysed using: (a) descriptive statistics, which included computing the means and standard deviations; (b) *Pearson* correlations; (c) simple regressions; and (d) mediation. To assess whether the variables were linearly independent, collinearity diagnostics were performed by calculating the collinearity statistics, namely Tolerance and VIF (variance inflation factor), using as reference values for confirmation a value above 0.1 for Tolerance and the closest to 0 for the VIF (Pestana and Gageiro 2008). Verification of the predictive power of the independent variables on the dependent variables was performed using linear regression analyses. The model fit was tested using mediation analysis, within the structural equation modelling module of JAMOVI. The confidence intervals were calculated through the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval because the sampling distribution of the indirect effect was asymmetric (Biesanz et al. 2010).

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations to the variables in the study.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha, and bivariate correlations to the variables in the study

	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Leader enthusiasm	3.46	1.122	(0.94)			
2. Group satisfaction	4.96	1.438	0.713**	(0.95)		
3. Positive emotions	3.61	0.901	0.542**	0.637**	(0.97)	
4. Perceived performance	5.71	1.035	0.456**	0.533**	0.571**	(0.77)

Note Cronbach's alpha between parentheses

As can be seen on Table 1 all variables under study have positive relations, from weak to strong.

Testing of Hypotheses

Table 2 systematizes the simple regression analyses performed, to test Hypothesis 1.

According to simple regression analysis, the enthusiastic leader contributes positively and significantly to explaining perceived performance ($B=0.421$; $p=0.001$; $r^2=21\%$).

For testing Hypotheses 2 and 3, mediation analysis was performed. It was found that group satisfaction, with a mediation percentage of 66.1%, mediates the association between enthusiastic leader on perceived performance. The estimated amount of mediation is 0.28, 95% confidence interval [0.18, 0.38], $Z=-5.45$, $p>0.01$ (Table 3). Positive emotions, with a mediation percentage of 55.8%, mediates the association between enthusiastic leader on perceived performance. The estimated amount of mediation is 0.22, 95% confidence interval [0.14, 0.30], $Z=-5.13$, $p>0.01$ (Table 4).

In other words, with a 95% confidence interval, group satisfaction and positive emotions were significant mediators of the effects of enthusiastic leader on perceived performance.

These results provide interesting insight into the process by which satisfaction and positive emotions could be interpreted as reinforcing the association between enthusiastic leader and perceived performance (Fig. 1).

Discussion and Conclusions

Understanding the different attributes and behaviors of leaders is crucial for the success and effectiveness of organizations. Leaders play a critical role in motivating and directing team members, influencing emotions, productivity, and job satisfaction. Therefore, studying leadership allows us to identify the characteristics and skills that effective leaders possess and understand how they can influence employee performance and well-being. According to Glassman and McAfee (1990) the absence of enthusiasm as one of the main deficiencies in leadership. This study demonstrated that the leader's enthusiasm positively influences perceived performance. Moreover, it revealed that the association between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance is mediated both by group satisfaction and positive emotions. Therefore, the mediating effect of group satisfaction and positive emotions in the relationship between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance suggests that leader enthusiasm can indirectly influence employees' perceived performance through its influence on group satisfaction and the positive emotions experienced by employees (e.g. Diener, Thapa, and Tay 2020; Peng, Lee, and Lu 2020; Purwanto et al. 2021). In other words, group satisfaction has a significant impact on employees' perception of performance because when team

Table 2 Systematization of simple regressions

	B	t	p	r^2	Adjusted r^2
Leader enthusiasm positively influences					
H1: Perceived performance	0.421	9.012	0.001	0.208	0.206
Group satisfaction	0.914	17.621	0.001	0.508	0.507
Positive emotions	0.436	11.349	0.001	0.294	0.292

Table 3 Mediation estimates for group satisfaction in the relationship between leader enthusiasm and perceived performance

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval		Z	p	% Mediation
			Lower	Upper			
Indirect	0.278	0.0510	0.184	0.384	5.45	<0.001	66.1
Direct	0.143	0.0634	0.023	0.268	2.25	0.024	33.9
Total	0.421	0.0533	0.317	0.530	7.89	<0.001	100.0

Table 4 Mediation estimates for positive affects in the relationship between enthusiastic leader and perceived performance

Effect	Estimate	SE	Z	p	% Mediation
Indirect	0.216	0.0422	5.12	<0.001	55.8
Direct	0.171	0.0554	3.09	0.002	44.2
Total	0.388	0.0516	7.51	<0.001	100.0

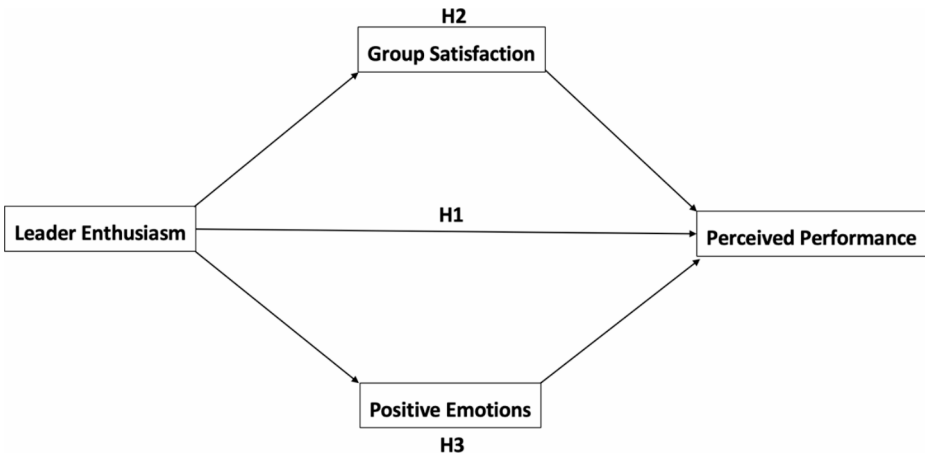


Fig. 1 Model of the study

members are satisfied with their work group and the environment they are in, it can positively influence how they perceive their own, and collective, performance (e.g. Bass et al. 2003; Judge et al. 2001). At the same time, positive emotions, by enhancing employees’ focus and concentration, lead them to be more present and engaged in tasks, which can result in perceived performance being more efficient and productive. In other words, when employees experience positive emotions, it can influence how they perceive their own, and the overall, performance (e.g. Chuang 2007; Diener et al. 2020; Staw and Barsade 1993). By investigating this mediating effect, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which leader enthusiasm impacts employees’ perception of performance.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study highlights the distinction between viewing enthusiasm as a personality trait as opposed to an attitude and approach to leading and managing groups. Furthermore, this research underscores the critical importance of delving into a broader spectrum of leadership attributes to acquire a comprehensive understanding of their effects on group satisfaction, positive emotions, and perceived performance. We argue

that mediating variables are indispensable in elucidating the intricate mechanisms through which leadership attributes shape employee outcomes, emphasizing the need for a nuanced examination of these intermediary factors.

In terms of management implications, this study emphasizes the critical importance of integrating enthusiasm as a fundamental aspect of leadership training programs. This enables leaders to grasp and nurture this attribute effectively. Leaders who foster a positive emotional climate can significantly enhance employee well-being and performance. Consequently, management should encourage leaders to cultivate emotionally positive work environments to improve overall organizational health and productivity. The study underscores the relevance of situational effects and personality traits in shaping individual responses, prompting managers to consider these factors when designing leadership strategies and interventions. Leaders are skilled at making decisions and setting goals but often fail to influence subordinates to achieve them. In other words, individuals are not solely motivated by reason—emotions are the psychological fuel for most behaviours, and a leader's enthusiasm is a prerequisite for these emotions (Glassman and McAfee 1990).

While this study makes significant contributions, it also reveals certain limitations that open avenues for future research. The initial limitation lies in the classification of enthusiasm as a personality attribute, aligning with the framework proposed by several authors in the education context (e.g., Jungert et al. 2020). However, an alternative perspective in the literature views enthusiasm as an attitude and a manner of leading and managing groups, especially within the context of transformational leadership (e.g., Buric and Moè 2020; Jin, Seo, and Shapiro 2016). This distinction prompts the need to reevaluate and redefine the construct of enthusiasm. Considering the extensive literature supporting the importance of situational effects and personality traits in shaping individuals' responses to situations and the behaviors of others (e.g., Jonason and Sherman 2020), it is imperative that future studies consider variables such as the leader's level of interaction with subordinates and the personality traits of subordinates. This should encompass their susceptibility to emotional contagion (Johnson 2008) and the intrapersonal fluctuations of affect (e.g., Junça-Silva, Mosteo, and Lopes 2023). It would also be interesting to study and understand non-verbal behaviour in the expression of enthusiasm, as well as the impact of conveyed actions and emotions on influencing subordinates and social contagion. In addition, this study predominantly concentrates on leader enthusiasm as the primary attribute of interest. Nevertheless, leaders exhibit a wide range of behaviors and characteristics that can significantly influence group dynamics. A more comprehensive exploration of various leadership attributes is warranted in future research. It would also be advantageous for analyzing the impact of leader enthusiasm to use a performance measure (e.g., quantity of tasks completed, working time, etc.) rather than a perceived performance variable.

Additionally, the applicability of this study's findings may be constrained by the specific context in which the research was conducted. The impact of leader enthusiasm on group satisfaction and positive emotions could vary significantly in diverse organizational and cultural settings. Therefore, future studies need to investigate how the context can influence a leader's attitude and enthusiasm (e.g. Li et al. 2020; Madrid et al. 2016). Additionally, it would be interesting to explore the hypothesis of the existence of an enthusiastic leader, which could lead to the discovery of a new type of leadership, as well as studying the personality variables associated with this type of leader.

The reliance on self-reported measures introduces potential common method bias, as participants' responses may be influenced by social desirability or recall biases when assessing their own emotions and perceived performance. Furthermore, the methodology and instruments used, especially in the case of the leader, are based on subjective perception. Therefore, it would be valuable to assess this component through observation, for example, by considering mimicry (e.g. Dindar et al. 2020) and understanding if behaviours occur through imitation and if they condition actions. This approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of non-verbal behaviour in expressing enthusiasm and its impact on followers.

While the mediation model is supported, it is vital to recognize that mediation does not establish causation. The associations revealed in this study are correlational, and unmeasured variables may also contribute to the observed effects. The mediating influences of group satisfaction and positive emotions are intricate and can be impacted by a multitude of factors. This study does not thoroughly investigate all the potential nuances and variables that may moderate these relationships.

In summary, studying leaders' enthusiasm is crucial for understanding how this characteristic affects employees' emotions, group satisfaction, and perceived performance. It also offers an opportunity to develop strategies and practices that improve the work environment, increase employee satisfaction, and drive organizational performance. By promoting a work environment that values and fosters positive emotions and greater group satisfaction, organizations can contribute to a more positive perception of individual and collective performance, which can lead to enhanced organizational outcomes.

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Data Availability The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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