

# A Review of Resonant Leadership Research and Future Directions

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## Abstract

In an organizational environment marked by high pressure, uncertainty, and deepening digital transformation, employees increasingly face psychological stress, emotional exhaustion, and relational alienation. How to reduce employees' psychological distress and enhance organizational harmony has therefore become an important issue in leadership research. Resonant leadership, as an emerging form of relational leadership, emphasizes emotional resonance between leaders and followers. By displaying mindfulness, hope, and compassion, resonant leaders create a positive climate and promote harmony between individuals and themselves, others, and the broader environment. Based on a systematic review of Chinese and international literature, this paper reviews research on resonant leadership from five aspects. First, it clarifies the conceptual meaning of resonant leadership and distinguishes it from related concepts such as relational leadership, emotional leadership, and interpersonal emotion management. Second, it reviews common measurement tools and dimensional structures, and discusses their applicability and limitations across cultural contexts. Third, it summarizes the antecedents of resonant leadership, with emphasis on emotional intelligence, personality traits, and contextual factors. Fourth, it reviews the positive effects of resonant leadership on employee attitudes, behaviors, performance, and team climate. It also integrates perspectives such as social exchange theory, empowerment theory, and a resource-based perspective to explain the underlying mechanisms. Finally, based on the limitations of existing research, this paper proposes future research directions regarding construct boundaries, dynamic processes, digital contexts, double-edged effects, and methodological improvement. These directions can enhance both theoretical explanation and practical guidance.

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## Keywords

Resonant Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Resonance, Relational Leadership, Digital Context

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## 1. Introduction

Today, organizations face intense competition, declining performance, and heavier workloads. Employees are under considerable pressure and anxiety (Gaan & Shin, 2023). These pressures may lead to higher turnover, lower organizational commitment, and poorer job performance (Kim & Lee, 2023; Lenka & Tiwari, 2016). In this context, leadership faces new challenges. Leaders are expected not only to attend to followers' psychological states and emotional needs, but also to provide hope and guide them to take positive action in difficult situations (Gaan & Shin, 2023). Resonant leadership has emerged as a relational leadership approach that may help address these challenges (Ramaswamy et al., 2023). Resonant leaders provide emotional support by showing empathy, compassion, and mindfulness. They help followers cope with pressure and overcome burnout (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Gaan & Shin, 2023). They also identify opportunities in challenging situations, create hope in the face of fear and despair, and inspire teams and organizations to move beyond adversity (Gaan et al., 2024). As a result, resonant leadership and its mechanisms have attracted growing scholarly attention.

Resonant leadership develops and extends existing leadership theories. Most traditional leadership theories emphasize the leader's one-way influence on followers. For example, charismatic leadership highlights how leaders attract followers through personal charisma (Klein & Delegach, 2023). Relational approaches such as servant leadership also mainly describe how leaders influence followers by serving them (Ni et al., 2022). By contrast, resonant leadership emphasizes emotional resonance between leaders and followers. It is an interactive, dynamic, and two-way process of emotional transmission (Gaan & Shin, 2024; Goleman et al., 2002). In this process, leaders transmit positive emotions and values to followers. At the same time, they receive followers' emotions and perceptions, which allows both sides to develop emotional synchronization and resonance. In addition, resonant leadership has a broader goal. Its ultimate purpose is to achieve harmony within the team and the organization (Goleman et al., 2002; Cummings et al., 2010). Li (2013) further summarized this goal as achieving harmony between leaders and themselves, others, and the surrounding environment.

In practice, resonant leadership can help reduce employee stress and promote harmonious organizational development (Ramaswamy et al., 2023). Its effectiveness was first empirically examined during large-scale hospital restructuring in North America in the early twenty-first century. At that time, many nurses experienced increased physical and emotional strain, lower job satisfaction, and fewer

positive behaviors (Cummings, 2004; Cummings et al., 2005). This situation is similar to the current pressures of excessive competition in Chinese organizations, where employees often experience lower psychological safety and work engagement, as well as higher burnout and anxiety. Studies suggest that resonant leadership provides emotional support through empathy. It helps employees feel cared for and understood and enhances their psychological safety in dealing with work and life challenges (Yang & Zhou, 2021; Gaan & Shin, 2024). It can also improve team morale and help employees move out of negative emotional states. Therefore, the development of resonant leadership is important for both theory and practice.

Although resonant leadership has shown explanatory power in reducing employee psychological pressure, promoting positive work states, and improving organizational relationships, the literature is still at an early stage (Bawafaa et al., 2015; Squires et al., 2010). Empirical research remains limited (Li, 2013). Existing studies are mainly conducted in Western contexts (Gaan et al., 2024; Lenka & Tiwari, 2016). They usually adopt a follower-centered perspective and examine the effects of resonant leadership on followers' attitudes (Cummings et al., 2010; Lenka & Tiwari, 2016; Parr et al., 2021; Ramaswamy et al., 2023), behaviors (Gaan et al., 2024; Laschinger et al., 2014; Tabche et al., 2024), and performance (Gaan & Shin, 2024; Gaan & Shin, 2023). However, several issues remain unresolved. First, scholars differ in their understanding of the concept, which has led to different dimensions and measurement tools. Second, the outcomes of resonant leadership have not been systematically classified by levels of analysis, such as individual and team levels, or by cultural context (Sinha, 2022). Third, although some studies have explored mechanisms, the theoretical perspectives remain scattered and lack integration. Fourth, research on resonant leadership in the Chinese context is very limited. Only a few studies have discussed its potential effectiveness from a theoretical perspective, suggesting that the topic has not received enough attention from scholars in China.

Based on these gaps, it is necessary to conduct a systematic review of resonant leadership research. Following the logic of concept, measurement, antecedents, outcomes, mechanisms, and future directions, this paper reviews and evaluates relevant Chinese and international literature. It first clarifies the conceptual meaning of resonant leadership and distinguishes it from related leadership constructs. It then compares existing measurement tools and their dimensional structures. Next, it summarizes the antecedents, outcomes, and theoretical mechanisms of resonant leadership. Finally, it identifies the limitations of existing research and proposes future directions. This review aims to provide a clearer knowledge map for future research and offer theoretical guidance for the application of resonant leadership in organizational practice.

## 2. Literature Search and Screening

To ensure the systematic nature of the literature sources and the traceability of the

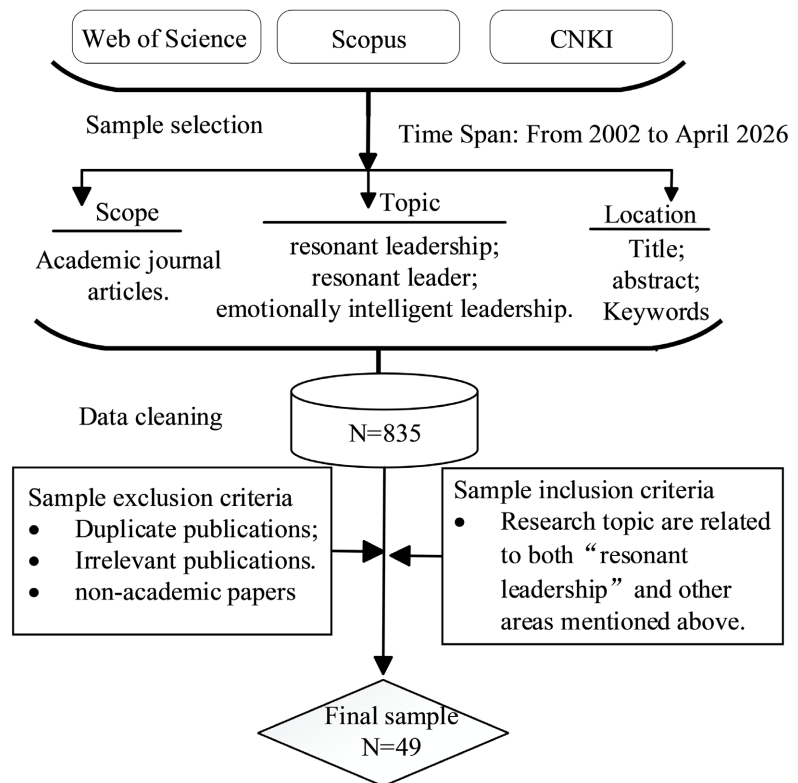
search process, this study conducted a systematic search of Chinese- and English-language studies on resonant leadership published between 2002 and April 2026. The starting point of the search period was determined based on the year in which Goleman and colleagues proposed the idea of resonant leadership, and the endpoint was April 2026. CNKI, Web of Science Core Collection, and Scopus were selected as the main databases. The search was limited to publications in Chinese and English, and the document type was limited to academic journal articles.

In terms of search strategy, CNKI was searched mainly in the fields of subject, title, keywords, and abstract. Web of Science Core Collection was searched using the Topic field, while Scopus was searched using the Title-Abstract-Keywords field. The English search terms included “resonant leadership”, “resonant leader”, and “emotionally intelligent leadership”. In CNKI, the corresponding Chinese expressions of these terms were used. To avoid omitting important studies, the reference lists of core publications were also traced and supplemented.

The literature screening process followed the PRISMA framework, namely the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Moher et al., 2009). First, the initial database search yielded 835 records, and 446 records remained after duplicates were removed. Next, titles, abstracts, and keywords were screened, and studies unrelated to resonant leadership were excluded, leaving 65 records. After further excluding conference papers, news reports, non-academic commentaries, records with incomplete information, and studies with limited relevance to the research topic, 57 records remained. Finally, through full-text reading, studies that only addressed emotional intelligence, relational leadership, or emotion management but did not directly examine resonant leadership were excluded. As a result, 49 core studies were included in the final sample.

To enhance the rigor and reliability of the screening process, literature screening was conducted collaboratively by members of the research team. Team members first screened titles, abstracts, and keywords according to unified inclusion and exclusion criteria, and then conducted full-text reading and cross-checking for the studies entering the second round of screening. For studies involving uncertain judgments or disagreements, the research team reached a consensus through discussion and consultation, thereby ensuring that the final included studies were highly relevant to the topic of resonant leadership.

The 49 included studies constitute the core sample for this review and mainly support the synthesis of the conceptual connotation, measurement approaches, antecedents, outcomes, mechanisms, and future research directions of resonant leadership. It should be noted that, in the sections on conceptual comparison, theoretical mechanisms, and future research directions, this study also draws on relevant literature on emotional leadership, leader interpersonal emotion management, technostress, AI leadership, and research methods to enhance the completeness of the theoretical analysis. The literature screening process is shown in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Literature search and screening process.

### 3. Conceptual Meaning of Resonant Leadership

#### 3.1. Definition and Features of Resonant Leadership

Resonant leadership originates from Goleman et al.'s (2002) work on emotionally intelligent leadership. It was proposed to explain and correct the problem of dissonant leadership in organizations. Goleman et al. (2002) argued that leaders are key nodes in a team emotional system. Their emotional expression, interaction style, and relationship management directly shape members' emotional experiences and team climate. When leaders experience pressure, depletion, or excessive self-sacrifice, they may become emotionally uncontrolled, controlling, indifferent, detached, or overly defensive. These behaviors can create psychological disconnection between leaders and employees and weaken trust, commitment, and cooperation. By contrast, resonant leadership emphasizes that leaders use emotional intelligence to identify their own emotions, understand others' feelings, regulate their interaction styles, and transmit positive emotions. Through these processes, leaders build emotional synchronization and relational connection with employees. Its core is not simply that leaders transmit optimism or enthusiasm to followers. Rather, leaders accurately perceive employees' situations, respond to their emotional needs, and guide individual emotions toward shared goals. Resonant leadership therefore combines emotion regulation, relationship building, and team integration. It is a leadership approach that promotes organizational harmony through emotional resonance.

To ensure consistency in the subsequent review and conceptual comparison, this study uses “emotional resonance” and “harmony” as two operational criteria for identifying and distinguishing resonant leadership. First, emotional resonance refers to a two-way emotional process in which leaders and followers perceive, respond to, and adjust to each other’s emotional states during interaction, gradually developing emotional attunement, mutual understanding, and joint adjustment. It differs from simple emotional contagion, emotion regulation, or leader empathy, because its focus is not merely on leaders’ recognition of or influence on followers’ emotions, but on reciprocal responses and interactive adjustment between leaders and followers around emotions and relationships. Second, harmony refers to the higher-level goal pursued by resonant leadership. It is reflected in the alignment between individuals and their own psychological states, the coordination of interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers, and the fit between members and the team, organization, and broader environment. Based on these two criteria, this study regards research that simultaneously emphasizes the two-way process of emotional resonance and the goal of relational or organizational harmony as core resonant leadership research. By contrast, studies that focus only on leaders’ emotional abilities, one-way emotional influence, general relational support, or empathy-based care are not treated as equivalent to resonant leadership research.

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) further clarified the foundations of resonant leadership. They proposed that mindfulness, hope, and compassion are the three core elements that help leaders renew themselves and form resonant relationships. Mindfulness refers to leaders’ sustained awareness of their own states, others’ emotions, and situational changes. It helps leaders maintain clear judgment under pressure. Hope refers to leaders’ positive construction of future goals and the meaning attached to them. It helps members develop a sense of direction and confidence in uncertain situations. Compassion refers to leaders’ understanding of, care for, and support of employees’ difficulties. It is the basis for trust and emotional connection. Later studies defined resonant leadership from different perspectives. McKee and Massimilian (2006) emphasized leaders’ ability to stay in tune with others and interact effectively. Squires et al. (2010) emphasized high emotional intelligence, self-management, emotional synchronization with others, and trust building. Bawafaa et al. (2015) defined resonant leadership as a positive relational leadership style that inspires confidence, trust, and empowerment among team members. Domestic research further interprets resonant leadership from the perspective of harmony. It argues that resonant leadership not only focuses on emotional connection between leaders and followers, but also aims to coordinate leaders with themselves, others, and the environment (Li, 2013). Although existing definitions differ in emphasis, they all regard emotional intelligence, emotional synchronization, positive relationships, and organizational harmony as key elements of resonant leadership.

In summary, scholars mainly understand resonant leadership from three per-

spectives. The first perspective emphasizes resonance itself. Leaders use emotional expression, emotional perception, and emotional response to form emotional synchronization with followers and the organizational context. This perspective highlights the interactive and dynamic nature of resonant leadership. However, concepts such as synchronization and resonance are abstract and difficult to transform into measurable behavioral indicators. The second perspective emphasizes leaders' capabilities. It views resonant leadership as being based on emotional intelligence and enacted through psychological and behavioral features such as mindfulness, hope, and compassion. This perspective is clear and useful for scale development and empirical testing. However, it may overlap with related constructs such as leader mindfulness, leader empathy, and emotionally intelligent leadership. The third perspective emphasizes the goal of harmony. It views the ultimate aim of resonant leadership as achieving harmony among leaders, followers, and the environment through positive emotional interaction. This perspective extends the value orientation of resonant leadership and helps explain its fit with the Chinese cultural emphasis on harmony. Still, its behavioral manifestations and measurement dimensions need further clarification.

Based on the above views, resonant leadership can be defined as a leadership approach that is grounded in leaders' emotional intelligence and uses emotional resonance to achieve harmony between individuals and themselves, others, and the environment.

### **3.2. Distinguishing Resonant Leadership from Related Concepts**

Resonant leadership is based on emotional intelligence and emphasizes emotional resonance between leaders and followers. It therefore overlaps with relational leadership, emotional leadership, and leader interpersonal emotion management. These concepts all involve leaders' attention to relationships or emotions, but they differ in their main focus. This section compares resonant leadership with these three related concepts.

Resonant leadership and relational leadership. Relational leadership emphasizes interpersonal relationships within teams. It is characterized by caring for people, developing people, and being people-centered. It aims to build a harmonious team and organizational climate (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). As a special form of relational leadership, resonant leadership also values harmony and focuses on employee care, harmonious interpersonal relations, and team climate. However, its pathway is more specific. Resonant leadership aims to help individuals, teams, and organizations reach a harmonious state. It achieves this goal through emotional resonance between leaders and employees. Leaders actively stay emotionally in tune with employees, promote psychological and emotional synchronization, develop mutual understanding, and form shared positive emotions. These processes help build harmonious interpersonal relationships (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). In contrast, relational leadership generally emphasizes caring for followers and creating a harmonious climate, but it does not necessarily specify

the means through which harmony is achieved. In this sense, relational leadership emphasizes the goal of harmony, whereas resonant leadership explains how harmony is achieved through emotional resonance.

Resonant leadership and emotional leadership. Emotional leadership refers to leaders' use of emotional capabilities to guide and manage members' positive and negative emotions through emotional expression, emotional contagion, and emotion regulation. It also seeks to create an emotional climate that fits task requirements and encourages members to work toward shared goals (Peng et al., 2014). Previous studies show that emotions are important in the leadership process. Leaders' emotional expressions affect not only how members evaluate them, but also members' work attitudes, cooperation, and performance (George, 2000; Humphrey, 2002; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002). The core of emotional leadership is how leaders use emotional abilities to influence followers' emotions and improve leadership effectiveness. Both emotional leadership and resonant leadership are based on emotional intelligence and emphasize the influence of leaders' emotional abilities on organizational members. However, their theoretical emphasis differs. Emotional leadership focuses more on leaders' identification, contagion, regulation, and use of followers' emotions. It mainly describes leaders' one-way influence on followers' emotional states. Resonant leadership emphasizes two-way emotional resonance and connection between leaders and followers. Leaders and followers both receive and respond to each other's emotions. They adjust their attitudes and behaviors based on this resonance, thereby promoting harmony in leaders' and followers' psychological states, interpersonal relations, and team functioning. In brief, emotional leadership focuses on leaders' one-way management of followers' emotions to achieve performance, while resonant leadership emphasizes two-way emotional exchange to achieve broader harmony.

Resonant leadership and leader interpersonal emotion management. Leader interpersonal emotion management refers to the process through which leaders influence followers' emotional states through words, behaviors, and interaction strategies. Its core lies in how leaders identify, regulate, and guide employees' emotional experiences. Research suggests that leaders are important sources of employee emotions. Their emotion management behaviors affect employees' stress responses, trust, relationship quality, and work performance (Kaplan et al., 2014; Thiel et al., 2015). In terms of strategies, interpersonal emotion management includes strategies that improve others' emotions, such as comforting, encouraging, explaining, supporting, and helping employees reappraise problems. It also includes strategies that worsen others' emotions, such as criticism, complaints, cold treatment, or pressure to suppress emotions (Niven et al., 2009, 2012). Studies further distinguish constructive, neutral, and destructive strategies of leader interpersonal emotion management. Constructive strategies focus on solving emotional problems and restoring positive emotions. Destructive strategies tend to suppress or ignore followers' emotions. Neutral strategies provide little substantive handling of emotional problems (Zou et al., 2022). Resonant leadership

and leader interpersonal emotion management both affect followers through emotion-related processes, but they differ in pathway, object, and goal. First, resonant leadership works through emotional resonance between leaders and followers. Resonance means emotional attunement and mutual understanding, and its outcomes may affect both leaders and followers. By contrast, interpersonal emotion management strategies do not necessarily involve two-way emotional communication. Even when leaders show understanding, the purpose may simply be to make followers feel supported and willing to follow. Leaders do not necessarily adjust their own emotions or behaviors based on followers' emotional feedback. Second, leader interpersonal emotion management focuses on managing followers' emotions and has a narrower goal. Resonant leadership not only focuses on individual emotions but also emphasizes the creation of overall harmony within the team. Its goal is broader and more long-term. Overall, resonant leadership emphasizes two-way empathy and overall harmony, while emotional leadership and interpersonal emotion management focus more on leaders' one-way influence on followers' emotions and on more specific goals (see **Table 1**).

As shown in **Table 1**, although resonant leadership and the related concepts all involve leaders' attention to emotions and relationships, resonant leadership is

**Table 1.** Comparison between resonant leadership and related concepts.

Concept	Theoretical core	Pathway	Object	Main distinction	Ultimate purpose
Resonant leadership	Based on emotional intelligence; achieves emotional resonance between leaders and followers through mindfulness, hope, compassion, and emotional response.	Emotional resonance; two-way emotional transmission.	Leaders and followers.	Emphasizes two-way emotional resonance and relational attunement, rather than one-way leader influence.	To achieve harmony between individuals and themselves, others, and the environment.
Relational leadership	Emphasizes relationship building, interaction practices, and a people-centered approach in leadership.	Caring for followers and creating a harmonious climate, but with a broad pathway.	Followers.	Focuses more on the relational process itself, but does not necessarily highlight emotional resonance or emotional synchronization.	To build harmonious teams and organizational climates.
Emotional leadership	Emphasizes leaders' use of emotional capabilities to influence members' emotions.	Emotional contagion and strategic emotional influence; mainly one-way.	Followers.	Focuses more on leaders' one-way influence on followers' emotions and less on joint adjustment between leaders and followers.	To manage employees' emotions and achieve organizational goals.
Leader interpersonal emotion management	Emphasizes leaders' use of specific strategies to influence followers' emotional experiences.	Constructive, neutral, or destructive emotion management strategies; mainly one-way.	Followers.	Focuses on specific emotion management strategies. It is not necessarily aimed at harmony or resonance, and it is not always positive.	To manage employees' emotions.

distinct in its two-way influence, concrete pathway, and broader goal. It is therefore necessary to study resonant leadership in greater depth so as to better explain leadership processes and employee responses.

#### 4. Dimensions and Measurement of Resonant Leadership

Existing studies usually treat resonant leadership as a multidimensional construct and measure it mainly through questionnaires. Commonly used scales include three-dimensional and four-dimensional structures, as summarized in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Measurement scales of resonant leadership.

Source	Dimensions	Number of items	Limitations	Sample item
Lenka & Gupta (2020)	Vision, compassion, and positive mood	19	The scale has many items. Its cultural applicability and cross-contextual stability need further examination.	“My leader provides a vision for our future work”.
Cummings et al. (2010)	Self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management	10	It highly overlaps with emotional intelligence scales and may not fully capture the unique emotional resonance process of resonant leadership.	“My leader effectively resolves conflicts when they arise”.
Estabrooks et al. (2009)	Vision, affiliative, coaching, and democratic	10	Some dimensions overlap with transformational, democratic, and coaching leadership.	“My leader allows me to make important decisions in my work”.

Lenka and Gupta (2020) developed a three-dimensional scale that includes vision, compassion, and positive mood. The scale contains 19 items. Among the four-dimensional scales, there are two typical versions. The first is the 10-item scale developed by Cummings et al. (2010) based on the emotional intelligence model proposed by Goleman et al. (2002). This scale originated from the leader emotional intelligence subscale in the Alberta Nurse Survey report (Giovannetti et al., 2002). It includes four dimensions: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management. It is used to assess leaders’ overall level of emotional intelligence. This scale has been widely used in later studies (e.g., Bawafaa et al., 2015; Gaan & Shin, 2024; Hassan & Qureshi, 2019; Ramaswamy et al., 2023; Squires et al., 2010). However, because it was directly adapted from an emotional intelligence scale, its four dimensions are fully consistent with the classic emotional intelligence model (Goleman, 1995; Goleman et al., 2017). It may therefore not fully capture the uniqueness of resonant leadership. The second four-dimensional scale was developed by Estabrooks et al. (2009) based on Cummings’ (2004) four elements of resonant leadership: vision, affiliative, coaching, and democratic. This scale also contains 10 items and has shown good reliability and validity (Parr et al., 2021). The vision dimension reflects the change-oriented element of resonant leadership and partly overlaps with transformational leadership (Cope & Murray, 2017).

These measurement tools have all been empirically tested and show acceptable reliability and validity. They share one feature: they are follower-rated scales. Employees evaluate their supervisors’ behaviors, and these evaluations are used to

measure the level of resonant leadership. However, they differ in important ways. The four-dimensional scales developed by Cummings et al. (2010) and Estabrooks et al. (2009) were both adapted from Goleman et al.'s (2002) emotional intelligence model. Their item contents are similar, but their dimensional structures differ. In contrast, the three-dimensional scale developed by Lenka and Gupta (2020) differs substantially from the previous two scales. Among the existing tools, the Cummings et al. (2010) scale is the most widely used.

It should be noted that these scales were all developed in Western cultural contexts. They rarely consider whether resonant leadership may have different structures in other cultures. In the Indian context, Lenka and Tiwari (2016), drawing on Boyatzis and McKee (2005), argued that resonant leadership may include an additional unique dimension: altruism. Similarly, China is deeply influenced by Confucian culture. Leaders and employees in Chinese organizations may differ from those in Western contexts in thinking styles, values, and behavioral norms. Resonant leadership in the Chinese context may therefore have unique structural dimensions (Li, 2013). For example, Xi et al.'s (2003) harmony management theory and its analysis of leadership suggest that resonant leadership may include local mindsets and behaviors, such as being flexible outwardly while firm inwardly, hiding sharpness, and showing humility, which help leaders promote organizational harmony (Li et al., 2014).

Overall, questionnaires remain the main method for measuring resonant leadership. Existing scales provide useful tools for empirical research, but they still need improvement in construct representation and research method. First, current scales mainly rely on employee evaluations. This approach captures employees' subjective perceptions, but it cannot fully capture leaders' own emotion regulation process or the dynamic changes in leader-follower interaction. Second, resonant leadership theoretically emphasizes interactive and two-way emotional transmission. Yet most empirical studies still follow a one-way logic of leaders influencing employees. Existing scale items also rarely measure emotional synchronization, two-way responses, and joint adjustment. As a result, the core process of resonant leadership has not been fully captured.

Future research should therefore further improve measurement tools for resonant leadership. On the one hand, researchers can develop items that better capture interaction and dynamics. These items should show how leaders identify employee emotions, respond to employee needs, and adjust their own behavior based on interaction feedback. On the other hand, experiments, behavioral observation, and multisource data can be used to complement traditional questionnaires. For example, Boyatzis et al. (2012) used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine neural activation associated with memories of resonant and dissonant leaders. Physiological and neural measurement methods used in empathy research may also inform resonant leadership studies (Clark et al., 2019). Future research can also use organizational data such as work emails, internal communication platforms, audio and video texts, and machine learning methods to identify

emotional expressions and relational cues in leader-follower interaction. This may reduce the subjective bias of single-source questionnaires (Tonidandel et al., 2018). In addition, Cummings et al. (2005) compared the effects of resonant and non-resonant leadership on nurses' emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, which provides a basis for future scenario-based simulations and field experiments.

## 5. Antecedents of Resonant Leadership

Research on the antecedents of resonant leadership remains very limited. Only one empirical study has directly examined how leader characteristics affect resonant leadership (Sinha, 2022). This study was conducted among managers in Indian organizations and collected survey data from 1027 managers. Among them, 87.2% were male and 12.8% were female. In terms of work experience, 54.8% had less than 10 years of experience, 30.6% had 10 to 20 years, and 14.6% had more than 20 years. Private-sector managers accounted for 89.1% of the sample, while public-sector managers accounted for 10.9%. Sinha (2022) used the scale of Cummings et al. (2010) to measure resonant leadership on a five-point Likert scale. The results showed that managers' overall level of resonant leadership was relatively high, with an average score of about 3.9 out of 5. Differences in gender, tenure, and type of organization were not significant. More specifically, resonant leadership scores showed little difference across gender or experience groups. Differences between private and public organizations were present but did not reach significance. However, item-level comparisons showed significant differences between private and public organizations on seven items related to openness, integrity, team achievement, self-control, empathy, developing others, and conflict management. The largest difference appeared in developing others. Leaders in public organizations scored significantly higher than leaders in private organizations on this item.

Although few other empirical studies directly test antecedents, many scholars suggest that leaders' emotional intelligence is an important antecedent of resonant leadership (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Cummings et al., 2010; Ramaswamy et al., 2023). Leaders with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to display resonant leadership behaviors. They can more easily achieve mutual understanding with employees through empathy and guide them toward shared goals (Goleman et al., 2002). Therefore, leaders' emotional intelligence and empathy can be regarded as important individual factors that shape resonant leadership. Some scholars also suggest that personality traits, such as the Big Five and core self-evaluations, as well as contextual factors, may jointly influence resonant leadership behaviors (Antonakis et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2021). These factors require further empirical examination.

## 6. Outcomes and Mechanisms of Resonant Leadership

### 6.1. Outcomes: Individual, Team, and Organizational Levels

#### 6.1.1. Individual-Level Outcomes

A large body of research has examined the effects of resonant leadership on em-

employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance. Overall, resonant leadership can promote positive behaviors (Tabche et al., 2024) and positive work attitudes (Ramaswamy et al., 2023). It can also reduce negative behaviors (Faeq et al., 2022) and negative attitudes (Cummings et al., 2005; Gaan & Shin, 2023; Squires et al., 2010). In terms of employee attitudes and psychological states, resonant leaders are understanding and empathetic. They attend to employees' psychological needs and provide positive emotional value, helping employees experience better work conditions and psychological states. Many empirical studies support these positive effects. Resonant leadership has a significant positive effect on job satisfaction (Cummings et al., 2005). It also positively predicts structural empowerment (Bawafaa et al., 2015; Laschinger et al., 2014), improves work engagement (Wagner et al., 2013), and enhances organizational commitment (Ali & Kashif, 2020; Hassan & Qureshi, 2019; Wagner et al., 2013). It also strengthens psychological capital (Gaan & Shin, 2024), organizational identification, and self-efficacy (Gaan & Shin, 2023). At the same time, resonant leadership significantly reduces turnover intention (Gaan & Shin, 2023), emotional exhaustion (Cummings et al., 2005), and psychological distress (Ramaswamy et al., 2023). Ramaswamy et al. (2023) further found that resonant leadership moderates the relationship between psychological distress and organizational commitment. When employees experience psychological distress, resonant leadership can weaken its negative effect on organizational commitment. In terms of behavior, resonant leadership can reduce negative workplace behaviors, such as coworker incivility (Laschinger et al., 2014) and workplace bullying (Faeq et al., 2022). In terms of performance, resonant leadership enhances employee engagement and role identification through emotional support and positive relationship building. It helps employees mobilize psychological resources and invest them in task performance, which improves job performance and productivity (Gaan & Shin, 2024; Lenka & Tiwari, 2016).

### 6.1.2. Team- and Organizational-Level Outcomes

Compared with individual-level outcomes, research on the team- and organizational-level outcomes of resonant leadership remains limited. Existing findings mainly focus on positive team effects. For example, resonant leadership has been shown to have significant positive effects on collective beliefs and team emotional intelligence (Ferreira, 2020). It also promotes cooperation within teams (Cummings et al., 2005). However, its effect on team creativity was not significant in one study (Lenka & Gupta, 2020). As a relational leadership style, resonant leadership can also improve interpersonal relationships and organizational climate. Studies show that resonant leadership enhances leader-member exchange quality (Squires et al., 2010; Parr et al., 2021) and contributes to a better work environment (Bawafaa et al., 2015). In general, empirical research on resonant leadership remains focused on the individual level. Its team- and organization-level effects have received insufficient attention. Even when team-level mechanisms are examined, most studies rely on social exchange perspectives, such as LMX. Future re-

search should therefore use multilevel designs to further examine the effects and mechanisms of resonant leadership at team and higher levels.

## 6.2. Mechanisms

### 6.2.1. Mediating Mechanisms

Existing studies on how resonant leadership affects followers generally follow the logic of perceived resonance leading to emotions or attitudes, which then lead to behavior (Hassan & Qureshi, 2019; Squires et al., 2010). In recent years, some studies have also adopted a resource perspective and proposed a path from perceived resonance to resources and then to attitudes or behaviors. This explains how resonant leadership supplements employees' psychological resources and shapes their work responses. The main theoretical perspectives include social exchange theory (Hassan & Qureshi, 2019; Ramaswamy et al., 2023), empowerment theory (Bawafaa et al., 2015; Laschinger et al., 2014), and, in some studies, social learning and social identity perspectives (Gaan & Shin, 2024; Gaan & Shin, 2023). Based on the literature, the mechanisms of resonant leadership can be summarized into three main paths.

The first path is the social exchange path. According to social exchange theory, individuals follow the norm of reciprocity in social interactions. When individuals receive benefits from others, they tend to repay them with positive behaviors (Zhao et al., 2019). From this perspective, existing studies have found that LMX, perceived organizational support, and job satisfaction play important mediating roles. Squires et al. (2010) proposed that LMX mediates the relationship between resonant leadership and work environment and safety climate. High-quality LMX includes cooperation, mutual help, and altruism. It connects resonant leadership with individual, team, and organizational outcomes. Parr et al. (2021) also found, based on social exchange theory, that resonant leadership positively affects work engagement, quality of care, patient safety, and patient satisfaction by improving perceived organizational support and LMX quality. Hassan and Qureshi (2019) integrated social exchange theory and affective events theory and tested the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between resonant leadership and organizational commitment. Their results showed that resonant leadership promotes organizational commitment by improving job satisfaction. However, this study mainly explained how resonant leadership affects job satisfaction. It did not fully explain why employees then repay the organization with higher commitment. Thus, the full social exchange mechanism remains underdeveloped.

The second path is the empowerment path. Laschinger et al. (2014) used organizational empowerment theory to examine the mediating role of overall empowerment between resonant leadership and coworker incivility, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction. Bawafaa et al. (2015), based on structural empowerment theory, proposed that structural empowerment mediates the relationship between resonant leadership and job satisfaction. Resonant leaders show empathy and allow employees to participate in creating a positive work environment. This helps

employees perceive higher structural empowerment and improves job satisfaction. Different from quantitative studies, Li (2013) used qualitative methods and drew on LMX theory to propose that leaders' own psychological states, such as authenticity, work meaning, and self-efficacy, may mediate the relationship between resonant leadership and employee performance and well-being. This view suggests that resonant leadership may operate not only by changing followers' psychological states, but also by changing leaders' own psychological states.

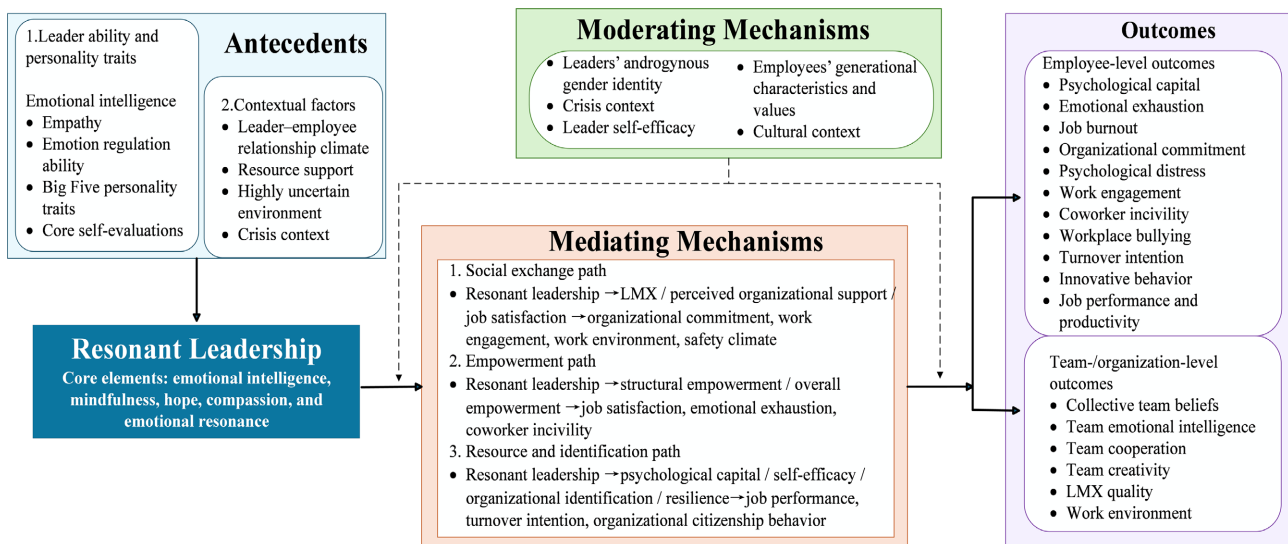
The third path is the resource and identity path. From a resource perspective, resonant leadership not only provides emotional support, but also supplements employees' psychological and relational resources and transforms these resources into positive work outcomes. Gaan and Shin (2024) integrated social exchange and social learning theories and found that psychological capital mediates the relationship between resonant leadership and job performance. Specifically, resonant leadership strengthens employees' hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy through hope, compassion, mindfulness, and positive emotional transmission. Employees also observe and imitate leaders' emotion regulation, and then invest more psychological resources in task performance. Gaan and Shin (2023) further found that self-efficacy and organizational identification mediate the effects of resonant leadership on turnover intention and job performance. This suggests that resonant leadership enhances employees' positive judgments of their own abilities and strengthens their identity connection with the organization. As a result, it reduces turnover intention and improves performance. Tabche et al. (2024) also found that follower resilience mediates the relationship between resonant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. These findings show that resonant leadership mainly works through psychological capital, self-efficacy, organizational identification, and resilience from a resource perspective. However, existing resource-based research still focuses mainly on the individual level. Lenka and Gupta (2020) tested team task reflexivity as a mediator between resonant leadership and team creativity, but the effect was not supported. This result suggests that whether resonant leadership can be converted into team creativity may depend on whether teams have sufficient opportunities and conditions for reflection and interaction. Overall, the resource perspective provides an important explanation for the mechanisms of resonant leadership, but future research should further examine team resources and cross-level resource transformation.

### 6.2.2. Moderating Mechanisms

Compared with mediating mechanisms, moderating mechanisms have received less attention. One representative study is Gaan and Shin (2024), who examined the moderating role of leaders' androgynous gender identity in the relationship between resonant leadership and employee outcomes based on gender role theory. They argued that, in urgent situations, resonant leaders may prefer to display masculine traits to make quick decisions. In other situations, employees may expect leaders to display feminine traits and provide care (Gaan & Shin, 2024). Therefore, leaders who can flexibly shift between masculine and feminine leadership traits

according to the situation, rather than adhering to a single style, are more likely to enhance employees' positive evaluations of resonant leadership. In addition, Gaan and Shin (2024) suggested that future studies should examine crisis situations and leader self-efficacy as possible boundary conditions. Gaan and Shin (2023) also noted that the values, psychological needs, and work expectations of Generation Z employees may influence their responses to resonant leadership. More importantly, current studies are mainly based on Western contexts (Li, 2013). Cultural contexts may also affect how employees interpret and respond to resonant leadership. Future research can further examine the boundary conditions of resonant leadership through cross-cultural comparisons or studies in local organizational contexts.

Based on the above review, this paper develops an integrative framework of the mechanisms and future directions of resonant leadership (see Figure 2). Solid lines indicate relationships supported by existing research, while dashed lines indicate future research directions or relationships that require further testing.



**Figure 2.** Integrative framework of resonant leadership mechanisms and future research directions.

## 7. Current Limitations and Future Directions

The above review shows that resonant leadership research has developed a basic theoretical framework centered on emotional intelligence, emotional resonance, and relational harmony. Existing evidence shows that resonant leadership is related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, psychological capital, turnover intention, and job performance (Cummings et al., 2005; Bawafaa et al., 2015; Ramaswamy et al., 2023; Gaan & Shin, 2023). However, compared with more established leadership theories such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, and inclusive leadership, resonant leadership remains at an early stage of conceptual development and empirical accumulation. Existing research tends to emphasize its positive effects. Less attention has been paid to its

construct boundaries, dynamic processes, applicability in digital work contexts, potential negative effects, and causal identification. Based on the preceding review of the concept, measurement, outcomes, and mechanisms, future research can be advanced in the following directions.

### **7.1. Clarifying Construct Boundaries and Incremental Explanatory Power**

As noted above, resonant leadership, relational leadership, emotional leadership, and leader interpersonal emotion management all involve leaders' attention to emotions and relationships. However, these concepts differ in their pathways, objects, and final purposes. The core of resonant leadership is not simply that leaders care for followers or regulate followers' emotions. Rather, it lies in the two-way process of emotional perception, emotional response, and relational adjustment between leaders and followers (Goleman et al., 2002; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). However, existing studies still show some conceptual overlap. Resonant leadership is easily confused with leader emotional intelligence, empathetic leadership, relational leadership, and servant leadership.

This issue is especially clear in measurement. Among existing scales, Cummings et al. (2010) developed a tool mainly based on the emotional intelligence model. Estabrooks et al. (2009) emphasized vision, affiliative, coaching, and democratic behaviors. Lenka and Gupta (2020) included vision, compassion, and positive mood. Although these scales have acceptable reliability and validity, some items overlap with emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and empathetic leadership. As a result, the emotional resonance feature of resonant leadership has not been fully captured. Recent research on empathetic leadership also shows clear overlap among leader empathy, emotional understanding, and relationship support. It therefore calls for stricter distinctions among related constructs (Muss et al., 2026).

Future research should further test the discriminant validity and incremental validity of resonant leadership. Specifically, researchers can include resonant leadership, emotionally intelligent leadership, empathetic leadership, servant leadership, inclusive leadership, and transformational leadership in the same model. They can then compare their explanatory power for outcomes such as psychological safety, thriving at work, knowledge sharing, voice behavior, and innovative behavior. Only when resonant leadership continues to show significant explanatory effects after controlling for related leadership constructs can its independent theoretical value be more convincingly established.

### **7.2. Shifting from a Static Leadership Style to a Dynamic Emotional Process**

Most existing studies treat resonant leadership as a relatively stable leadership style. They usually measure employees' overall perceptions of leaders through one-time surveys or multi-wave questionnaires. However, based on the theoretical

meaning of resonant leadership, resonance is not a static trait. It is a dynamic process that is generated, changed, and repaired in specific interactions. Goleman et al. (2002) emphasized that leaders are key nodes in the emotional system of teams. Their emotional expression and interaction style influence members' emotional states. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) also noted that mindfulness, hope, and compassion help leaders renew themselves and form resonant relationships with others. These views suggest that resonant leadership is not merely a stable behavioral pattern. Rather, it is a process through which leaders continuously regulate their own and others' emotions in response to pressure, tasks, and relationships.

Future research should use more dynamic designs to examine fluctuations and short-term effects of resonant leadership in daily work. On the one hand, affective events theory can be used to examine how leaders' daily emotional expression, vision communication, compassionate support, and mindful responses influence employees' daily positive emotions, psychological safety, and proactive behavior (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). On the other hand, experience sampling methods, diary studies, and longitudinal designs can be used to examine how emotional resonance between leaders and followers emerges. For example, researchers can examine whether leaders' positive emotional expressions on a given day influence employees' work engagement through employees' positive emotions, and whether employees' positive responses further strengthen leaders' resonant leadership behaviors on the following day. Diary research on leadership shows that leadership behaviors and their emotional consequences fluctuate during the workday. Leaders' positive emotions also influence their later helping behavior (Chan et al., 2023). These findings provide methodological guidance for dynamic research on resonant leadership.

Future research should also pay attention to resonance interruption and resonance repair. In real organizations, leaders and employees are not always emotionally aligned. When leaders' decisions conflict with employees' expectations, when leaders' care is perceived as performative, or when employees lack trust in leaders' emotional responses, existing resonance may be weakened. Future research can examine how leaders use explanation, feedback, apology, support, and relationship repair to rebuild emotional resonance. This would move resonant leadership research from a focus on positive influence to a broader focus on relationship maintenance and repair.

### **7.3. Extending Resonant Leadership Research to Digital, Remote, and AI-Involved Leadership Contexts**

The preceding discussion mainly assumes traditional face-to-face organizational interaction. In such settings, leaders form emotional resonance with employees through direct communication, emotional support, and relational interaction. However, with the spread of remote work, hybrid work, digital collaboration platforms, and AI-based management tools, leader-follower interaction is changing. Digital work reduces nonverbal cues in face-to-face communication and increases

information overload, constant connectivity pressure, and technology adaptation pressure. Research on technostress shows that digital technologies change not only employees' job demands but also leader-follower interaction. Supportive and empowering leadership can reduce employee technostress, while highly controlling and always-available leadership expectations may increase it (Rademaker et al., 2025).

Against this background, the research context of resonant leadership should be expanded. First, future studies can examine how resonant leadership affects work engagement in remote work through online communication quality, virtual support, psychological empowerment, and digital trust. Gaan et al. (2024) found, based on a sample from Indian information technology firms, that resonant leadership influences remote work engagement through psychological empowerment. This suggests that even in remote interaction contexts, employees still need emotional support and relational connection from leaders. Second, future research can examine whether resonant leadership reduces employees' anxiety, technostress, and emotional exhaustion during digital transformation. Because resonant leadership emphasizes mindfulness, hope, and compassion, it may help employees understand the meaning of technological change, reduce uncertainty, and strengthen psychological resources.

Furthermore, as AI increasingly participates in performance feedback, task allocation, personnel evaluation, and managerial decision-making, future research should compare human leadership, AI leadership, and human-AI hybrid leadership in terms of emotional resonance. Recent research suggests that higher AI involvement can reduce employees' positive emotions. Especially when decisions are favorable, fully automated leadership may not create the same emotional engagement as human leadership (Lochner et al., 2025). This suggests that resonant leadership may be even more valuable in the AI era. It can explain why organizations still need human leaders' emotional support, value communication, and relational coordination while pursuing algorithmic efficiency and automated management.

#### **7.4. Moving from One-Way Positive Effects to Double-Edged and Optimal-Level Perspectives**

Most existing studies emphasize the positive effects of resonant leadership. They show that it can improve job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological capital, work engagement, and organizational citizenship behavior, while reducing turnover intention, emotional exhaustion, and negative workplace behaviors (Cummings et al., 2005; Laschinger et al., 2014; Ali & Kashif, 2020; Tabche et al., 2024). However, every leadership style may have boundary conditions and potential costs. Resonant leadership emphasizes emotional response, compassionate care, and relational harmony. If used excessively, it may produce unintended consequences.

First, resonant leadership may consume leaders' resources. Resonant leaders

need to continuously identify employees' emotions, respond to their needs, and adjust their interaction styles. This process requires emotional labor and cognitive effort. Research on leaders' emotional labor shows that surface acting and deep acting can consume self-control resources and increase the risk of abusive supervision. Leader mindfulness may buffer this negative process (Ortynsky et al., 2024). Therefore, when organizations lack sufficient support and leaders bear heavy emotional support responsibilities for a long time, resonant leadership may increase leaders' emotional exhaustion and role burden.

Second, resonant leadership may create emotional dependence among employees. Moderate resonant leadership can increase employees' sense of being understood and their psychological safety. However, if employees rely too strongly on leaders for emotional support, their own emotion regulation and problem-solving abilities may be weakened. Third, excessive pursuit of harmony may suppress necessary task conflict. Resonant leadership emphasizes mutual understanding and emotional consistency. Yet team innovation and complex decision-making often require divergent views, critical discussion, and constructive conflict. If employees reduce genuine opinion expression in order to maintain harmony, resonant leadership may inhibit voice and innovation in some contexts.

Future research should therefore reconsider resonant leadership from a double-edged or optimal-level perspective. On the one hand, researchers can test whether resonant leadership has an inverted U-shaped effect. Moderate resonance may be most beneficial, whereas excessive emotional involvement may lead to dependence, pressure, or silence. On the other hand, future studies can examine whether task complexity, performance pressure, team conflict climate, and employee independence change the direction or strength of resonant leadership effects. This would prevent scholars from assuming that more resonant leadership is always better and would support a more balanced theoretical explanation.

### **7.5. Strengthening Causal Identification, Longitudinal Tracking, and Intervention Research**

In terms of research methods, resonant leadership studies still rely heavily on cross-sectional questionnaires and employees' subjective evaluations. Although some studies have used multilevel models or multi-wave designs, existing evidence is still limited in establishing causal relationships between resonant leadership and employee outcomes. On the one hand, employees with positive psychological states may evaluate their leaders more favorably, creating reverse causality. On the other hand, unobserved factors such as organizational climate, team culture, and LMX quality may influence both perceptions of resonant leadership and subsequent work outcomes. Future research therefore needs more rigorous research designs.

First, longitudinal tracking designs can be used to examine how resonant leadership forms, changes, and influences employee development over time. Research on leadership development suggests that longitudinal studies are more suitable for

revealing the growth of leadership capability and leadership behavior. They also help clarify the time order between leadership behavior and employee outcomes (Cotrim & Gomes, 2024). Second, experiments and scenario-based simulations can be used to test the causal effects of resonant leadership. For example, researchers can manipulate whether a leader displays emotional response, vision communication, compassionate support, and joint adjustment, and then examine changes in employees' psychological safety, trust in the leader, work engagement, and voice intention. Third, future research can conduct field intervention studies to develop resonant leadership training programs and evaluate their effects through pre- and post-tests, control groups, and behavioral observation.

Because resonant leadership includes core elements such as mindfulness, hope, and compassion, training programs can incorporate mindfulness training, self-leadership training, emotion regulation training, and empathic communication training. Systematic review evidence suggests that self-leadership and mindfulness training can improve leaders' self-regulation, stress resilience, job satisfaction, and team motivation (Tenschert et al., 2025). This provides a useful basis for intervention studies on resonant leadership. Future research can also combine multisource and behavioral data to reduce common method bias. For example, researchers can collect leader self-reports, employee ratings, peer evaluations, and objective performance data at the same time. They can also use digital traces such as meeting transcripts, online communication records, vocal tone, and emotion-related words to identify emotional resonance in leader-follower interaction. Through multimethod, multisource, and multi-wave designs, resonant leadership research can better reveal its theoretical mechanisms and practical value.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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