

# The curvilinear effect of work loneliness on performance is buffered by self-leadership skills

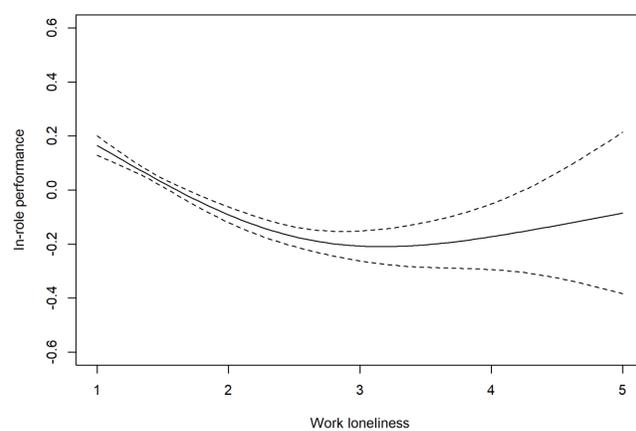
## Background and aim

- Work loneliness arises from dissatisfying social relationships in work and has negative consequences for employee well-being and organizational outcomes.
- Previous research has linked work loneliness to reduced performance, yet possible curvilinear association have not been explored. For instance, humans tend to adapt to challenging situations, which may affect how work loneliness impacts performance.
- Self-leadership skills - such as the ability to set goals and motivate oneself - enable employees to improve performance and maintain it even when feeling lonely.
- Loneliness impairs executive functioning and interferes with the ability to self-regulate, which include managing thoughts, attention, cognition, feelings, and behaviors. Self-leadership skills can mitigate these adverse effects.
- This study investigates the curvilinear effects of work loneliness and self-leadership skills on in-role performance, as well as the buffering role self-leadership skills on the adverse effect of work loneliness.

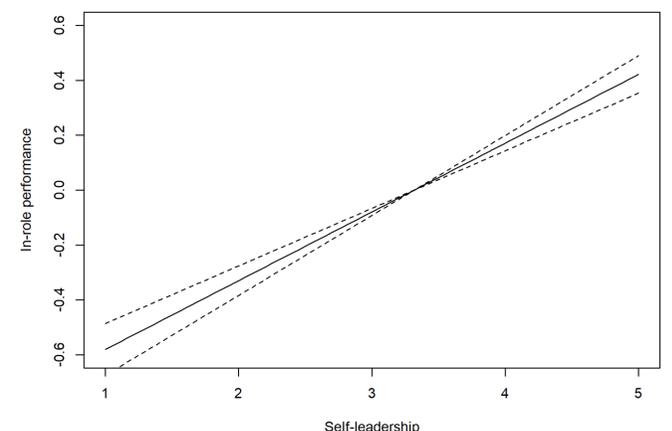
## Methods

- The sample (N=1641) was obtained from ten distinct Finnish units of a large multinational corporation operating in the technology manufacturing sector in 2022. The overall response rate was 49%.
- To test the hypotheses, nonparametric and semiparametric generalized additive models (GAMs) with thin plate regression splines were estimated. The analyses were conducted with statistical software R (version 4.4.1), employing the *mgcv* package.
- Validated measures of work loneliness, self-leadership and in-role performance were applied. Sex, age, organizational tenure and social support were included as covariates to control for potential confounding effects.

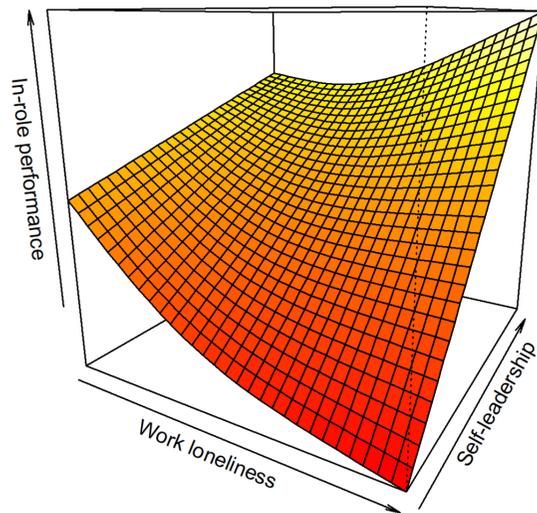
## Results



**Figure 1.** Curvilinear association between work loneliness and in-role performance (dotted lines represent 95% CI)



**Figure 2.** Linear association between self-leadership skills and in-role performance (dotted lines represent 95% CI)



**Figure 3.** Interaction effect of work loneliness and self-leadership on in-role performance

- A Saturation (/ceiling/plateau) effect was observed in the negative relationship between work loneliness and in-role performance.
- Even relatively low levels of work loneliness were found to impair in-role performance, but the maximum detrimental effect on in-role performance was reached at mid-scale levels of the work loneliness.
- Positive association emerged between self-leadership skills and in-role performance.
- Self-leadership was found to buffers the adverse effect of work loneliness on in-role performance.
- However, the number of respondents reporting high levels of work loneliness was limited, which affects the certainty of the results.

## Conclusions

- Organizational interventions should not exclusively target employees experiencing high levels of work loneliness. Instead, organizations should pay attention to social connectivity, provide opportunities, and encourage all employees to develop and maintain social connections at work.
- Organizations should aim to create healthy social work climate that includes a climate of trust, belonging and shared values.
- Moreover, implementing self-leadership training may offer employees tools to cope with adverse effects of work loneliness.
- We hope that the curvilinear findings of this study inspires further theoretical development regarding the nuanced ways in which work loneliness influences employee performance and other outcomes as well.

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