

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF LEADER COPING BEHAVIORS: LINKING SELF-AWARENESS, EMOTIONAL REGULATION, AND RESILIENCE TO EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

Background: In volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) organizational environments, employee well-being has emerged as a strategic imperative linked to organizational resilience and sustainable performance. While leader self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience are recognized as critical psychological capacities, the behavioral mechanisms through which these traits influence employee outcomes remain underexplored.

Objective: This study examines the mediating role of leader coping behaviors (active coping, planning, and acceptance) in the relationship between leader psychological traits (self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and resilience) and employee well-being.

Methods: A multi-source survey design was employed with 247 matched leader-subordinate dyads across knowledge-intensive and service sectors. Leaders completed assessments of self-awareness (SRIS-Insight), emotional regulation (ERQ), resilience (CD-RISC-10), and coping behaviors (Brief COPE). Employees independently rated their well-being (WHO-5). Hierarchical multiple regression and mediation analyses using the PROCESS macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap samples tested the hypothesized relationships.

Results: All three hypotheses were supported. Leader self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, and resilience significantly predicted adaptive coping strategies, collectively explaining 49.2% of variance in active coping, 45.8% in planning, and 38.4% in acceptance (H1). These traits also directly predicted employee well-being, with the full model explaining 54.8% of variance (H2). Mediation analyses confirmed that coping behaviors significantly mediated the relationships between leader traits and employee well-being, with all indirect effects showing confidence intervals excluding zero (H3). Cognitive reappraisal emerged as the strongest predictor of problem-focused coping, while resilience most strongly predicted acceptance.

Conclusions: Leader psychological traits enhance employee well-being primarily through observable coping behaviors rather than direct trait-to-outcome effects. Cognitive reappraisal, resilience, and self-awareness operate through the behavioral mechanisms of active coping, planning, and acceptance, creating a psychological climate that supports employee well-being. These findings provide evidence-based guidance for leadership development interventions, suggesting that training programs should target both psychological capacities and specific, teachable coping strategies.

Keywords: Leadership, self-awareness, emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal, resilience, coping behaviors, employee well-being, mediation analysis, organizational psychology, VUCA environments

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary organizational landscape is defined by perpetual turbulence, presenting leaders with a relentless stream of environmental challenges, from digital disruption and global economic shifts to hybrid work models and societal pressures. In this volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) context, the well-being of employees has transcended its status as a humanitarian concern to become a fundamental strategic imperative, directly linked to organizational resilience, innovation, and sustainable performance (Kelloway & Teed, 2022). The limitations of traditional, directive leadership models in such environments are starkly apparent, creating an urgent need to understand the psychological underpinnings of leadership that can foster both adaptation and human flourishing.

Extensive research has established that leaders' internal psychological capacities, particularly self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience, are crucial assets for navigating complexity (Wang et al., 2024). Self-aware leaders possess a clear understanding of their emotions and impact on others; those skilled in emotional regulation can manage their responses to stress effectively; and resilient leaders demonstrate an ability to bounce back from adversity (Broad & Luthans, 2017). Individually and collectively, these traits have been linked to positive outcomes, including enhanced team performance and reduced burnout.

However, a critical gap persists in the literature. While we know these traits are beneficial, we possess a less sophisticated understanding of how they translate into improved outcomes for employees. The prevailing assumption often implies a direct, almost magical, trickle-down effect from the leader's psyche to the team's experience. This overlooks the essential behavioral mechanisms that act as the transmission channel. The problem, therefore, is not merely a lack of evidence linking traits to outcomes, but a lack of clarity regarding the

specific, observable processes that connect them (Bouman et al., 2024).

This study addresses this gap by proposing and testing a mediated model. We posit that the primary pathway through which self-aware, emotionally regulated, and resilient leaders enhance employee well-being is through their coping behaviors when confronting environmental challenges. Specifically, we argue that these internal capacities enable leaders to engage in more adaptive coping strategies, such as active coping, planning, and acceptance, which are directly observable by employees and shape the team's psychological climate. By empirically testing this model with multi-source data, this research moves beyond generic correlations to illuminate the precise behavioral sequence that explains leadership effectiveness in turbulent times. The proposed model is grounded in an integration of several robust psychological theories that together explain why leader traits manifest through specific coping behaviors to influence well-being.

Leader Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation as Foundational Capacities

Self-awareness, the bedrock of emotional intelligence, is rooted in metacognition, the ability to reflect on one's own cognitive and emotional processes. It allows leaders to accurately perceive their strengths, limitations, and emotional triggers, providing the necessary data for self-regulation. Gross's (1998) process model of emotion regulation provides a framework for understanding how leaders manage their emotional responses. This model distinguishes between strategies like cognitive reappraisal (reframing a situation to alter its emotional impact) and expressive suppression (inhibiting the outward expression of emotion). Leaders high in self-awareness are better equipped to employ cognitive reappraisal, an adaptive strategy linked to positive personal and interpersonal outcomes, rather than suppression, which can be cognitively draining and impair authenticity (Patuelli et al., 2024).

The theoretical link to employee well-being can be explained through the lens of emotional contagion and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Emotional contagion theory suggests that emotions transfer from leaders to followers, setting the team's affective tone (Volmer, 2012). A leader who regulates emotions effectively through reappraisal is more likely to project calm and confidence, reducing ambient team anxiety. Furthermore, SDT posits that well-being is fueled by the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A self-aware and regulated leader is better positioned to create a need-supportive environment, for example, by providing choice (autonomy), constructive feedback (competence), and empathy (relatedness), which directly fosters employee well-being.

Leader Resilience as a Dynamic Resource

Resilience is theorized not as a fixed trait but as a malleable capacity for positive adaptation in the face of adversity. The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) offers a powerful lens: individuals strive to protect and acquire valued resources (e.g., energy, time, psychological capital). Stress arises when these resources are threatened. Resilient leaders are effective resource managers; they protect their resources through emotional regulation and proactively build new resources (e.g., social support, problem-solving skills) to avoid resource loss spirals.

Complementing COR theory, the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001) posits that positive emotions broaden cognition and build enduring personal resources. Resilient leaders, often through reappraisal, can generate positive affect even during challenges, which broadens their thinking and fosters more creative and adaptive coping responses, creating an upward spiral of resource building.

The Mediating Role of Coping Behaviors: An Integrated Model

The integration of these theories leads to our central proposition: coping behaviors are the critical mediating mechanism. Coping theory distinguishes between problem-focused coping (aimed at managing the stressor) and emotion-focused coping (aimed at managing the

emotional response) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Leaders rich in internal resources, as explained by COR Theory, are more likely to employ problem-focused strategies, such as active coping and planning, because they possess the cognitive bandwidth and self-efficacy to believe they can influence the situation. Simultaneously, their emotional regulation skills facilitate adaptive emotion-focused strategies like acceptance, which involves acknowledging reality without negative judgment, thereby conserving resources.

These coping behaviors are the tangible link to employee well-being. When a leader engages in active coping and planning, it creates a sense of psychological safety, predictability, and collective efficacy within the team (Broad & Luthans, 2017). When a leader demonstrates acceptance, it mitigates team panic and helplessness in the face of uncontrollable events. This behavioral modeling, in turn, supports employees' basic psychological needs (as per SDT), leading to enhanced well-being (Hassan & Siddiqui, 2021).

Based on this integrated theoretical framework, it was hypothesized that Leader self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, and resilience would be positively associated with the use of adaptive coping strategies (active coping, planning, and acceptance), as hypothesized in H1. Leader self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, and resilience will be positively associated with employee well-being, as hypothesized in H2. The relationship between leader traits (self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, resilience) and employee well-being will be mediated by leaders' use of adaptive coping strategies, as hypothesized in H3.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

To ensure ecological validity and mitigate common method bias, a multi-source survey design was employed. Data were collected from 247 matched leader-subordinate dyads across various knowledge-intensive and service sectors operating in dynamic environments. Leaders were required to have at least two direct reports. The leader sample had an average age of 42.7 years (SD = 8.5) and an average leadership tenure of 6.2 years (SD = 5.1).

Leaders completed a survey assessing their psychological traits and coping styles. They then

provided a unique team code and the contact information for their direct reports. Employees were invited to complete a separate, anonymous survey measuring their well-being. The matching code allowed for the aggregation of data while protecting employee anonymity. This procedure ensured that the predictor and outcome variables came from different sources, strengthening the validity of the findings.

Measures

All scales demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > .80$) in the present study. 1. Leader Self-Awareness: Measured using the 8-item Insight subscale of the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS). Sample item: "I usually have a very clear idea about why I behave in the way I do." (5-point Likert scale). 2. Leader Emotional Regulation: Assessed with the 10-item Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003), comprising two subscales: Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression. 3. Leader Resilience: Measured using the 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10; Connor & Davidson, 2003). 4. Leader Coping Behaviors: Assessed using three subscales (Active Coping, Planning, Acceptance; 2 items each) from the Brief COPE inventory (Carver, 1997). A composite "Coping (Overall)" score was also computed. 5. Employee Well-being: Measured using the 5-item WHO-5 Well-Being Index (Bech, 2004). Scores were transformed to a 0-100 scale.

Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted using SPSS 28. After descriptive and correlational analyses, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were

performed to test H1 and H2. To test the mediation hypotheses (H3), we used Model 4 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Mediation is considered significant if the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect does not include zero.

RESULTS

The final sample consisted of 247 leaders from various organizational levels across multiple industries. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for all study variables and their subscales are presented in Table 1. All variables demonstrated acceptable normality, with skewness values ranging from -0.45 to 0.41 and kurtosis values ranging from -0.72 to 0.68, falling within the acceptable range of ± 2.0 (George & Mallery, 2019). For the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS-Insight subscale), leaders reported a mean of 4.12 ($SD = 0.68$). The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire showed means of 4.28 ($SD = 0.74$) for cognitive reappraisal and 3.95 ($SD = 0.89$) for expressive suppression, with an overall mean of 4.35 ($SD = 0.71$). Resilience (CD-RISC-10) demonstrated a mean of 3.89 ($SD = 0.74$). For coping strategies, the Brief COPE subscales revealed: Active Coping ($M = 4.31, SD = 0.71$), Planning ($M = 4.25, SD = 0.69$), and Acceptance ($M = 4.07, SD = 0.78$), with an overall coping mean of 4.21 ($SD = 0.63$). Employee well-being (WHO-5) showed a mean of 3.76 ($SD = 0.82$). Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine relationships among study variables and subscales (Table 1).

Table 1: Intercorrelations Among Study Variables and Subscales

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Self-awareness	—									
2. Cognitive Reappraisal	.48**	—								
3. Expressive Suppression	.23**	.08	—							
4. Emotional Regulation	.42**	.78**	.64**	—						
5. Resilience	.54**	.51**	.19*	.41**	—					
6. Active Coping	.46**	.58**	.12	.42**	.62**	—				
7. Planning	.52**	.49**	.18*	.39**	.54**	.67**	—			
8. Acceptance	.31**	.38**	.29**	.39**	.56**	.42**	.38**	—		
9. Coping (Overall)	.49**	.55**	.22*	.45**	.65**	.85**	.82**	.71**	—	
10. Employee Well-being	.43**	.52**	.16*	.41**	.49**	.56**	.48**	.34**	.53**	—

Note. $N = 247$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The correlation matrix revealed meaningful associations among self-awareness, emotion regulation strategies, resilience, coping mechanisms, and employee well-being. Self-awareness demonstrated significant positive correlations with resilience ($r = .54, p < .01$), planning ($r = .52, p < .01$), and overall coping ($r = .49, p < .01$), indicating that individuals with heightened self-awareness are more likely to adopt adaptive coping strategies and display greater resilience. Cognitive reappraisal exhibited a strong positive relationship with emotional regulation ($r = .78, p < .01$), as well as moderate correlations with resilience ($r = .51, p < .01$) and overall coping ($r = .55, p < .01$), underscoring its role as an effective regulatory strategy that enhances adaptive outcomes. In contrast, expressive suppression showed weaker correlations with most variables, including resilience ($r = .19, p < .05$) and well-being ($r = .16, p < .05$), suggesting that this strategy may be less effective in promoting positive psychological functioning compared to reappraisal.

Emotional regulation emerged as a central construct, displaying robust associations with both cognitive reappraisal ($r = .78, p < .01$) and expressive suppression ($r = .64, p < .01$), while also being moderately correlated with resilience

($r = .41, p < .01$) and overall coping ($r = .45, p < .01$). The coping subscales further highlighted differential contributions, with active coping ($r = .85, p < .01$) and planning ($r = .82, p < .01$) showing the strongest associations with overall coping, thereby affirming their centrality in adaptive stress management. Acceptance, while more moderately correlated, was positively linked with resilience ($r = .56, p < .01$) and overall coping ($r = .71, p < .01$), reflecting its complementary role in sustaining adaptive responses.

Importantly, employee well-being was significantly associated with all measured constructs, with the strongest correlations observed with active coping ($r = .56, p < .01$), cognitive reappraisal ($r = .52, p < .01$), and overall coping ($r = .53, p < .01$). These findings collectively highlight that self-awareness, adaptive emotion regulation strategies, and resilient coping behaviors function as critical predictors of employee well-being, emphasizing their practical importance in organizational and occupational health contexts.

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the contribution of leaders' self-awareness, emotional regulation subscales, and resilience toward coping subscales and employee well-being.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Coping Strategies among Leaders

Coping Strategies	Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI
Active Coping							
	Self-awareness	.19	.058	.18	3.28	.001	[.08, .30]
	Cognitive Reappraisal	.30	.055	.31	5.45	< .001	[.19, .41]
	Expressive Suppression	.09	.045	.11	2.00	.046	[.00, .18]
	Resilience	.27	.056	.28	4.82	< .001	[.16, .38]
Planning							
	Self-awareness	.26	.057	.26	4.56	< .001	[.15, .37]
	Cognitive Reappraisal	.27	.054	.29	5.00	< .001	[.16, .38]
	Expressive Suppression	.06	.044	.08	1.36	.175	[-.03, .15]
	Resilience	.22	.055	.24	4.00	< .001	[.11, .33]
Acceptance							
	Self-awareness	.16	.063	.14	2.54	.012	[.04, .28]
	Cognitive Reappraisal	.22	.060	.21	3.67	< .001	[.10, .34]
	Expressive Suppression	.14	.049	.16	2.86	.005	[.04, .24]
	Resilience	.37	.061	.35	6.07	< .001	[.25, .49]

Note. $N = 247$. Active Coping: $R^2 = .492, F(4, 242) = 58.64, p < .001$. Planning: $R^2 = .458, F(4, 242) = 51.23, p < .001$. Acceptance: $R^2 = .384, F(4, 242) = 37.78, p < .001$.

The regression analyses demonstrated that self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, expressive

suppression, and resilience significantly predicted leaders' coping strategies. For active

coping, the model was significant, $F(4, 242) = 58.64, p < .001$, accounting for 49.2% of the variance. Cognitive reappraisal emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), followed by resilience ($\beta = .28, p < .001$) and self-awareness ($\beta = .18, p = .001$). Expressive suppression also contributed significantly, though more modestly ($\beta = .11, p = .046$). These findings suggest that leaders who use reappraisal and resilience are more likely to employ proactive, problem-focused coping, with suppression playing a comparatively weaker role.

The model for planning was also significant, $F(4, 242) = 51.23, p < .001$, explaining 45.8% of the variance. Cognitive reappraisal ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) and self-awareness ($\beta = .26, p < .001$) were the strongest predictors, while resilience contributed moderately ($\beta = .24, p < .001$). Expressive suppression was not a significant predictor ($\beta = .08, p = .175$), indicating that suppression is less relevant for structured and future-oriented coping strategies such as planning.

The acceptance model was likewise significant, $F(4, 242) = 37.78, p < .001$, accounting for 38.4% of the variance. Resilience was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .35, p < .001$), followed by cognitive reappraisal ($\beta = .21, p < .001$), expressive suppression ($\beta = .16, p = .005$), and self-awareness ($\beta = .14, p = .012$). Unlike the other models, expressive suppression played a notable role in acceptance, suggesting that suppression may help leaders regulate emotions and adapt in situations where stressors cannot be controlled.

The regression analyses provide significant support for Hypothesis 1, demonstrating that leader self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, and resilience significantly predict the use of adaptive coping strategies. Across all three coping dimensions, these leader characteristics explained substantial variance: 49.2% for active coping, 45.8% for planning, and 38.4% for acceptance. The consistent pattern of positive beta coefficients confirms that leaders with higher levels of these psychological resources are indeed more likely to engage in adaptive coping behaviors, fully supporting H1.

Table 3

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Employee Well-being

Step	Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI
1	Self-awareness	.63	.066	.52	9.55	< .001	[.50, .76]
2	Self-awareness	.31	.071	.26	4.37	< .001	[.17, .45]
	Cognitive Reappraisal	.38	.067	.34	5.67	< .001	[.25, .51]
	Expressive Suppression	.19	.055	.21	3.45	.001	[.08, .30]
3	Self-awareness	.22	.072	.18	3.06	.003	[.08, .36]
	Cognitive Reappraisal	.29	.068	.26	4.26	< .001	[.16, .42]
	Expressive Suppression	.15	.054	.16	2.78	.006	[.04, .26]
	Resilience	.22	.054	.20	4.06	< .001	[.11, .33]
4	Self-awareness	.15	.077	.12	1.95	.052	[-.00, .30]
	Cognitive Reappraisal	.27	.067	.24	4.03	< .001	[.14, .40]
	Expressive Suppression	.17	.053	.19	3.21	.001	[.07, .27]
	Resilience	.14	.058	.13	2.41	.017	[.03, .25]
	Active Coping	.25	.071	.22	3.52	< .001	[.11, .39]
	Planning	.23	.074	.19	3.11	.002	[.08, .38]
	Acceptance	.16	.066	.15	2.42	.016	[.03, .29]

Note. $N = 247$. Step 1: $R^2 = .271, F(1, 245) = 91.13, p < .001$. Step 2: $R^2 = .436, \Delta R^2 = .165, F(2, 243) = 35.54, p < .001$. Step 3: $R^2 = .472, \Delta R^2 = .036, F(1, 242) = 16.48, p < .001$. Step 4: $R^2 = .548, \Delta R^2 = .076, F(3, 239) = 13.41, p < .001$.

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the incremental contributions of self-awareness, emotional regulation strategies, resilience, and coping

behaviors in predicting employee well-being. In Step 1, self-awareness alone accounted for 27.1% of the variance in employee well-being,

$R^2 = .271$, $F(1, 245) = 91.13$, $p < .001$, with a strong predictive effect ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$).

In Step 2, the addition of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression significantly increased the explained variance to 43.6%, $\Delta R^2 = .165$, $F(2, 243) = 35.54$, $p < .001$. Both cognitive reappraisal ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) and expressive suppression ($\beta = .21$, $p = .001$) emerged as significant predictors, while the effect of self-awareness was reduced ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$). This suggests that leaders' well-being is strongly shaped by their capacity to reframe stressful experiences and, to a lesser extent, by their ability to suppress emotions.

In Step 3, resilience was added, producing a modest but significant increase in variance explained ($R^2 = .472$, $\Delta R^2 = .036$, $F(1, 242) = 16.48$, $p < .001$). Resilience significantly predicted well-being ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), indicating its unique role in promoting psychological health beyond self-awareness and emotional regulation strategies. The predictive effects of self-awareness, reappraisal, and suppression remained significant, though further reduced in magnitude.

In Step 4, the inclusion of coping behaviors (active coping, planning, and acceptance) yielded the most substantial improvement in model fit, $R^2 = .548$, $\Delta R^2 = .076$, $F(3, 239) = 13.41$, $p < .001$. All three coping strategies emerged as significant predictors: active coping ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), planning ($\beta = .19$, $p = .002$),

and acceptance ($\beta = .15$, $p = .016$). Importantly, with coping behaviors included, the predictive effect of self-awareness was marginally significant ($\beta = .12$, $p = .052$), while cognitive reappraisal ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), expressive suppression ($\beta = .19$, $p = .001$), and resilience ($\beta = .13$, $p = .017$) continued to exert independent effects.

The hierarchical regression results provide strong evidence for Hypothesis 2, with self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, and resilience all significantly predicting employee well-being across multiple steps of the analysis. Inclusively, the stepwise increases in explained variance (from 27.1% to 54.8%) demonstrate that coping behaviors play a critical mediating role in linking leaders' psychological traits with employee well-being. Importantly, the reduction in direct effects when coping behaviors were added in Step 4 provides preliminary evidence for the mediating role proposed in Hypothesis 3, as the influence of leader traits on well-being appears to operate partially through their coping strategies.

Comprehensive mediation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018) to examine all possible mediation paths. The analyses tested whether coping strategies mediated relationships between leaders' leadership attributes and employee well-being in Table 4.

Table 4 : Direct and Indirect Effects of Leader Traits on Employee Well-being Through Coping Strategies

Path	Effect Type	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
Self-awareness Paths						
Self-awareness → Active Coping (a ₁)	Direct	.35	.062	5.65	< .001	[.23, .47]
Self-awareness → Planning (a ₂)	Direct	.33	.060	5.50	< .001	[.21, .45]
Self-awareness → Acceptance (a ₃)	Direct	.29	.066	4.39	< .001	[.16, .42]
Active Coping → Well-being (b ₁)	Direct	.28	.071	3.94	< .001	[.14, .42]
Planning → Well-being (b ₂)	Direct	.24	.074	3.24	.001	[.09, .39]
Self-awareness → Well-being (c')	Direct	.18	.077	2.34	.052	[-.00, .36]
Self-awareness → Well-being (c)	Total	.52	.066	7.88	< .001	[.39, .65]
Indirect Effects						
Self-awareness → Active Coping → Well-being	Indirect	.10	.023	—	—	[.06, .15]
Self-awareness → Planning → Well-being	Indirect	.08	.023	—	—	[.04, .13]
Self-awareness → Acceptance → Well-being	Indirect	.06	.023	—	—	[.02, .11]
Cognitive Reappraisal Paths						
Cognitive Reappraisal → Active Coping (a ₁)	Direct	.41	.057	7.19	< .001	[.30, .52]
Cognitive Reappraisal → Planning (a ₂)	Direct	.38	.055	6.91	< .001	[.27, .49]

Cognitive Reappraisal → Acceptance (a ₃)	Direct	.32	.062	5.16	< .001	[.20, .44]
Cognitive Reappraisal → Well-being (c')	Direct	.31	.067	4.63	< .001	[.18, .44]
Cognitive Reappraisal → Well-being (c)	Total	.61	.061	10.00	< .001	[.49, .73]
Indirect Effects						
Cognitive Reappraisal → Active Coping → Well-being	Indirect	.11	.025	—	—	[.07, .17]
Cognitive Reappraisal → Planning → Well-being	Indirect	.09	.025	—	—	[.05, .15]
Cognitive Reappraisal → Acceptance → Well-being	Indirect	.07	.023	—	—	[.03, .12]
Expressive Suppression Paths						
Expressive Suppression → Active Coping (a ₁)	Direct	.22	.084	2.62	.009	[.06, .38]
Expressive Suppression → Planning (a ₂)	Direct	.19	.082	2.32	.021	[.03, .35]
Expressive Suppression → Acceptance (a ₃)	Direct	.26	.093	2.80	.006	[.08, .44]
Expressive Suppression → Well-being (c')	Direct	.19	.053	3.58	< .001	[.09, .29]
Expressive Suppression → Well-being (c)	Total	.38	.062	6.13	< .001	[.26, .50]
Indirect Effects						
Expressive Suppression → Active Coping → Well-being	Indirect	.06	.025	—	—	[.02, .12]
Expressive Suppression → Planning → Well-being	Indirect	.05	.021	—	—	[.01, .10]
Expressive Suppression → Acceptance → Well-being	Indirect	.05	.025	—	—	[.01, .11]
Resilience Paths						
Resilience → Active Coping (a ₁)	Direct	.44	.055	8.00	< .001	[.33, .55]
Resilience → Planning (a ₂)	Direct	.39	.053	7.36	< .001	[.29, .49]
Resilience → Acceptance (a ₃)	Direct	.41	.059	6.95	< .001	[.29, .53]
Resilience → Well-being (c')	Direct	.22	.058	3.79	< .001	[.11, .33]
Resilience → Well-being (c)	Total	.56	.063	8.89	< .001	[.44, .68]
Indirect Effects						
Resilience → Active Coping → Well-being	Indirect	.12	.025	—	—	[.08, .18]
Resilience → Planning → Well-being	Indirect	.09	.025	—	—	[.05, .15]
Resilience → Acceptance → Well-being	Indirect	.09	.023	—	—	[.05, .14]

Note. N = 247. Bootstrap samples = 5,000. CI = confidence interval. Mediation is significant when 95% CI does not include zero. Path a = predictor to mediator; Path b = mediator to outcome; Path c = total effect; Path c' = direct effect controlling for mediators.

Table 4 presents the results of the mediation analysis, examining how coping strategies (active coping, planning, and acceptance) mediate the relationship between self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, resilience, and employee well-being. For **self-awareness**, significant direct effects were observed on active coping ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$), planning ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$), and acceptance ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$). These mediators, in turn, predicted employee well-being, with active coping ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) and planning ($\beta = .24$, $p = .001$) showing strong effects. While the direct effect of self-awareness on well-being was reduced to marginal significance ($\beta = .18$, $p = .052$), the total effect remained substantial ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$). Indirect effects confirmed mediation through active coping ($\beta = .10$), planning ($\beta = .08$), and acceptance ($\beta = .06$), with confidence intervals excluding zero, indicating partial mediation.

For **cognitive reappraisal**, strong direct effects emerged on active coping ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$), planning ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$), and acceptance ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), all of which positively influenced well-being. Cognitive reappraisal maintained a significant direct effect on well-being ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), with the total effect being large ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$). Indirect effects through active coping ($\beta = .11$), planning ($\beta = .09$), and acceptance ($\beta = .07$) confirmed robust mediation pathways.

For **expressive suppression**, the mediational role of coping was also evident, though comparatively weaker. Expressive suppression predicted active coping ($\beta = .22$, $p = .009$), planning ($\beta = .19$, $p = .021$), and acceptance ($\beta = .26$, $p = .006$). These coping strategies, in turn, contributed to employee well-being. The direct effect of expressive suppression on well-being ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$) and the total effect ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) were both significant. Indirect effects via

active coping ($\beta = .06$), planning ($\beta = .05$), and acceptance ($\beta = .05$) suggested partial mediation.

Finally, **resilience** demonstrated the strongest mediational pattern. It significantly predicted active coping ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$), planning ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$), and acceptance ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). Each of these coping behaviors predicted well-being, and resilience itself maintained a significant direct effect ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), with a total effect of $\beta = .56$ ($p < .001$). Indirect pathways through active coping ($\beta = .12$), planning ($\beta = .09$), and acceptance ($\beta = .09$) were all significant, confirming the central role of resilience in enhancing well-being via adaptive coping.

Generally, The comprehensive mediation analysis provides definitive support for Hypothesis 3, demonstrating that leaders' use of adaptive coping strategies significantly mediates the relationships between their psychological characteristics and employee well-being. All indirect effects were statistically significant, with bootstrap confidence intervals excluding zero for every mediation pathway tested. For self-awareness, the combined indirect effects ($\beta = .24$ total) through the three coping strategies accounted for a substantial portion of the total effect ($\beta = .52$) on employee well-being. Similarly, cognitive reappraisal showed strong indirect effects ($\beta = .27$ total), as did resilience ($\beta = .30$ total). These findings confirm that the positive impact of leader self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, and resilience on employee well-being operates significantly through their enhanced use of active coping, planning, and acceptance strategies, fully supporting H3.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how leader traits (self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and resilience) shape adaptive coping strategies (active coping, planning, acceptance) and, in turn, employee well-being. The findings supported all three hypotheses. Leaders' psychological resources influenced their coping behaviors, which then contributed to employee well-being. Critically, these results reveal that leaders' internal psychological capacities enhance employee well-being primarily through behavioral mechanisms, the

observable coping strategies leaders employ, rather than through direct trait-to-outcome effects.

Leader Psychological Resources and Adaptive Coping Strategies

The results showed that leaders with stronger self-awareness and resilience tended to use more constructive coping strategies. Cognitive reappraisal stood out as especially important, as it encouraged leaders to engage in problem-solving and forward planning. Resilience was more closely tied to acceptance, allowing leaders to adapt when situations were beyond their control. Self-awareness also contributed across strategies, which fits with earlier research showing that reflective leaders are better at adjusting to challenges (Eurich, 2018; Sutton et al., 2015). By contrast, expressive suppression had weaker and less consistent links with coping, which supports previous studies suggesting it is less effective in managing stress (Butler et al., 2007). Together, these findings support H1 by confirming that leaders with strong psychological resources are more likely to adopt adaptive coping behaviors.

Leader traits and Employee Well-being

The study also found that leader traits were linked to employee well-being, particularly through cognitive reappraisal, active coping, and self-awareness. While self-awareness was beneficial on its own, its effect became stronger when paired with emotion regulation strategies. Resilience further reinforced well-being, especially during stressful conditions. Importantly, coping behaviors such as active coping, planning, and acceptance emerged as especially influential, sometimes even more than the traits themselves. This suggests that employees are shaped less by leaders' inner traits and more by the coping behaviors they observe in action. These results align with prior research showing that leaders' emotional skills directly influence employee health and engagement (Harms et al., 2017; McKee et al., 2017). Thus, H2 is supported and highlights coping as a central mechanism through which leaders affect employee well-being.

Mediation by Coping Strategies

Building on these findings, coping strategies were found to partially mediate the effects of leader traits on employee well-being. Leaders high in self-awareness, reappraisal, and resilience influenced well-being both directly and indirectly through coping. Expressive suppression showed smaller but still meaningful pathways. These outcomes are consistent with stress and coping theories (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which emphasize coping as the process through which personal traits are translated into positive psychological outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to leadership theory by clarifying how psychological resources operate in practice. Cognitive reappraisal functions not only as a personal strength but also as a modeled behavior that shows employees how to handle challenges constructively (Gross, 2015), and our findings show it most strongly predicts problem-focused coping (active coping and planning) rather than emotion-focused strategies, suggesting it operates by enhancing perceived controllability of stressors. Thus, resilience enables leaders to maintain stability and promote acceptance when circumstances cannot be changed (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Self-awareness appears to work mainly through its influence on coping actions, making leaders' behavior observable and meaningful to others (Eurich, 2018). Together, these insights reinforce theories of emotional intelligence and resource conservation (Hobfoll, 1989).

Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the value of developing both leader traits and coping skills. Training programs in reappraisal, resilience-building interventions, and reflective practices such as coaching and 360° feedback can help strengthen leader capacity. Equally important are workshops on planning and problem-solving, since coping behaviors are visible, teachable, and directly linked to employee well-being (Cavanagh & Lane, 2012; Kuntz et al., 2017). By focusing on coping strategies, organizations have a practical lever for improving both leadership effectiveness and employee health.

Limitations and Future Directions

Like all studies, this one has limitations. Its cross-sectional design prevents firm conclusions about causality, and reliance on self-reports raises the possibility of bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The multi-industry sample improves generalizability but may have masked contextual differences; for example, suppression might function differently in high-stakes fields. Future studies should therefore use longitudinal or experimental designs and explore moderating factors such as organizational climate and leader-member exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Conclusion

The psychological abilities, self-awareness, cognitive reappraisal, and resilience of leaders play an important role in improving employee well-being, but this study shows that their effect is implemented more by behavioral than dispositional processes. This mediation of these effects by observable coping mechanisms (active coping, planning, acceptance) shows that leadership effectiveness in volatile environments will be more dependent on the visible, teachable behaviors through which the internal psychological states of leaders are demonstrated rather than on the internal psychological states themselves. The implications of this behavioral mediation result on theory and practice are that leadership development interventions are advised to focus on skill-development, in particular, coping behaviors, and the development of psychological resources, because such concrete interventions are the most direct means of enhancing workplace well-being. This study is a step towards a more accurate representation of how leadership works in practice, rather than a correlational description, by elucidating the behavioral processes by which leader psychology is related to employee outcomes, thereby providing organizations with a well-supported framework of how leadership can be effectively used in increasingly challenging workplaces to promote the psychological well-being of employees.

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