

Mission Driven Bureaucrats

Empowering
People To Help
Government Do

BETTER
~~Good~~

DAN HONIG

**HKS Building
State Capability
& The People
Lab**

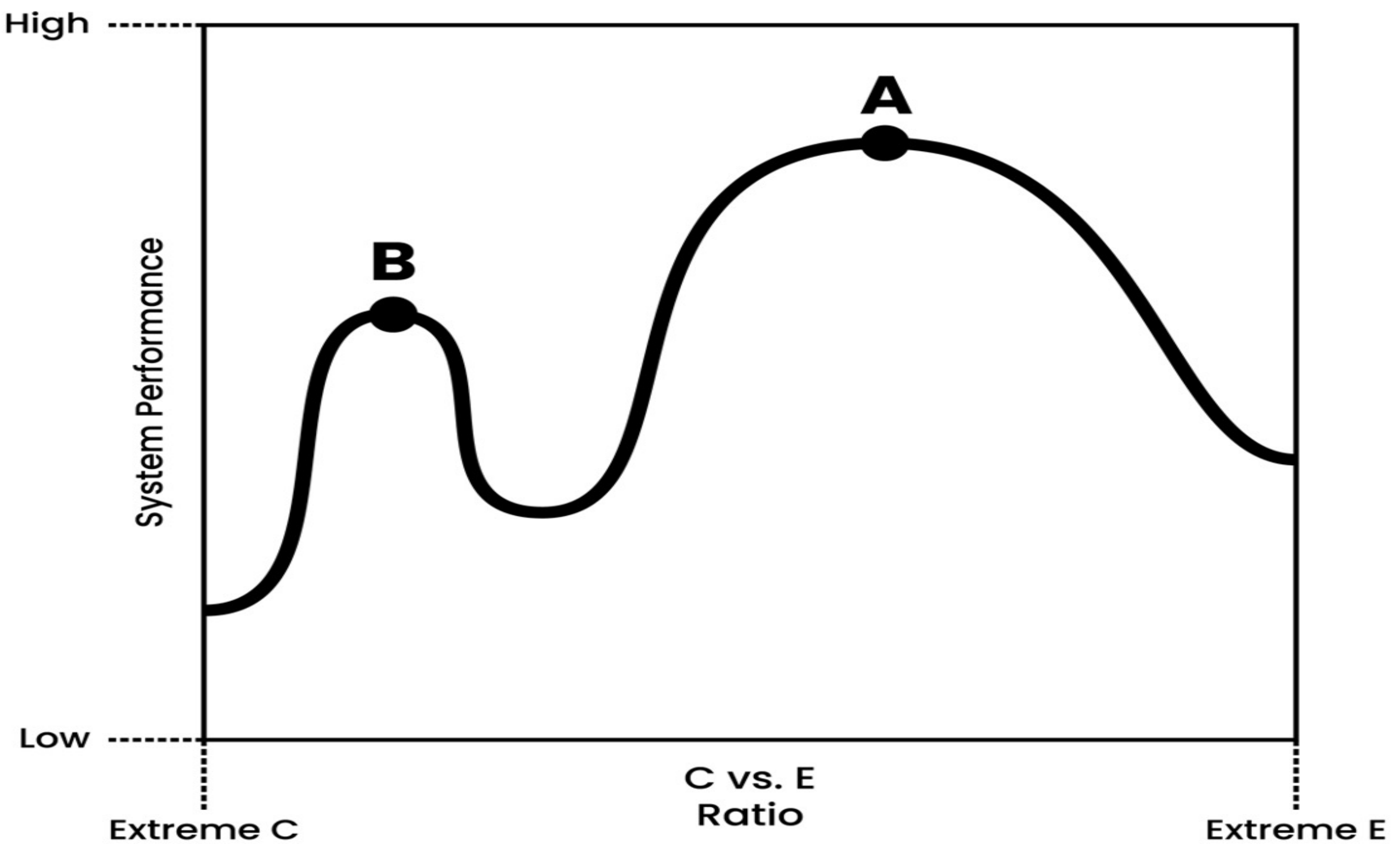
**October 28,
2024**



Management for Compliance(C) vs. Empowerment(E)



Photos from [StyleGAN2](#) - [Karras et al.](#) and Nvidia;
[thispersondoesnotexist.com](#)



MDB Evidence - Mine & Others'

- US - Child Protective Services Detroit: *intrinsically motivated departures*, mostly qual with some motivational surveys (joint with Sobeck & Borragina-Ballard, Wayne State; *CYSR 2021*)
- Thailand district (*ampur*)-level 'vertical bureaucrats', *effect of management & teams on acting beyond de jure instructions*, mixed-methods with surveys
- Bangladesh engineers: Empowering management on motivation/selection & performance, surveys (joint with Tim Besley & Adnan Khan, LSE)
- Ghana & Liberia fast stream civil service programs: *effect of motivated on performance and work environments on baseline motivated*, mixed methods w/ RD
- Interviews/profiles of individual bureaucrats
- But does it generalize? Econometric analysis of existing civil servant survey data; over 4 million individual/2,000 agency observations
- Lots of others' brilliant research

Five Things I Learned Which I Hope are Useful



My Learning 1: Motivation *Changes* in Response to Management

A portrait of Judy Parfitt, a woman with short, grey hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a dark, possibly black, top and small pearl earrings. The background is dark and out of focus.

“It felt important to persuade long-serving white Afrikaans-speaking employees... the majority started to believe in and identify with this purpose of creating a better life for all.” - Judy Parfitt

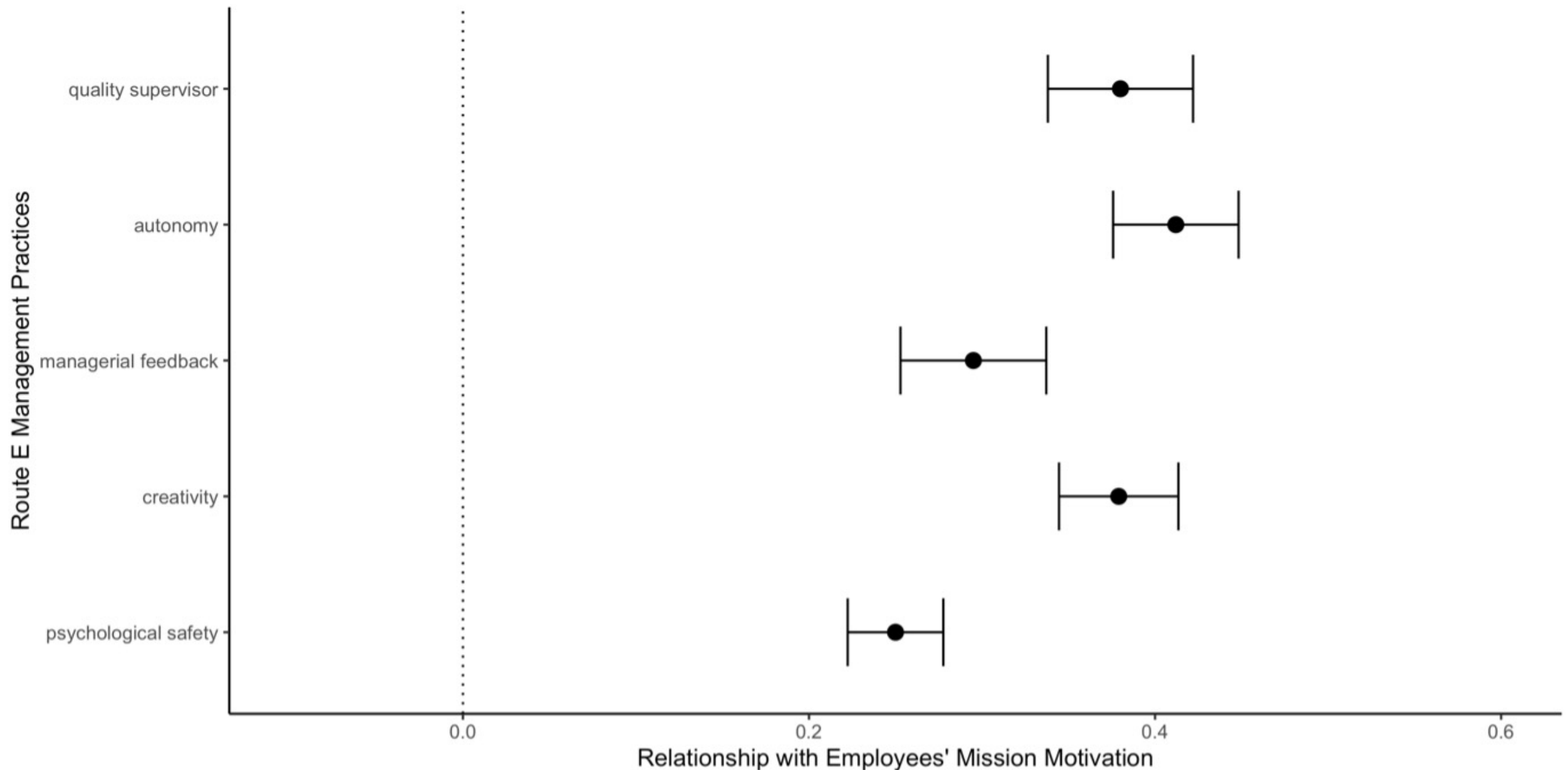
Judy Parfitt



Identical Buildings - Different Managers

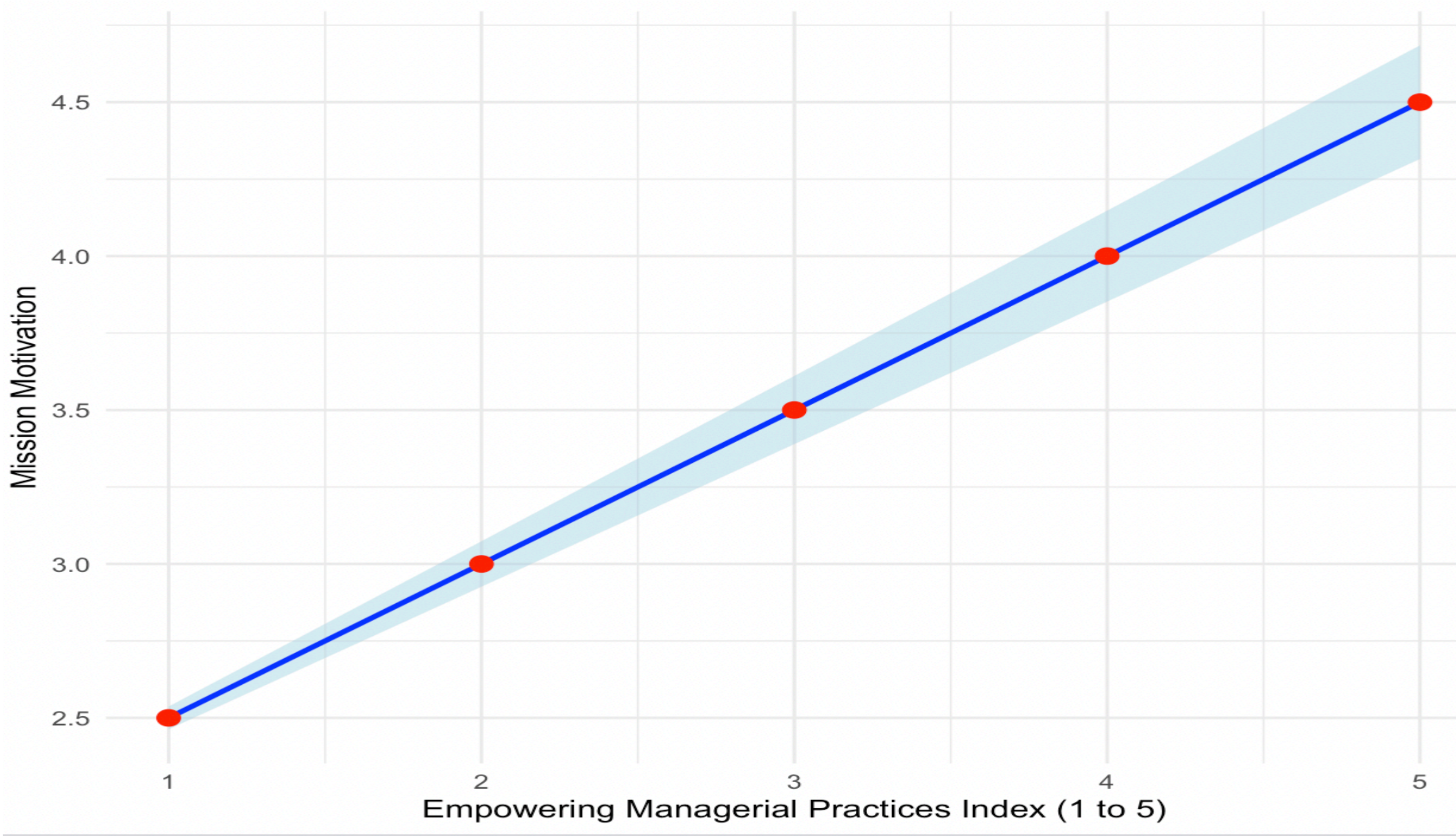


Empowering Management Practice & Mission Motivation Covary



Agency-level data, Agency FEs

Honig 2024 Mission Driven Bureaucrats; PNAS 2021



2: Management Can *Attract or Repel* the Mission Motivated



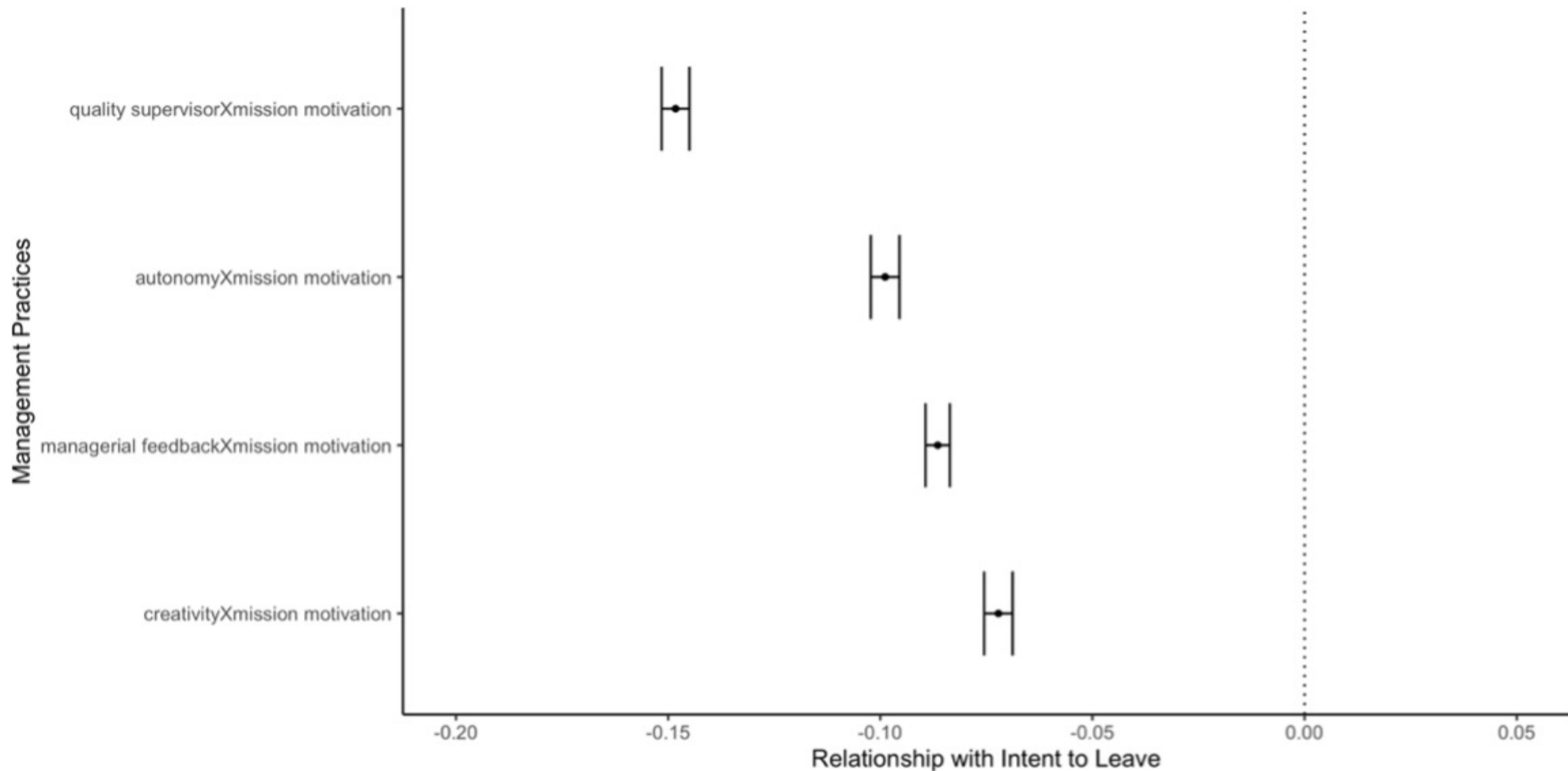
DETROIT

WE HOPE
FOR
BETTER
THINGS

IT SHALL
RISE
FROM
THE ASHES

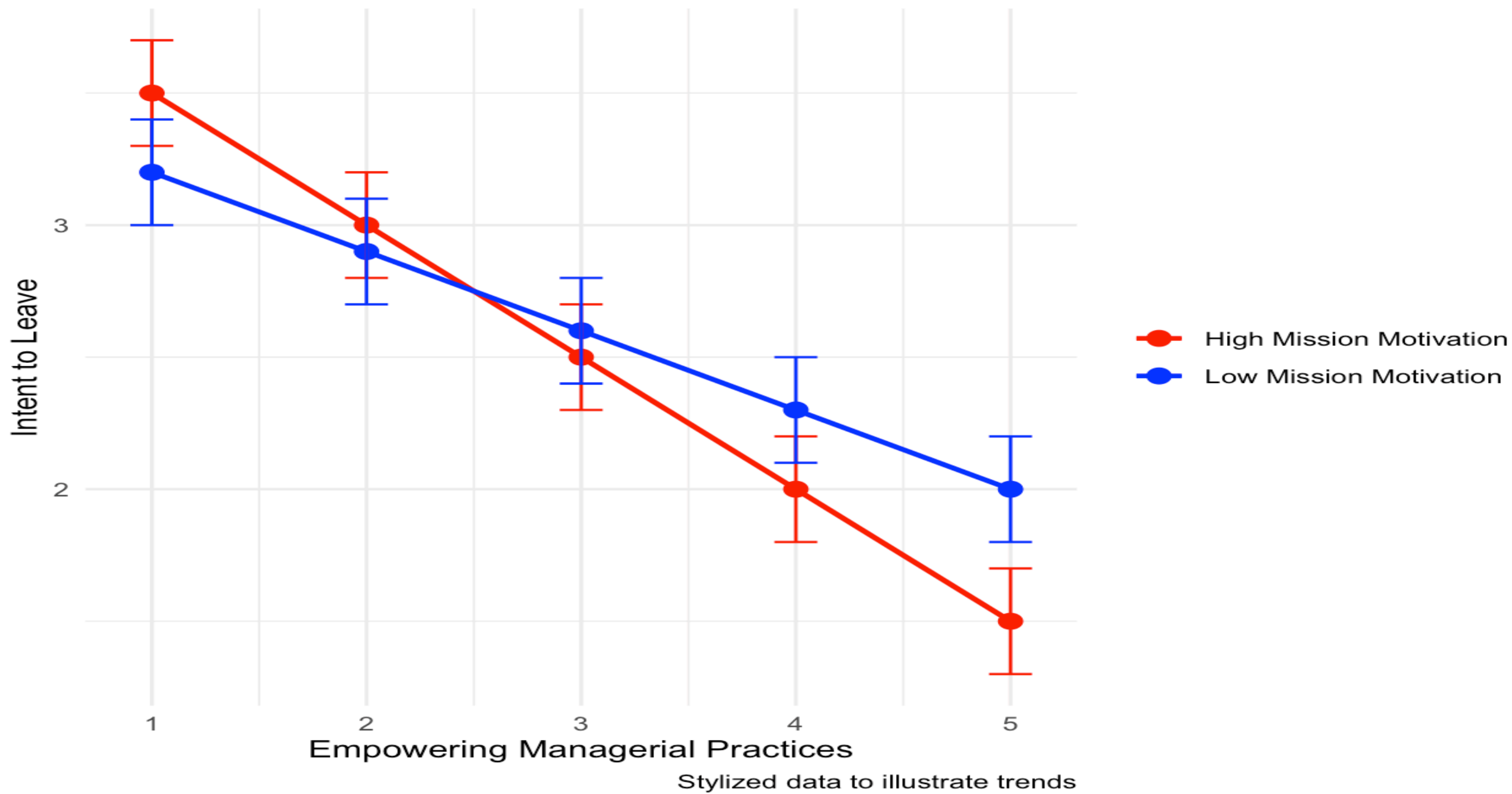
MICHIGAN

The More Mission Motivated Will Stay if They Can Have Impact... and Leave if they Can't



Individual-Level Data; 3,800,000+ observations, over 5 countries

Honig 2024 Mission Driven Bureaucrats; PNAS 2021



3: Empowerment-Oriented Reforms ***Work Better*** than Compliance-Oriented Reforms*

***On the Rare Occasions When Anyone Has Looked**

Management for Empowerment Outperforms Compliance in “Head to Head” Competition

- ***Pakistani Health Workers:*** RCT finds encouraging “mission motivation” yields greater performance gains than financial rewards (Khan 2021)
- ***Nigerian infrastructure:*** Better performance with more autonomy, less incentives & control (Rasul & Rogger 2018)
- ***Ghanaian Public-sector wide:*** More discretion & autonomy associated with better performance, “especially for tasks that are ill-suited to predefined monitoring” (Rasul, Rogger, & Williams 2020)
- ***Pakistani Procurement:*** More autonomy outperforms pay-for-performance in RCT in ‘high bar’ case for MDBs on monitorability due to motivate-ability (Bandiera et al. 2021)

Why? Because Too Much Compliance is the *Norm*



4: Compliance-Oriented Accountability Can *Undermine* Performance

Hurricane Sandy & US HUD

Seaside Heights, NJ;
August 12, 2012



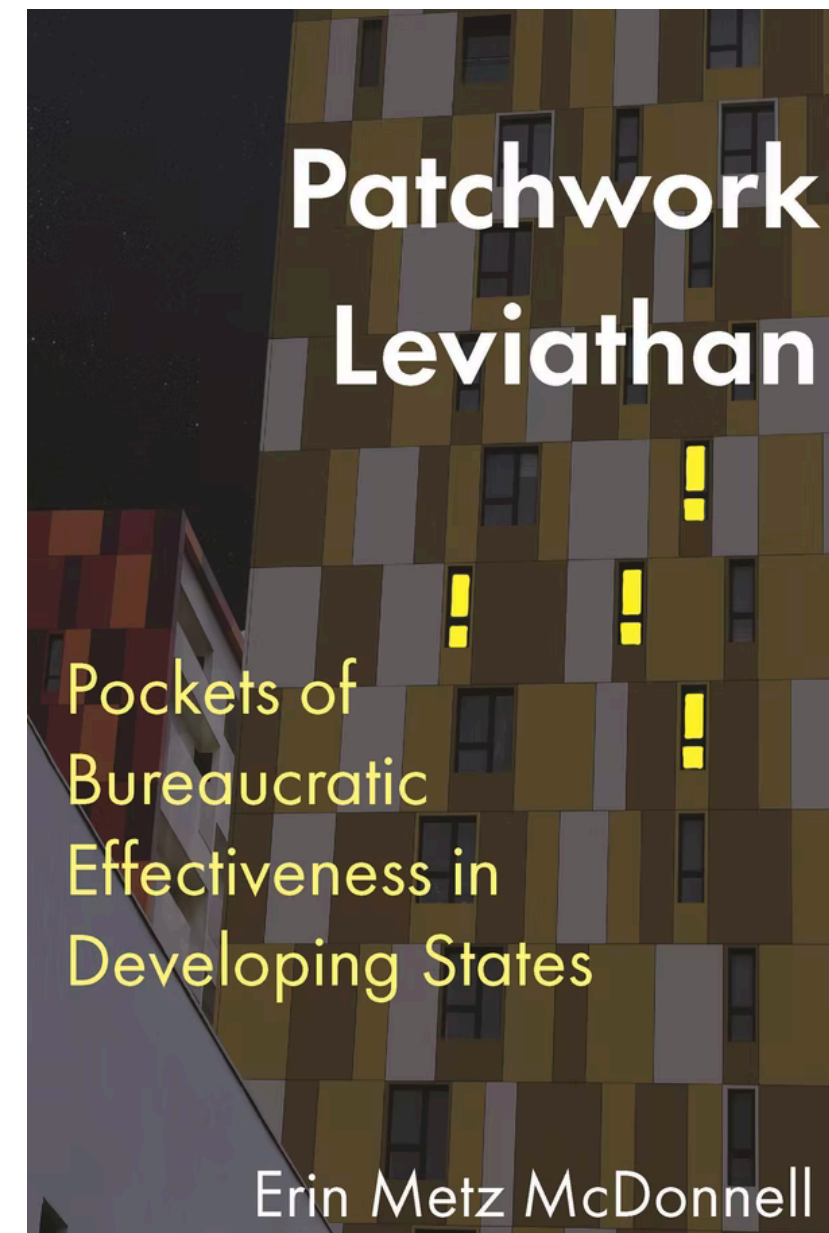


Trey Reffett, Senior Advisor
for Disaster Recovery, HUD

*Punitive oversight leads to a perpetuation of poverty; in a disaster, perfect paperwork is the last thing displaced families are focused on. **The poorer the family, the less likely they'll be able to produce the documentation. Time spent responding to the Inspector General is less time spent on grant activities in a world of finite budgets.** But maybe even more importantly, overly cautious program design and implementation results in poor people being left out.*

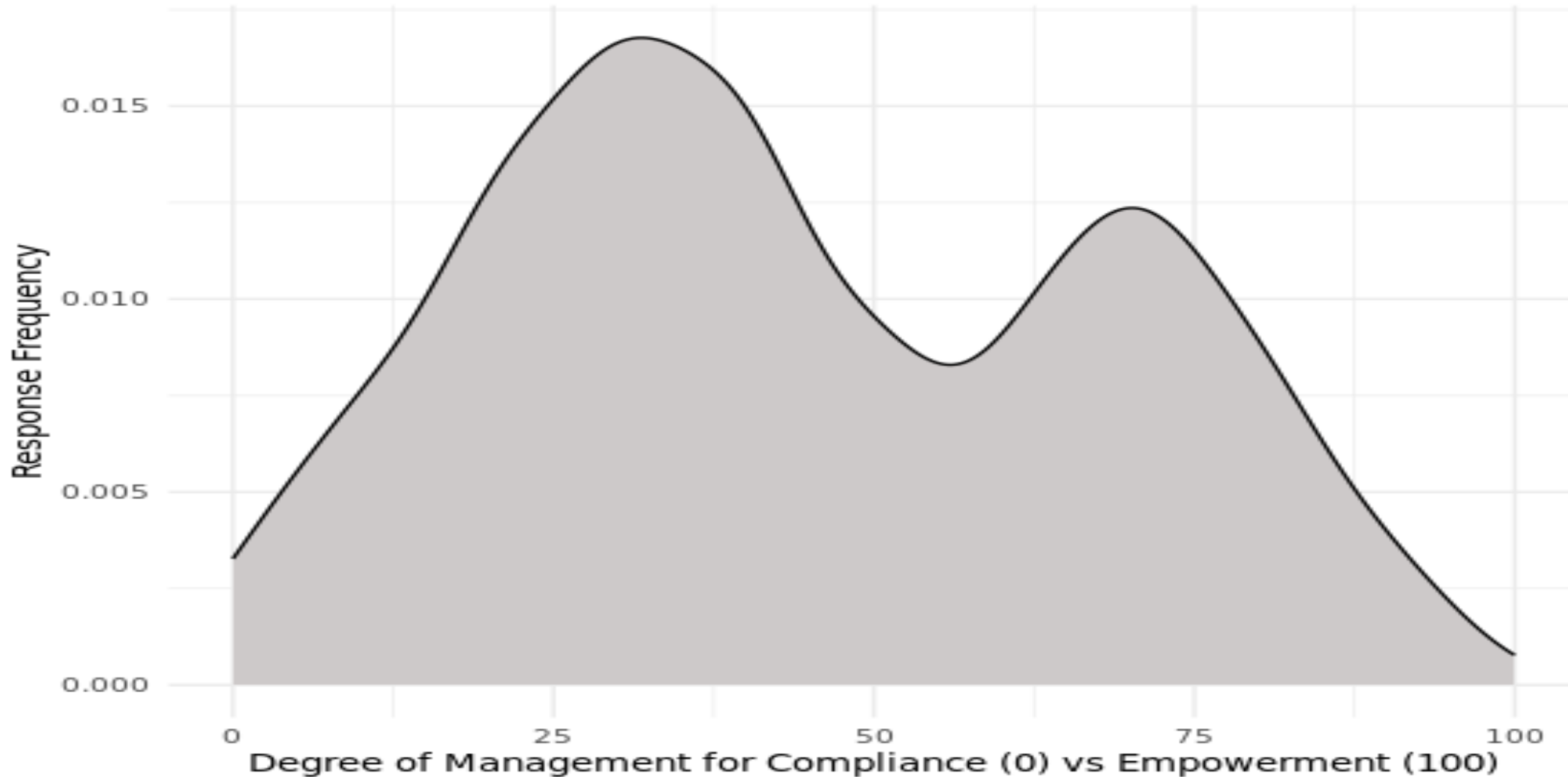
The Current Status Quo is Wrong - and Dangerous

“Currently dominant approaches to state reform... seek to limit discretion”, with “abstract monitoring systems that can monitor across large scales and at a distance, assuming only a pinnacle principal can be trusted to monitor his interests.”



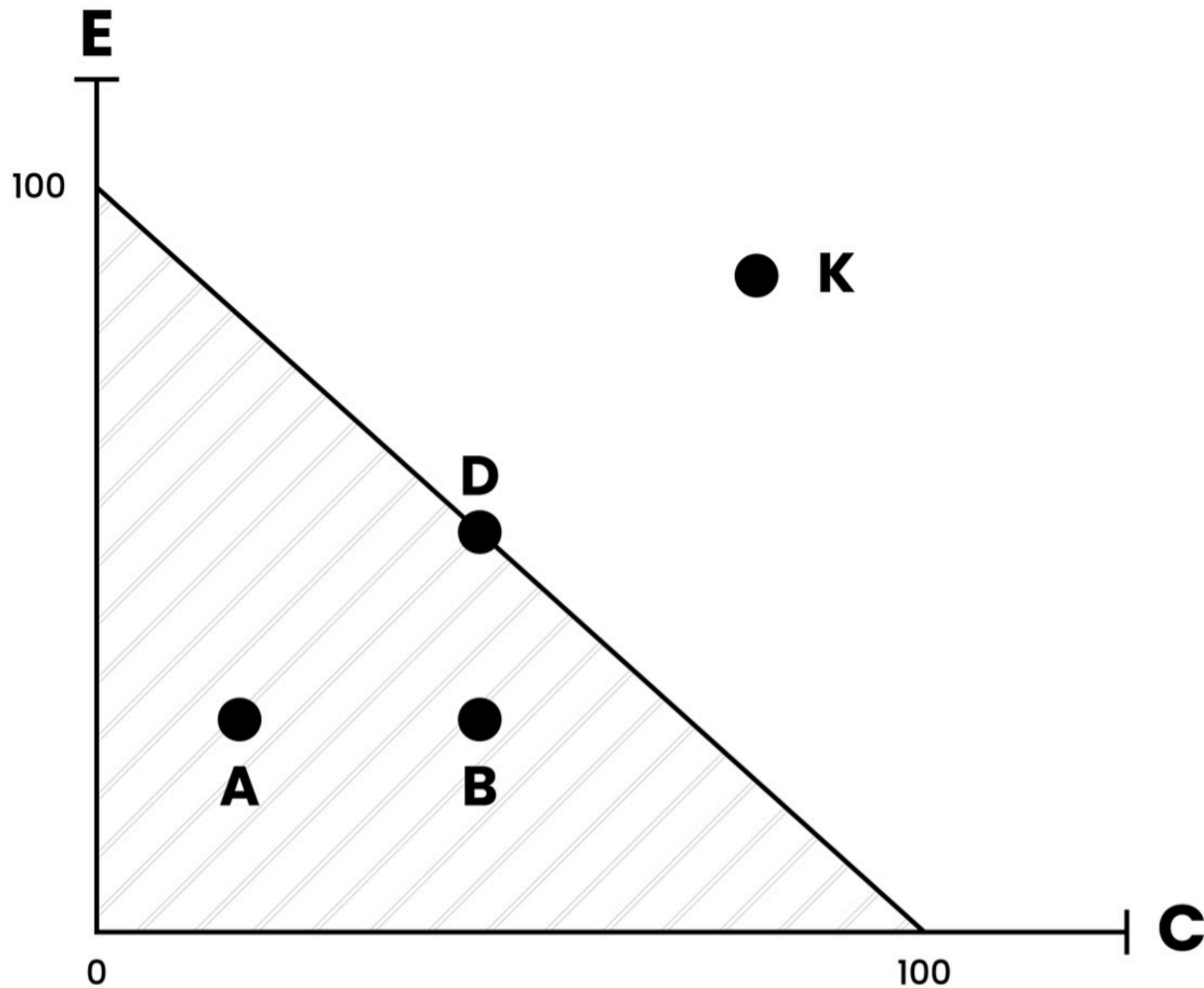
Too Much Compliance, Too Little Empowerment Everywhere We Look (28 Countries; 1300 responses)

Survey Distribution of Route C vs Route E Management



5: More Empowerment &
Different Accountability
(Often) Achievable Without
Reducing Current
Compliance

“Undermanaged” Agencies Can Increase Empowerment Without Reducing Compliance



Empowering Managerial Solutions for...

Managers to empower subordinates.

Strategy

Description

1 Removing or insulating your team from red tape.

Collecting feedback on unhelpful rules. Removing these or creating exceptions.

2 Connecting actions to results.

Connecting employees with clients or beneficiaries, allowing them to witness the positive consequences of their actions at work.

3 Encouraging self-directed development.

Asking employees what they want to learn, do and contribute.

4 Treating your subordinates more like equals.

Collectively discussing policy options and approaches alongside one's team.

5 Establishing a clear mission point.

Defining a clear and widely understood mission point.

Empowering Managerial Solutions for...

Managers to empower

teams.

Strategy

Description

1

Peer reviews and discussions.

Regular peer discussions to foster a collective sense of mission and peer accountability.

2

Promoting professionalism.

Creating a sense of belonging within a professional community, for instance by utilising mission symbols.

3

Reinforcing an Empowerment-oriented team narrative.

Developing a narrative of the team's identity, and actively communicating this purpose to employees.

Empowering Managerial Solutions for...

Senior leaders to empower

agencies.

Strategy

1 Setting up systems to listen.

2 Adding green tape.

3 Cultivating communities of practice.

4 Building 'better' bosses.

5 Formally delegating authority.

6 Centering citizen-bureaucrat interactions.

7 Recognising and rewarding mission motivation.

8 Facilitating downhill managerial trust.

Description

Setting up channels for employees to suggest improvements.

Adding or revising rules to empower and support employees.

Creating groups of employees who work towards a similar goal.

Encouraging managers to manage more thoughtfully.

Delegating decision-making authority to those lower down the hierarchy.

Focusing accountability/performance around bureaucrat-citizen relationships.

Celebrating employees who have shown exceptional mission motivation.

Setting an example of empowerment-oriented management.





“If I didn't feel like I was accomplishing anything here and I didn't feel like I was trusted, I probably wouldn't be long for this job. No one would.” - Joseph Roberts

Thank You

Dan Honig

dan.honig@ucl.ac.uk

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“Bureaucrats have preferences... among them is the desire to do the job.”

–James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy, p. 159

“[Work] is about a search, too, for daily meaning as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for a sort of life rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying.”

–Studs Terkel, Working, p. xiii