

The Mediating Effect of Trust in Leader on the Relationship between Empowering Leadership and Employee Creativity

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Abstract

This study interrogates primarily the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity. Furthermore, it aims to reveal if there is a mediating role of trust in leader on this relationship. The theoretical background of the research extends over the social exchange theory, behavioral self-management theory, social cognitive theory and job demands-resources model. Based upon the relevant literature, it has been intended to explain the interactions between the structures of empowering leadership, trust in leader and employee creativity. In order to accomplish this, a quantitative research was conducted among 172 engineers working in manufacturing companies located in Ankara and Istanbul. According to the results obtained from the research, it was figured out that empowering leadership has a significant and positive relationship with both employee creativity and trust in leader. It was also noted that trust in leader played a partial mediation role on the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity. As a result, with this research, it has been intended to provide valuable contributions to the related literature.

Keywords: *Empowering leadership, Employee creativity, Trust in leader, Contemporary leadership styles*

Güçlendirici Liderlik ve İşgören Yaratıcılığı Arasındaki İlişkide Lidere Duyulan Güvenin Aracılık Etkisi

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Öz

Bu çalışma öncelikle güçlendirici liderlik ve işgören yaratıcılığı arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Buna ilaveten çalışmada, bu ilişki üzerinde lidere duyulan güvenin aracılık rolünün olup, olmadığının ortaya konulması amaçlanmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın kuramsal altyapısı, sosyal mübadele kuramı, davranışsal öz-yönetim kuramı, sosyal bilişsel kuram ve iş talepleri-kaynakları modeline kadar uzanmaktadır. İlgili alanyazın temel alınarak, güçlendirici liderlik, lidere duyulan güven ve işgören yaratıcılığı değişkenleri arasındaki ilişkiler açıklanmaya çalışılmaktadır. Bunu yapabilmek adına, Ankara ve İstanbul'da yer alan imalat şirketlerinde çalışan 172 mühendis arasında, nicel bir araştırma yapılmıştır. Bu arařtırmadan elde edilen sonuçlara göre, güçlendirici liderliğin, işgören yaratıcılığı ve lidere duyulan güven üzerinde anlamlı ve olumlu bir etkisinin olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Ayrıca, güçlendirici liderlik ve işgören yaratıcılığı arasındaki ilişkide, lidere duyulan güvenin kısmi aracılık rolü oynadığı tespit edilmiştir. Böylece, bu çalışmada elde edilen sonuçlar sayesinde ilgili alanyazına değerli katkılarda bulunulması amaçlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Güçlendirici liderlik, İşgören yaratıcılığı, Lidere duyulan güven, Çağdaş liderlik yaklaşımları*

Introduction

Nowadays it has been more important to demonstrate complicated roles for leaders, as the environment in which their organizations survive is becoming more complex, unstable and uncertain (Kinicki, McKee and Wade, 1996). It is because, leaders have to keep up with the developments caused mostly by the help of the globalization. Based on these developments, technologies such as communication and information have improved and changed at a very high speed (Thamhain, 2004). Correspondingly, they caused today's leaders to exert different leadership styles. Among those, empowering leadership style glitters recently. It stems from the concept of "empowerment" that was born in the 1980s and developed in the 1990s and since then it has been a focus point among researchers (e.g. Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Luthans, 1995). Empowerment refers to the process of facilitating employees for making decisions on their own and accordingly participating in decision making mechanism in organizations (Erstad,1997).

With the help of empowerment it is possible to distribute power of decision making among organization members, especially ones occupying non-managerial positions. Furthermore, empowerment is crucial in gaining sustainable competitive advantage as, business environment is transforming to an information focused structure (Appelbaum and Honeggar, 1988). In such a context, human resources in the organizations are more skilled, more educated and more information oriented than yesterday. And they have a tendency to have job autonomy over their own work (Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger and Hemingway, 2005). This is why empowerment is a vital motivator for high-skilled employees at workplace.

Managing in such an environment, leaders tend to delegate authority and empower employees more than ever (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). These types of behaviors generated the concept of empowering leadership. Based on its importance this concept has been given emphasis by researchers. According to scholars, empowering leadership provides employees to feel free to make decisions about their own work, which in turn decreases their level of intention to quit (Gill,

Mathur, Sharma and Bhutani, 2011) at the same time, increasing their job performance (Srivastava, Bartol and Locke, 2006) and creativity (Zhang and Bartol, 2017). Among these favorable employee outcomes, 'creativity' is attracting more attention among researchers. The reason is that, it has been proved to have vital effects on the level of organizational competitiveness (George and Zhou, 2002). Therefore, here the principal target is to explore the link of empowering leadership behavior with creativity. To achieve this, it will be criticized whether there exists compelling effects of empowering leadership for individual employee creativity based upon social exchange theory (e.g. Blau, 1964), behavioral self-management theory (Thorenson and Mahoney, 1974), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) and Job Demands-Resources Model (Schaufeli, 2017).

Moreover, in the empowering leadership studies, it has been noted that there are significant moderating variables effecting its relationships with positive employee outcomes. Among these are, citizenship behavior (Auh, Menguc and Jung, 2014), psychological empowerment and employee motivation (Zhang and Bartol, 2010), job satisfaction (Vecchio, Justin and Pearce, 2010) and trust in leader (Bligh, 2017). There are fewer researches on the subject of trust in leader and its antecedents and consequences compared to other constructs (Zhang and Zhou, 2014). Therefore another aim of present research is to close another important hole in related literature by finding out whether trust in leader plays an arbitrating performance for the link betwixt empowering leadership and employee creativity or not. To achieve this, before hypothesis development, a comprehensive literature review is crucial for the research.

Scrutiny of Literature

As providing a basis for hypothesis development, scrutiny of literature for empowering leadership, trust in leader and creativity shall foster theoretical discussion throughout the study.

Empowering Leadership

To explore empowering leadership, first of all it is critical to examine the concept of empowerment. Since scholars have not agreed a general definition of empowerment, they seem to call it as 'employee empowerment' (Gómez and Rosen, 2001), organizational empowerment (Randolph and Sashkin, 2002) and psychological empowerment (Speitzer, 1995). On the contrary if it is to state a general definition of empowerment, it can be explained as, 'sharing power with subordinates' (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). It originates from the social exchange theory (e.g. Blau, 1964, Emerson, 1962). According social exchange theory, when party does a favor to another, the other party reciprocates (Thibault and Kelley, 1959). Here, by doing a favor to employees (empowerment), it is expected from them to reciprocate (e.g. work related positive behaviors).

Empowering leadership occurs when employees are given the freedom to act their own (Liu, Lepak, Takeuchi and Sims, 2003), and they are both delegated authority (Lee, Willis and Tian, 2017) and enhanced emancipated and autonomic decision making (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015). Directed to both individuals and teams, empowering leadership increases the degree of self management and control (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades and Drasgow, 2000).

Conceptualization of Empowering Leadership

According to Sharma and Kirkman (2015), empowering leadership definitions can be analyzed in two ways. The first is the behavioral approach. This perspective of explaining empowering leadership focuses on the behaviors of formal leaders in organizations. According to leader's behavior approach, by empowering leadership, leaders boost organization members to share their feelings and opinions and enable them to engage in arriving at a result (Arnold, et al., 2000) based on behavioral self-management theory (Thorenson and Mahoney, 1974). Self-management theory relies heavily on self-control pro-

cess in which an employee exerts behaviors of self-observation, self goal setting and self evaluation (Mahoney and Arnkoff, 1978) when he/she is empowered by the leader. The second is the process approach in which empowering leadership is accepted as a 'power sharing process' that delegates power to employees and enhance their job autonomy (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Sharma and Kirkman, 2015).

Analyzing the related literature, it has been understood that empowering leadership has two dimensions (Mathieu, Gilson and Ruddy,2006). The first dimension is named to be *structural* approach of empowering leadership. This approach focuses on the external context (e.g. Lee, et al.,2018). And it is on when for example, an employee has been stimulated in terms of empowerment by his/her leader. The second approach is called as psychological approach of empowering leadership. This approach takes empowerment in four dimensions which are; *meaningfulness, competence, self-determination and impact* (Spreitzer, 1995). It is, handling the issue from the perceptions of employees themselves. In other words, here it is important for employees to feel empowered by their leaders.

Distinguishing From Related Concepts

The concept of empowering leadership should be distinguished from other related constructs in the literature. According to an extensive revision of empowering leadership research made by Sharma and Kirkman (2015), it is distinctive from the related constructs of; '*delegation*', '*participative leadership*', '*transformational leadership*'.

When compared to 'delegation', empowering leadership is a broader concept. Empowering leadership is not only giving authority on decision making, as in the case of delegation, but also inspiring employees to manage themselves (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). Also empowering leadership differs from participative leadership in terms of motivating employees to make their own decisions and having autonomy in the workplace. Because participative leadership consists mostly the leaders' demanding employees' ideas and suggestions while making a decision (Huang, Iun, Liu and Gong, 2010).

Likewise, empowering leadership differentiates from transformational leadership in several points. Transformational leaders, hearten followers to develop themselves by providing what they need by *inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration* (Bass,1985). Nevertheless, transformational leaders don't distribute power to the followers, like empowering leaders do (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015). This is the case because empowering leaders' primary concern is to encourage followers make their own decisions.

Trust in Leader

Trust in leader has become a key factor in leader-follower relationships since the early theory of leadership till the recent leadership theories (Bligh, 2017). Trust can be defined as a benevolent behavior expected from a person based on his/her personal characteristics and intentions perceived by the other party (Yamagishi and Yamagishi, 1994). Also according to Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995), trust is being defenseless against another party by reason the expectation of his/her behaving in a manner which will not harm the trustor party.

The subject of trust in leader is crucial in empowering leadership. It is because to empower employees not only one-sided but also two-sided trust should be established. There are some factors important for developing trust in leader for followers. Among these are, ethical climate and justice (e.g. DeConinck, 2011), perceived organizational support (e.g. Wong, Wong and Ngo, 2011), transformational leadership (e.g. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter, 1990), leader-member exchange (e.g. Schriesheim, Castro and Cogliser, 1999) and empowering leadership (e.g. Bobbio, Bellan and Manganeli, 2012).

According to Dirks and Ferrin (2002), there are two approaches about forming trust in leader which are *relationship-based perspective* and *character-based perspective*. First perspective is based on social exchange theory. According to this approach, followers build exchange relationships based on trust and mutual obligations (Blau, 1964; Konovsky and Pugh, 1994). Oppositely, according to character-based perspective, members generate trust based on traits of leader. These

may consist integrity, fairness and objectivity (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). According to both approaches, trust in leader has a tendency to be effected by leaders and leadership styles.

Employee Creativity

According to scholars it is evident that creativity is crucial for organizational survival (Zhou, 1998). It connotes to develop unique and beneficial ideas, suggestions, response or solution for an open-ended task by employee or employees (Amabile, 1988). There exist three within-individual and one outside the individual components. These are stemmed from componential theory of creativity. The within-individual components are, '*domain-relevant skills*', '*creativity-relevant processes*' and '*task motivation*'. The domain-relevant skills refer to the proficiency in the related area. The creativity-relevant processes refer to intellectual processes that lead to unique ideas. Task motivation refer to the personal intrinsic motivation to achieve a challenging task. And the outside the individual component is, environment and especially social environment (Amabile, 2013).

As an important point outside the individual component for an employee creativity, leadership style bursts into prominence. For example, leader-member exchange has positive link correlation with creativity (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Likewise, transformational and supportive leadership boost creativity in the workplace (Sosik, Kahai and Avolio, 1998; Oldham and Cummings, 1996).

Employee creativity generally decreases when there is a directive management, time pressure and criticism of new ideas in the organization or in the group. On the contrary, it increases when there is a collaboration with other employees, support for creative thinking and encouragement of idea generating by supervisor (Amabile, 2013).

Hypothesis Development and Research Model

There are quite remarkable number of researches about the favorable results of empowering leadership. These studies theoretically based on social exchange theory and Job Demands-Resources Model, explo-

ring links betwixt empowering leadership and task performance that found positive correlations (e.g. Lee, 2017). Similarly it has been evident that empowering leadership holds favorable effects on organizational citizenship (e.g. Raub and Robert, 2010). Another positive outcome of the same construct has been observed for employee creativity. Although there are scarce resource analyzing this relationship, scholars have pointed out favorable link of empowering leadership and creativity (e.g. Harris, Li, Boswell, Zhang and Xie, 2014; Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Zhang and Zhou, 2014). For this reason it is hypothesized as:

Hypothesis 1: Empowering leadership is positively related to employee creativity.

Furthermore, followers' trust in leader is effected by both the leader's characteristics and the relationship quality occurring between the follower and the leader (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Hence, it is expected to have different effects of different leaders and leadership styles on followers' trust in leader. According to Bobbio, et al. (2012), empowering leadership is a concrete indicator for trust in leader and effects it positively. Thus,

Hypothesis 2: Empowering leadership is positively related to trust in leader.

Also based on the related literature, trust in leader has plenty of positive employee outcomes (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Employee creativity is one of them. When an exchange exists among employees and their leader built on trust, employees' creativity in the work place tends to rise (Jaiswal and Dhar, 2017). So Hypothesis 3 is as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Trust in leader is positively related to employee creativity.

Additionally, when there is a trust in leader, employees' positive work outcomes increase (Deluga, 1994). According to Dirks and Ferrin (2002), leader's actions and practices are important for employees to build trust in him/her. While inspiring employees to set goals and to decide by delegating authority, both the leader and the members generate mutual trust. Trust exerts a mediating mechanism for many positive behaviors at work (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Creativity is one of the positive employee outcomes provided by empowering leadership that trust mediates. Hence, the following hypothesis is as:

Hypothesis 4: Trust in leader plays a mediating role in the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity.

Figure 1 shows relationships between the indicated variables which are empowering leadership, trust in leader and employee creativity.

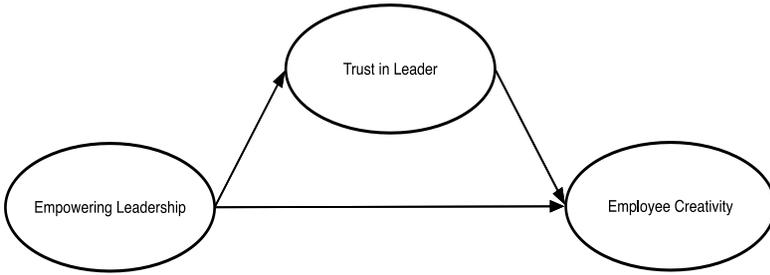


Figure 1. Research Model

Research Method

Research Procedure and Sampling

To collect and analyze data, quantitative research design has been applied throughout this study. This was done by applying survey technique. Data was collected from engineering departments from three manufacturing companies. Two of the companies were located

in Ankara and one company was operating in Istanbul in Turkey. Manufacturing industry has the biggest share of Gross Domestic Product in Turkey. This industry had a ratio of 16,6 percent in 2016 according to the data obtained from Turkish Statistical Institution. The participants were selected as engineers because, creativity was thought to play a more important role among them.

So as to collect data surveys were distributed to the participants in Ankara by hand, and mailed to the participants in Istanbul. Among 195 questionnaires, 172 returned. This generated the response rate of %88.2. Demographic data of participants are demonstrated below.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

	f	%
Company		
1	63	37
2	51	29
3	58	34
Gender		
Female	54	31
Male	118	69
Marital Status		
Married	101	59
Single	71	41
Age		
21-30	42	25
31-40	57	33
41-50	45	26
50+	28	16
Education		
Bachelor's degree	156	90
Postgraduate degree	16	10
Tenure		
0-5 years	38	22
6-10 years	62	36
11-15 years	43	25
15+ years	29	17
Total	172	100,0

Measures Used in the Research

All of the measures used in the study were designed on a five-point Likert-type scale starting from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Original scales for collecting data were in English. As the participants are not native English speakers, all of the items in the measures were translated as a method of back translation (Brislin, 1986).

In order to measure *empowering leadership*, the questionnaire of Ahearne, Mathieu and Rapp (2005) was filled by the employees participated in the research. A sample item from the measure is: "My manager expresses confidence in my ability to perform at a high level." There are 12 items in the scale consisting of four dimensions. These dimensions are named as; "enhancing the meaningfulness of work", "fostering participation in decision making", "expressing confidence in high performance" and "providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints". Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.91, 0.82, 0.87 and 0.81 respectively.

As the scale for measuring *trust in leader*, the abbreviated type of Organizational Trust Inventory of Cummings and Bromiley (1996) was used. It was also validated by Bobbio, et al. (2012) with Cronbach's $\alpha=0.93$. In this study it was found to consist three dimensions of; "keeping commitments", "negotiating honestly" and "not taking excessive advantage". Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.84, 0.89, 0.77 respectively. An example item: "I feel that my manager will keep his/her word."

Employee creativity was measured by the creativity scale of Zhou and George (2001). The 13-item questionnaire was filled by supervisors. An example item: "This employee searches out new technologies, processes, techniques and/or product ideas." Cronbach's alpha coefficients was 0.80.

Data Analysis and Results

To analyze stated sample and to observe the links between empowering leadership, trust in leader and employee creativity, firstly the

correlations between the variables were evaluated. Subsequently, regression analysis took place.

Factor Analysis

Both exploratory and confirmatory analyses were conducted for these measures. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and Bartlett Sphericity test results for each scales are demonstrated at Table 2.

Table 2. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett Sphericity Tests Results

<i>Empowering Leadership Scale</i>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0,86	
Bartlett Sphericity Test	X ²	1.232,2
	Sd	88
	p	0,000***
<i>Trust in Leader Scale</i>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0,81	
Bartlett Sphericity Test	X ²	965,4
	Sd	52
	p	0,000***
<i>Employee Creativity Scale</i>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0,72	
Bartlett Sphericity Test	X ²	1.593,1
	Sd	34
	p	0,000***

*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

According to Table 2, KMO value for empowering leadership scale was 0,86; trust in leaders scale was 0,81 and employee creativity scale was 0,72. According to Field (2000), the lower limit for KMO is 0,50. As KMO values of all the scales were above the limit, it was suitable to apply factor analysis.

With the help of exploratory factor analysis, empowering leadership scale was found to have four components, and all of the items having loadings above 0.50. Likewise trust in leadership scale turned

out to have three components and all items have loadings above 0.50. Employee creativity scale has one component and like the others, all of its items had loadings above 0.50.

In order to validate the measures, following the exploratory factor analysis, also confirmatory analysis was applied. The results are shown at Table 3. Goodness of fit indices for all of the measures are within the accepted limits, indicated by Hu and Bentler (1999).

Table 3. Goodness of Fit Indices for Measures

Measure	χ^2 /df	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	GFI
Empowering Leadership	3,284	0,940	0,908	0,086	0,932
Trust in Leader	2,746	0,955	0,920	0,077	0,944
Employee Creativity	1,985	0,973	0,945	0,082	0,958

Correlation Analysis

Within the scope of correlation analysis, means, standard deviations, correlations and reliabilities of measures are shown at Table 4.

Table 4. Correlations among Variables

Measure	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1.Empowering Leadership	3.12	1.16	(0.91)		
2.Trust in Leader	2.84	0.97	0.46***	(0.93)	
3.Employee Creativity	2.95	1.28	0.58***	0.36**	(0.80)

*p<0.05. **p<0.01. ***p<0.001.

According to Table 4, significant and moderate positive relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity exists ($r=0.58$; $p<0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported. Likewise, it has been inferred from the results that there is a moderate positive relationship between empowering leadership and trust in leader ($r=0.46$; $p<0.001$). Hence, Hypothesis 2 is supported. Moreover, it was obtained from data that, also here moderate positive link with trust in leader and employee creativity can be observed ($r=0.36$; $p<0.01$). Again based on this result, Hypothesis 3 is also supported. Here, the strength of the relationship between empowering leadership and

employee creativity is bigger than the strength of the relationship between trust in leader and employee creativity.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

To reveal if there is a mediating role of trust in leader on the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity, three steps hierarchical regression was conducted. The aim was to explore the significant effects among variables step by step (Baron and Kenny, 1986). The hierarchical regression results are present at Table 5.

Table 5. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Beta Co-efficient	R ²	Adjusted R ²	P
Empowering Leadership (EL)	Employee Creativity	0,38	0,234	0,231	0,000**
Empowering Leadership (EL)	Trust in Leader	0,43	0,358	0,354	0,000**
Empowering Leadership (EL)	Employee Creativity	0,26	0,472	0,466	0,000**
Trust in Leader (TL)	Employee Creativity	0,54			
$\Delta R^2: 0,238$					

*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

According to hierarchical regression analysis, it has been revealed that empowering leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity ($\beta_{EL1}=0,38$; $p<0,01$). Likewise, empowering leadership has been noted to have again positive and significant effect on trust in leader ($\beta_{EL2}=0,43$, $p<0,01$). To reveal the mediation effect on the last step, it has been understood that there is a partial mediation effect of trust in leader on the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity. This is because, the Beta coefficient of empowering leadership that explain employee creativity decreased

from 0,38 to 0,26 ($\beta_{EL3}=0,26$, $p<0,01$). Also after trust in leader, the model faced a rise in terms of ΔR^2 with a result of 0,238. So, Hypothesis 4 is partially supported. Eventually, to test the mediating model, Sobel Test was conducted and it was obtained as sufficient ($Z_1=5,352$, $p<0,01$).

Conclusion

Throughout the research, the aim was to search relationships between empowering leadership, individual employee creativity and trust in leader. In this context, it was also another main aim of this study to reveal if trust in leader plays mediating role on the link with empowering leadership and employee creativity. To reach these aims, data were obtained from a group of engineers, a significant example of most creative employee category.

According to the results of this research, empowering leadership has a significant and positive relationship with employee creativity ($r=0.58$; $p<0.001$). The magnitude of the correlation is bigger than the result obtained by Zhang and Bartol (2010) ($r=0.24$; $p<0.001$). Likewise, empowering leadership again has a significant and positive relationship with trust in leader ($r=0.46$; $p<0.001$). On the contrary, this correlation obtained in the study is weaker than the one obtained by more powerful than the magnitude obtained by Bobbio, et al., (2012) ($r=0.75$; $p<0.001$). Additionally, with the help of the hierarchical regression analysis, it was understood that empowering leadership has positive effects on both trust in leader and creativity. The important point here is that, trust in leader played a partial mediator role on the relationship between empowering leadership and individual employee creativity. With stated results, present study has provided a valuable resource for the related literature.

By the help of this research, it has been understood that when leaders not only delegate employees but also provide the freedom to make their own task related decisions and psychologically empower and support them, they tend to generate unique, creative and fruitful ideas and suggestions. These exclusive ideas, suggestions and solutions are absolute facilitator for companies both to survive and gain

competitive advantage over other companies in the sector. So this study revealed an important factor which is empowering leadership, for companies trying to increase employee creativity. So managers should lead subordinates by empowering them more, beyond exerting for example participative leadership.

Moreover, if employees trust in leaders, creative behavior increases as employees feel comfortable in the workplace. Based on the results obtained in this study, employees need a relationship with their managers based on trust, to be more creative. When they believe that their managers act as the way they expect, they seem to generate new ideas and solutions to particular situations or problems. Additionally, when employees trust in their leaders, empowering leadership tends to be more effective.

In future empowering leadership and creativity should be considered at team-level, since this study was conducted on individual level. Also the sample should be expanded by both number of participants and sector of companies.

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