

Strengths-Based Leadership and Eudaimonic Well-Being: Roles of Growth Mindset and Strength Use

Güçlü Yönler Odaklı Liderlik-Ödemonik Esenlik İlişkisinde Gelişim Odaklılıkla Güçlü Yönlerin Kullanımı

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Strengths-based leadership
Eudaimonic well-being
Growth mindset
Strengths use
Positive organizational behavior

Strengths-Based Leadership (SBL) is a positive leadership approach that emphasizes identifying, developing, and leveraging individual strengths to enhance organizational performance and employee well-being. While prior research links SBL to increased employee engagement, performance, and satisfaction, its specific mechanisms in promoting eudaimonic well-being (EWB) form of well-being characterized by self-actualization and meaningful life experiences—remain underexplored. This study investigates the relationship between SBL and EWB, focusing on the mediating roles of growth mindset and strength use. Based on data from 304 Turkish employees, path analysis was employed to test a hypothesized model linking SBL, growth mindset, strength use, and EWB. Results indicate that SBL positively relates to both growth mindset and strength use, which in turn mediate its relationship with EWB. These findings highlight the transformative role of strengths-based leadership in fostering psychological well-being through intrinsic motivation and strengths utilization.

Received: 16.11.2025

Accepted: 10.03.2026

Article Classification:

Research Article

ÖZ

Anahtar kelimeler:

Güçlü yönler odaklı liderlik
Ödemonik iyi oluş
Gelişim odaklı zihniyet
Güçlü yönlerin kullanımı
Pozitif örgütsel davranış

Güçlü yönler odaklı liderlik, kişilerin güçlü yönlerin belirlenmesini, geliştirilmesini ve kullanılmasını vurgulayan, örgütsel performansı ve çalışan iyi oluşunu artırmayı amaçlayan pozitif bir liderlik yaklaşımıdır. Geçmiş araştırmalar güçlü yönler odaklı liderliği artıran çalışan bağlılığı, performansı ve memnuniyetiyle ilişkilendirmiş olsa da kendini gerçekleştirme ve anlamlı yaşam deneyimleriyle karakterize edilen bir iyi oluş biçimi olan ödemonik esenliği teşvik etmedeki özel mekanizmaları yeterince incelenmemiştir. Bu çalışma, güçlü yönler odaklı liderlik ile ödemonik esenlik arasındaki ilişkiyi, gelişim odaklı zihniyet ve güçlü yön kullanımı değişkenlerinin aracı rolleri üzerine odaklanarak incelemektedir. Bu çalışmada 304 Türk çalışandan elde edilen verilere dayanarak, güçlü yönler odaklı liderlik, gelişim odaklı zihniyet, güçlü yön kullanımı ve ödemonik esenlik arasındaki varsayımsal modeli test etmek için yol analizi uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlar, güçlü yönler odaklı liderliğin hem gelişim odaklı zihniyeti hem de güçlü yön kullanımı pozitif yönde etkilediğini ve bu değişkenlerin güçlü yönler odaklı liderlik ile ödemonik esenlik arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık ettiğini göstermektedir.

Gönderilme Tarihi: 16.11.2025

Kabul Tarihi: 10.03.2026

Makale Kategorisi:

Araştırma Makalesi

ETHICAL APPROVAL: Approval for this study was obtained from the MEF University Ethics Committee at its meeting dated 20 December 2024, with approval number E-47749665-050.04-5300.

1. INTRODUCTION

Positive leadership has been conceptualized as a set of leadership behaviors that intentionally foster positive emotional experiences among followers by emphasizing their internal needs and personal strengths (Kelloway et al., 2012; Yan et al., 2023). Although the term positive leadership has been relatively recent, the underlying principle of leaders engaging in constructive and supportive behaviors toward employees is implicitly embedded in many contemporary leadership theories (Kelloway et al., 2012). A central responsibility of positive leaders is to enable employees to perform at their highest potential by providing encouragement and developmental support (Wang et al., 2023).

As rooted in positive psychology (Wang et al., 2023) and recognized as a foundational element of positive leadership, strengths-based leadership (SBL) has been premised on the belief that individuals have their unique combination of unique strengths that allow them to perform at their personal best (Wood et al., 2011) and have greater potential to develop those unique strengths than to correct their weaknesses (Harter et al., 2002; Burkus, 2011). This leadership style emphasizes identifying, nurturing, and leveraging both leaders' and employees' strengths (Ding et al., 2020). The primary aim of SBL is to improve productivity, efficiency, and organizational success by enabling individuals to operate within their zones of strength (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Leaders who adopt this approach consistently invest in their team members' strengths while managing their weaknesses (Burkus, 2011).

Drawing on positive psychology research, evidence has been suggested that employees are more likely to achieve optimal workplace performance when leadership practices promote a strengths-based focus rather than an emphasis on weaknesses (Linley et al., 2005). Research has shown that SBL has been positively associated with employee engagement, performance, well-being, life satisfaction, and optimism (Ding et al., 2020; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2017; Wang et al., 2023). For example, when their leaders emphasize their strengths, employees are 73% more likely to feel engaged (Burkus, 2011). SBL has also been linked to reduced absenteeism and decreased symptoms of depression (Gander et al., 2012). In this way, SBL has been positioned not only as a tool for enhancing organizational performance but also for promoting employees' psychological well-being and quality of life (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018; Ding et al., 2020).

The potential of SBL to enhance well-being can be grounded in its capacity to generate positive experiences through the activation and application of personal strengths (Kilcullen et al., 2018). Thus, it is reasonable to propose that SBL contributes to enhancing well-being, enriching lives through the joy of discovering and utilizing personal strengths (Weber et al., 2013). Leaders who practice SBL provide the necessary support and resources that help employees meet their intrinsic needs for growth and self-improvement, ultimately contributing to job satisfaction and mental health (Wang et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there has been limited empirical evidence to support this idea (Ding & Yu, 2022).

While strengths-based leadership is a relatively undeveloped field, it has gained growing popularity in recent years by revealing possible benefits both at individual and organizational levels (Wang et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the focus of previous studies on SBL have been primarily on performance, engagement and hedonic well-being (i.e., pleasure and happiness); therefore, little is known about how SBL can specifically relate to eudaimonic well-being and through which psychological mechanisms.

There has also been an extensive body of literature examining the relationships between leadership and employee well-being (Kelloway & Barling, 2010; Kelloway et al., 2012). Given that eudaimonic well-being has been a relatively underexplored outcome, the present study extended this line of research by focusing on the associations between recent developments in SBL and eudaimonic well-being. Specifically, it investigated the mechanisms through which SBL can potentially enhance eudaimonic well-being, thereby addressing an important gap in the literature.

Furthermore, no prior study has tested both growth mindset and strength use together as relevant factors, which can potentially contribute to the exploration of the underlying mechanisms through which SBL shapes employee outcomes. Accordingly, by integrating three major theoretical frameworks; SBL, self-determination theory, and the ability–motivation–opportunity, the model tested in the present study offered a more comprehensive explanation of these underlying mechanism.

1.1. Eudaimonic Well-Being and SBL

Eudaimonic well-being (EWB) pertains to living in accordance with one's true self and realizing one's full potential. It emphasizes self-actualization, autonomy, and life purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Unlike hedonic well-being, which focuses primarily on pleasure, comfort, and the presence of positive emotions, EWB is about meaningfulness and long-term flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

EWB also aligns with the long-term developmental needs of employees and the evolving expectations for meaningful and fulfilling work. Therefore, Eudaimonic well-being (EWB) is especially relevant for modern organizations since it is inherently developmental and growth oriented. It captures deeper dimensions of human functioning such as growth, purpose, and self-realization (Ryff et al., 2021) which are consistent with SBL's emphasis on developing strengths and are specifically essential in today's complex work environments. Hence, EWB represents a more conceptually aligned outcome than hedonic well-being, which reflects short-term affective states and is a more suitable outcome for SBL than hedonic well-being. EWB provides a more comprehensive perspective to understand the deeper, long-term impacts of strengths-based leadership by emphasizing authentic functioning and strength development.

The eudaimonic perspective views well-being as psychological well-being, as characterized by various scholars from diverse theoretical frameworks (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryff (2014) operationalized EWB using six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. According to self-determination theory (SDT), EWB results from satisfying the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation—a key element in SDT—is associated with greater performance and overall well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

EWB has been an important concept in work experience as well as in daily life since it is directly related to a fulfilling and meaningful life (Ryff, 2014). Nevertheless, despite the established benefits of SBL on employee well-being, engagement, and satisfaction (Ding et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023), its specific role and mechanisms in cultivating EWB remains underexplored.

1.2. The Mediating Roles of Growth Mindset and Strength Use

A mindset is a system of beliefs and attitudes that influence how individuals perceive themselves and interpret the world (Dweck, 2006). It influences one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in various situations. Dweck conceptualized mindset as a continuum with two poles: growth mindset and fixed mindset. Those with a growth mindset believe that abilities and intelligence can be developed, while those with a fixed mindset see them as static.

Employees with a growth mindset are more likely to use and develop their strengths, especially when they perceive leadership support and encouragement (Liu & Tong, 2022; Tierney et al., 1999). When leaders foster a culture that supports growth, employees are empowered to improve their strengths, leading to personal and professional development (Wang et al., 2023). Given that, SBL fosters environments emphasizing development and authentic competence, it is expected to shape employees' fundamental beliefs about growth.

van Woerkom and Meyers (2019) suggested that employees with a growth mindset tend to see their intelligence and abilities as improvable, thus, they are more likely to utilize and develop them. Furthermore, employees with a growth mindset also learn from other employees' strengths (Rowden, 2002). Also, once employees internalize a growth mindset, they are more likely to engage in

behaviors that allow them to enact and refine their strengths.

Strengths are authentic traits and capacities that enable individuals to perform at their best, characterized by their energizing and genuine nature (Linley & Harrington, 2006). These traits, refined through experience and practice, are vital to sustained effectiveness across contexts (Forest et al., 2012). Both mediators align naturally with eudaimonia: growth mindset reflects the pursuit of personal development, while strength use represents the enactment of one's authentic capacities—central to Ryff's (2014) model of psychological flourishing.

The use of personal strengths—defined as their application across various contexts including the workplace (Van Woerkom et al., 2016)—is closely aligned with SDT. When individuals engage in activities that utilize their strengths, they experience intrinsic motivation, which enhances creativity, performance, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Kong and Ho (2015) proposed that leadership can catalyze self-determined behaviors by promoting autonomy and strengths use. The use of strengths embodies the action-oriented nature of eudaimonia, as it involves applying one's best qualities to meaningful tasks (Ryan et al., 2008). Eventually, it is a more direct predictor of key outcomes as it directly involves action in the workplace. Empirical research supports this link. For example, Harzer and Ruch (2013) found that individuals who applied three or more strengths at work reported higher levels of EWB. Similarly, Page and Vella-Brodrick (2008) demonstrated that strengths-based self-improvement enhances well-being.

According to the ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) model (Appelbaum et al., 2000), performance is optimized when individuals possess the skills, motivation, and opportunities to act. SBL enhances all three by developing employee abilities, fostering a growth-oriented mindset, and creating environments conducive to strengths application (Ding & Yu, 2022). Consequently, employees under strengths-based leadership are more likely to utilize their strengths at work, leading to improved psychological well-being. SBL satisfies core SDT needs by supporting autonomy (choosing how to use strengths), competence (building strengths), and relatedness (supportive leader relationships). Simultaneously, SBL enhances the ability, motivation, and opportunity components of the AMO model, making strength use more likely. Through this dual pathway, SBL is theoretically positioned to increase both growth mindset and strength use, which jointly supports EWB.

Based on the arguments, we hypothesized that:

H1: SBL is positively related to growth mindset.

H2: Growth mindset is positively related to strengths use.

H3: SBL is indirectly related to EWB through the sequential mediation of growth mindset and strengths use.

The proposed model a sequential mediation (see Figure 1).

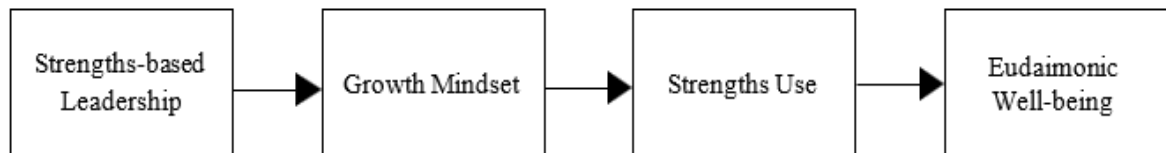


Figure 1: Hypothesized Model

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

Data were collected from 304 Turkish employees through convenience sampling. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants who were involved in the study. The study received ethical approval from the MEF University Ethics Committee in 2024. Descriptive demographic details of the participants are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variables	n	%
Assigned sex		
Woman	188	61.8
Man	115	37.8
Doesn't want to specify	1	0.3
Education		
High school	16	5.3
Associate/ bachelor's degree	191	62.8
Postgraduate	97	31.9
Organization type		
Private	199	65.5
Public	105	34.5
Employee status		
Non-managerial	237	78
Managerial	67	22

Table 2: Descriptive Properties of Participants

In years	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Age	32.49	8.23	18-71
Affiliation (company)	5.95	6.31	0.2-32
Affiliation (role)	5.36	5.93	0.2-32
Supervisor reporting	3.16	3.51	0.2-30

2.2. Measurements

SBL was measured with the 11 items used by Ding et al. (2020), Ding and Yu (2022), and Ding et al. (2023). The Cronbach's alpha value was .94.

The Growth Mindset scale developed by Dweck (1999) and later developed again by Sigmundsson et al. (2020) including 8 items was used. Cronbach's alpha was .86.

Six strengths use items from the Strengths Use and Deficit Correction Questionnaire (van Woerkom

et al., 2016) were used. The Cronbach's alpha value was .92.

Finally, to measure EWB, the Turkish translation of The Eudaimonic Well-Being Scale (Waterman et al., 2010; Yıldırım & Bozdemir, 2020) was used. The Turkish version consisted of 18 items. Three items were excluded from further analyses due to their low inter-item correlations. The final Cronbach's alpha value was .88.

All scales used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). All items except the EWB were translated and back-translated into Turkish independently by the authors within the current study. The final versions were agreed upon through discussion.

To test their constructs, separate confirmatory factor analyses were conducted. All scales demonstrated good fit with their original structures.

3. RESULTS

First, a correlational analysis was conducted to explore links among study variables (see Table 3).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. SBL	304	3.73	0.94	–			
2. Growth mindset	304	4.38	0.51	.384**	–		
3. Strengths use	304	4.19	0.69	.466**	.680**	–	
4. EWB	304	3.99	0.61	.403**	.670**	.748**	–

** $p < .01$.

To test the hypothesized model, a path analysis was conducted. The hypothesized model's fit was at the expected level, nevertheless it got better when the direct link between SBL and strengths use and growth mindset and EWB were added, ($X^2(1) = 1.02$, $p = .27$, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.98, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.26) (see Figure 2). Thus, the H3 was partially supported. The results showed that SBL contributed growth mindset ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) and strengths use ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), growth mindset enhanced EWB ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) and strengths use ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$), which in turn had a positive impact on EWB ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$).

The results supported H1 and H2, as all hypothesized direct relationships were statistically significant ($p < .001$).

In summary, the sequential mediation path was significant. However, the direct path from SBL to EWB remained significant after the inclusion of mediators, indicating partial mediation rather than full mediation.

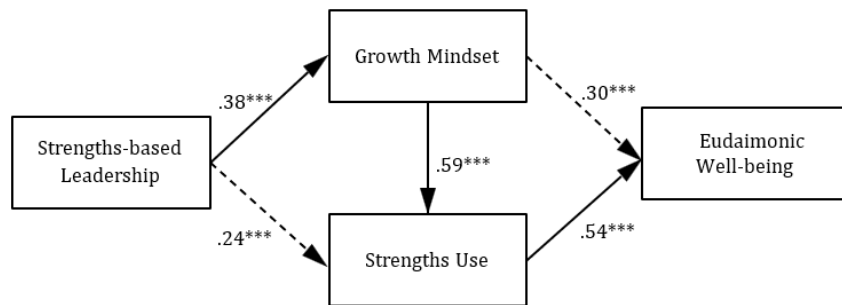


Figure 2: Path Analysis

Note. The dotted lines are the non-hypothesized relations.

*** $p < .001$.

4. DISCUSSION

This study extends our understanding of the mechanisms underlying SBL's impacts and provides actionable insights for companies seeking to foster long-term well-being and performance of their employees. Strengths-based leaders are associated with employees' perceptions of discovering and using their strengths, fostering a growth mindset driven culture, and creating opportunities for strengths to be utilized effectively (Ding & Yu, 2022; Rath & Conchie, 2008). Leaders who identify and cultivate their employees' strengths are associated with higher levels of EWB, hence contributing to a more motivated and productive workforce. Methodologically, this study contributes to the literature by investigating leadership style, mindset, use of strengths, and well-being in the same model. This comprehensive method provides a more complete picture of employee growth and strengthens the scientific basis for future SBL research.

The findings indicate that growth mindset and strengths utilization are not simply inherent personality traits but rather improvable skills. Thus, it is important to explore SBL as a constructive leadership approach focused on enhancing positive subjective experiences by encouraging the recognition, cultivation, and application of both their own and subordinates' strengths, thereby supporting organizations in attaining long-term competitive advantage (Ding et al., 2020).

Organizations may consider focused interventions aimed at supporting employees' well-being by using focused interventions such as coaching and mindset training rather than hiring individuals who already possess these qualities. Organizations can also include strengths-based approaches into their leadership development programs and management practices. Employees' long-term work satisfaction and performance can be boosted if organizations train leaders to communicate effectively with their employees who have different mindsets. In summary, organizations can cultivate a workforce that thrives both professionally and personally by aligning their leadership practices with the principles of growth mindset and strengths use.

However, our study has some limitations that should be recognized. First, the fact that the study was conducted with participants who are employees that work mostly in the private organizations in Türkiye limits the generalizability and applicability of our results to other cultural or organizational contexts. The emphasis on private companies also limits industry representation and misses the characteristics of organizations. Also, since our study has a cross-sectional design, it makes it difficult to establish causal relationships between variables. Even though our study shows relationships between our variables, mindset, and strengths-use, it cannot tell how these relationships develop over time. Additionally, the results may have potential biases such as social desirability since our study is based on self-reported data.

Although SBL is often associated with positive outcomes, it is important to examine any potential unexpected consequences since, focusing solely on strengths may unintentionally limit employees' opportunity to grow their weaker areas, or may create a work environment where individuals feel obligated to regularly perform only in domains where they are already skilled. Such an imbalance could hinder the overall professional development of employees. Prior research argues that solely focusing on existing strengths might obscure developmental requirements, cause missed learning opportunities, and eventually weaken leadership and organizational effectiveness (Kaiser & Overfield, 2011). Therefore, examining these potential downsides can assist in improving SBL processes and can ensure that strengths-based programs are executed in a way that promotes overall employee development.

In Türkiye, leadership perceptions are determined by cultural norms that value seniority, hierarchical relations, and collectivism patterns, which contrast from individualistic leadership concepts popular in Western contexts (Özbilgin, 2011). Therefore, cultural differences are also another important limitation of our study. Perception of leaders, the application of strengths, and the importance of a growth mindset and eudaimonic well-being can be different between cultures. For instance, western cultures that often emphasize individual development, and self-actualization align well with

concepts of strengths use and growth mindset. Collectivist cultures on the other hand prioritize community peace and modesty, which can potentially influence how these concepts appear. Not looking at gender dynamics can also be considered as a limitation to our study since the interaction between a male employee and a female leader might affect perceptions of leadership differently due to societal stereotypes or power dynamics.

Future studies should investigate how these elements can influence or mediate the effects of SBL. They could use longitudinal designs to better understand the causality and change between variables over time. Expanding research across cultures and different industries will also improve our model's robustness and applicability. And including gender as a factor or considering gender dynamics could provide more insight into the literature. Overall, this study establishes a framework by combining strengths-based leadership with employee well-being, but in order to fully understand the complexity and impact across multiple contexts of the model further research is needed.

STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS

Support Information: No external funding was received for this study.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval: All procedures involving human participants in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committees and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethics committee approval for the questionnaire used in this study was obtained from the MEF University Ethics Committee, pursuant to Approval No: E-47749665-050.04-5300

Informed consent form: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

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