

## How Empowering Leadership Shapes Work Engagement: The Role of Psychological Empowerment and Power Distance Orientation

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### ABSTRACT

Work engagement has become a critical concern in contemporary organizations, particularly as workforce dynamics continue to evolve. Among emerging employee groups, Generation Z demonstrates distinct expectations regarding leadership, autonomy, and workplace values, making it essential to understand the factors that foster their engagement at work. This study examines how empowering leadership shapes work engagement by incorporating psychological empowerment as an underlying mechanism and power distance orientation as a contextual boundary condition. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through a survey and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that empowering leadership positively and significantly enhances work engagement. Psychological empowerment partially mediates this relationship, indicating that empowering leadership strengthens employees' sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, which in turn fosters greater engagement. Furthermore, power distance orientation moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment, with stronger effects observed among individuals with lower power distance orientation. These findings highlight the importance of empowering leadership in fostering employee engagement by addressing both psychological mechanisms and individual cultural orientations.

*Keywords: empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, power distance orientation, work engagement, Generation Z*

## INTRODUCTION

Work engagement has become a central concern in contemporary organizations, as it reflects employee energy, dedication, and psychological involvement in their work. High levels of work engagement are associated with positive organizational outcomes, including improved performance, stronger commitment, and employee well-being (Knevelsrud et al., 2025; Qian et al., 2019). However, maintaining work engagement remains a challenge, particularly in the context of an evolving workforce characterized by changing expectations toward leadership, autonomy, and workplace values.

Among emerging workforce groups, Generation Z employees demonstrate distinct preferences for meaningful work, participative leadership, and opportunities for self-development. They are more likely to disengage when leadership practices are perceived as overly hierarchical or controlling. This condition highlights the importance of leadership approaches that emphasize empowerment, trust, and employee involvement. In this regard, empowering leadership has gained increasing attention as a leadership style that encourages autonomy, supports participation in decision-making, and facilitates employee development (Fadila et al., 2023; Supriyanto et al., 2023).

Previous studies have shown that empowering leadership positively influences work engagement (Peral, 2025; Wen et al., 2023). Employees who perceive their leaders as empowering tend to feel more valued, trusted, and motivated, leading to higher levels of engagement. However, this relationship is not solely direct, as it is often explained through underlying psychological mechanisms. Psychological empowerment, which comprises meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, has been widely recognized as a key mechanism through which empowering leadership shapes employee attitudes and behaviors (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024). Employees who feel psychologically empowered are more likely to develop a sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation, which subsequently enhances their work engagement (Fatima et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of research, empirical findings regarding the mediating role of psychological empowerment remain inconsistent. While some studies report strong mediating effects, others reveal weaker or non-significant relationships with work engagement (Qian et al., 2019). These inconsistencies suggest that additional factors may influence how empowering leadership translates into psychological empowerment and work engagement.

One such factor is power distance orientation, which refers to the extent to which individuals accept unequal distributions of power within organizations (Adamovic, 2022). Employees with low power distance orientation tend to favor egalitarian relationships and participative leadership, whereas those with high power distance orientation are more comfortable with hierarchical structures. Prior research indicates that power distance orientation moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment, with stronger effects observed among employees with lower power distance orientation (Wen et al., 2023; Li & Rasiah, 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study examines how empowering leadership shapes work engagement by incorporating psychological empowerment as a mediating mechanism and power distance orientation as a moderating factor.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Work engagement is a positive and fulfilling psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, reflecting the extent to which employees invest physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in their work (Knevelsrud et al., 2025). Employees with high levels of work engagement tend to demonstrate enthusiasm, persistence, and strong attachment to their work roles, which contribute to positive organizational outcomes such as improved performance and reduced turnover intention (Qian et al., 2019).

One leadership approach that has received increasing attention in relation to work engagement is empowering leadership. Empowering leadership emphasizes the delegation of authority, encouragement of participation in decision-making, and support for employee development, thereby enabling employees to take initiative and feel responsible for their work outcomes (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024). Empirical studies consistently show that empowering leadership positively influences work engagement, as employees who perceive their leaders as empowering are more likely to feel trusted, valued, and motivated to actively engage in their work (Peral, 2025; Fadila et al., 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Empowering leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement. In addition to its direct effect, empowering leadership also influences employees' psychological states. Psychological empowerment refers to a motivational construct comprising meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, which shape how employees perceive their role within the organization (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024). When leaders provide autonomy, support development, and involve employees in decision-making, employees are more likely to feel capable, meaningful, and influential in their work. Empirical evidence shows that empowering leadership positively affects psychological empowerment (Wen et al., 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Empowering leadership has a positive and significant effect on psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment also plays a crucial role in shaping employee work engagement. Employees who perceive their work as meaningful, feel competent in performing tasks, and have autonomy in decision-making are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement. Psychological empowerment strengthens intrinsic motivation and fosters a sense of ownership toward work, which ultimately enhances work engagement (Fatima et al., 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Psychological empowerment has a positive and significant effect on work engagement. Furthermore, psychological empowerment is often positioned as a mediating mechanism that explains how empowering leadership influences work engagement. Empowering leadership creates conditions that enhance employees' psychological states,

which in turn lead to higher engagement. However, previous findings regarding this mediating role remain inconsistent, indicating the need for further investigation (Qian et al., 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and work engagement. In addition to psychological mechanisms, individual cultural orientation may influence how employees respond to leadership practices. Power distance orientation reflects the extent to which individuals accept unequal power distribution within organizations (Adamovic, 2022). Employees with low power distance orientation tend to prefer participative and egalitarian leadership, whereas those with high power distance orientation are more comfortable with hierarchical structures.

In the context of empowering leadership, individuals with low power distance orientation are more likely to perceive empowerment practices such as autonomy, participation, and shared decision-making as positive and motivating, thereby strengthening their psychological empowerment. In contrast, individuals with high power distance orientation may feel less comfortable with such practices due to their preference for clear hierarchical authority. As a result, the effectiveness of empowering leadership in enhancing psychological empowerment may vary depending on employee power distance orientation (Wen et al., 2023; Li & Rasiah, 2025). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: H5: Power distance orientation moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment, such that the relationship is stronger for employees with lower power distance orientation.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a survey method to examine the relationships among empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, work engagement, and power distance orientation. The research design is explanatory, aiming to test causal relationships among variables through hypothesis testing (Sugiyono, 2016).

### **Sample and Data Collection**

The population of this study consisted of Generation Z employees. A non-probability sampling technique was applied using purposive sampling. Respondents were selected based on specific criteria, including individuals born between 1996–2007, currently employed, and having a minimum of one year of work experience. A total of 200 respondents participated in this study. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to respondents. All measurement items were assessed using a Likert scale to capture respondents' perceptions of the research variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2017).

## Measurement of Variables

The variables examined in this study consist of empowering leadership as the independent variable (X), psychological empowerment as the mediating variable (Z), work engagement as the dependent variable (Y), and power distance orientation as the moderating variable (W). Each variable was operationalized using measurement indicators adapted from established scales as follows:

Empowering Leadership : Delegation of authority, participation in decision-making, information sharing, support for employee development (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024; Wen et al., 2023)

Psychological Empowerment : Meaning, competence, self-determination, impact (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024).

Work Engagement : Vigor, dedication, absorption (Adamovic, 2022).

Power Distance Orientation : Acceptance of hierarchical authority, obedience to superiors, centralized decision-making (Monje-Amor et al., 2021).

All measurement items were assessed using a Likert scale to capture respondents' perceptions of each construct.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis was performed in two stages: evaluation of the measurement model and evaluation of the structural model.

The measurement model was assessed using indicator loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability to ensure validity and reliability. The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping procedures (Hair, 2019).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

The measurement model was evaluated to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs. Convergent validity was examined using indicator loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, and AVE values were above 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity (Hair, 2019). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. All constructs demonstrated values above 0.70, confirming internal consistency reliability. Furthermore, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio, indicating that all constructs are empirically distinct. These results confirm that the measurement model is valid and reliable for further analysis.

Table 1. Outer Loading

Research Variables	Item	Loading	Rule of Thumb	Conclusion
<i>Empowering Leadership</i>	EL1	0,793	0,700	Valid
	EL2	0,855	0,700	Valid
	EL3	0,861	0,700	Valid
	EL4	0,867	0,700	Valid
	EL5	0,871	0,700	Valid
	EL6	0,851	0,700	Valid
	EL7	0,859	0,700	Valid
<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>	PE1	0,837	0,700	Valid
	PE2	0,837	0,700	Valid
	PE3	0,837	0,700	Valid
	PE4	0,851	0,700	Valid
	PE5	0,859	0,700	Valid
	PE6	0,839	0,700	Valid
	PE7	0,842	0,700	Valid
	PE8	0,832	0,700	Valid
	PE9	0,845	0,700	Valid
	PE10	0,862	0,700	Valid
	PE11	0,838	0,700	Valid
<i>Work Engagement</i>	WE1	0,865	0,700	Valid
	WE2	0,866	0,700	Valid
	WE3	0,864	0,700	Valid
	WE4	0,870	0,700	Valid
	WE5	0,880	0,700	Valid
	WE6	0,846	0,700	Valid
	WE7	0,801	0,700	Valid
	WE8	0,803	0,700	Valid
<i>Power Distance Orientation</i>	PDO1	0,883	0,700	Valid
	PDO2	0,794	0,700	Valid
	PDO3	0,853	0,700	Valid
	PDO4	0,833	0,700	Valid
	PDO5	0,817	0,700	Valid
	PDO6	0,810	0,700	Valid

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Research Variables	AVE Value
<i>Empowering Leadership</i>	0,725
<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>	0,712
<i>Work Engagement</i>	0,722
<i>Power Distance Orientation</i>	0,692

Table 3. Larcker Criterion

<i>Research Variables</i>	<i>Empowering Leadership</i>	<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>	<i>Work Engagement</i>	<i>Power Distance Orientation</i>
<i>Empowering Leadership</i>	<b>0,851</b>	0,656	0,616	-0,618
<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>	0,656	<b>0,844</b>	0,642	-0,596
<i>Work Engagement</i>	0,616	0,642	<b>0,850</b>	-0,607
<i>Power Distance Orientation</i>	-0,618	-0,596	0,607	<b>0,832</b>

Table 4. HTMT

<i>Research Variables</i>	<i>Empowering Leadership</i>	<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>	<i>Work Engagement</i>	<i>Power Distance Orientation</i>
<i>Empowering Leadership</i>	—			
<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>	0,691	—		
<i>Work Engagement</i>	0,652	0,672	—	
<i>Power Distance Orientation</i>	0,666	0,636	0,650	—

Table 5. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

<b>Research Variables</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>Composite reliability</b>
<i>Empowering Leadership</i>	0,937	0,949
<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>	0,959	0,964
<i>Work Engagement</i>	0,945	0,954
<i>Power Distance Orientation</i>	0,911	0,931

### Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was evaluated to determine the explanatory power of the proposed research model. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates that empowering leadership and power distance orientation explain 58.4% of the variance in psychological empowerment, reflecting a moderate level of explanatory power.

Furthermore, empowering leadership and psychological empowerment explain 47.9% of the variance in work engagement, which also indicates a moderate level of explanatory power. These results suggest that the proposed model adequately explains the endogenous constructs examined in this study and demonstrates sufficient predictive capability in understanding employee psychological empowerment and work engagement.

Table 6. R-square

<b>Variabel Penelitian</b>	<b>R-square</b>
<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>	0,584
<i>Work Engagement</i>	0,479

The structural relationships among empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, work engagement, and power distance orientation are presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 illustrates the structural model generated through the PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedure, including standardized path coefficients and significance levels for each hypothesized relationship. The figure provides a comprehensive visual representation of the direct, mediating, and moderating relationships among the constructs examined in this study, thereby supporting the interpretation of the proposed research model.

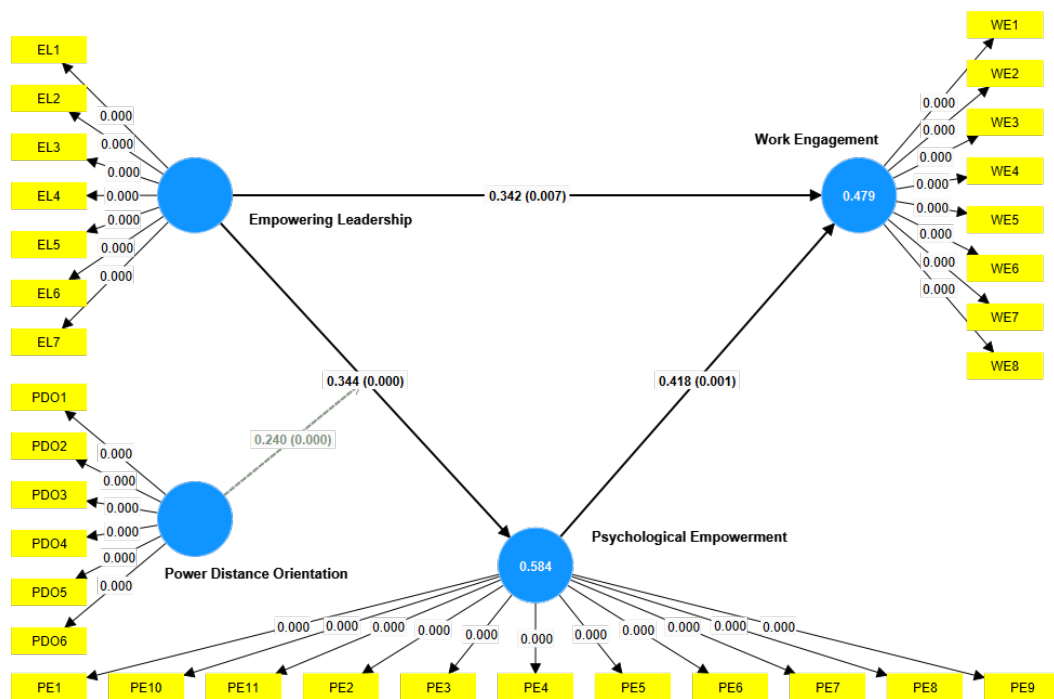


Figure 1. Structural Model (Inner Model)

The direct effect analysis presented in Table 7 indicates that empowering leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement ( $\beta = 0.342$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ), indicating that employees are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of work engagement when they perceive their leaders as empowering. Empowering leadership also has a positive and significant effect on psychological empowerment ( $\beta = 0.344$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), suggesting that empowering leadership strengthens employees' psychological states by enhancing their sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact.

Furthermore, psychological empowerment has a positive and significant effect on work engagement ( $\beta = 0.418$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating that employees who experience stronger psychological empowerment are more likely to exhibit greater vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. Overall, these findings provide empirical evidence supporting the direct relationships proposed in this study. Therefore, H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

Table 7. Direct Effect Analysis

<b>Variabel Penelitian</b>	<b>Original sample (O)</b>	<b>Sample mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T-statistics ( O/STDEV )</b>	<b>P-values</b>
<i>Empowering Leadership → Work Engagement</i>	0,342	0,335	0,128	2,678	0,007
<i>Empowering Leadership → Psychological Empowerment</i>	0,344	0,356	0,084	4,085	0,000
<i>Psychological Empowerment → Work Engagement</i>	0,418	0,428	0,123	3,404	0,001

The mediation analysis presented in Table 8 indicates that psychological empowerment significantly mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and work engagement ( $\beta = 0.144$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding suggests that empowering leadership enhances employee work engagement not only through a direct effect but also indirectly by strengthening their psychological empowerment.

Specifically, empowering leadership increases employees' sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, which subsequently contributes to higher levels of work engagement. Therefore, psychological empowerment functions as a partial mediating variable in the relationship between empowering leadership and work engagement. Overall, these findings provide empirical support for H4.

Table 8. Mediation Effect Analysis

<b>Variabel Penelitian</b>	<b>Original sample (O)</b>	<b>Sample mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T-statistics ( O/STDEV )</b>	<b>P-values</b>
<i>Empowering Leadership → Psychological Empowerment → Work Engagement</i>	0,144	0,153	0,063	2,295	0,022

The moderation analysis presented in Table 9 indicates that power distance orientation significantly moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment ( $\beta = 0.240$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding suggests that the influence of empowering leadership on psychological empowerment varies depending on employees' levels of power distance orientation.

Specifically, employees with lower power distance orientation are more likely to respond positively to empowering leadership practices, as they tend to value autonomy, egalitarian relationships, and participative decision-making. In contrast, employees with higher power distance orientation may be less responsive to empowering leadership due to their greater acceptance of hierarchical authority. Therefore, power distance orientation functions as a significant moderating variable, and H5 is supported.

Table 9. Moderation Effect Analysis

Variabel Penelitian	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics ((O/STDEV))	P-values
Power Distance Orientation x Empowering Leadership -> Psychological Empowerment	0,240	0,236	0,047	5,052	0,000

The effect size ( $f^2$ ) was evaluated to assess the magnitude of the influence of exogenous variables on endogenous variables within the structural model. The  $f^2$  values indicate the practical significance of each relationship by measuring how strongly each predictor contributes to the explained variance of the dependent constructs.

The results demonstrate that empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, and power distance orientation contribute meaningfully to the proposed structural relationships. These findings suggest that, beyond statistical significance, the variables included in this model also possess practical relevance in explaining variations in psychological empowerment and work engagement (Hair, 2019).

Figure 2. Effect Size Analysis

	Empowering Leadership	Power Distance Orientation	Psychological Empowerment	Work Engagement
Empowering Leadership			0.161	0.128
Power Distance Orientation			0.061	
Psychological Empowerment				0.191
Work Engagement				
Power Distance Orientation x Empowering Leadership			0.225	

Predictive relevance was assessed using the Stone-Geisser  $Q^2$  values obtained through the blindfolding procedure, as presented in Figure 3. The  $Q^2$  values for psychological empowerment (0.402) and work engagement (0.339) are greater than zero, indicating that the structural model possesses adequate predictive relevance.

These findings suggest that the proposed model has sufficient predictive capability in explaining the endogenous constructs and demonstrates acceptable predictive accuracy in understanding employee psychological empowerment and work engagement (Hair, 2019).

Figure 3. Predictive Relevance Analysis

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
Empowering Leadership	1400.000	1400.000	0.000
Power Distance Orientation	1200.000	1200.000	0.000
Psychological Empowerment	2200.000	1315.532	0.402
Work Engagement	1600.000	1057.356	0.339

## **DISCUSSION**

This study aims to examine how empowering leadership shapes work engagement through the mediating role of psychological empowerment and the moderating role of power distance orientation. The findings demonstrate that empowering leadership significantly enhances employees' work engagement both directly and indirectly through psychological empowerment. These results are consistent with previous studies indicating that empowering leadership is an important determinant of employee engagement, as leaders who encourage autonomy, participation, and developmental support foster stronger employee motivation and involvement (Peral, 2025; Wen et al., 2023).

The significant positive effect of empowering leadership on psychological empowerment indicates that empowering leadership practices strengthen employees' perceptions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. This finding supports prior research suggesting that empowering leadership promotes employees' intrinsic motivation and psychological capacity by facilitating autonomy and participative decision-making (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024; Wen et al., 2023). Furthermore, psychological empowerment significantly influences work engagement, indicating that employees who experience stronger psychological empowerment are more likely to demonstrate vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work (Adamovic, 2023; Qian et al., 2019).

The mediation analysis further confirms that psychological empowerment serves as an important explanatory mechanism through which empowering leadership enhances work engagement. This finding is aligned with previous studies emphasizing that empowering leadership strengthens employees' internal psychological conditions, which subsequently foster greater engagement at work (Wen et al., 2023; Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024).

In addition, power distance orientation significantly moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment. Employees with lower power distance orientation are more responsive to empowering leadership because they tend to value egalitarian relationships, autonomy, and participative decision-making. Conversely, employees with higher power distance orientation may be less influenced by empowering leadership due to their stronger acceptance of hierarchical authority (Monje-Amor et al., 2021; Adamovic, 2023).

Overall, this study contributes to the leadership and organizational behavior literature by integrating both mediating and moderating mechanisms in understanding how empowering leadership shapes work engagement. Practically, organizations should encourage empowering leadership practices while simultaneously considering employees' cultural orientations to maximize psychological empowerment and engagement outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that empowering leadership plays a significant role in enhancing work engagement among Generation Z employees, both directly and indirectly through

psychological empowerment. Empowering leadership strengthens employees' perceptions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, which subsequently increases their level of engagement at work.

Psychological empowerment was found to partially mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and work engagement, confirming that employees' internal psychological states serve as an important mechanism in translating leadership practices into stronger engagement outcomes. In addition, power distance orientation significantly moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment, indicating that employees' cultural values influence how effectively empowering leadership practices are received.

These findings contribute to the organizational behavior and leadership literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the direct, mediating, and moderating mechanisms underlying work engagement. Practically, organizations are encouraged to implement empowering leadership practices while considering employees' psychological and cultural orientations to maximize engagement and organizational performance.

## **LIMITATION AND IMPLICATION**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study focuses specifically on Generation Z employees, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other generational groups or broader workforce populations. Second, the use of a cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to establish long-term causal relationships among the variables examined. Third, the study relies on self-reported questionnaire data, which may increase the potential for common method bias.

Future research is recommended to expand the scope of investigation by involving more diverse demographic groups, organizational contexts, and cultural settings. Longitudinal research designs may also provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of empowering leadership on employee engagement. Additionally, future studies may consider incorporating other potential mediating or moderating variables to further enrich understanding of the mechanisms through which empowering leadership influences work engagement.

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