

SELF-LEADERSHIP TO MAKE EMPLOYEES GIVE THEIR BEST

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ABSTRACT

Self-leadership is one of the critical power and control centers that drives organizations. Although senior management controls employees, employees determine how much of management's requests are implemented in the final stage. This article investigates the role of self-leadership and psychological empowerment in job performance. The purpose of this paper is to examine the effect of employees' use of self-leadership strategies on their job performance and to determine whether psychological empowerment has a mediating role in this relationship. Data were obtained by the voluntary participation of 512 employees operating in various sectors (The majority of them are those working in the insurance sector with 69.3%.) in Turkey. A convenience sampling method was used to collect the questionnaires. The SPSS program was used to analyze the data sets obtained. And, the mediator analysis was performed with PROCESS Macro on model 4. It has been found that psychological empowerment has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between self-leadership strategies and job performance. Study results show that employees' self-management potential is a vital business resource, and it is possible to evaluate this resource effectively with self-leadership strategies. The paper contributes to self-leadership and psychological empowerment literature and offers practical implications for organizations.

Keywords: *Self-Leadership, Psychological Empowerment, Job Performance*

INTRODUCTION

According to B. Bass and R. Bass (2009), the reason why leadership takes shape in human beings stems from the need for people to be brought up by their parents. People follow their parents because they need their help to survive. Over time, other influential people such as teachers and administrators take the leadership role of parents. Leadership is part of human life (Karabay, 2015) but leadership is not just about managing others; it also encompasses the ability of people to lead themselves (Neck and Manz, 2010).

Employees may face various difficulties in business life. While they face these difficulties, they do not always have the right people to help them. In these situations, employees can overcome these challenges by using the right strategies and techniques (Manz, 1983). Psychological empowerment and self-leadership can be given as examples of modern management techniques and strategies that will enable employees to succeed in today's conditions (Goldsby, 2021).

Today, it is perhaps more important than ever for people to know how to control and influence themselves using internal motivation strategies (Galanti et al., 2021). The Covid-19 epidemic has caused changes in the way businesses work (Gostin and Wiley, 2020). Most of the employees started to work remotely for the first time. Employees have had to do many tasks they usually do at work by themselves at home (Deloitte, 2020). In the business world, it is crucial for employees who work far from their managers to overcome the difficulties they face on their own (Kirchner et al., 2021).

Self-leadership methods and strategies could be a pivotal factor to increase employees' job performance, not limited to but especially in the time of Covid-19 (Maykrantz et al., 2021). Self-leadership strategies can help employees adapt to different situations (Inam et al., 2021). These strategies could be beneficial, particularly in times of change when employee resilience and flexibility are a must (Cookea et al., 2020).

This study aims to empirically examine the relationships between the concepts of self-leadership, psychological empowerment, and job performance. The social cognitive theory was used to frame and analyze the hypothesized relations. This paper seeks to shed light on a subject that has not been researched much in academia and guide the business world's managers and organizations. It is generally

seen in the literature that self-leadership improves performance, but the number of studies examining this relationship in Turkey is limited. Likewise, studies on the relation between self-leadership and psychological empowerment relationships are also limited. In addition, it may be interesting to see how self-leadership affects these concepts time of Covid-19 when most of the employees work from home and could exhibit more self-leadership strategies.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Self-Leadership

Self-leadership has been a current phenomenon going on for nearly forty years (Goldsby, 2021). When the leadership and management literature is examined, a leader and at least one follower are generally needed to talk about the leadership process. Self-leadership contrasts with traditional leadership. In the self-leadership approach, people can reach their own goals by motivating themselves and applying cognitive strategies. In this approach, both the leadership and the follower role are combined in a single person (Stewart et al., 2011).

Self-leadership is a philosophy, systematic activities, and mental strategies applied to be more efficient and show high performance (Manz and Sims, 2001). The concept of self-leadership has emerged from researching how employees can lead themselves. According to this understanding, all employees have the potential to lead effectively on their own. It is not necessary to have superior virtues or to be a chosen person to be a self-leader. In fact, everyone is a self-leader to some degree, but not everyone is successful at it (Manz, 1983).

Self-leadership has been developed using self-influence theories to present more comprehensive and integrated theory (Manz, 1986). Self-leadership; includes behavior-oriented strategies of self-regulation, self-control, and self-management theories. In addition to these, cognitive-oriented approaches have been derived from intrinsic motivation theories, social cognitive theory, and positive cognitive psychology (Houghton and Neck, 2002). Even though self-leadership is derived from different theories, self-leadership is a unique and broader concept than self-regulation (Bailey et al., 2018), self-control (Müller and Niessen, 2018), self-management (Markham and Markham, 1995), and intrinsic motivation theories (Manz, 1986).

Self-leadership dimensions are generally divided into three main categories in the studies (Houghton and Neck, 2002; Goldsby, 2021). These are behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, constructive thinking strategies. The behavior-oriented dimension of self-leadership is connected to individuals' self-control and self-observation. The natural reward dimension of self-leadership is given attention to the positive aspects of the work. The constructive thinking model dimension of self-leadership includes the development of new thoughts or thought models that will positively affect the performance of the individual (Neck and Houghton, 2006).

Psychological Empowerment

Globalization, rapidly increasing competition, changing and uncertain business conditions encourage businesses to use empowerment practices. Empowerment is a management technique that has become a necessity for most companies today. Studies show that more than seventy percent of companies apply empowerment methods to their employees (Lawler et al., 2001).

Employee empowerment is seen as both a managerial approach and a cognitive situation. From an organizational perspective, empowerment refers to administrative practices to share knowledge, resources, rewards, and authority with lower-level employees (Kanter, 1993). From a psychological perspective, employee empowerment is the employee's belief that they can fulfill a task (Conger and Kanungo, 1988).

Psychological empowerment is a psychological state that employees experience with increased self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation at work. Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) described psychological empowerment as the perception of self-efficacy and the willingness to participate in events (Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988). Psychological empowerment takes shape according to how authoritative and responsible the employee thinks they are. The reason why businesses apply empowerment techniques and

strategies in industries is the advantages brought by people-oriented management. The success of companies depends on sharing power with their employees and managing processes in cooperation with them (Akçakaya, 2010).

Since its introduction, psychological empowerment has attracted the attention of many researchers and has been studied (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Liden and Arad, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Spreitzer (1995) explains psychological empowerment in four dimensions. If one of these four dimensions is missing, empowerment is not fully realized. These four dimensions are as follows: meaning, self-determination, competence, and impact. (Spreitzer, 1995). Meaning changes according to the harmony between the work performed and the employee's beliefs, values, and behaviors. If the employee's beliefs, values, and behaviors are like the needs of the job, this job is meaningful to the employee. Otherwise, the job is meaningless to the employee (Brief and Nord, 1990). Competence is related to employees' perception of self-efficacy. In other words, it is the belief that employees have the abilities and skills to fulfill their duties (Gist, 1987). Autonomy refers to a sense of control over one's work. Autonomy, that is, depends on how much freedom the employee thinks in his work. Employees become autonomous to the extent that they make their own decisions in their work (Deci et al., 1989). Impact is the feeling of being able to influence significant results within the organization. Impact relates to how much an employee thinks they have a say in work-related decisions (Ashforth, 1989).

Job Performance

In academic, athletic, and professional environments, the performance of individuals is always at the forefront. The activities of individuals, which are the subject of performance, are recorded, compared, and evaluated accordingly. The performances of individuals affect their success in various areas of their lives. The job performance of employees is a factor that affects both their careers and the success of their organizations (Morrow et al., 2015).

Job performance refers to the efficiency of task fulfillment at work (Sonnentag et al., 2008). Job performance could express all the behaviors that employees exhibit while at work (Motowidlo and Kell, 2012). Since job performance has a critical role in the success of businesses, job performance is regularly evaluated in organizations. In this way, result-oriented, flexible, effective, and fair employee management becomes possible (Robert et al., 2003).

Self-Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

Self-leadership and psychological empowerment are closely related concepts, but they are not the same thing and can't be substituted with each other (Lee and Koh, 2001). Self-leadership is a philosophy, systematic activities, and mental strategies applied to be more efficient and show high performance (Manz, 2015). Psychological empowerment is a psychological state necessary for individuals to feel a sense of control about their work (Spreitzer, 2008).

Self-leadership strategies help employees to see the more enjoyable aspects of their jobs and to control their behavior. Employees who implement self-leadership strategies tend to find their work more meaningful, to see themselves as more competent in their work, and to think that they have a say in their work and are autonomous. Studies show that self-leadership could be an antecedent to psychological empowerment (Houghton and Yoho, 2005). Also, Aldighrir (2019) said that self-leadership is a reliable and effective mechanism for providing psychological empowerment to employees. Based on these thoughts and studies:

Hypothesis 1: Self-leadership is positively related to employees' perception of psychological empowerment.

Self-Leadership and Job Performance

Organizations use rewards, punishments, performance standards to get performance from employees. In this way, organizations create a system of control over employees. It is possible to direct employees externally in this way, but employees; values and beliefs also constitute the internal control system of the employees. This internally focused system has a significant impact on employees' behaviors (Manz, 1986). In this sense, self-leadership can be described as the heart of organizational behavior (Manz, 2015).

Self-leadership strategies have long been considered to improve employee performance (Goldsby et al., 2021). Employees who adopt the philosophy of self-leadership set specific goals for themselves, make efforts to achieve them, evaluate how effective their actions were, and review their behaviors. As a result of this process, employees' awareness of their behaviors increases. While doing their jobs, they act with this awareness to show more productive attitudes and behaviors. This way, employees can deliver higher performance and, in a sense, reach their potential (Manz, 2015). Self-leadership is the achievement of self-determined goals by using social cognition, self-determination, and self-regulation (Mayfield et al., 2021). Based on these thoughts and studies:

Hypothesis 2: Self-leadership is positively related to employees' job performance.

Psychological Empowerment and Job Performance

One of the critical assumptions of empowerment theory is that empowered employees outperform relatively less empowered employees. Employees are empowered by getting more responsibility and authority. While fulfilling the new obligations given to them, employees can create more value in their work. In other words, they can perform more. The increase in performance while solving the problems, instead of communicating them to the top management, arises from the opportunity to solve problems directly. Employees, in general, have more technical knowledge about their jobs than managers because they are the one who performs the job. Therefore, employees who have the necessary job skills and choose how to do their jobs can serve better than their colleagues who do not have this opportunity (Tuuli and Rowlinson, 2009).

After the emergence of psychological empowerment, researchers examined the relationship between psychological empowerment and job performance. By examining psychological empowerment, ways to increase job performance have been sought. Studies conducted in various industries operating in the public and private sectors have shown that employee empowerment practices effectively improve performance. Psychological empowerment is positively related to the job performance of employees (Hechanova et al., 2006; Sun, 2016). According to another study, psychological empowerment increases the voluntary performance behaviors of employees (Taştan and Serinkan, 2013). Empowerment is a factor that increases performance levels (Tetik, 2016). Based on these thoughts and studies:

Hypothesis 3: Psychological empowerment is positively related to employees' job performance.

Relationship Between Self-Leadership, Psychological Empowerment, and Job Performance

Self-leadership strategies contain self-direction and self-influence needed by individuals to fulfill their duties and responsibilities (Houghton and Neck, 2002). Behavior-oriented strategies aim to increase one's self-awareness and to manage their behaviors. Employees often use behavior-focused strategies to overcome unpleasant but demanding work in the workplace (Neck and Houghton, 2006). With behavior-oriented strategies of self-leadership, employees could be more competent and self-determined (Houghton and Neck, 2002). With natural reward strategies, people can find their job more meaningful. Constructive thinking model strategies are strategies developed to enable people to create a productive thinking model to increase their performance and make it a habit to think in a way that will improve their performance (Neck and Houghton, 2006). So, with right work settings, self-leadership could affect psychological empowerment and increase performance (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015).

Psychological empowerment generally focuses on three essential points. These are the perception of controlling one's environment, self-efficacy, and effort to reach the determined goals. Perception of controlling the environment changes according to employee's position, autonomy, and performance. The perception of self-efficacy depends on the employee's ability to fulfill their duties and responsibilities and varies according to their skill and ability level. Finally, for employees to be successful, they must find their job meaningful and make the necessary effort (Menon, 1999). Psychological empowerment could be a bridge between the organizational empowerment techniques and strategies and the positive work outcomes expected to occur in the employee (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Lashley, 1999). Also, subordinate psychological empowerment and self-leadership are associated with performance (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015). So, it is safe to assume:

Hypothesis 4: Positive relationship between self-leadership and employees' job performance is mediated by psychological empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Measures

The rate of our male participants is 52.1% and 68.8% of our participants are married. When the distribution by age is examined, the largest group is composed of people between the ages of 30 and 40 with a rate of 28%. This group is followed by people between the ages of 40-50 with a rate of 26.8%. The rate of participants between the ages of 50-60 is 21.9%. In short, with a rate of 76.7%, the majority of our participants are between the ages of 30-60. In terms of educational status, undergraduate graduates come first with a rate of 54.1%. The rate of those with a master's degree is 19.9%. In terms of the sector; employees in the insurance sector constitute the largest segment with 69.3%, followed by the education sector with 11.3%. While 24.8% of the participants are senior managers, 22.3% are mid-level managers and 16.8% are public servants.

Data was collected through a questionnaire. To examine the proposed hypotheses, we used multi-item scales that we adopted from the previous studies. We used 5-point Likert Scale ranging from "1=Strongly Disagree" to "5=Strongly Agree". "Self-Leadership" was measured by asking nine questions (e.g. item: "I establish specific goals for my own performance") developed from the Houghton, Dawley and DiLiello (2012). "Job Performance" was measured by asking four questions (e.g. item: "I complete my tasks on time") developed from the Yilmaz (2015). And finally, "Psychological Empowerment" was measured by asking twelve questions (e.g. item: "My job activities are personally meaningful to me"), the scale was adapted from Spreitzer (1995). After identifying these question items, one bilingual research assistant translated questions into Turkish and, another bilingual research assistant retranslated the questions into English. After consensus was reached for the differences between these two translations, we developed a draft questionnaire. And finally, two academics in this field, evaluated the items to establish face validity.

Measure Validity and Reliability

After data collection, we conducted exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction with varimax rotation. Subsequently excluding 3 questions with factor loadings below 0.50 (one question from the job performance dimension and two questions from the self-leadership dimension), factors are divided as expected and all the items were distributed to the factors as it expected to be. And, in the ultimate factor analysis all of the factor loadings are above ,50. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index has been found ,917 and is higher than recommended ,50 value. Bartlett's test of sphericity is at statistically significant level of 0.00 ($\chi^2 (231) = 7664,420; p=.00$). The total explained variance value was also found to be 80.84%.

Afterwards exploratory factor analysis, means and standard deviations were calculated for each factor and a correlation matrix was created. Table 1 demonstrate the means, standart deviations, correlation coefficients and Cronbach Alpha's. All Cronbach Alpha values are higher than ,70 as Nunnally (1978) recommended. These results show that, our validity and reliability measurement are adequate.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients, Cronbach's Alphas and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	1	2	3	Means	Std. Deviations	Cronbach Alpha
Psychological Empowerment	1			4,2112	,75735	,941
Self-Leadership	,433**	1		4,3178	,58117	,816
Performance	,626**	,346**	1	4,3359	,64575	,764

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis Testing

Table 2. Regression Analysis Results

Model-1 (DV: Psychological Empowerment)				Model-2 (DV: Job Performance)				Model-3 (DV: Job Performance)			
Self-Leadership	β	t	Sig.	Self-Leadership	β	t	Sig.	Psychological Empowerment	β	t	Sig.
		,433	10,832		,000		,346		8,308	,000	
F= 117,339 R ² = ,187 Sig= ,000				F= 69,015 R ² =,119 Sig= ,000				F= 326,962 R ² = ,392 Sig= ,000			

We conducted regression analysis to test our hypotheses. According to the results (seen in Table 2); Model-1 (F= 117,339; R²= ,187; Sig=,000), Model-2 (F= 69,015; R²=,119; Sig=,000) and Model-3 (F= 326,962; R²= ,392; Sig=,000) are significant. In Model-1, it was found that self-leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment (β = ,433; Sig= ,000). In Model-2, it was also found that self-leadership is positively related to job performance (β = ,346; Sig= ,000). Finally, in Model-3 it was found that psychological empowerment is positively related to job performance (β = ,626; Sig= ,000). So, according to the results; **H₁**, **H₂** and **H₃** are **supported**.

The mediator analysis was performed with PROCESS Macro on model 4 (Hayes, 2013). 5% bias-corrected confidence interval with 5,000 bootstrapping method was utilized. It was found that (seen Table 3) in Model-1; self-leadership is positively related to job performance (β =,3832; p<0.01). Also, self-leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment (β =,5631; p<0.01) as seen in Model-2. In Model-3; both self-leadership (β =,1020; p<0.05) and psychological empowerment (β =,4993; p<0.01) are related to job performance. But, when psychological empowerment is included in the model, the effect of self-leadership decreased (The regression coefficient decreased from (β = ,3832**) to (β =,1020*)). So, these results indicated that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between self-leadership and job performance to Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure.

Table 3. Mediation Analysis Results

	Model-1 (DV: Job Performance)		Model-2 (DV: Psychological Empowerment)		Model-3 (DV: Job Performance)	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Self-Leadership	,3832**	8,2990	,5631**	10,8166	,1020*	2,4081
Psychological Empowerment					,4993**	15,3369
R ²	,1194		,1872		,3985	
F	68,8739		116,9998		167,9249	

Furthermore, both direct effect (.0188; .1853) and indirect effect (.2107; .3723) of X on Y are significant as seen in Table 4. So, psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between self-leadership and job performance. And so, **H₄** is **supported**. So, it can be stated that the influence of self-leadership on job performance increases with the mediating effect of psychological empowerment.

Table 4. Mediating Effect of Psychological Empowerment

	Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI
Indirect Effect	,2812	.0408			(.2107, .3723)
Direct Effect	,1020	.0424	2,4081	.0164	(.0188, .1853)
Total Effect	,3832	.0462	8,2990	.0000	(.2925, .4739)

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1, which states that self-leadership is positively related to employees' perception of psychological empowerment is supported. Self-leadership strategies help employees to see the more

enjoyable aspects of their jobs and to control their behavior. In this way, it is aimed that employees show more productive behaviors than before. Employees who apply self-leadership strategies tend to find their work more meaningful, to see themselves as more competent in their work, and to think that they have a say in their work and are autonomous. It is possible that employees who feel psychologically strong exhibit more self-leadership behaviors, but it is more accurate to assume that self-leadership affects psychological empowerment. It is claimed that self-leadership affects employees' way of thinking and changes their behaviors and thoughts. Many studies have confirmed this claim (Houghton and Yoho, 2005; Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015).

Hypothesis 2, which states that self-leadership is positively related to employees' job performance, is supported. Previous studies also support this result (Prussia et al., 1998; Konradt et al., 2009; Rambe et al., 2018; Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015; Harari et al., 2021). The self-leadership approach includes strategies and techniques that will help employees to be successful in their jobs. Employees with self-leadership use several cognitive and behavioral strategies and techniques. Employees are intrinsically motivated by these strategies and techniques. Thus, employees can manage themselves more effectively. It is seen that the employees who successfully apply the self-leadership philosophy experience an increase in their job performance.

Hypothesis 3, which states that psychological empowerment is positively related to job performance, is supported. This study has shown that employee empowerment practices effectively increase performance. Similar studies also show that psychological empowerment positively affects the job performance of employees (Hechanova et al., 2006; Sun, 2016). A leader can empower his employees by giving them decision-making authority. Like this, authorized employees become active problem solvers who contribute to the planning and execution of work.

Hypothesis 4, which states that a positive relationship between self-leadership and employee's job performance is mediated by psychological empowerment, is supported. Although studies support this result theoretically, the number of studies examining this empirical is limited (Neck and Houghton, 2006). Successful self-leaders have high self-awareness, self-management skills, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and locus of control (Daud, 2020). Self-leading employees can do their jobs more efficiently, so their self-confidence increases, and they can control their work environment easily. In this way, it is possible for employees to feel empowered in their work. Employees who think empowered do not hesitate to take responsibility and make more effort to fulfill their obligations (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015). This study results show that self-leadership also increases job performance through psychological empowerment.

Practical Implications

Every employee has self-leadership potential. By using this potential, it is possible to increase the productivity and performance of the employees (Manz, 1983a). Self-leadership is a learnable phenomenon (Manz, 1980). Therefore, anyone who wants can become an effective self-leader by working on it. To get high efficiency and performance from the human resources, organizations and HR managers should know the self-leadership levels of managers and employees they work with or intend to work with. Employees with low self-leadership levels can be given training on this subject. Providing this training to employees who can lead could become more successful leaders for their organizations.

If a person cannot guide himself well, this person cannot be expected to guide others properly. Therefore, the leader or manager must first fulfill his responsibilities. From this perspective, self-leadership is a must for managing others. Managers should be role models to their employees with their self-leadership behaviors and show them how to self-leadership strategies can be used. Thus, employees will adapt and learn the self-leadership philosophy more easily.

In the Covid-19 period, telecommuting is preferred much more. In the absence of certain constraints brought by the office environment, employees who try to carry out remote work at home need to know how to motivate themselves. It can be difficult to supervise and motivate those who work at home. There are external control elements in the office environment. Factors such as when employees come to work, how long they work in the office, and how they work are inspected closely. Employees carry out their work consciously, but it isn't easy for everyone to control such elements when working from home. Therefore, managers should encourage their employees to act with more internal control rather than

external control. One of the best ways to do this is to adopt the philosophy of self-leadership as organizational culture. Thus, employees will be able to motivate themselves, and the need for external-oriented management will decrease. Self-leadership strategies could help employees overcome many of the challenges they face by increasing self-control and intrinsic motivation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study's limitations are an opportunity for researchers who will work on this subject in the future. This research was conducted during the Covid-19 outbreak and in an environment of constant or semi-restrictions. Therefore, the research methods used are limited. In this study, the survey method was chosen as the data collection tool. In future studies, apart from the survey, data acquisition methods such as interviews and observation can also be used together with the survey method. Thus, it will be possible to obtain more data. In addition, the study's findings can be tested using analysis methods not used in this study.

This study was carried out on employees working in different sectors in Turkey. Future studies can apply this research by selecting a particular industry. Thus, it can be tested whether the findings determined in this study are valid for specific sectors. Another critical point is that the average age of the employees in this study is approximately 42. Self-leadership skills and related relationships may differ for a younger sample. Another limitation of the study is that the people participating in the survey subjectively evaluate themselves.

CONCLUSION

The ways of working are changing with Covid-19. Companies encourage constructive attitudes and behaviors by empowering their employees (Gostin and Wiley, 2020). Employees are given greater autonomy, responsibility, and decision-making authority. To overcome these responsibilities, employees must be individuals who can control their behavior and motivate themselves (Manz, 1992; Müller and Niessen, 2019).

Self-leadership is the starting point of many processes in the organization. Although the concept of self-leadership generally deals with individuals, its results are not limited to the individual level (Stewart and Barrick, 2000). It is becoming more and more critical for employees to have self-leadership skills to adapt to businesses' competitive and rapidly changing conditions. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the effect of self-leadership on employees' job performance. We thought this study would contribute to the literature on self-leadership, psychological empowerment, and job performance. Results of the study indicate that self-leaders not only ensure their development but also contribute to their organizations.

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