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The effect of empowering leadership on workforce agility: A multi-group analysis by work experience*

Elif Ebeoğlu[a], Yavuz Selim Düger[b]**

[a]*Student, Graduate School of Education, Department of International Trade and Finance, Master's Program, Kütahya, 43020 Türkiye. E-Mail: elif.ebeoglu23@gmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8421-6624*

[b] *Ph.D., Assoc. Prof., Kutahya Dumlupinar University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, International Trade and Finance, Kütahya, 43020 Türkiye. E-Mail: yselim.duger@dpu.edu.tr, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3523-9671*

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ABSTRACT

In today's business world, uncertainties, rapid change, and intense competition force businesses to be agile not only structurally but also in terms of their people. In this context, employee adaptability, proactivity, and resilience have become critical elements for the sustainability of organizational agility. The aim of this study is to determine the effect of an empowering leadership approach on workforce agility. In other words, it examines how empowering leadership behaviors affect employees' proactiveness, adaptability, and psychological resilience. However, the reflection of leadership practices on employee behavior may not occur in the same way for all employees. Especially, work experience can differentiate how employees perceive, internalize, and translate leadership practices into behavior. To this end, data was collected through a survey conducted with 218 employees in manufacturing businesses operating in Kütahya. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling and multiple group analysis techniques. The findings revealed that empowering leadership significantly and positively affects workforce agility, and that this effect varies according to length of employment, indicating that leadership practices do not produce uniform outcomes across different experience levels.

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** Corresponding author / Sorumlu yazar

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Güçlendirici liderliğin işgücü çevikliğine etkisi: çalışma deneyimine göre çoklu grup analizi

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ÖZ

Günümüz iş dünyasında belirsizlikler, hızlı değişimler ve yoğun rekabet, işletmeleri yalnızca yapısal değil, aynı zamanda insani yönlerden de çevik olmaya zorlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, çalışanların uyumluluğu, proaktifliği ve psikolojik dayanıklılığı örgütsel çevikliğin sürdürülebilirliği açısından kritik unsurlar haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, çalışanların çevik davranışlar sergilemesinde güçlendirici liderlik yaklaşımının etkisini belirlemektir. Başka bir ifadeyle, güçlendirici liderlik davranışlarının çalışanların proaktiflik, uyum ve psikolojik dayanıklılık davranışlarını nasıl etkilediği incelenmektedir. Ancak liderlik uygulamalarının çalışan davranışlarına yansıması, tüm çalışanlar için aynı biçimde gerçekleşmeyebilir. Özellikle örgütte geçirilen süre, çalışanların liderlik sinyallerini algılama, içselleştirme ve davranışa dönüştürme biçimlerini farklılaştırabilmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, Kütahya'da faaliyet gösteren üretim işletmelerinde 218 çalışana ulaşılarak anket aracılığı ile veriler toplanmıştır. Veriler, yapısal eşitlik modellemesi ve çoklu grup analizi teknikleri kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, güçlendirici liderliğin işgücü çevikliğini anlamlı ve pozitif yönde etkilediğini, ayrıca bu etkinin çalışma süresine göre farklılaştığını ortaya koymuştur, bu durum, liderlik uygulamalarının farklı deneyim seviyelerinde aynı sonuçları üretmediğini göstermektedir.

1. Introduction

In today's business world, global change is no longer a choice but an inevitable necessity for businesses. Therefore, merely surviving in this changing environment is not enough; it is also necessary to continuously develop new strategies to stay ahead of competitors. Agility is at the heart of these strategies. From a business perspective, agility is the ability to respond quickly to changing competitive conditions, recognize and capitalize on emerging opportunities in a timely manner, and adapt proactively to internal or environmental changes (Sharifi and Zhang, 1999). This competency plays a critical role not only in times of crisis but also in today's era of increasing development and innovation (Aktas, Dogan, and Gungor, 2017).

In the business world, the sustainability of agility in an environment of deepening uncertainty and technological transformation does not depend solely on the quality of strategic decisions made. The existence of a workforce capable of implementing these decisions is also a determining factor. At this point, workforce agility (WA) is defined as the ability to use existing knowledge and skills at the right time, coordinate effectively, and possess a structure of individual competencies with high mobility (Braun, Hayes, Frautschy DeMuth and Taran, 2017). Therefore, an agile workforce is not limited to performing assigned tasks but can also take an active role in change processes. It is very difficult for other systems to be agile without an agile workforce. This is because WA is a key element that strengthens other agility approaches (Alavi and Wahab, 2013).

Leadership is a process that charts a course for followers, establishes a shared vision, and develops strategic steps in that direction (Eren, 2013). However, the impact of leadership cannot be explained as a unilateral behavior. Employees' attitudes, values, and expectations are decisive in shaping this process. Therefore, leadership is not limited to the function of providing direction. It also encompasses creating an organizational climate that motivates employees, supports them, and enables them to realize their potential (Northouse, 2018). The ability of organizations to maintain their existence

in a stable and sustainable manner largely depends on the effectiveness of such leadership skills. Therefore, leadership is a critical element not only in terms of individual employee performance but also in terms of the overall functioning of the organization (Taner, 2024).

The diversification of environmental dynamics and the changing expectations and needs of individuals have also reshaped perceptions and practices of leadership over time. In this transformation process, classical leadership types—whether autocratic, democratic, or bureaucratic—have begun to lose their prominence. They have been replaced by more adaptable, flexible leadership approaches that can respond to the requirements of the age (Ergün Özler, 2013). These are contemporary leadership approaches such as transformational, empowering, visionary, strategic, and servant leadership. The transformation in leadership practices enables managers to establish more trust-based and interactive relationships with their employees. This not only improves the quality of relationships but also encourages employees to exhibit positive behaviors such as innovation, creativity, and proactivity. Furthermore, the positive impact of leadership approaches on WA has been proven (Das, Mukhopadhyay and Suar, 2023). Among these approaches, the empowering leadership (EL) concept, which emphasizes power sharing and focuses on motivating employees, is particularly noteworthy.

The sphere of influence of leaders within an organization is based on both formal sources of power (rewards, punishments, authority) and informal elements (personal characteristics, social relationships, expertise, and access to resources) (Cheong, Yammarino, Dionne, Spain and Tsai, 2019). The EL approach encourages employees to take more initiative and act autonomously in their work processes by evaluating these two dimensions of power together. This understanding differs from the traditional perspective that concentrates power in a single center; it prioritizes employee participation and development. In other words, empowering leaders distribute power through practices such as sharing information, providing guidance, offering emotional support, and involving employees in decision-making processes (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). This type of leadership practice strengthens employees' intrinsic motivation, performance levels, and perception of independence. Therefore, EL appears to be an important factor in increasing employee agility (Naim, Sahai and Elembilassery, 2024; Varshney and Varshney, 2024). However, these studies assume that the impact of leadership is homogeneous for all employees and do not adequately consider contextual differences.

The impact of EL on WA is explained in this study from the perspectives of structural empowerment, Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, and Social Exchange Theory (SET). These approaches reveal how leadership facilitates agile behaviors by assuming a resource-providing and reciprocal role (Naim et al., 2024). The primary objective of this research is to examine the effects of the EL approach on WA. This relationship is tested using structural equation modeling (SEM), and whether it differs based on employees' work experience is evaluated using multiple group analysis. Specifically, it aims to reveal the effects of leaders' empowering behaviors on employees' proactivity, adaptability to change, and psychological resilience. Existing research often addresses these two concepts superficially and does not thoroughly examine the relationships between the sub-dimensions (Kim and Yoon, 2025; Naim et al., 2024; Varshney and Varshney, 2024). Although recent empirical studies have begun to examine the relationship between EL and WA, evidence remains limited regarding this relationship from a multidimensional perspective and across work-experience groups. This study is significant because it examines the relationship between these two variables in detail at the sub-dimension level and within the context of work experiences. Furthermore, it contributes to the literature both theoretically and practically by examining how EL is perceived and how it influences agile behavior in the context of a high power distance culture such as Türkiye.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Empowering leadership

In an organizational context, power is an important element not only for interpersonal interactions but also for the continuity of institutional functioning. The sustainability of activities in organizations is directly related to how power relations are structured and managed (Alkan and Erdem, 2018). Employees and managers resort to various points of support in order to expand their spheres of influence and strengthen their positions within the organization. These points of support are basically addressed in the literature under two main categories: formal power and informal power. Formal power

is based on the authority derived from an individual's hierarchical position within the organization. Informal power, on the other hand, is based on factors such as personal characteristics, social networks, and knowledge, independent of an individual's position. Leaders can use various fundamental powers to influence their followers, such as reward, coercion, legitimacy, expert, and referent (French and Raven, 1959).

The evolution of power-related perspectives has shifted toward an EL approach that supports employee participation and development. EL is defined as a leadership style that enables employees to take on more responsibility and act autonomously by utilizing both formal and informal sources of power (Cheong et al., 2019). At the core of this approach is the sharing of authority, rather than its concentration in a single individual. The leader positions the employee not only as an implementer but also as an element that participates in decision-making processes and takes initiative. Practices such as knowledge sharing, coaching, emotional support, participation in decision-making mechanisms, and encouragement are tools of this leadership approach (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). As a result of these practices, employees' perception of independence is strengthened, and their performance levels increase. In addition, intrinsic motivation is supported; the sense of responsibility and autonomy increases (Cheong et al., 2019; Sharma and Kirkman, 2015).

Empowerment practices are a management approach that produces result not only at the individual level but also at the organizational level. These practices increase employees' desire to contribute to the organization and make them feel more secure and competent. Furthermore, the concentration of tasks, authority, and responsibility in the same person creates a foundation that supports the development process of employees. Empowerment practices nurture creativity and intrinsic motivation, strengthening the individual's capacity for self-control. This creates a system of self-regulating employees. From the organization's perspective, decision-making processes gain speed, structural flexibility increases, and both internal and external customer satisfaction improves. As a result, competitiveness increases, new business opportunities emerge, and practices such as knowledge sharing help organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Akçakaya, 2010). Empowerment encourages employees to take on more responsibility, develop their skills, increase self-confidence, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase job satisfaction, allowing managers to focus on strategic issues, accelerate decision-making, and increase productivity (Doğan and Demiral, 2009).

There are two primary approaches to explaining the empowerment process. The first is a structural approach grounded in Kanter’s (1977) organizational theory. Kanter argues that individuals' organizational success depends more on their access to structural opportunities, power relations, and resources within the organization than on their personal talents. According to him, for employees to achieve effectiveness, they must have access to organizational opportunities (career development, skill acquisition), power (participation in decision-making), support (mentoring, collaboration, a trusting environment), and information (job-related data and feedback). This structural understanding has subsequently become established in the literature as the structural empowerment approach (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian and Wilk, 2001).

The second perspective is the psychological empowerment approach developed by Spreitzer (1995). In this approach, empowerment is addressed through the individual's subjective assessments rather than structural arrangements. The employee's ability to attribute meaning to their work, perceive themselves as competent, take initiative, and assume a certain degree of risk are the fundamental components of this framework. Therefore, empowerment is not merely a delegation of authority; it is a multidimensional process that involves strengthening employees at the perceptual and emotional levels. Psychological empowerment is a multidimensional construct that shapes the work environment and is reflected in job roles. These dimensions, as explained by Spreitzer, are as follows:

• Meaning: The feeling that work feels meaningful and important to an individual, resulting from the alignment of an individual's values with their work role.

• Competence: The belief that an individual can be successful at work by using their knowledge and skills—in other words, the confidence to perform tasks effectively.

• Self-determination: The individual's ability to make decisions about work processes, direct their actions, and have a say in how the work is done.

• Impact: The extent to which an individual's decisions and actions influence strategic and operational processes and the sense of influence over work outcomes.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) define this process as overcoming the perception of powerlessness at a cognitive level. Within this framework, leadership behaviors initially create an empowered perception, which in turn develops employees' self-efficacy beliefs. Ultimately, proactive behaviors lead to positive behavioral outcomes such as increased intrinsic motivation and performance. Therefore, although empowerment is not linear, it occurs through a causal chain (leadership → empowering perception → self-efficacy → behavioral outcomes). In this context, leaders' efforts to increase employees' perceptions of control, support their competence beliefs, and create autonomy-supportive environments play a critical role.

2.2. Workforce agility

Agility is a critical competency for businesses to survive in today's rapidly changing, uncertain, and competitive environment. Agility refers to the ability of businesses to adapt to changing environmental conditions and respond to opportunities in a timely manner (Goldman, Nagel and Preiss, 1995; Sharifi and Zhang, 1999). In fact, today, agility is becoming a fundamental requirement for survival rather than a strategic choice (Breu, Hemingway, Strathern and Bridger, 2001; Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997). In this context, the need for organizations to be agile stems from the necessity of adapting to the rapidly changing corporate environment. Organizational agility is the capacity to gain competitive advantage by making knowledge-based decisions in a timely and effective manner in market conditions characterized by uncertainty and rapid change (Goldman et al., 1995). This capacity involves the organization's ability to respond to emerging changes not only quickly but also strategically. However, the agility process cannot be explained solely by technology investments or structural revisions, as is often thought. The key factor determining the success of the process is the extent to which the transformation is embraced and internalized by employees (Shafer, Dyer, Kilty, Amos and Ericksen, 2003). It is extremely important for employees to adopt an agile approach in changing corporate habits and building competitiveness.

This is where WA comes into play. In a business environment where technological developments are accelerating, characterized by uncertainty and constant change, the sustainability of organizational agility and the efficient implementation of decisions depends on an agile workforce (Alavi, Wahab, Muhamad and Arbab Shirani, 2014; Braun et al., 2017). An agile workforce is defined as human capital with the capacity to respond immediately and effectively to changing demands, combining individual competencies with flexibility in business processes, rapid learning, and effective coordination (Muduli, 2013). WA cannot be evaluated as the sum of the characteristics possessed by employees. It refers to a dynamic capacity that enables these characteristics to be mobilized in an integrated manner with organizational goals (Teece et al., 1997). In this context, an agile employee is an individual who can develop a positive attitude, is constantly open to learning, has problem-solving skills, can think creatively, and can adapt to conditions of uncertainty. However, WA cannot be explained solely at the individual level. It is a holistic phenomenon that must be considered in conjunction with organizational structure, leadership style, technology use, and learning culture. Indeed, WA has two distinguishing aspects: the ability to recognize change early and the capacity to respond quickly and appropriately to that change (Paul, Jena and Sahoo, 2020).

2.3. Empowering leadership and workforce agility

Workforce agility refers to the capacity of employees to adapt quickly to changing environmental conditions, transition flexibly between different tasks, develop a proactive attitude, and generate creative solutions to problems encountered (Muduli, 2017; Varshney and Varshney, 2024). This capacity is not merely an indicator of individual skills; it is a strategic element that directly affects organizational performance and competitive advantage (Paul et al., 2020). However, the sustainability of agility is closely related to the leadership approaches and practices adopted within the organization (Sanatigar, Hadi Peikani and Gholamzadeh, 2017; Varshney and Varshney, 2024). EL, which is particularly prominent in transformation processes, grants employees a broader scope of autonomy and actively involves them in decision-making mechanisms (Cheong et al., 2019). This leadership approach increases organizational commitment through psychological empowerment, perceived meaningfulness,

and leader-employee interaction, while also creating a climate that supports agile behaviors (Horoub and Zargar, 2022; Tummers and Bakker, 2021).

EL contributes to the creation of a climate of psychological safety within the organization, which in turn increases employees' voluntary participation in knowledge sharing (Lysfjord and Skarstein, 2024). The leader's trust in employees, encouraging their participation in decision-making processes, and adopting a learning-oriented attitude rather than a punitive approach to mistakes ensures the development of a more open and transparent communication structure within the organization (Bandura, 1977). In such a context, employees do not shy away from expressing their thoughts and are more willing to share their experiences and knowledge. Therefore, this environment not only supports individual learning but also strengthens organizational learning capacity. The increase in learning capacity directly contributes to WA. Managers who adopt an EL approach support employees in expressing their views and suggestions and acknowledge their contributions by making them visible. This attitude paves the way for increased knowledge sharing within the organization (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014). Knowledge sharing is closely related to employee agility and plays a functional role in the emergence of agile behaviors. Indeed, information sharing processes supported by an open communication environment are among the fundamental mechanisms that explain how the relationship between EL and employee agility is shaped (Naim et al., 2024).

Considering the decisive role of leadership in the context of WA, EL is regarded as an important organizational resource (Cheong et al., 2019). This leadership style supports the emergence of agile behaviors through the autonomy granted to employees, the support provided, and the psychological safety environment created. Therefore, EL is not only effective on job satisfaction or team performance. It also strengthens competencies directly linked to agility, such as employees' ability to adapt quickly to changing conditions, take responsibility, and develop creative solutions (Varshney and Varshney, 2024). When employees perceive themselves as empowered, they exhibit proactive behaviors such as flexibility, resilience, and perseverance more intensely (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). In this context, workplace social courage may also support employees' willingness to take initiative and engage in positive work behaviors (Mert, Sen and Alzghoul, 2022). Empowering leaders support this process by increasing employees' level of organizational commitment and encouraging them to pursue more ambitious goals. These behaviors are directly linked to employee agility. Indeed, the ability to adapt quickly to changing conditions is one of the fundamental components of agility. The development of this capacity is closely related to the environment of trust provided by the leader and the autonomy granted to employees (Amanda et al., 2024).

Findings reported in the literature (Muduli and Pandya, 2018; Naim et al., 2024; Saputra, Patrick and Ronald, 2022; Varshney and Varshney, 2024) indicate that an EL style plays a decisive role in the development of an agile workforce. This leadership approach does not merely directly influence agility; it also provides indirect contributions through various organizational and psychological mechanisms. Various theories have been integrated to explain the mechanisms behind the complex relationship between EL and WA.

Naim et al. (2024) proposed two different approaches to understanding how this relationship operates. The first is to combine the structural empowerment and motivation perspectives. According to this view, behaviors such as leaders delegating authority to employees, encouraging participation in decision-making processes, and facilitating access to resources create a sense of empowerment in employees. This structural empowerment enhances employee motivation, enabling them to adapt more quickly to changing circumstances and demonstrate agility. The second important theoretical framework combines COR and social exchange theories. COR theory posits that individuals seek to acquire, protect, and invest in valued resources (such as energy, status, and psychological well-being). EL helps employees avoid resource losses by providing or enhancing valued resources, such as psychological well-being, for employees. SET, on the other hand, emphasizes the reciprocity inherent in this resource exchange. In response to the support and resources provided by leaders, employees tend to contribute more to the organization, share knowledge, and demonstrate greater agility (Naim et al., 2024). Based on these insights, the following hypotheses were developed.

H1: EL significantly and positively affects WA.

H1a: EL significantly affects employees' level of proactive behavior.

H1b: EL significantly affects employees' adaptive behaviors.

H1c: EL significantly affects employees' psychological resilience levels.

However, it should not be expected that the impact of EL on employee behavior will come out in the same way for every employee. As employees' experience increases, their perception of their roles, their interpretation of leadership practices, and their translation of these practices into behavior can also be expected to change. The organizational socialization literature shows that employees' involvement processes and experience levels shape their responses to organizational practices (Feldman, 1976; Bauer et al., 2007). Leadership research, on the other hand, reveals that leadership effects are not homogeneous for all followers, and that individual characteristics and contextual factors shape these processes (Shamir and Howell, 1999). In this context, it is assumed that the impact of EL on WA may not be equally apparent to all employees. Based on this assumption, hypotheses have been formulated to test whether this relationship differs according to work experience.

H2: The effect of EL on WA varies according to work experience.

H2a: The effect of EL on proactive behavior varies according to work experience.

H2b: The effect of EL on adaptive behavior varies according to work experience.

H2c: The effect of EL on psychological resilience varies according to work experience.

3. Methodology

3.1. Purpose, scope, and method of the research

Today's business world is evolving into an increasingly complex and unpredictable environment under the influence of dynamics such as digitalization, global competition, and uncertainty. In this context, businesses' ability to achieve sustainable success (e.g., profitability, productivity, market share) depends not only on technological investments but also on employees' individual competencies such as proactivity, adaptability, and psychological resilience (Sherehiy, Karwowski and Layer, 2007). The concept of WA, which stands out in the literature within this framework, refers to employees' capacity to quickly adapt to change, take initiative, and demonstrate resilience. Leadership styles play a critical role in the development of these competencies, and the effects of different leadership styles on WA have been examined in various studies (Cyfert, Szumowski, Dyduch, Zastempowski and Chudziński, 2022; Kim and Yoon, 2025; Prasetiawan, Nurhayati and Riana, 2025). However, empirical research specifically addressing the multidimensional effects of EL on this concept is quite limited. Accordingly, the research model was tested using a SEM approach. Furthermore, multiple group analysis was applied to examine whether the effect of EL on WA differed according to work experience.

In line with the objectives of the study, permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Kütahya Dumlupınar University under number 2024/10, dated November 4, 2024; the study was conducted on blue-collar and white-collar employees working in businesses operating in the private sector in Kütahya. In the study, managers' empowering behaviors were evaluated based on the perceptions of employees. In this context, delegation of authority, assignment of responsibility, granting the opportunity to make independent decisions, information sharing, skill development, and coaching practices aimed at innovative performance were measured. In addition, the levels of proactivity, capacity for adaptation to change, and psychological resilience exhibited by employees in response to these leadership practices were also included in the scope of the research. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and a correlational survey model was preferred. The survey method was used as the data collection tool. The survey forms prepared within this scope were sent to the participants comprising the sample of the study via electronic means.

Difficulties in accessing reliable data sources during the research process and the time-consuming and restrictive nature of official permit procedures led to the scope of the study being defined within a narrower framework than initially anticipated. This limitation necessitated restricting the research to a specific region and sector. Accordingly, the universe was defined as blue-collar and white-collar personnel working in manufacturing companies operating in the Kütahya Organized Industrial

Zone, and the data collection process was conducted within this scope. This universe was selected taking into account accessibility and research conditions.

Convenience sampling was preferred in this study due to the time and access convenience it provided in reaching participants. The data collection process was conducted between December 2024 and March 2025, and a total of 338 questionnaires were distributed during this period. Of the 257 questionnaires returned, 39 were excluded from the evaluation for reasons such as incomplete filling, leaving blank, or giving the same answer to all items. Thus, 218 valid data sets were obtained for use in the analyses. The adequacy of the sample size was also evaluated using the a-priori sample size approach for SEM proposed by Westland (2010) and implemented in Soper's SEM sample size calculator. Based on 38 observed variables, 11 latent variables, an anticipated medium effect size of 0.30, $\alpha = 0.05$, and statistical power = 0.80, the minimum required sample size was calculated as 143. Therefore, the final sample size of 218 was considered sufficient for the SEM analyses.

During the data collection process, a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure participants' opinions (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). The questionnaire also included questions regarding demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, work experience, and educational status. The data were analyzed using SPSS 20.0 and AMOS 16.0, and ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5) was used only for English language editing during manuscript preparation.

3.2. Scales of the Study

In the study, the Empowering Leadership Scale developed by Konczak et al. (2000) was used to determine employees' perceptions of the leader's empowering characteristics. The scale consists of a total of 17 statements and includes six sub-dimensions: delegation of authority, assignment of responsibility, independent decision-making, information sharing, skill development, and coaching for innovative performance. When examining the distribution of items across dimensions, it is seen that the dimensions of delegation, responsibility, independent decision-making, skill development, and coaching for innovative performance each consist of three statements, while the dimension of information sharing consists of two statements.

To determine employees' WA tendencies, the WA scale developed by Sherehiy (2008) and used by Alavi et al. (2014) was utilized. The scale consists of a total of 39 items and includes three sub-dimensions: proactivity, adaptability, and psychological resilience. When examining the item distribution, it can be seen that the proactivity dimension consists of 11 items, the adaptability dimension consists of 16 items, and the psychological resilience dimension consists of 12 items.

4. Research findings

4.1. Demographic findings

The demographic structure of the individuals participating in the study was evaluated based on variables such as age, gender, marital status, work experience, education level, and employment status. Findings regarding the characteristics of the participants, based on the 218 valid survey data used in the analysis, are summarized below.

When examining the gender distribution of participants, 51.8% were female (n=113) and 48.2% were male (n=105). In terms of marital status, 56.9% of the sample were single (n=124) and 43.1% were married (n=94). The distribution by age group shows that 26.1% are aged 18–25, 18.3% are aged 26–30, 28.9% are aged 31–39, 25.2% are aged 40–54, and 1.4% are aged 55 and above. In terms of work experience, 56.4% of participants had less than three years of experience, while 43.6% had three years or more of experience. In terms of education level, 15.1% had completed elementary school, 29.8% had completed high school, 39% had completed an associate's degree, 11% had completed a bachelor's degree, 4.1% had completed a master's degree, and 0.9% had completed a doctorate. This distribution shows that the majority of the sample had completed secondary education and an associate's degree. In terms of employment status, 72.9% of participants were classified as blue-collar workers (n=159) and 27.1% as white-collar workers (n=59).

4.2. Measurement model assessment

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the scales used in the study, to reveal the factor structure, and to determine the explanatory power of each item. Principal component analysis was performed separately to each scale, and Varimax rotation was used in the analyses. Detailed findings from the exploratory factor analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

EFA results and factor loadings

Scales	Factors	Number of Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO
Empowering Leadership	Delegation of Authority	3	0.699-0.841		
	Accountability	3	0.712-0.893		
	Self-Directed Decision Making	3	0.719-0.858		
	Information Sharing	2	0.795-0.810	0.886	0.838
	Skill Development	2	0.516-0.909		
	Coaching for Innovative Performance	3	0.647-0.874		
Total Variance Explained: 74.06 Bartlett Test: χ2:1496,789 df: 140 p: 0.00					
Workforce Agility	Adaptability	14	0.514-0.728		
	Proactivity	10	0.537-0.703	0.944	0.917
	Psychological Resilience	7	0.466-0.765		
Total Variance Explained: 51.34 Bartlett Test: χ2: 3714,123 df: 465 p: 0.00					

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy coefficient was calculated to determine whether the EL and WA scales were suitable for factor analysis. According to the results obtained, the KMO value was found to be 0.838 for EL and 0.917 for WA. These values indicate that the sample size is quite sufficient and high for factor analysis (Kalaycı, 2016). When examining the Bartlett Sphericity Test results, the chi-square value was found to be statistically significant for both EL ($\chi^2(120) = 1496.789$; $p < 0.01$) and WA ($\chi^2(465) = 3714.123$; $p < 0.01$). These findings reveal that there are meaningful relationships between the variables and that the data set meets the necessary conditions for factor analysis.

According to the results of the factor analysis, the items of the EL scale are grouped under six factors. The factor loadings for the items range from 0.516 to 0.909. However, item SD1, which is included in the knowledge development dimension, was excluded from the analysis because it did not fit the expected factor structure. It was determined that the six factors obtained explained 74.06% of the total variance. This ratio indicates that the scale has strong construct validity. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the internal consistency of the scale was calculated as $\alpha=0.886$, indicating a high level of reliability.

The factor analysis findings indicate that the items belonging to the WA scale are grouped under three main dimensions. The factor loadings for the items were found to range from 0.466 to 0.765. However, it was found that some items did not fit the expected factor structure and loaded significantly on more than one factor. Therefore, item P9 from the proactivity dimension; items PR1, PR2, PR3, PR5, and PR10 from the psychological resilience dimension; and items A2 and A15 from the adaptability dimension were excluded from the analysis. The total variance explained by the three factors was calculated as 51.34%. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which indicates the internal consistency of the scale, was found to be $\alpha=0.944$, and this result demonstrated that the measurement tool is highly reliable.

Following EFA completion, individual confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed for each scale. Table 2 presents the CFA parameter estimates.

Table 2

Results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Scales	Factors	Number of Items	Factor Loadings	*t*	*p*
Empowering Leadership	Delegation of Authority	3	0.756-0.832	11.777-11.824	0.000
	Accountability	3	0.664-0.843	8.801-9.229	0.000
	Self-Directed Decision Making	3	0.715-0.731	8.806-8.810	0.000
	Information Sharing	2	0.756-0.776	8.571	0.000
	Skill Development	2	0.532-0.892	6.296	0.000
	Coaching for Innovative Performance	3	0.669-0.759	8.378-9.167	0.000
Workforce Agility	Adaptability	10	0.651-0.762	8.861-10.141	0.000
	Proactivity	7	0.626-0.748	8.892-10.712	0.000
	Psychological Resilience	5	0.656-0.842	8.583-9.925	0.000

In confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), standardized factor loadings are considered to assess the extent to which observed variables represent the underlying latent structures. Loadings above 0.50 are considered statistically acceptable (Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2014). CFA was applied to the WA scale, which was determined to consist of three sub-dimensions as a result of exploratory factor analysis. Items A1, A2, A3, A16, P1, P10, P11, PR4, and PR12, whose standardized factor loadings were below 0.50, were excluded from the analysis. In addition, modification indices were examined, and covariance relationships between specific error terms were defined. In this context, error covariances were established between the item pairs P4–P5 and P5–P6 in the proactivity dimension; PR6–PR7 and PR8–PR9 in the psychological resilience dimension; and A12–A11, A10–A9, A7–A8, A6–A7, and A5–A6 in the adaptability dimension.

The results of the analyses revealed that the factor loadings for all items on the EL scale ranged from 0.532 to 0.892 and were above acceptable limits. Similarly, in the confirmatory factor analysis conducted for the WA scale, the standardized load values of the items were found to be in the range of 0.626 to 0.842. In confirmatory factor analysis, not only factor loadings but also the t values of the relevant parameters are expected to be statistically significant. In the literature, t-values above 1.96 for the $p<0.05$ level and above 2.56 for the $p<0.01$ level are considered significant (Çokluk, Şekercioğlu and Büyüköztürk, 2016). In this study, it was determined that the t-values for all items were above 2.56 and that the results were significant at the $p<0.01$ level.

According to confirmatory factor analysis, the chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and comparative fit indices (CFI, NFI, and RMSEA) were used to evaluate the EL and WA scale. When examining the findings presented in Table 3, it is understood that the scales show a good level of fit; therefore, the structural validity of the scale is ensured.

Table 3

Overview of goodness-of-fit measures for the CFA models of empowering leadership and workforce agility scales

Goodness of Fit Index	Empowering Leadership CFA Values	Workforce Agility CFA Values	Compliance Status
X^2	208.682	356.929	
df	89	197	
χ^2/df	2.385	1.812	Good Fit
RMSEA	0.079	0.061	Good Fit
GFI	0.900	0.878	Good Fit
CFI	0.916	0.937	Good Fit
NFI	0.865	0.871	Acceptable

To demonstrate the psychometric adequacy of the measurement model, convergent and discriminant validity analyses were conducted. Within the scope of convergent validity, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values were calculated. According to Hair et al. (2014), CR values should generally be above 0.70, while AVE values should be at least 0.50. When the findings in Table 4 are evaluated, the CR values of all constructs are at acceptable levels. The AVE values of the EL sub-dimensions and Psychological Resilience are above the 0.50 threshold. However, the AVE values for Proactivity (0.48) and Adaptability (0.48) were slightly below the recommended threshold. These constructs were retained because their CR values (0.87 and 0.90), Cronbach's alpha values (0.890 and 0.918), and standardized factor loadings were at acceptable levels. Therefore, convergent validity was evaluated holistically rather than relying solely on the strict AVE cutoff (Cheung, Cooper-Thomas, Lau, and Wang, 2024). These findings generally support the convergent validity and reliability of the measurement model.

Table 4

Convergent validity values

	Factors	Number of Items	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Empowering Leadership	Delegation of Authority	3	0.85	0.65	0.845
	Accountability	3	0.79	0.56	0.775
	Self-Directed Decision Making	3	0.76	0.52	0.765
	Information Sharing	2	0.74	0.59	0.739
	Skill Development	2	0.70	0.54	0.644
	Coaching for Innovative Performance	3	0.76	0.51	0.752
Workforce Agility	Proactivity	7	0.87	0.48	0.890
	Psychological Resilience	5	0.86	0.55	0.855
	Adaptability	10	0.90	0.48	0.918

For a scale to have discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE value of each latent variable must be greater than the correlation coefficients of that variable with all other latent variables in the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). When the findings in Table 5 are evaluated within the framework of the Fornell–Larcker criterion, it is seen that the square root values of the AVE for each dimension are

greater than the correlation coefficients. This indicates that there is sufficient differentiation between the structures and that the discriminant validity condition is met. Overall, it is understood that the reliability and validity indicators related to the measurement model are at an acceptable level.

Before testing the hypotheses, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables. This analysis aims to examine the nature of the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables as part of a preliminary assessment. When examining the results presented in Table 5, it is seen that there are positive and statistically significant relationships between the subscales of the EL scale and the subscales of the WA scale. The findings indicate the existence of a unidirectional relationship pattern between the variables.

Table 5

Correlation results between variables

		M	*SD*	√AVE	1	2	3	4
1	Empowering Leadership	3.86	0.63	0.75	1			
2	Proactivity	4.07	0.56	0.70	0.65	1		
3	Psychological Resilience	4.04	0.56	0.74	0.41	0.61	1	
4	Adaptability	4.10	0.55	0.69	0.46	0.58	0.56	1

The fact that all correlation coefficients remain below the 0.80 threshold indicates that there is no risk of multicollinearity in the model. In other words, there is no excessive overlap between the variables. This finding demonstrates that each scale used in the study represents its structure independently and consistently.

5. Hypothesis testing

In this study, SEM was established to test the effect of employees' perceptions of EL on workforce agility. The model aims to examine the causal relationships between variables in a comprehensive manner. The correlation analysis conducted first revealed significant relationships between the variables. The SEM analyses then applied revealed the direction and magnitude of these relationships. Detailed findings of the analysis are presented in Table 6. The structural model was evaluated using various goodness-of-fit indices. The results show an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.88$; RMSEA = 0.064, 90% CI [0.058, 0.069]). Although some fit indices are below the recommended threshold values (CFI = 0.86; TLI = 0.85), these values are considered acceptable given the complexity of the model and the number of hidden structures it contains.

Table 6

Path values related to SEM results

		B	β	R^2	t	p	
H1	EL ---> Workforce Agility	0.53	0.75	0.56	6.32	0.000	Supported
H1a	EL ---> Proactivity	0.68	0.85	0.73	6.50	0.000	Supported
H1b	EL ---> Adaptability	0.58	0.68	0.46	6.52	0.000	Supported
H1c	EL ---> Psychological Resilience	0.44	0.65	0.43	6.05	0.000	Supported

EL: Empowering Leadership

SEM findings indicate that employees' perceptions of EL have a positive and statistically significant effect on WA ($\beta = 0.75$; $R^2 = 0.56$; $p < 0.01$). This finding shows that higher perceptions of EL are associated with higher levels of WA, and the model explains 56% of the variance in WA. When the sub-dimensions are examined in detail; the strongest effect was observed for proactivity ($\beta = 0.85$;

$R^2 = 0.73$; $p < 0.01$), followed by adaptability ($\beta = 0.68$; $R^2 = 0.46$; $p < 0.01$) and psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.65$; $R^2 = 0.43$; $p < 0.01$). These findings indicate that EL has positive and statistically significant relationships with all sub-dimensions of WA. According to these results, hypotheses H1, H1a, H1b, and H1c were supported.

These findings highlight the overall impact of EL on workforce agility. However, to examine whether this effect occurs at the same level for all employees, a multiple group analysis (MGA) based on work experience was conducted in the next stage.

5.1. The role of work experience in the measurement model

In this study, work experience duration was divided into two groups, "less than 3 years" and "3 years and more," based on the literature on organizational socialization and career development. Meta-analytic findings indicate that although organizational adjustment processes for new employees develop rapidly in the first 12 months, 2–3 years are necessary for full role internalization and the display of proactive behaviors (Al Balushi, Thumiki, Nawaz, Jurcic and Gajenderan, 2022; Bauer et al., 2007). Similarly, the career settling-in phase generally begins with 3 years of experience, and this threshold is considered a turning point where employees internalize organizational norms (Slocum and Cron, 1985).

Before proceeding with multiple group analysis, it was tested whether the measurement model was comparable in two subgroups formed based on work experience. The purpose of the test is not to examine latent means, but whether the effect of EL on WA differs between groups. Therefore, structural and metric invariance were tested. In the literature, ensuring metric-level invariance is considered sufficient when comparing structural paths (Hair et al., 2014; Kline, 2016). In addition, the equality of structural regression coefficients was tested to evaluate path differences between groups.

Accordingly, the unconstrained model was compared with the model in which factor loadings were restricted. The comparison results showed $\Delta CFI = 0.005$ ($p < 0.01$) and $\Delta NFI = 0.009$. These values indicate that the measurement model is comparable between groups with "less than 3 years" and "3 years and more" of work experience (Cheung and Rensvold, 2002). Thus, the assumption that the observed differences stem not from measurement error but from real psychological mechanisms related to the length of experience has been made testable.

The results of the multi-group analysis for employees with less than 3 years and 3 years or more of experience are given in Table 7.

Table 7

Comparison of structural path coefficients according to work experience

		< 3 Years β	> 3 Years β	$\Delta\chi^2$ (p)	
H2	EL ---> Workforce Agility	-	-	15.11 (0.002)*	Supported
H2a	EL ---> Proactivity	0.85	0.87	8.29 (0.004)	Supported
H2b	EL ---> Adaptability	0.58	0.68	12.07 (0.001)	Supported
H2c	EL ---> Psychological Resilience	0.44	0.65	7.63 (0.006)	Supported

*For hypothesis H2, the simultaneous variation of paths P, A, and PR was tested using the Omnibus Test.

The findings of the multiple group analysis show that the effect of EL on WA differs significantly depending on work experience. The Omnibus test, which simultaneously evaluated the sub-dimensions of workforce agility, revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups ($\Delta\chi^2 = 15.11$; $p < 0.01$). An examination of the source of this differentiation shows that, although the standardized coefficients for the proactivity dimension are relatively close across groups, the difference

is nevertheless statistically significant. In terms of adaptive behavior, the effect of EL was significantly increased in employees with higher experience (β = 0.79). Similarly, in the psychological resilience dimension, the leadership effect was stronger compared to the less experienced group (β = 0.84). These findings suggest that EL shapes WA in different ways through sub-dimensions within the context of experience, rather than as a single construct.

6. Discussion

Today, people are often evaluated based on criteria such as productivity, competence, and performance. However, humans are not simply employees who perform tasks; they are also multifaceted beings who search for meaning through their emotions, intuition, and changing moods. Therefore, it is essential to approach the workforce holistically—rather than as a mere tool—to achieve sustainable agility in today's organizations. Agility is not solely a matter of processes or organizational structures; at its core, it is a human-centered phenomenon.

WA has been addressed from both theoretical and practical perspectives. However, at the center of all these approaches is the human factor. Humans act not only with their intellect but also with their emotions, constantly striving for growth and meaning. At this point, EL stands out not merely as a guiding orientation, but as a leadership approach that recognizes the individual's potential, acknowledges the person behind the role, and creates room for their development. An empowering leader should view employees not simply as individuals who perform tasks, but also as actors who participate in decision-making processes, contribute to change, and add value to organizational agility.

This study examined the effects of EL behaviors on WA through quantitative analyses. The findings revealed significant and positive relationships between EL and WA. These findings largely align with similar studies in the literature (Naim et al., 2024; Varshney and Varshney, 2024; Cheong et al., 2019). Furthermore, when considered within the framework of COR and SET, this situation can be explained by the tendency for employees to contribute more to the organization in exchange for the resources provided by the leader. EL has been found to have a particularly high impact on employees' proactivity levels, indicating that the authority, knowledge sharing, and coaching support provided by the leader facilitate their rapid and proactive response to environmental changes.

Similarly, the findings indicate that EL has a positive effect on employees' adaptability. This finding suggests that the leader's attitude is a determining factor in employees' development of flexibility and openness to environmental change. These results align with studies emphasizing the role of leadership in proactive behavior, particularly in industries characterized by high organizational complexity and uncertainty (Tummers and Bakker, 2021).

Furthermore, the findings of the multiple group analysis reveal that the impact of EL on WA differs depending on the employees' work experience. Specifically, the leadership effect is stronger in senior employees, particularly in the dimensions of adaptability and psychological resilience. This finding suggests that leadership practices are internalized over time, and as experience increases, employees transform these practices into agile behaviors more effectively. Therefore, EL has a contextually sensitive mechanism of influence, not producing the same level of results for all employees.

Considering Türkiye's cultural structure, the effects of EL become more evident. According to Hofstede, Türkiye has a context characterized by high power distance and collectivist culture, with more centralized decision-making processes. In this context, the findings suggest that empowering leadership may serve as a mechanism that balances hierarchical cultural expectations with employees' need for autonomy, participation, and agility. While employees in such hierarchical structures tend to have a high reliance on authority, the findings suggest that they are open to delegation, knowledge sharing, and development opportunities. This result suggests that EL can transcend traditional cultural norms and foster participation, collaboration, and agile behavior. Similarly, Aycan (2006) demonstrated that even in high power distance and collectivist contexts like Türkiye, leaders can empower employees by using authority as a development tool rather than sharing it. Therefore, EL stands out as an effective approach for fostering agile workforce development, even in high power distance cultures.

6.1. Theoretical and practical contributions

The findings indicate that EL cannot be reduced to merely task delegation or authority transfer. This leadership approach has a multidimensional structure that supports employees' psychological empowerment and develops organizational agility capacity. EL produces a behavioral and relational sphere of influence beyond structural arrangements. The research results also reveal that EL has a significant effect on psychological resilience. The leader's supportive attitude and the establishment of a trust-based relationship enable employees to remain more resilient in conditions of stress, pressure, and uncertainty. In this context, it can be said that psychological resilience is a trait that is strengthened by leadership behaviors.

Based on the findings of this study, it is possible to make various suggestions in terms of managerial, human resources and academic processes. Leaders who grant employees autonomy, include them in decision-making processes, and support their development increase WA. EL behaviors should be prioritized in management training programs; skills such as empathy, coaching, and effective communication should be developed. Employee training programs focused on flexibility, learning, and innovation should be planned, and job descriptions should include criteria for demonstrating agile behavior. Performance management systems should focus not only on outcomes but also on evaluating agile behaviors that contribute to the process. Furthermore, the fact that the study was conducted within Türkiye’s cultural context characterized by high power distance is important, as it demonstrates that EL can foster agile behavior even in hierarchical settings.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study was conducted only in a specific sector and region. Future comparative studies across different sectors and cultural contexts would enhance the generalizability of the model. It is recommended that future research test potential mediating variables (e.g., organizational commitment, job satisfaction) that may affect the relationship between EL and agility.

In this study, an online survey method was used in the data collection process. However, this method has some structural limitations. Participants' failure to pay sufficient attention to the survey, leaving questions incomplete, or interpreting statements differently can negatively affect the reliability and validity of the data (Arıkan, 2018). On the other hand, acting on a voluntary basis in the data collection process has led to participation rates falling below the expected level and limited the generalizability of the findings.

7. Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the effects of EL behaviors on WA. The findings reveal that EL positively impacts WA. It particularly contributes significantly to sub-dimensions such as proactivity, adaptability to change, and psychological resilience. These results demonstrate that organizations must invest in human resources and develop an agile workforce to achieve sustainable competitiveness.

The particularly strong impact of EL on proactivity suggests that it enhances critical competencies such as taking initiative, being open to change, and coping with challenges. It also demonstrates that employees are more creative and agile in generating solutions during organizational change processes with the support they receive from their leaders. However, the findings indicate that EL practices produce more pronounced results, particularly among employees with higher levels of experience. This suggests that leadership practices should be differentiated taking employee experience into account.

Author Statement

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