

The Moderation Effect of Supervisor's Power Distance and Mediation Effect of Interpersonal Relationship on The Relationship Between Supervisor's Trust and Empowering Leadership in Higher Vocational Colleges in Henan Province

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were: (1) to develop a relationship model of factors on empowering leadership of public higher vocational colleges in Henan Province. (2) To find mediating factors in the model of empowering leadership in Henan provincial higher public vocational colleges (3) to find moderation effect of the supervisor's power distance on the relationship between the supervisor's trusts and empowering leadership. The research design was a quantitative survey research, Population in this study were 3,329 senior officials from 25 public vocational colleges in Henan Province. A multi-stage random sampling technique was adopted to selected 400 senior officials as the sample. Basic statistics were employed for demographic data analysis, the CFA was used for measurement model, the SEM were employed for structural model analysis, and z-test was used to test the hypotheses.

The research results showed that: (1) the relationship model was composed of 3 latent variables namely supervisor's trust, interpersonal relationship, and empowering leadership, and the model fit well with the empirical data. (2) The supervisor's trust and interpersonal relationship play a mediating role in the model. (3) Power distance plays a moderating effect the relationship between the supervisor's trust and empowering leadership.

Keywords: Supervisor's Trust; Supervisor's Power Distance; Interpersonal Relationship; Empowering Leadership; Moderation, Mediation.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in studying the antecedents of empowering leadership (Lin et al., 2019). However, these studies mainly focus on the influence of leader gender factors and their cognitive factors on authoritative behavior. For example, long-term outcome considerations for leaders (Wenhui & Hui, 2009), self-sacrifice spirit (Wenhui & Hui, 2009), power distance perception (Pengbo et al., 2019), uncertainty avoidance (Pengbo et al., 2019), desire for control (Pengbo et al., 2019), authorization risk consideration (Jun et al., 2018) and collectivism and narcissism (Ahluwalia, 2020). Extensive empirical research has demonstrated the positive impact of empowering leadership on organizations, teams, and individual employees alike (Lorinkova & Perry, 2017). Although empowerment has many potential benefits for both organizations and employees, it also means that leaders share and relinquish their rights (Richardson et al., 2002). Therefore, leaders are often unwilling to

authorize. In practical situations, the willingness or execution of leaders' empowerment is often less than ideal (Byun et al., 2020) especially in China where there is a typical high power distance context (Hui & Cuilian, 2012). This phenomenon is referred to as "non-authorization" (Anderson, 1992) and is considered a fatal flaw of leaders (Achilles' heel). Therefore, exploring leaders' empowerment behavior is far more important than investigating its impact on outcomes (Hur, 2006). authorization has a stronger motivating effect on subordinates with high power perception (Eylon, 1999).

Currently, research on the influencing factors of empowering leadership is still in its early stages (Wenjie et al., 2015), and there is insufficient research on the antecedents of leader authorization. Henan Province's vocational colleges and specialized institutions are all municipal higher education institutions, influenced by both the overall management environment in China and the local management atmosphere. They are accustomed to issuing orders from above without much consideration for service-oriented principles (Qing, 2022). These universities have both a strong desire for empowerment and constraints imposed by bureaucratic thinking. As a member of the leadership group in Henan Province's vocational colleges and specialized institutions, the researcher keenly feels the importance and necessity of exploring factors influencing empowering leadership styles. Therefore, investigating these factors has significant practical implications.

Research Objectives

1. To develop the relationship model of factors on empowering leadership of vocational colleges in Henan Province.
2. To study the mediation effect of the relationship on the relationship between supervisor's trust and empowering leadership.
3. To study the moderation effect of the supervisor's power distance on the relationship between the supervisor's trust and empowering leadership.

Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: The supervisor's trust has a positive effect on the empowering leadership.

Hypothesis 2: The supervisor's trust has a positive effect on the interpersonal relationship.

Hypothesis 3: The interpersonal relationship has a positive effect on the empowering leadership.

Hypothesis 4: The supervisor's power distance has a negative effect on the empowering leadership.

Hypothesis 5: The supervisor's power distance has a negative effect on the supervisor's trust.

Hypothesis 6: The Supervisor's power distance has a moderating effect on the relationship between the supervisor's trust and the empowering leadership.

Hypothesis 7: The interpersonal relationship mediates the relationship between the supervisor's trust and the empowering leadership.

Hypothesis 8: The supervisor's trust mediates the relationship between the supervisor's power distance and the empowering leadership.

Hypothesis 9: The supervisor's trust and the interpersonal relationship mediate the chain-like relationship between the supervisor's power distance and empowering leadership.

Research Methodology

Researchers have employed research in quantitative research methods, collecting a large amount of relevant literature through literature search and backtracking. From this, key factors influencing empowering leadership have been identified, including a supervisor's trust, the superior's power distance, and the relationship. The study has preliminarily determined the impact of these factors on empowering leadership.

1. Population and sample

The research design was a quantitative survey research, Population in this study were 3,329 senior officials from 25 public vocational colleges in Henan Province. A multi-stage random sampling technique was adopted to selected 400 senior officials as the sample.

2. Data Collection

The questionnaire is delivered to the selected senior through targeted sending via WeChat, and the collection of questionnaires is done through WeChat. A set of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and subsequently, 400 valid responses were collected for analysis.

3. Data analysis

The CFA was used for measurement model, the SEM were employed for structural model analysis, and z-test was used to test the hypotheses.

Research Conceptual Framework

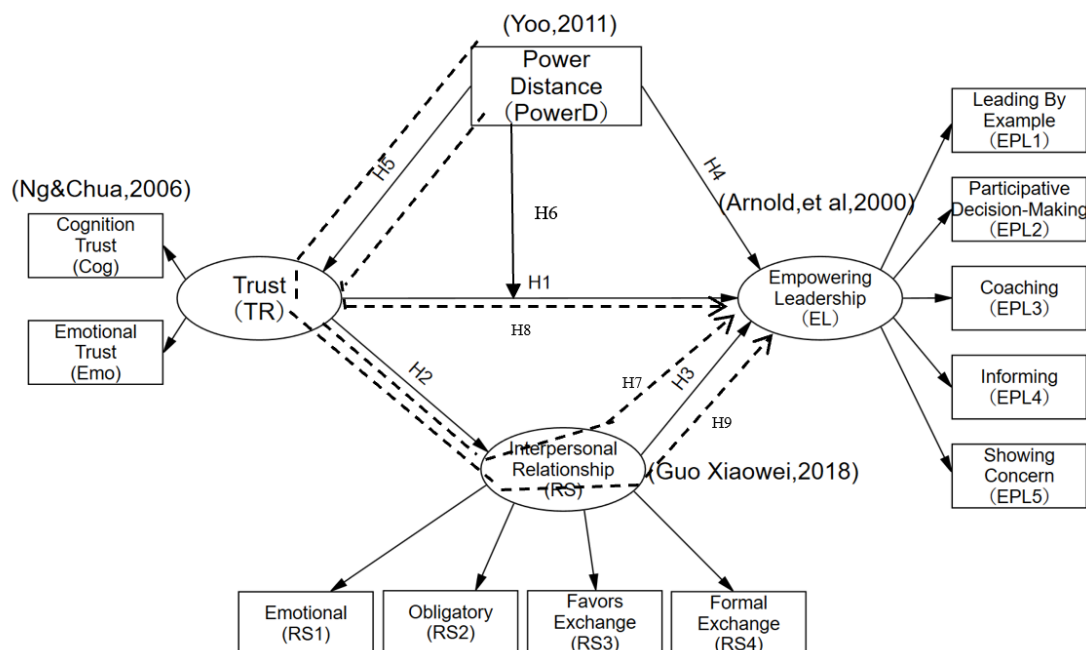


Figure 1 Research conceptual framework

Empowering leadership used as the dependent variable in this research, which includes 5 observed variables: Leading by Example, Participative Decision-Making, Coaching, Informing, Showing Concern with the department members (Arnold et al., 2000).

This research considers the supervisor's power distance as an independent and moderating variable, measured as a unidimensional construct (B et al., 2011).

The supervisor's trust was treated as an independent variable in this research, includes 2 observed variables: Cognition Trust and Emotional Trust (Ng & Chua, 2006).

The interpersonal relationship was treated as a mediating variable, includes 4 observed variables: Emotional, Obligatory, Favors Exchange, and Formal Exchange (Xiaowei & Wei, 2018).

Research Results

Research finding were as follow:

1. The main factors affecting empowering leadership in public higher vocational colleges in Henan Province are the supervisor's trust, power distance, and interpersonal relationship.

1. Intercorrelation between observed variables

Table 6.1 Intercorrelation among observed Variables in CFA model

Variables		Cog	Emo	RS1	RS2	RS3	RS4	EPL1	EPL2	EPL3	EPL4	EPL5
Trust	Cog	1.00										
	Emo	.84***	1.00									
Relationship	RS1	.45***	.46***	1.00								
	RS2	.42***	.47***	.83***	1.00							
	RS3	.40***	.47***	.74***	.77***	1.00						
	RS4	.39***	.40***	.69***	.69***	.68***	1.00					
Empowering Leadership	EPL1	.41***	.47***	.51***	.52***	.49***	.46***	1.00				
	EPL2	.32***	.38***	.45***	.45***	.42***	.43***	.73***	1.00			
	EPL3	.37***	.45***	.47***	.46***	.46***	.46***	.83***	.74***	1.00		
	EPL4	.40***	.45***	.50***	.50***	.46***	.45***	.82***	.76***	.85***	1.00	
	EPL5	.31***	.38***	.42***	.43***	.38***	.41***	.76***	.74***	.80***	.78***	1.00

Note: *** p < .001

Data analysis in table 6.1 showed an inter-coefficient correlation among observed Variables, in data analysis all pairs of correlation were statistically significant, these directions were positive, and their magnitude was not more than .90. these results indicated that the assumption of correlation was assumed.

2. Indicators of latent variable

Table 2 Estimated factor loading in unstandardized, standardized, and z-test

Variable	Relationships	Estimate factor loading		z-test	P	R ²
		Unstandardized	standardized			
Trust	Emo ⇐ TR	1.00	.93	19.59	***	.86
	Cog ⇐ TR	.95	.91			.82
Empowering Leadership	EPL1 ⇐ EL	1.00	.89	22.75	***	.80
	EPL2 ⇐ EL	.93	.83			.68
	EPL3 ⇐ EL	1.08	.92			.85
	EPL4 ⇐ EL	1.04	.92			.84
	EPL5 ⇐ EL	.94	.86			.74
Interpersonal Relationships	RS1 ⇐ RS	1.06	.90	19.93	***	.81
	RS2 ⇐ RS	1.08	.91	20.21	***	.83
	RS3 ⇐ RS	1.02	.84	18.35	***	.71
	RS4 ⇐ RS	1.00	.78			.60

In Table 6.2, data analysis of the CFA model showed that, the latent variable “Trust” which composed of 2 indicators, Cognition Trust (Cog) and Emotional Trust (Emo). The latent variable “interpersonal relationship” was composed of 4 indicators, Emotional (RS1), Obligatory (RS2), Favors Exchange (RS3), and Formal Exchange (RS4). The observed variable “Empowering Leadership” was composed of 5 indicators, EPL1, EPL2, EPL3, EPL4, and EPL5. All variables have factor loading more than 0.7, which showed that the indicators were acceptable and the R² more than 0.6 which showed that each indicator variation could be explained by the latent variable.

3. Model fit evaluation

Table 3. Model fit evaluation

Measure	Estimate	Threshold	Interpretation
CMIN	109.797	--	--
DF	49	--	--
CMIN/DF	2.241	Between 1 and 3	Excellent
CFI	0.985	>0.95	Excellent
SRMR	0.029	<0.08	Excellent
RMSEA	0.056	<0.06	Excellent
PClose	0.235	>0.05	Excellent

Table 3 showed that the model fit is excellent.

The research results show that the main factors affecting empowering leadership in public higher vocational colleges in Henan Province are the supervisor's trust, power distance, and interpersonal relationships.

2. In the model depicting the relationship with empowering leadership, both supervisor's trust and interpersonal relationships serve as mediating factors.

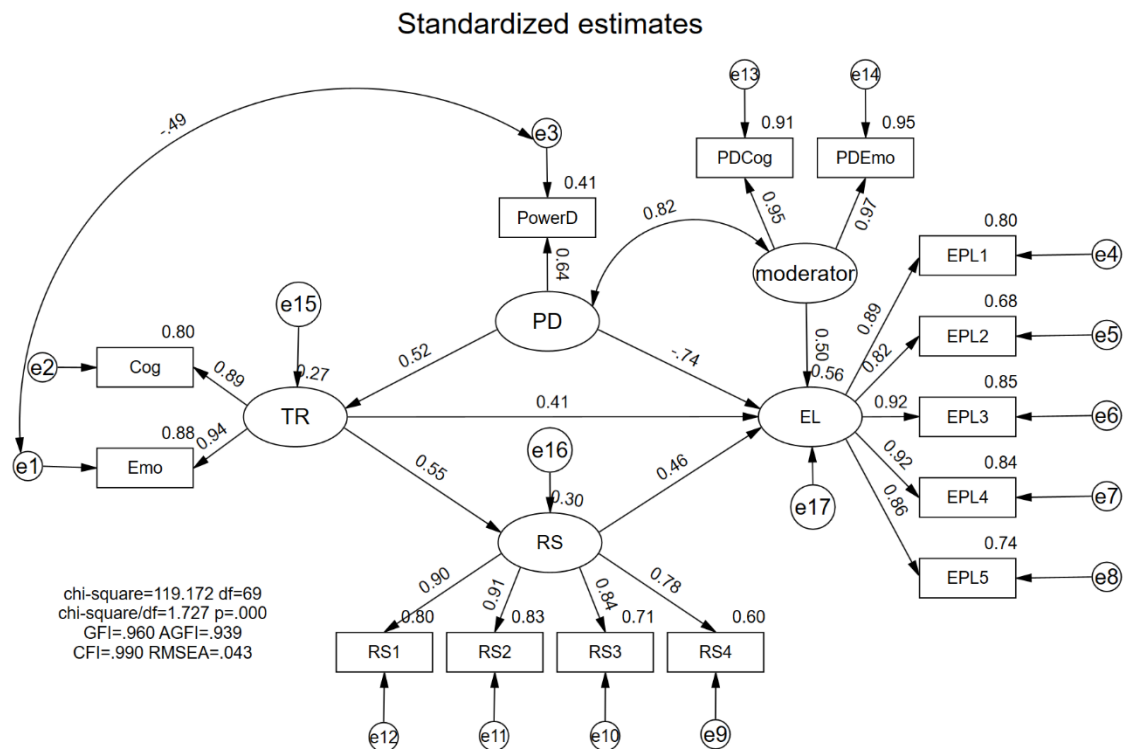


Figure 1 Structural equation mode in standardized Estimate

Figure 1 showed that the model fit is excellent.

Table 4 Hypothesis testing of direct effects

Relationsh ips	Estimates		S. E	Z-test	P- value	R ²	Hypothes is
Unstandardized	Standardized						
EL \leftarrow TR	.500	.412	.09	5.163	***	.42	H1
RS \leftarrow TR	.508	.551	.04	10.264	***		H2
EL \leftarrow RS	.610	.463	.07	8.211	***	.29	H3
EL \leftarrow PD	-1.917	-.735	.86	-2.217	.027		H4
TR \leftarrow PD	1.119	.521	.15	7.135	***	.12	H5

Significance Indicators: *** P<.001(Gaskin&Lim,2018)

Hypothesis H1: Path coefficient of supervisor's trust (TR) in empowering Leadership (EL) was .500 in unstandardized and .412 in standardized and the z-test was statistically significant($P<.001$) showed that the trust (TR) had a positive direct effect on empowering leadership (EL).

Hypothesis H2: Path coefficient of supervisor's trust (TR) on interpersonal relationship (RS) was .508 in unstandardized and .551 in standardized and the z-test was statistically significant($P<.001$) showing that trust (TR) had a positive direct effect on interpersonal relationship (RS).

Hypothesis H3: Path coefficient of interpersonal relationship (RS) on empowering leadership (EL) was .610 in unstandardized and .462 in standardized and the z-test was statistically significant($P<.001$) showing that interpersonal relationship (RS) had a positive direct effect on empowering leadership (EL).

Hypothesis H4: Path coefficient of the supervisor's power distance (PD) on empowering leadership (EL) was -1.917 in unstandardized and -.735 in standardized and the z-test was statistically significant($P=.027$) showed that the power distance (PD) had a negative direct effect on empowering leadership (EL).

Hypothesis H5: Path coefficient of the power distance (PD) on the trust (TR) was 1.119 in unstandardized and .521 in standardized and the z-test was statistically significant($P<.001$) showed that the supervisor's power distance (PD) had a positive direct effect on supervisor's trust (TR).

Table 5 Hypothesis testing of indirect effects.

Relationships	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P	Hypothesis
TR \Rightarrow RS \Rightarrow EL	.33	.24	.42	***	H7
PD \Rightarrow TR \Rightarrow EL	.17	.08	.25	***	H8
PD \Rightarrow TR \Rightarrow RS \Rightarrow EL	.14	.09	.20	***	H9

Significance Indicators: *** $P<0.001$ (Gaskin&Lim,2018)

Hypothesis H7: The influence of the supervisor's trust (TR) on empowering leadership (EL) is statistically significant($P<.001$) in the presence of interpersonal relationships (RS). This suggests that the interpersonal relationship (RS) further influences empowering leadership after conveying the influence of the supervisor's trust (TR).

Hypothesis H8: The influence of the supervisor's power distance (PD) on empowering leadership (EL) is statistically significant($P<.001$) in the presence of the supervisor's trust (TR). This suggests that the supervisor's trust (TR) further influences the empowering leadership after conveying the influence of the supervisor's power distance (PD).

Hypothesis H9: The research results confirm a chain-like mediating mechanism, indicating that the impact of a supervisor's power distance (PD) on empowering leadership (EL) is mediated through two sequential factors: supervisor's trust (TR) and interpersonal relationship (RS). This mediation chain is statistically significant ($P <.001$). This finding underscores the collaborative role of supervisor's trust (TR) and interpersonal relationship (RS) in transmitting the influence of power distance.

The research results showed that in the model depicting the relationship with empowering leadership, both the supervisor's trust and interpersonal relationships serve as mediating factors.

3. The association between supervisor's trust and empowering leadership is moderated by the supervisor's power distance.

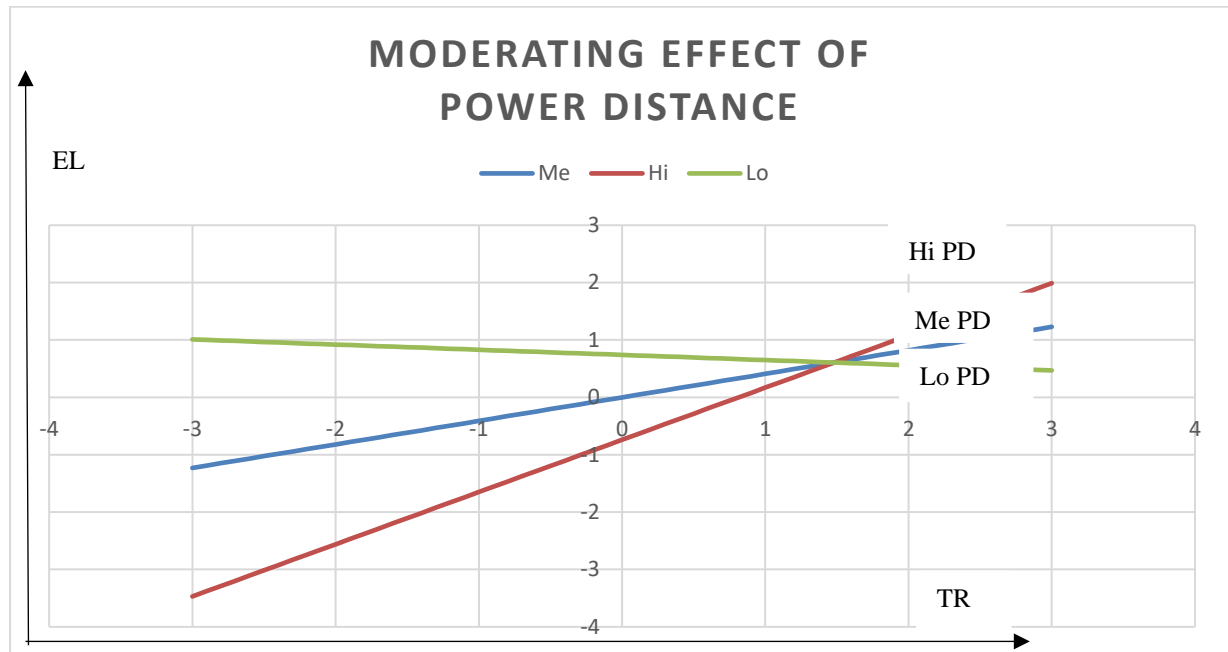


Figure 2 Moderating effect of supervisor's power distance

Figure 2 showed that when there was an interaction effect, or moderation effect relationship between supervisor's trust (TR) which affected the empowering leadership (EL) was not the same between groups of supervisor's power distance (PD), as more of the high-power distance (PD) had positive and high effect on empowering leadership (EL) and the low power distance (PD) had low effect on empowering leadership (EL). The results showed that power distance (PD) plays a moderating role in the supervisor's trust and empowering leadership (H6).

The research results showed that the association between the supervisor's trust and empowering leadership is moderated by the supervisor's power distance, indicating a moderation effect in the model.

Conclusion

1. The main factors affecting empowering leadership in higher vocational colleges in Henan Province are the supervisor's trust, power distance, and interpersonal relationships.

Through quantitative research, it is found that the supervisor's trust, power distance, and interpersonal relationship are the most important influencing factors in empowering leadership. Specifically, supervisor's trust and interpersonal relationship have direct and significant positive effects on empowering leadership. When supervisors place more trust in their subordinates, they demonstrate a greater willingness to authorize them. As the interpersonal relationships between supervisors and subordinates improve, supervisors are more willing to grant authority to their subordinates. However, power distance has a direct and significant negative impact on empowering leadership. In organizational environments marked by a high-power distance, leaders are often unwilling to bestow rights upon subordinates. These findings provide concrete directions for implementing empowering leadership in public higher vocational colleges in Henan Province, allowing leaders to better understand and respond to the roles of different factors in empowering leadership.

2. In the model depicting the relationship with empowering leadership, both the supervisor's trust and interpersonal relationships serve as mediating factors.

In the model illustrating the association with empowering leadership, both supervisor's trust and interpersonal relationships play pivotal roles as mediating factors. These factors contribute significantly to the dynamics of how empowering leadership is established and its impact on organizational outcomes. The mediating effect of a supervisor's trust implies that the level of trust a supervisor places in their subordinates acts as a catalyst in facilitating empowering leadership. When supervisors have confidence in the abilities and judgments of their team members, it fosters an environment conducive to empowerment. This trust serves as a bridge between leadership practices and the actualization of empowering behaviors among subordinates. Simultaneously, interpersonal relationships function as another key mediating factor in the model. In summary, both supervisor's trust and interpersonal relationships emerge as crucial mediators in the model, shedding light on the nuanced mechanisms through which empowering leadership operates. These insights can guide organizational leaders in fostering a trustful and collaborative culture that ultimately enhances the implementation and impact of empowering leadership.

3. The association between the supervisor's trust and empowering leadership is moderated by the supervisor's power distance, indicating a moderation effect in the model.

The connection between the supervisor's trust and empowering leadership undergoes moderation by the power distance, signifying a moderation effect within the model. This moderation effect introduces an additional layer of complexity to the relationship dynamics, suggesting that the impact of the supervisor's trust on empowering leadership is contingent upon the level of power distance within the organizational hierarchy. In organizations characterized by high power distance, the moderation effect implies that the positive association between the supervisor's trust and empowering leadership may be amplified. In such hierarchical structures, where authority and decision-making are more centralized, a supervisor's trust could hold greater significance in empowering subordinates. The power distance acts as a contextual factor influencing the strength and direction of the relationship between trust and empowering leadership.

Discussion

In the subsequent discussion, the focus revolves around contextualizing the research findings within the existing literature, highlighting both the alignment and disparities between the research outcomes and the insights garnered from prior studies.

1. Supervisor's trust impact on Empowering Leadership (H1):

The finding that trust has a significant positive direct impact on empowering leadership (H1) resonates with established literature, as emphasized by scholars like Shin and Lee (2023), van Knippenberg et al. (2021), and Li Pengbo et al. (2019). Trust, being a foundational element, fosters effective interpersonal relationships and creates an environment conducive to empowering leadership. This alignment underscores the consistent positive association between trust and empowering leadership documented in prior research.

2. Supervisor's Trust and Interpersonal Relationships (H2):

The research findings affirm a significant positive direct impact of supervisor's trust on interpersonal relationships (H2), aligning with the works of Khalifa (2019), Byun et al. (2020), and Lian, K. F. (2017). Supervisor's trust establishes mutual respect, fostering a positive environment for interpersonal interactions. This alignment emphasizes the pivotal role of trust in shaping the quality of interpersonal relationships in the organizational context.

3. Interpersonal Relationships and Empowering Leadership (H3):

The identification of a significant positive direct impact of interpersonal relationships on empowering leadership (H3) aligns with research by Zhan, X. (2023), Li et al. (2020), and Wang et al. (2020). Positive interpersonal relationships consistently contribute to the emergence of empowering leadership, highlighting the importance of relational dynamics in leadership behaviors.

4. Power Distance's Impact on Empowering Leadership (H4) and Trust (H5):

The research confirms a significant negative direct impact of power distance on empowering leadership (H4), consistent with findings by Shin, J., & Lee, S. (2023), Tang, G. et al. (2020), and Yu et al. (2017). However, the positive direct impact of power distance on supervisor's trust (H5) deviates from the literature. This unexpected positive relationship may be attributed to the specific organizational and cultural contexts, suggesting the need for further exploration.

In addition to these findings, the research unveils moderating and mediating relationships. Supervisor's power distance moderates the relationship between trust and empowering leadership (H6), aligning with the works of Li Pengbo et al. (2019), Hanna, Hanna. et al. (2019), and Jun et al. (2018). The mediating roles of interpersonal relationships (H7), supervisor's trust (H8), and their chain-like mediation (H9) align with existing literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of how trust, power distance, and interpersonal relationships interact in influencing empowering leadership.

These discussions highlight the intricate interplay between trust, power dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and their combined impact on empowering leadership. The alignment with existing literature validates the robustness of the research findings, while deviations provide avenues for further investigation, emphasizing the nuanced nature of leadership dynamics.

Recommendations

1. Recommendation for Policies Formulation

Effective leadership hinges on trust, power dynamics, and interpersonal relationships. Strengthening trust between supervisors and subordinates is paramount. Establish transparent communication channels and implement evaluations to reinforce trust in subordinates. Additionally, adjusting power distance by promoting a flatter management structure and advocating a cooperative leadership style can help reduce hierarchical barriers. Encouraging interpersonal relationships through team-building activities and training programs further fosters a supportive organizational culture. Finally, incentivizing positive supervisor performance can reinforce the importance of trust and relationship-building in leadership practices.

2. Recommendation for Practical Application

Implementing policies that prioritize building trust relationships between supervisors and subordinates is crucial. Providing leadership training for better understanding and increased trust, along with establishing transparent decision-making processes, can strengthen organizational dynamics. Similarly, managing power distance through promoting equality and open communication, coupled with implementing a flexible management structure, can create a more inclusive environment. Fostering interpersonal networks through organized activities and encouraging outside-of-work contact further enhances collaboration and mutual understanding among team members. Finally, incentivizing positive relationships through recognition programs can reinforce the value of trust and positive interactions in the workplace.

3. Recommendation for Further Research

Investigating additional factors influencing empowering leadership beyond the explained variance is essential for a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics. Delving into specific aspects of trust development within the leadership context and identifying factors impacting interpersonal relationships can further enrich leadership studies. Exploring potential moderating and mediating variables affecting leadership relationships can provide valuable insights into the complexity of organizational dynamics. Additionally, conducting in-depth research across diverse cultural contexts and exploring the effectiveness of empowering leadership in virtual work environments can contribute to the evolving landscape of leadership theory and practice. These research directions promise practical leadership insights, ensuring leaders are equipped to navigate the complexities of contemporary work environments.

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