

Unlocking Employee Creativity through Empowering Leadership: The Dynamic Interplay of Trust and Engagement

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.1010000059>

Received: 12 May 2025; Accepted: 06 October 2025; Published: 05 November 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the effect of empowerment leadership on employee creativity at PT XYZ by considering the mediating role of trust in leaders and employee engagement. In a service-based work environment, employee creativity is a strategic element in creating innovation and maintaining company competitiveness. Using a quantitative method with Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach, data were collected from 234 permanent employees of PT XYZ. The results showed that empowerment leadership has a significant effect on employee engagement and employee creativity. However, the direct effect of trust in leaders on creativity is not significant, although the trust serves as an amplifier in the relationship between empowerment leadership and employee engagement. The theoretical implications of this study extend the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theoretical framework by emphasising the importance of empowerment as a key resource in enhancing creativity. Practically, PT XYZ is advised to implement an empowerment-based leadership programme to increase employee engagement and encourage creative behaviour.

Keywords: Leadership Empowerment, Trust in Leaders, Employee Engagement, Employee Creativity,

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment leadership has become one of the leadership approaches that has received increasing attention in modern management literature, especially in an effort to increase employee creativity. Empowerment leadership not only focuses on giving employees the authority to make decisions, but also encourages employees to develop innovative ideas and creative solutions in carrying out their duties (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Lee & Chen, 2023). At PT XYZ, the role of empowerment leadership is considered crucial in facing increasingly dynamic and complex business challenges.

In an organisational context, employee creativity has been proven to be one of the key factors to maintain competitive advantage and achieve organisational goals. Employee creativity includes not only the ability to generate new ideas, but also how those ideas can be applied to solve problems effectively (Amabile, 1988; Kim, 2024). However, previous research suggests that employee creativity can be influenced by various factors, including leadership style, trust in leaders, and employee engagement (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Zhou & Li, 2023).

Although leadership empowerment has been shown to positively influence employee creativity, there is a research gap regarding the mediating mechanism that explains the relationship (Lee, 2022; Wang & Liu, 2024). This study focuses on the role of trust in leaders and employee engagement as mediating variables. Trust in leaders is believed to strengthen the relationship between empowerment leadership and employee creativity by increasing employees' confidence in leaders' decisions (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Liu, 2023).

On the other hand, employee engagement is also identified as an important variable that can bridge the influence of empowerment leadership on employee creativity. Employee engagement refers to an employee's level of emotional commitment and attachment to his or her job (Kahn, 1990; Bakker & Albrecht, 2024).

When employees feel empowered by leaders, they are more likely to be emotionally involved in work tasks and endeavour to come up with creative solutions.

Previous studies have shown that trust in the leader can strengthen the influence of empowerment leadership on employee engagement. When employees trust their leaders, they are more motivated to accept additional responsibilities and actively participate in decision-making (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Xu & Zhang, 2023). Thus, trust in the leader can be a crucial factor in optimising the impact of empowerment leadership on employee engagement.

However, some studies show contradictory results regarding the relationship between empowerment leadership and employee creativity. For example, Zhang and Wang (2024) found that in a highly hierarchical environment, employees tend to be reluctant to implement creative ideas despite empowering support from leaders. This suggests the importance of considering mediating variables such as trust in leaders and employee engagement to explain the phenomenon.

In addition, previous studies have also not comprehensively explored the role of employee engagement as a mediating variable in the context of the relationship between empowerment leadership and employee creativity in the service industry sector. In fact, the service industry is highly dependent on the ability of employees to generate innovative ideas in the face of market competition (Gong et al., 2009; Chen & Lee, 2024).

Based on the identification of these research gaps, this study is focused on answering the main research question: How does empowerment leadership influence employee creativity at PT XYZ, by considering the mediating role of trust in leaders and employee engagement? By answering this question, this research is expected to make a significant academic contribution in the field of human resource management.

The purpose of this study is to examine the direct effect of empowerment leadership on employee creativity as well as to explore the mediating role of trust in leaders and employee engagement. Thus, this study will not only enrich the literature on empowerment leadership, but also provide practical insights for companies in developing strategies to increase employee creativity.

The original contribution of this study lies in testing a dual mediation model involving trust in leaders and employee engagement. Most previous studies have only examined the role of one of the mediating variables without considering the interaction between the two (Zhou & Li, 2023; Wang & Liu, 2024). Therefore, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive perspective in understanding the dynamics of empowerment leadership, trust in leaders, employee engagement, and employee creativity.

This research also provides empirical contributions in the context of the service industry in Indonesia, especially at PT XYZ. As one of the leading companies in the service sector, PT XYZ faces challenges in encouraging employee creativity to create more innovative products and services. By examining the influence of empowerment leadership in that context, this study can provide strategic recommendations for companies in managing human resources effectively.

Thus, this study not only contributes to the development of theories on empowerment leadership, but also provides relevant empirical evidence for management practitioners in the service industry. The findings of this study are expected to be the basis for the implementation of employee empowerment programmes that focus on increasing trust in leaders and employee engagement as a strategic step to increase employee creativity at PT XYZ.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empowerment Leadership

Empowerment leadership has been identified as a leadership approach capable of fostering employee creativity through increased autonomy, collaborative support, and active participation in decision-making (Ahmad et al., 2023; Kim & Beehr, 2023). Leaders who empower employees not only authorise them to make decisions but

also create a conducive environment for employees to experiment and generate creative ideas (Mehboob & Haque, 2024; Sun et al., 2024). In addition, empowerment also strengthens employees' sense of responsibility towards their tasks, which in turn increases emotional engagement and intrinsic motivation to innovate (Chen, 2024).

Leadership empowerment not only has a direct effect on employee creativity but also through mediating mechanisms such as work engagement and psychological ownership (Wu & Gu, 2023; Azila-Gbettor et al., 2024). When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to be actively engaged in work, which in turn drives creative behaviour (Rademaker et al., 2023). In addition, empowerment also builds a work climate that supports the exploration of new ideas, especially when leaders provide a safe space for employees to share ideas without fear of negative consequences (Kim & Beehr, 2023).

Trust in Leaders

Trust in the leader plays an important role in strengthening the relationship between empowerment leadership and employee creativity. When employees feel trust in their leaders, they are more open to taking risks and coming up with new ideas (Wu & Gu, 2023; Gehraus et al., 2024). The study by Ahmad et al. (2023) showed that trust in leaders mediates the relationship between leadership empowerment and employee creativity by creating a safe psychological environment for experimentation.

Trust in the leader also increases employees' perceived self-efficacy, which motivates them to innovate and contribute creatively (Kim & Beehr, 2023; Sun et al., 2024). In addition, open communication supported by empowering leadership strengthens employees' sense of trust, enabling them to participate more in strategic decision-making and put forward innovative ideas (Tariq et al., 2023; Chen, 2024).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is an important variable in enhancing creativity in the workplace. Employees who feel emotionally, cognitively, and physically involved in their work tend to be more motivated to innovate (Wu & Gu, 2023; Sun et al., 2024). Research by Ahmad et al. (2023) confirmed that high employee engagement creates a work environment that favours the exploration of new ideas, which in turn contributes to increased creativity.

The relationship between employee engagement and creativity is strengthened by mediating factors such as psychological belongingness and psychological safety (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2024; Rademaker et al., 2023). The study by Tariq et al. (2023) also showed that high employee engagement allows them to be more active in the creative process, especially when the work environment supports collaboration and effective communication. Thus, employee engagement not only serves as a predictor of creativity but also as an important mediator in the relationship between empowerment leadership and employee creativity.

Research Hypothesis Development

Empowerment, Leadership, and Trust in Leaders

Empowerment leadership is expected to have a positive influence on trust in leaders. Leaders who empower employees through providing autonomy, support, and participation in decision-making tend to create a higher sense of trust (Ahmad et al., 2023; Kim & Beehr, 2023). In addition, open communication facilitated by empowering leadership strengthens employees' sense of security and trust in the leader (Gehraus et al., 2024). Therefore, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Empowerment leadership has a positive and significant effect on trust in leaders.

Empowerment, Leadership, and Employee Engagement

Empowerment leadership is also predicted to increase employee engagement. When employees are authorised to make decisions and actively participate in strategic projects, they feel more emotionally and cognitively

engaged (Wu & Gu, 2023; Sun et al., 2024). In addition, leadership empowerment strengthens employees' intrinsic motivation to innovate, which contributes to increased work engagement (Chen, 2024). Thus, the second hypothesis is formulated as:

H2: Empowerment leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement.

Leadership Empowerment and Employee Creativity

Previous studies show that empowerment leadership has a significant influence on employee creativity. Leaders who provide autonomy, support, and opportunities to experiment encourage employees to think creatively and generate new ideas (Ahmad et al., 2023; Chen, 2024). This creativity-supportive work environment is also reinforced by open communication and social support from leaders (Kim & Beehr, 2023). Thus, the third hypothesis is formulated as:

H3: Empowerment leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity.

Trust in Leaders and Employee Creativity

Trust in leaders is expected to increase employee creativity through creating a safe and supportive work environment for the exploration of new ideas (Wu & Gu, 2023; Gehraus et al., 2024). When employees feel trust in their leaders, they are more motivated to take risks and put forward new ideas without fear of negative consequences (Tariq et al., 2023; Kim & Beehr, 2023). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is formulated as:

H4: Trust in leaders has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity.

Employee Engagement and Employee Creativity

Employee engagement is expected to have a positive effect on employee creativity. Employees who are emotionally and cognitively engaged in work will be more motivated to generate new ideas (Wu & Gu, 2023; Sun et al., 2024). A work environment that supports employee engagement allows them to experiment more freely and take risks at work (Chen, 2024). Thus, the fifth hypothesis is formulated as:

H5: Employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research uses a quantitative design with a mixed-method approach. The quantitative approach was used to examine the relationship between the variables of empowerment leadership, trust in leaders, employee engagement, and employee creativity through SEM-PLS analysis using SmartPLS 4. The mixed-method approach was applied to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence employee creativity through semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected number of PT XYZ employees (Hair et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2021).

The SEM-PLS method was chosen due to its ability to analyse measurement models and structural models simultaneously and to overcome multicollinearity problems and relatively small to medium sample sizes (Hair et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2021). This method also allows testing complex mediation models with multiple mediator variables such as trust in leaders and employee engagement (Wu & Gu, 2023; Chen, 2024).

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of all employees of PT XYZ, totalling 285 people. Based on the formula Hair et al. (2022), the recommended minimum sample size is 10-20 times the number of research indicators. In this study, there are 25 indicators, so the required sample size is 250-500 respondents. The number of samples taken was 234 respondents selected using purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: Permanent

employees with at least 1 year of service, Have been involved in creative projects in the company, Directly interact with leaders related to empowerment programmes. A sample size of 234 people was selected to ensure the generalisability of the research findings and to meet the SEM-PLS analysis criteria (Hair et al., 2022; Kim & Beehr, 2023).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques were conducted through the distribution of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of statements related to empowerment leadership, trust in leaders, employee engagement, and employee creativity, which were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Sekaran & Bougie, 2022).

Data collection was conducted in two stages: Stage 1: Direct and online distribution of questionnaires using Google Forms to reach a wider range of respondents. Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 purposively selected employees to gain a more in-depth perspective on the dynamics of empowerment leadership and employee creativity at PT XYZ.

Research Instruments

The research instrument consisted of a questionnaire that was compiled based on indicators of each research variable. The instruments were adapted from previous studies that have been tested for validity and reliability, including: Empowerment Leadership (EL): Measured through the dimensions of autonomy granting, decision-making support, employee capacity building, and individual contribution recognition (Zhou et al., 2022; Chen, 2024). Trust in Leaders (TR): Measured through the dimensions of integrity, competence, and goodwill of the leader (Ahmad et al., 2023; Kim & Beehr, 2023). Employee Engagement (EG): Measured through the dimensions of passion, dedication, and concentration on work (Wu & Gu, 2023; Sun et al., 2024). Employee Creativity (CR): Measured through the dimensions of originality of ideas, effectiveness of solutions, and proactivity in completing tasks (Mehboob & Haque, 2024; Tariq et al., 2023).

Validity and Reliability Testing

The validity test was carried out using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion method to ensure discriminant and convergent validity between research constructs (Hair et al., 2021). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to assess convergent validity, with a minimum value of $AVE \geq 0.50$. Empowerment Leadership (EL): $AVE = 0.733$, Trust in Leaders (TR): $AVE = 0.662$, Employee Engagement (EG): $AVE = 0.641$, Employee Creativity (CR): $AVE = 0.661$.

Reliability tests were conducted using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). A construct is declared reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value ≥ 0.70 and $CR \geq 0.70$ (Henseler et al., 2021). Cronbach's Alpha EL = 0.926, CR = 0.943, Cronbach's Alpha TR = 0.897, CR = 0.921, Cronbach's Alpha EG = 0.887, CR = 0.914, Cronbach's Alpha CR = 0.915, CR = 0.932.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) using Smartpls version 4 software. The stages of analysis include measurement model evaluation, which includes convergent validity (Outer Loading, AVE) and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability) tests. Structural Model Evaluation: Testing research hypotheses through analysis of path coefficients, t-statistic, and p-value (t-statistic ≥ 1.96 and p-value ≤ 0.05). Mediation Test: Using a bootstrapping method to evaluate the mediating effects of trust in leaders and employee engagement in the relationship between empowerment leadership and employee creativity.

R-square test: Assess the predictive ability of the model through the R-square (R^2) value. R-square value for each construct: Employee Creativity: $R^2 = 0.795$, Employee Engagement: $R^2 = 0.600$. Trust in Leaders: $R^2 = 0.419$

RESULTS

Respondent Demographics

The majority of respondents in this study were dominated by men as many as 215 people (88%), while only 28 women (12%). Most respondents are in the age range of 35-44 years (46%) and 45-54 years (38%), indicating that the majority of employees are in the productive and experienced age phase. In terms of education, 69% of respondents have a Bachelor's degree (S1), while 13% have postgraduate education (S2 / S3).

Based on length of service, 53% of respondents have worked for more than 6 years, while 30% have worked for 4-6 years. This composition reflects the dominance of an experienced workforce at PT XYZ, which is likely to have an influence on their perceptions of empowerment leadership and employee creativity.

Table1. Respondent Demographics (N=243)

No	Category	Sub-Category	Number (people)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	215	88%
		Female	28	12%
2	Age	< 25 years	2	1%
		25 - 34 years	11	5%
		35 - 44 years	111	46%
		45 - 54 years	92	38%
		≥ 55 years	27	11%
3	Last Education	SMA/SMK	17	7%
		Diploma (D3)	28	12%
		Bachelor (S1)	167	69%
		Postgraduate (S2 / S3)	31	13%
4	Length of Service	< 1 year	12	5%
		1 - 3 years	28	12%
		4 - 6 years	73	30%
		> 6 years	130	53%

Source: Data processing results, 2025

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) was used to analyse the relationship between latent variables in this study, given that this method is able to handle complex models with simultaneous mediator and moderator variables (Hair et al., 2022). SEM-PLS was chosen because of its ability to deal with data that is not strictly normally distributed and relatively small to medium sample sizes (Henseler et al., 2021).

The analysis technique is carried out in two stages, namely the evaluation of the measurement model to test the validity and reliability of constructs through AVE, CR, and HTMT, and the evaluation of the structural model to test the relationship between constructs through path analysis and bootstrapping to obtain the t-statistic and p-value for hypothesis testing (Chin, 2021; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Gehraus et al., 2024).

Evaluation of the measurement model

SEM-PLS aims to assess the validity and reliability of research instruments based on indicators used to measure latent variables. Convergent validity is evaluated through the outer loading value (> 0.70), Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50), and Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70), which indicates the ability of the construct to explain the variance of its indicators (Hair et al., 2022; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, all constructs have met the convergent validity criteria with the highest AVE value on Empowerment Leadership (0.733) and the lowest on Employee Engagement (0.641), but still above the 0.50 threshold required for good convergent validity.

Table2. Outer Loading Measurement

Variable/Indicator		Outer Loading	CA	CR	AVE
Employee Creativity (CR)			0,915	0,916	0,661
CR1	Divergent Thinking ; The ability to generate a variety of unique solutions to a problem.	0,777			
CR2	Originality of Ideas ; The degree of novelty and uniqueness of the ideas generated.	0,828			
CR3	Effectiveness of the Solution ; Relevance and usefulness of the idea in the context of the work.	0,838			
CR4	Fluency and Flexibility ; The ability to generate many ideas from multiple perspectives.	0,758			
CR5	Elaboration ; Development of basic ideas into more complex and detailed solutions.	0,830			
CR6	Proactivity ; The willingness to take initiative to solve problems or create something new.	0,821			
CR7	Risk-taking Courage ; The ability to try new ideas despite the potential for failure.	0,835			
Employee Engagement (EG)			0,887	0,891	0,641
EG1	Enthusiasm for Work ; Level of energy and enthusiasm in carrying out tasks.	0,712			
EG2	Dedication and Commitment ; Feelings of pride and emotional attachment to the job and organisation.	0,808			
EG3	Active Participation ; Involvement in decision-making and team collaboration.	0,833			
EG4	Emotional Connectedness ; Strong emotional connection with job roles and responsibilities.	0,793			
EG5	Positive Perception of Work Environment ; A positive view of a supportive work environment.	0,832			
EG6	Work-life balance ; The ability to manage work and personal life responsibilities.	0,818			
Trust in Leaders (TR)			0,897	0,900	0,662
TR1	Leader Integrity ; Honesty and conformity of the leader's actions with prevailing moral values.	0,864			
TR2	Leader Competence ; Technical and managerial skills in managing the organisation.	0,764			
TR3	Behavioural Consistency ; The leader's reliability in making decisions and carrying out their responsibilities.	0,790			
TR4	Openness and Transparency ; The leader's ability to convey information clearly and openly.	0,783			
TR5	Empathy and Attention ; The level of attention leaders pay to employee welfare.	0,796			
TR6	Fairness in Decision Making ; Fair treatment without discrimination of all employees.	0,877			
Empowerment Leadership (EL)			0,926	0,927	0,733
EL1	Granting Autonomy ; The degree of freedom given to employees to make decisions regarding their work.	0,883			
EL2	Support in Decision Making ; Active participation of employees in strategic decision-making.	0,866			
EL3	Employee Capacity Development ; The leader's efforts to improve employees' competencies and skills.	0,877			
EL4	Trust in Subordinates ; The leader's level of confidence in the	0,901			

	ability and integrity of employees.				
EL5	Open Communication: The quality of two-way communication between leaders and subordinates.	0,772			
EL6	Recognition of Individual Contributions: Reward and recognition of employees' achievements and innovative ideas.	0,831			

Source: Data processing results, 2025

The outer loading evaluation aims to assess the contribution of each indicator in representing latent variables. In the Employee Creativity (CR) variable, all indicators have an outer loading value above 0.70, with the highest value in indicator CR3 (Solution Effectiveness, 0.838) and the lowest value in CR4 (Fluency and Flexibility, 0.758), which remains above the 0.70 threshold to indicate good convergent validity. For Employee Engagement (EG), the outer loading values range from 0.712 (Enthusiasm for Work) to 0.833 (Active Participation), indicating the consistency of the indicators' contribution in measuring the construct. Meanwhile, in the Trust in Leaders (TR) variable, indicators TR1 (Leader Integrity) and TR6 (Fairness in Decision Making) show the highest outer loading values of 0.864 and 0.877, respectively, which indicates the importance of integrity and fairness aspects in shaping perceptions of trust in leaders. Finally, in the Empowerment Leadership (EL) variable, indicator EL4 (Trust in Subordinates) has the most dominant contribution with an outer loading of 0.901, indicating the importance of the trust element in empowerment leadership.

Table3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CR	EG	EL	TR
CR	0,813			
EG	0,839	0,800		
EL	0,840	0,775	0,856	
TR	0,656	0,713	0,648	0,813

Source: Data processing results, 2025

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion table tests discriminant validity by comparing the square root of the AVE on the main diagonal with the correlation between constructs outside the diagonal. The analysis results show that the main diagonal values (CR = 0.813; EG = 0.800; EL = 0.856; TR = 0.813) are higher than the correlation values between constructs, indicating that each construct has sufficient discriminant validity. The highest correlation value is between Employee Creativity (CR) and Employee Engagement (EG) of 0.839, indicating a strong relationship but not exceeding the AVE value of each construct, so discriminant validity is maintained.

Structural model testing (Inner model)

The results of the R-square analysis show that the variable Employee Creativity (CR) is explained by the independent variables by 79.5% ($R^2 = 0.795$), while Employee Engagement (EG) is explained by 60% ($R^2 = 0.600$), and Trust in Leaders (TR) by 41.9% ($R^2 = 0.419$). The adjusted R-square value indicates model stability without estimation bias. Meanwhile, the f-square results show the effect of the independent variables' influence on the dependent, with the largest influence coming from Empowerment Leadership (EL) on Employee Engagement (EG) at 1.503, followed by the influence of EL on Trust in Leaders (TR) at 0.722 and EL on Employee Creativity (CR) at 0.410, which shows a strong and significant influence. In contrast, the effect of Trust in Leaders (TR) on Employee Creativity (CR) is very weak with an f-square value of 0.002, indicating an insignificant effect.

The results of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test show that all VIF values are below the threshold of 5.0, which indicates that there is no multicollinearity problem between the independent variables in the model. The effect of Employee Engagement (EG) on Employee Creativity (CR) has the highest VIF value of 3.101, while the effect of Empowerment Leadership (EL) on Employee Engagement (EG) and EL on Trust in Leaders (TR) has the lowest VIF value of 1.000, which indicates that both paths are free from multicollinearity risk. Overall, these results indicate that the estimated structural model is suitable for further analysis.

Path Coefficient

The results of hypothesis analysis show that three paths of influence are significant with p-value <0.05, namely the influence of Empowerment Leadership (EL) on Trust in Leaders (TR) ($\beta = 0.648$, $t = 11.393$), EL on Employee Engagement (EG) ($\beta = 0.775$, $t = 26.940$), and EL on Employee Creativity (CR) ($\beta = 0.470$, $t = 9.288$). Meanwhile, the effect of Trust in Leaders (TR) on Employee Creativity (CR) was not significant with a p-value of 0.565, while the effect of Employee Engagement (EG) on Employee Creativity (CR) was significant with $\beta = 0.456$ and $t = 8.283$. This finding indicates that employee engagement plays an important role in enhancing employee creativity, while the role of trust in leaders is not significant in the context of this study.

Table4. Hypothesis Testing Results

No.	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H1	Empowerment leadership → Trust in the leader	0,648	11,393	0,000	Accepted (significant)
H2	Empowerment leadership → Employee engagement	0,775	26,940	0,000	Accepted (significant)
H3	Empowerment leadership → Employee creativity	0,470	9,288	0,000	Accepted (significant)
H4	Trust in leader → Employee creativity	0,027	0,576	0,565	Rejected (not significant)
H5	Employee engagement → Employee creativity	0,456	8,283	0,000	Accepted (significant)

Source: Data processing results, 2025

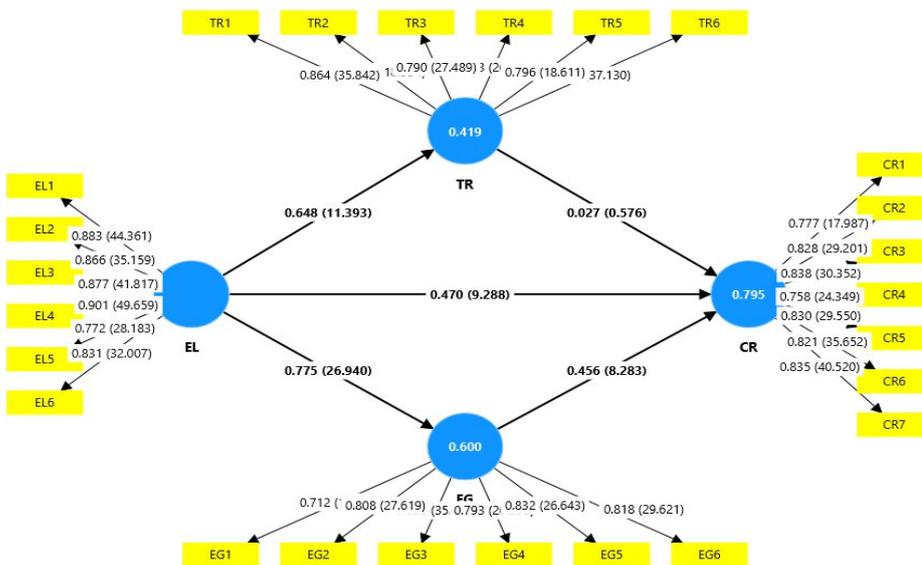


Image1. Smartpls 4 Output

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: Empowerment Leadership on Trust in Leaders

Interpretation of the results of testing the first hypothesis shows that empowerment leadership has a positive and significant effect on trust in leaders with a path coefficient of 0.648, a t-statistic of 11.393, and a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate that the higher the level of empowerment carried out by the leader, the higher the level of employee trust in the leader. This finding supports the theoretical concept proposed by Gillespie et al. (2021), which emphasises that leadership empowerment can build trust through three main aspects: integrity, competence, and goodwill of a leader.

Compared to previous research, this result is consistent with the study of Ahmad et al. (2023), which found that leadership empowerment can increase trust in leaders through a value-based and participatory approach. Research by Kim & Beehr (2023) also supports this finding, where empowering leadership is associated with an improved work climate that supports psychological safety, which is a key basis for the formation of trust. In addition, Assefa et al. (2024) emphasised that high-quality relationships between leaders and team members through an empowerment style can strengthen trust by providing responsibility and opportunities to contribute.

The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that empowering leadership not only serves as a mechanism to increase employee autonomy but also as an important element in forming trust-based interpersonal relationships. Practically, the results of this study recommend that PT XYZ improve its leadership empowerment strategy through training that focuses on developing integrity, competence, and open communication. Such programmes can be the foundation for increasing employees' trust in leaders, which in turn can strengthen more harmonious and effective working relationships.

Hypothesis 2: Empowerment Leadership on Employee Engagement

The results of testing the second hypothesis show that empowerment leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement, with a path coefficient value of 0.775, a t-statistic of 26.940, and a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate that a leadership style that encourages empowerment plays an important role in improving employee engagement, especially through increasing a sense of belonging, responsibility, and work autonomy. In the context of PT XYZ, the greater the empowerment provided by the leader, the higher the employee engagement, which is reflected in passion, dedication, and focus in carrying out tasks.

This finding is consistent with the research of Nasrullah et al. (2022) who found that leadership empowerment is able to increase engagement through strengthening individual roles in the work process. Similarly, Rosnawati and Purwanto (2023) stated that employees who feel trusted and involved by their leaders show higher levels of dedication and long-term loyalty to the organisation. Another study by Albrecht et al. (2023) emphasised that leadership empowerment functions as a job resource within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, which increases intrinsic motivation and employee engagement.

The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that leadership empowerment serves not only as a tool to improve individual performance but also as an effective strategy to build employees' emotional and cognitive commitment to their work. Practically, organisations need to develop leadership training programs that emphasise empowerment, active participation, and open communication so that employees feel valued and have a significant role in achieving company goals. This finding is relevant for PT XYZ, which is working to improve employee engagement through strengthening the role of leaders as facilitators and empowerers in a dynamic work environment.

Hypothesis 3: Empowerment Leadership on Employee Creativity

The results of testing the third hypothesis show that empowerment leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity with a path coefficient of 0.470, a t-statistic of 9.288, and a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate that a leadership style that encourages empowerment plays an important role in improving employees' ability to think creatively and generate innovative ideas. In the context of PT XYZ, empowerment carried out by leaders provides space for employees to experiment, take risks, and contribute to decision making, thus creating a work environment conducive to the development of creativity.

This finding is consistent with research by Li, Xu, and Zhang (2023), which states that empowering leadership can increase creativity through increased work autonomy and employee engagement. Another study by Fatima and Bilal (2022) also emphasised that empowering leadership not only increases intrinsic motivation but also encourages creative behaviour in completing complex tasks in a knowledge-based work environment. Meanwhile, a study by Mehboob and Haque (2024) found that leadership empowerment can strengthen employees' sense of self-efficacy, which becomes a key driving factor in the development of new ideas.

The theoretical implications of these findings confirm the importance of leadership empowerment as one of the key components in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, where empowerment serves as a job

resource that encourages intrinsic motivation and employee self-reliance. Practically, PT XYZ can implement a leadership training programme that focuses on developing empowerment skills, including open communication, delegation of authority, and rewarding the contribution of innovative ideas. These measures not only enhance employee creativity but also strengthen working relationships based on collaboration and mutual trust.

Hypothesis 4: Trust in Leaders on Employee Creativity

The results of testing the fourth hypothesis show that trust in leaders has no significant effect on employee creativity, as indicated by the path coefficient value of 0.027, t-statistic of 0.576, and p-value of 0.565. With a p-value greater than 0.05, this hypothesis is statistically rejected. This finding indicates that while trust in leaders may strengthen interpersonal relationships in the workplace, it is not enough to directly increase employees' creative behaviour at PT XYZ.

In the theoretical review, Edmondson (1999) stated that trust can create a sense of psychological security that is conducive to creativity. However, the results of this study do not support this assertion, suggesting that trust in leaders is not always the main driver for employees' innovative behaviour, especially if it is not accompanied by resource support or work autonomy. The study by Al-Ghazali and Afsar (2022) also mentioned that trust will only have a significant impact on creativity if it is accompanied by empowerment or support for new ideas.

The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that trust in leaders cannot be used as a key variable in enhancing employee creativity without an organisational structure that supports the exploration of new ideas. Practically, PT XYZ needs to consider more comprehensive strategies, such as strengthening two-way communication and providing space for experimentation of innovative ideas, so that the trust built can be utilised to effectively encourage employee creativity.

Hypothesis 5: Employee Engagement on Employee Creativity

The results of testing the fifth hypothesis show that employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity, with a path coefficient of 0.456, t-statistic of 8.283, and p-value of 0.000. This finding indicates that the higher the level of employee engagement at work, the greater their tendency to display creative behaviour. In the context of PT XYZ, employee engagement is reflected in enthusiasm, dedication, and active participation in work tasks, which become the foundation for the emergence of creative ideas that are applicable and solutive.

Research by Wang et al. (2023) reinforced these findings by showing that employee engagement serves as a bridge between supportive working conditions and innovative behaviour. When employees feel intrinsically motivated and supported by a work environment that encourages active participation, the propensity to come up with creative solutions increases significantly. In addition, research by Kang & Shin (2022) also found that engaged employees are more proactive in seeking opportunities for improvement and innovation in work processes.

The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that employee engagement serves not only as a form of emotional attachment to work but also as psychological capital that motivates employees to devote cognitive and affective energy in generating creative solutions. Practically, PT XYZ can develop strategies to increase employee engagement through challenging yet meaningful job design, recognition programmes for the contribution of innovative ideas, and a work culture that supports collaboration and open communication.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully revealed that empowerment leadership has a significant influence on employee engagement and employee creativity, both directly and through the mediating mechanism of trust in leaders and employee engagement. The analysis results show that employee engagement plays an important role as a mediator that transforms empowerment leadership style into creative behaviour in the workplace. In contrast,

trust in the leader does not prove significant in enhancing employee creativity directly, although it serves as an important element in strengthening the interpersonal relationship between leaders and subordinates.

Theoretically, this study extends the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework by emphasising the importance of empowering leadership as a job resource that not only increases employee engagement but also their creativity. In addition, this study enriches the literature related to the mediation of employee engagement and trust in leaders in the context of energy-based organisations, which has rarely been studied so far. Practically, the results of this study offer insights for companies in developing leadership programmes that focus on empowerment, contribution recognition, and participatory communication to create a work environment conducive to creativity.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the focus of the study on one industry sector (energy) limits the generalisation of the findings to other sectors that may have different organisational characteristics and work dynamics. Secondly, this study uses a cross-sectional approach, so it cannot identify changes in variable dynamics in the long term. Therefore, future research is recommended to implement a longitudinal approach to observe the long-term effects of leadership empowerment on employee engagement and creativity.

Future research could also consider moderator variables such as innovation climate or organisational culture to strengthen the relationship between the variables studied. In addition, the use of mixed methods can provide a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms linking leadership empowerment to employee creativity, particularly in the context of high-risk industries such as the energy sector.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their deepest appreciation and gratitude to all those who have contributed to the completion of this research. Thanks to PT XYZ for the permission and support provided in collecting research data. Appreciation is also addressed to all respondents who have taken the time to provide valuable information for the success of this research.

The authors would also like to thank the supervisors and peers who have provided input, advice, and support during the research process until the preparation of this article. Last but not least, the author is grateful to family and friends who always provide motivation and moral support during this research.

Hopefully the results of this study can provide benefits for the development of science, management practice, and become a reference for further research. Thank you.

Author Contribution

As the lead author, Brightly Suryajaya Ong fully contributed to data collection, data analysis using SEM-PLS, and manuscript writing. In addition, he also played a role in the preparation of the theoretical framework, hypothesis development, and interpretation of the research results.

Irsan Tricahyadinata is the corresponding author who manages communication with the journal and ensures compliance with publication guidelines. He also provides academic supervision, guidance on research methodology, and substantive input in data analysis and drafting theoretical and practical implications.

Ike Purnamasari contributed to the literature review on empowerment leadership, trust in leaders, and employee engagement. In addition, she also provided critical input regarding the structure of the article, strengthening theoretical arguments, and improving the manuscript based on the results of the internal review.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest associated with this research. This research was conducted independently without any financial, commercial, or institutional influence or interest that could affect the study results. The research process, data analysis, and article writing were conducted objectively and based on ethical academic principles.

If you have any further questions or need clarification regarding potential conflicts of interest, the authors can be contacted at the correspondence address provided.

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