

EMPOWERMENT AT WORK: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

Research Purpose: The aim of the present study is threefold. First, it intends to describe workers' psychological empowerment in a sample of Portuguese workers. Secondly, to describe empowering leadership perceived by employees about their hierarchical superiors. Finally, to examine the relationships between psychological empowerment dimensions and empowering leadership dimensions.

Method: A cross-sectional survey design was adopted with a convenience sample of Portuguese workers (N = 125). Cronbach's alpha was utilized to examine the reliability of the dimensions. Pearson's correlation coefficient and simple linear regressions were used to analyze the association between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment dimensions.

Measuring Instruments: Spreitzer's Psychological Instrument and the Empowering Leadership Scale were administered.

Main Findings: The results revealed significant and positive correlations between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment dimensions, especially employee self-determination.

Implications/limitations: This research demonstrates that leaders can have an active role in increasing employee psychological empowerment, which can be an antecedent of positive employee attitudes and work outcomes. It is suggested in future studies to use more extensive and more representative samples. Furthermore, longitudinal and experimental research designs will verify if there is a significant causal relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment.

Value of the paper: This study empirically confirms that empowering leadership is associated with employees' psychological empowerment among Portuguese workers.

Key-words: empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, Portuguese workers, Pearson's correlation coefficient, linear regression

Type of paper: Research paper

1. Introduction

In the past decades, the concept of empowerment emerged as an essential approach to promote positive attitudes and work behaviors among employees, which translated into a shift of power from the top of the hierarchy to the base, namely to the employees who have high levels of knowledge and specialized competences (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015). Many companies and organizations have replaced their traditional hierarchy with empowered work teams with previously attributed responsibilities to managers and supervisors (Arnold et al., 2000).

Conger and Kanungo (1988) were the authors who first defined empowerment through the employees' perspective. Empowerment was defined as "a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information" (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). From this perspective, empowering is about giving power to employees by eliminating the conditions that instigate their impotence at work, allowing them to contribute directly to organizational success (Wilkinson, 1998).

In order to feel psychologically empowered, individuals must reach a set of psychological states. Spreitzer (1995) based on Thomas and Velthouse (1990) Cognitive Model, defines these psychological states, or cognitions, as meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.

Meaning is the act of comparing the value of a work or task to the own individual's ideals or standards, the investment of the individual's psychic energy towards the task (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). *Competence* indicates the degree to which a person believes that he/she can perform task activities with skill when trying to (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). *Self-determination or choice* reflects a sense of autonomy towards initiating and continuing certain work behaviors or processes, such as making decisions about work methods (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 2008). The final cognition of psychological empowerment (PE) is *impact* and represents the degree to which an individual can influence the work-related task's accomplishment (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995). These four dimensions combine additively (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990), which means that they all contribute to an overall PE construct. If any of these dimensions is absent, then the empowering experience will be limited (Spreitzer, 1995). For example, if an individual perceives that their job can be impactful, but they have no competencies and skills to perform it – which means that the dimension of competence is lacking – then they will not feel empowered (Spreitzer, 2008).

It has been empirically demonstrated that PE can have a positive influence on many employee attitudes, such as job satisfaction (Konczak et al., 2000; Seibert et al., 2004; Dewettinck and Van Amejide, 2011; Amundsen and Martinsen,

2015) and organizational commitment (Konczak et al., 2000; Dewettinck and Van Aemeijde, 2011). PE also can be positively related to positive work outcomes, such as creativity (Zhang and Bartol, 2010), work effort (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015), innovative behaviors (Chen et al., 2011), and work performance (Seibert et al., 2004).

Although PE has been studied in different contexts and cultures, only a few studies are in the Portuguese context. Just two studies were found that apply the Psychological Empowerment Instrument (PEI) of Spreitzer (1995) in the Portuguese context (Santos et al., 2014; Teixeira, Nogueira and Alves, 2016). Considering this shortcoming in Portuguese literature, we aim to contribute to the study and characterization of Portuguese workers' PE. Therefore, in the present study, we have the following research question:

RQ1: How are the several dimensions of PE scored by the Portuguese workers of the sample?

In order to respond to the contextual changes of today's knowledge economy, organizations became more flattened and decentralized, with power being moved from the top to the base of the organizational hierarchy, especially to the employees with high levels of skills and capacities, the so-called knowledge workers (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015). The traditional command and control hierarchies were increasingly less appropriated (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997).

Empowering leadership (EL), a social-structural component of empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008), emerged as a particular form of leadership with the central characteristics of facilitation and support (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2013). EL can be defined as a set of leader behaviors through which power is shared with the followers to promote their self-reliance and ability to work autonomously, taking into consideration the organizational goals and strategies (Srivastava et al., 2006). Although EL has similarities with other leadership constructs, it is a distinct style of leadership. In their study, Sharma and Kirkman, 2015, distinguished EL from other leadership styles such as delegation, participative leadership, transformational leadership, and leader-member exchange, arguing that EL involves a transfer of power from the leader to the subordinates and that EL encourages employees to set their own goals and to make their own decisions (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015).

Arnold et al. (2000) identified five categories of EL behaviors. The first set of EL behavior defined by the authors is *leading by example*, behaviors that prove the leader's commitment to his work and his team's work, for example, establishing high-performance levels (Arnold et al., 2000). The next set of EL behavior is called *coaching*, that is, educating the team members and helping them be more self-reliant by making suggestions about improvements in their performance

(Arnold et al., 2000). The third set of EL behaviors is designated *participation in the decision process*. It refers to using the information and input of team members to make decisions, which includes encouraging the team to express their own opinions and ideas (Arnold et al., 2000). The following EL behavior set is called *informing*, representing the dissemination of organizational information, such as its mission and philosophy, for example, the leader explaining the company's decisions to the team and informing the new organizational policies (Arnold et al., 2000). The final set of EL behaviors defined by Arnold et al. (2000) is *showing concern/interacting with the team* through a set of behaviors that demonstrate concern for the team's well-being and keeping up with what is happening with the team, treating it as a whole. So, considering these five dimensions, it is aimed in this research paper to characterize the EL behaviors perceived by Portuguese workers about their hierarchical superiors. Therefore, in the present study, we include the following research question:

RQ2: How are the different dimensions of EL scored by workers regarding their leaders?

Considering the concepts of EL and PE, it is intuitive to assume that a strong relationship exists. Theoretically, it is reasonable to argue that EL can influence employee PE for four reasons (Zhang and Bartol, 2010): (1) An empowering leader tends to enhance the meaningfulness of work because the leader's empowering behavior can help the employee to understand the importance of his/her contribution to the organization; (2) An empowering leader positively influences the employee's self-reliance towards their work through the leader's expression of confidence in the follower's competence; (3) The empowering leader encourages employees to be autonomous towards their work, which can foster self-determination; (4) Finally, the empowering leader fosters employees' involvement in the decision-making process, which promotes employee sense of impact. Considering the theoretical foundation for EL's possible influence on employee PE, some empirical studies have been produced to confirm it. Some of them are reviewed in the following paragraph.

An empirical study conducted with a sample of 381 employees from four service organizations in Belgium found EL behaviors to be positively related to PE at an individual level (Dewettinck and Van Amejide, 2011). Another empirical study carried out at a major IT company in China with surveys applied to 498 employees, and 164 supervisors supported the hypothesis that EL is positively associated with employee PE (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). De Klerk and Stander (2014), in a South African organization from the secondary sector (N = 322 employees), found that EL behaviors explain 37% of the variance in employee PE. These findings obtained in different cultural contexts support the positive

influence of EL behaviors on employee PE. However, there are no studies in the Portuguese context on EL / PE relationship.

Moreover, the analysis of possible processes behind each EL dimension's influence on each PE dimension can be made with a deeper understanding of that psychosocial process. To undertake that challenge, the present paper aims to study and characterize that influence in a sample of Portuguese workers. The following research question can be stated:

RQ3: What are the influences which PE dimensions receive from the various dimensions of EL?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to respond to the research questions, with all data gathered at a single point in time.

2.2. Participants and Procedures

Data was collected through a survey-based questionnaire. The snowball sampling method (Heckathorn and Cameron, 2017) was used to reach the target respondents. This method is also known as chain-referral-sampling, and it begins with a convenience sample of initial subjects that serve as “seeds” to recruit other subjects for the study (Heckathorn, 2011).

The respondents accessed the questionnaire via a web link. This procedure re-assured that the respondents' answers were protected and made it easier for them to share the link with their contacts. The questionnaire was online for three months, from 26th April to 25th July of 2020, during the pandemic.

The initial sample was constituted of 329 respondents. However, 204 were excluded because of missing answers in several items. Table 1 presents the results of the descriptive and frequency analysis of the demographic variables. The effective sample comprises 125 participants (N = 125), mostly female (62%, n = 75). The participants' age ranges from 23 to 65 years old, with an average of 40.31 years old (Standard Deviation (SD) = 11.306 months). The majority of the respondents have a high education level, according to ISCED 2011, with qualifications above high school level (76,90%, n = 93).

Regarding the job tenure of the participants, as Table 1 shows, the working time in the current organization ranges between 3 months and 39 years, with an average of 8.94 years (SD = 8.73), and the time at the current function ranges between 1 month and 48 years, with an average of 7.46 years (SD = 8.91). Most of the participants have a permanent employment contract (79.2%, n = 99) and 17.6% have a fixed-term contract (n = 22).

	A	SD	N	%
Gender				
Female			75	62.00%
Male			46	38.00%
Age	40.31	11.31		
Education Level (according to ISCED 2011)				
Low Education			0	0.00%
Medium Education			28	23.10%
High Education			93	76.90%
Working time at the current organization (months)	107.29	104.78		
Working time at current function (months)	89.52	106.93		
Employment contract				
Casual Employment			0	0.00%
Fixed Term Contract			22	18.20%
Permanent Employment Contract			99	81.80%

Table 1. Sample Description

Note: A = Average;
SD = Standard Deviation;
N = Number of observations

2.3. Instruments

Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ)

The five categories of EL behaviors, *Leading by example, Coaching, Participation in the decision process, Informing and Showing concern/interacting with the team*, served as the base for the construction of the ELQ (Arnold et al., 2000), the instrument used in this research to measure the perceived EL behaviors.

Dewettinck and Van Ameijde (2011) have shown that although the ELQ (Arnold et al., 2000) was constructed to access leadership empowerment behavior in a team context, it can also be useful in an individualized working context. In the empirical literature, the ELQ has been used as a measure in a variety of studies, with samples from different cultures such as North American (e.g., Srivastava et al., 2006; Xue et al., 2011), Asian (e.g., Raub and Robert, 2013; Fong and Snape, 2015) and European (e.g., Martínez-Córcoles et al., 2012), and many business contexts, such as higher education institutions (e.g., Xue et al., 2011), hospitality (e.g., Srivastava et al., 2006), customer service (e.g., Fong and Snape, 2015), companies in the secondary (e.g., Martínez-Córcoles et al., 2012) and tertiary sector (e.g., Raub and Robert, 2013).

A study by Mónico et al., 2019 validated the ELQ among Portuguese workers, with a sample of 408 workers. Confirmatory factor analysis performed by the validation study authors indicates a good fit to the original factorial structure of the ELQ instrument, with adequate reliability.

The ELQ is constituted by 38 items, and the respondent must evaluate each proposition on a 5-point Likert scale. The 38 items are grouped in five factors: (1)

Leading by Example formed by five affirmations (e.g., “Works as hard as he/she can”); (2) *Participative Decision-Making* formed by six affirmations (e.g., “Gives all workgroup members a chance to voice their opinions”); (3) *Coaching* formed by eleven items (e.g. “Provides help to workgroup members”); (4) *Informing*, formed by six affirmations (e.g. “Explains his/her decisions and actions to my workgroup”); (5) *Showing Concern/Interacting with the Team* formed by ten affirmations (e.g. “Treats workgroup members as equals”). This scale has an inverted item that is part of the factor *Participative Decision-Making*, the item number 11 (“Makes decisions that are based only on his/her own ideas”).

Spreitzer’s Psychological Empowerment Instrument (PEI)

Based on the four dimensions of PE, Spreitzer (1995) developed a measure that has been predominately used in empirical research (Spreitzer, 2008). The Spreitzer’s PE scale is a 12-item questionnaire, three for each PE dimension: (1) *Meaning* (e.g., “My job activities are personally meaningful to me.”); (2) *Competence* (e.g., “I am confident about my ability to do my job.”); (3) *Self-Determination* (e.g., “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.”); and (5) *Impact* (e.g., “My impact on what happens in my department is large.”). The respondent evaluates each proposition with a 7-point Likert scale.

Spreitzer’s PEI has been applied at an individual level (Kraimer et al., 1999) and team level (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). Also, this scale has been applied in various cultures, such as Asian (e.g., Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Fong and Snape, 2015; Kundu et al., 2019), African (e.g., De Klerk and Stander, 2014), American (e.g., Koberg et al., 1999; Seibert et al., 2004), Australian (e.g., Carless, 2004) and European (e.g., Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015; Teixeira et al., 2016). The scale developed by Spreitzer (1995) has been used in several business contexts such as banking (e.g., Kundu et al., 2019), call centers (e.g., Fong and Snape, 2015), public and private financial organizations (e.g., Carless, 2004), IT companies (e.g., Seibert et al., 2004; Zhang and Bartol, 2010), nonprofit organizations (e.g., Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015), higher education institutions (e.g., Chen et al., 2011), health care industry (e.g., Koberg et al., 1999; Kraimer, Seibert and Liden, 1999) and hospitality (e.g., Chiang and Hsieh, 2012)

Spreitzer’s PEI was validated in a Portuguese sample (n=296 nurses) by Teixeira, Nogueira and Alves (2016). The factor analysis performed by the authors of the validation study identified the four factors found by Spreitzer (1995). The Portuguese version of the scale has a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient ranging between 0.688 and 0.868 in the four dimensions (Teixeira et al., 2016).

2.4. Data analysis procedures

The following statistical techniques were applied: (1) Reliability analysis of the EL and PE dimensions, by calculating Cronbach’s Alpha; (2) Correlation

analysis, using Pearson's correlation coefficient and; (3) Simple linear regression analysis, with the PE dimensions as dependent variables. For data record and processing, it was used the 26th version of the IBM SPSS Statistics.

3. Results

3.1. Empowering Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

Considering the reduced number of observations (N=125) and considering that the scales are validated for the Portuguese context (Mónico, Salvador, et al., 2019; Teixeira et al., 2016) was decided not to use the factor analysis method. The average of the questions corresponding to each dimension was considered to calculate the factors' scores for EL and PE.

The reliability of each of the factors was calculated through Cronbach's alpha. As demonstrated in Table 2, all EL and PE dimensions have a Cronbach's alpha higher than .81, confirming its internal robustness. According to the labels presented by Taber (2018), the EL dimensions Coaching (.968), Informing (.942), Showing Concern/Interacting with the team (.959) have excellent reliability. Regarding the PE dimensions, meaning has the highest value for the Cronbach's Alpha (.925), presenting strong reliability.

The descriptive analysis of each dimension was performed (see Table 2).

	Cronbach's Alpha	A	SD
EL Dimensions			
Leading by Example	.882	3.68	.91
Participation in the decision-making process	.904	3.56	.92
Coaching	.968	3.61	.93
Informing	.942	3.55	.92
Showing Concern/Interacting with the team	.959	3.63	.95
PE Dimensions			
Meaning	.925	5.83	1.15
Competence	.873	5.95	.81
Self-determination	.817	5.23	1.16
Impact	.842	5.17	1.10

Table 2. Reliability and descriptive analysis of EL and PE dimensions

Note: A = Average; SD = Standard Deviation

As can be observed in Table 2, it was found that *Leading by Example* was the EL dimension that presented the highest mean (M = 3.68; SD = .91), and the EL dimension that presented the lowest average was *Informing* (M = 3.55; SD = .92). *Competence* was the PE dimension that presents the highest mean (M = 5.95; SD = .81), and the PE Dimension that presented the lowest average was *Impact* (M = 5.17; SD = 1.10).

3.2. Correlation analysis

The correlation analysis between EL and PE dimensions was performed using Pearson's correlation coefficient (see Table 3).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Leading by Example	-								
2 Participation in the decision-making process	.703**	-							
3 Coaching	.810**	.879**	-						
4 Informing	.733**	.748**	.851**	-					
5 Showing Concern/ Interacting with the team	.752**	.882**	.894**	.774**	-				
6 Meaning	.410**	.330**	.369**	.351**	.352**	-			
7 Competence	.343**	.314**	.319**	.319**	.374**	.553**	-		
8 Self-Determination	.484**	.505**	.517**	.405**	.499**	.527**	.398**	-	
9 Impact	.421**	.390**	.405**	.335**	.419**	.645**	.544**	.716**	-

Table 3. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

It is possible to verify that all the EL dimensions and all the PE dimensions are positively and significantly correlated. As shown in Table 3, Pearson's correlation coefficient is higher in the correlations that include the self-determination PE dimension and the EL dimensions than other correlations between the PE and EL dimensions. However, it is essential to verify if these differences have statistical significance. Thus, it was formulated the following hypothesis to test if there are significantly higher correlations.

$$H_0: \rho_1 = \rho_2$$

$$H_1: \rho_1 > \rho_2$$

The method used to test the significance of the differences was the one presented by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). The comparison results are presented in Table 4 and indicate that, for the studied sample and with a significance of 5%, we reject the null hypothesis, concluding for the difference between correlations.

In the ten correlations with a significant positive difference shown in Table 4 (test statistic $z > 1,645$), the correlation containing the PE dimension *self-*

determination has a Pearson correlation coefficient (see Table 3) higher than the correlation by which it is compared.

The results also indicated a significantly higher association between *self-determination* and *participation in the decision-making process* ($r = .505$), compared to the correlations between *participation in the decision-making process* and other PE dimensions. The same outcome is shown with the EL dimension *coaching* ($r = .517$).

Dependent Correlations	Test Statistic <i>z</i>
Coaching/ Self-determination vs. Informing and Self-determination	2.587*
Coaching/ Self-determination vs. Coaching/ Competence	2.284*
Participation in the decision-making process/ Self-determination vs. Partici- pation in the decision-making process/ Meaning	2.257*
Participation in the decision-making process/ Self-determination vs. Partici- pation in the decision-making process/ Competence	2.189*
Coaching/ Self-determination vs. Coaching/ Meaning	1.940*
Participation in the decision-making process/ Self-determination vs. Partici- pation in the decision-making process/ Impact	1.924*
Showing Concern/Interacting with the team/ Self-determination vs. Showing Concern/Interacting with the team and Meaning	1.903*
Coaching/ Self-determination vs. Coaching/ Impact	1.891*
Participation in the decision-making process/ Self-determination vs. Informing/ Self-determination	1.780*
Showing Concern/Interacting with the team/ Self-determination vs. Informing and Self-determination	1.760*

Table 4. Comparing correlations

* Significant at the .05 level (1-tailed).

Note: Bold indicates the significantly higher correlation

4.3. Linear Regression Analysis

To further study the relationship between the EL dimensions and the PE dimensions, a simple linear regression analysis (see Table 5).

This analysis showed that all the EL dimensions have a significant and positive effect on the PE dimensions. This effect is especially relevant in the relations involving the dependent variable *self-determination*, which have the highest coefficient of determination (R^2).

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Dependent Variable (PE Dimensions)	Independent Variable (EL Dimensions)	B (SD)	R ²
Meaning	Leading by Example	.513* (SD = .105)	16.80%
	Participation in the decision-making process	.411* (SD = .108)	10.90%
	Coaching	.457* (SD = .105)	13.60%
	Informing	.436* (SD = .107)	12.30%
	Showing Concern/Interacting with the team	.425* (SD = .104)	12.40%
Competence	Leading by Example	.305* (SD = .077)	11.80%
	Participation in the decision-making process	.278* (SD = .077)	9.90%
	Coaching	.281* (SD = .076)	10.20%
	Informing	.281* (SD = .077)	10.20%
	Showing Concern/Interacting with the team	.321* (SD = .073)	14.00%
Self-Determination	Leading by Example	.613* (SD = .102)	23.50%
	Participation in the decision-making process	.637* (SD = .100)	25.50%
	Coaching	.648* (SD = .098)	26.80%
	Informing	.510* (SD = .105)	16.40%
	Showing Concern/Interacting with the team	.609* (SD = .097)	24.90%
Impact	Leading by Example	.504* (SD = .100)	17.70%
	Participation in the decision-making process	.464* (SD = .101)	15.20%
	Coaching	.480* (SD = .099)	16.40%
	Informing	.398* (SD = .103)	11.20%
	Showing Concern/Interacting with the team	.483* (SD = .096)	17.50%

Table 5. Simple Linear Regressions between ELQ and PE dimensions

Note: *. Sig = .05; SD = Standard Deviation

5. Discussion

This research aimed to study the relationship between EL and employee PE. The first objective was to describe the EL in a sample of Portuguese workers. All the EL dimensions showed high reliability, demonstrating a high internal consistency. The descriptive statistics indicated that the EL dimension that presented the highest average score is *leading by example*. The outcomes suggested that, on average, the participants in this study considered that their hierarchical superiors more than sometimes exhibit behaviors that demonstrate a commitment to his/her work and team's work. On the other hand, the least observed EL dimension is *informing*.

The second goal of this study was to describe the PE dimensions in the sample. As the dimensions of EL, all dimensions of PE presented high reliability, corresponding to a high internal consistency level. The results indicated that *competence* is the PE dimension that presented the highest average score in the sample. Likewise, the results revealed that, on average, the participants in this research more than agree to perceive that they can perform tasks with skill when they try. On the other hand, the *impact* was the PE dimension that presented the lowest average score in the sample.

The third objective was to verify to what extent EL is associated with employees' PE. According to the correlation and linear regression analysis results, all EL behaviors are positively associated with employees' PE since all correlations and simple linear regressions were positive and statistically significant. Further exploration of the correlation results indicated a significantly stronger association between *self-determination* and two EL dimensions: *participation in the decision-making process* and *coaching*, than the correlations between *participation in the decision-making process/coaching* and other PE dimensions.

Theoretical Contributions

This research paper makes contributions to the existing literature in two ways. First, it supports other studies that suggested that when workers have the perception that their hierarchical superiors have an empowering style of leadership, they feel empowered (Seibert, Wang, and Courtright, 2011; Tripathi and Bharadwaja, 2020). It signifies that behaviors that increase the perception of the leader's commitment to his/her work and team and that endow employee autonomy, involvement and guidance, add to the employees' increased orientation towards their work role and sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Dewettinck and Van Ameijde, 2011; De Klerk and Stander, 2014; Fong and Snape, 2015). Secondly, this study adds to other research that points to a positive association between EL and *self-determination* (Zhang and Bartol, 2010) since the results reveal that workers can feel more autonomous regarding their work and in making decisions about work methods when leaders coach them to be more

self-reliant and value their input when making decisions. In general, empowering leadership behaviors are effective in empowering workers.

Practical contributions

This research has implications for organizations, managers, and Human Resource (HR) managers in organizations.

When talent is a dominant source of value, organizations need to implement new strategies for attracting and retaining knowledge workers. Moreover, since knowledge workers prefer to work in supportive organizational climates (Tripathi and Bharadwaja, 2020), our findings are relevant because they demonstrate that leaders can play an active role in increasing the sense of empowerment at the workplace and improving the psychological empowerment of employees, including their self-determination.

PE has empirically demonstrated to be an antecedent of positive employee attitudes and work outcomes (Konczak et al., 2000; Seibert et al., 2004; Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Chen et al., 2011; Dewettinck and Van Amejide, 2011; Amundsen and Martinsen, 2015). Also, there is empirical evidence that demonstrates the mediator effect of PE in the relationship of EL with job performance, since self-determination can enable employees to make quick decisions, leading to higher job performance through the diminution of work referral (Kundu et al., 2019).

Considering the previous paragraphs, organizational decision-makers should take into consideration the study findings when selecting and training supervisors and managers to endow behaviors that foster employee meaningfulness of work, perceived competence, self-determination and perceptions of impact (Tripathi and Bharadwaja, 2020) since they can improve the level of job performance by boosting employee PE (Kundu et al., 2019).

6. Conclusion

This research comprises a quantitative study carried out using a sample of Portuguese workers. The analyses conducted allowed to characterize the presence of EL and PE dimensions in the sample. It was confirmed a significant and positive association between the EL and PE dimensions. This approach showed that behaviors demonstrating the commitment of the leader to his or her work and team and that endow employee autonomy, involvement, and guidance contribute to the employees' perception of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact towards their work.

This study also shows that leaders who coach and include team members in the decision-making process will contribute to a greater perception of self-determination, i.e., a sense of autonomy towards their work. This self-determination dimension is among the PE dimensions the most influenced by EL behaviors. Previous literature has shown that job autonomy enhances work

motivation and reduces mental strain, leading to higher job performance (Muecke and Iseke, 2019). Therefore, leaders' coaching behaviors and participating in decisions by subordinates are evidenced to be greater in generating good consequences in terms of empowering workers.

7. Limitations and future studies

This study presents some limitations, namely that data was collected through a convenience sample, which was not representative of the population. In future investigations, it is suggested to use a probability sampling technique, such as simple random sampling, that will provide a representative sample of the population, allowing statistical inferences from the sample to the population. Moreover, larger samples could make the results more robust.

The fact that this is a cross-sectional study is also a limitation. Other research designs such as longitudinal and experimental will verify if there are variations over time and the existence of a causal relationship between EL and PE.

Although those limitations deserve to be pointed out, the study contributes to understanding the relationships between empowering leadership behaviors and the psychological empowerment of those who were led.

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