


# Empowering leadership and employee voice in Makassar's state-owned enterprises

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**Dates:**

Received: 07 Mar. 2025

Accepted: 17 July 2025

Published: 26 Sept. 2025

**How to cite this article:**

Rusydi, M., 2025, 'Empowering leadership and employee voice in Makassar's state-owned enterprises', *Acta Commercii* 25(1), a1415. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ac.v25i1.1415>

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**Orientation:** Empowering leadership (EL) plays a crucial role in fostering proactive employee behaviours, such as voice behaviour (VB). Understanding how EL influences VB is essential for enhancing workplace autonomy and employee empowerment.

**Research purpose:** This study examines the relationships between EL, job autonomy (JA), psychological empowerment (PE) and VB. It specifically investigates the mediating roles of JA and PE in the EL–VB relationship.

**Motivation for the study:** While EL is theorised to promote VB, existing research lacks clarity on the underlying mechanisms, particularly the mediating influence of JA and PE. This study addresses this gap insights into leadership practices that enhance employee voice.

**Research design, approach and method:** A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 209 employees from four state-owned enterprises (BUMN) in Makassar, Indonesia. Data were collected through purposive and snowball sampling and analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

**Main findings:** Empowering leadership significantly enhances JA and PE. However, EL does not directly influence VB, and neither JA nor PE mediates this relationship. This suggests that other factors, such as psychological safety and organisational support, may be necessary to stimulate proactive employee voice.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Organisations should focus on leadership development programmes that enhance autonomy and empowerment while fostering an environment supporting employee voice.

**Contribution/value-add:** This study contributes to self-determination theory and empowerment theory by highlighting the indirect effects of EL on VB. It underscores the need for additional mediators in leadership–VB models.

**Keywords:** empowering leadership; job autonomy; psychological empowerment; voice behaviour; organisational behaviour.

## Introduction

In the current dynamic and competitive business landscape, firms increasingly depend on employees' expertise, inventiveness and proactive actions to sustain a competitive advantage. A vital element in cultivating such behaviours is empowering leadership (EL), a style that prioritises the distribution of authority, grants autonomy and motivates employees to take initiative and express their thoughts and concerns (Gao & Jiang 2019; Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2018; Tian & Chae 2023). Empowering leadership cultivates an atmosphere where employees feel esteemed and inspired to contribute to corporate achievement, rendering it a crucial element in promoting employee voice behaviour (VB). Voice behaviour, characterised as the voluntary expression of ideas, suggestions, concerns or opinions aimed at promoting organisational effectiveness, is vital for fostering innovation, addressing challenges and improving overall performance (Raub & Robert 2013). Nonetheless, the methods by which EL affects VB are inadequately examined, especially for the mediating functions of job autonomy (JA) and psychological empowerment (PE).

Voice behaviour is a proactive and positive action that allows firms to harness employees' capacity for enhancement and creativity. Employees must experience psychological safety and empowerment to engage in VB, underscoring the essential function of EL. Empowering leadership enhances employee motivation to articulate their views by promoting participative decision-making, supplying resources, encouraging involvement and instilling confidence (Gao & Jiang 2019).

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Recent research has demonstrated a favourable correlation between EL and VB; nevertheless, there are still gaps in comprehending the mediating pathways of this relationship (Raub & Robert 2013; Tian & Chae 2023).

Job autonomy and PE are two potential mediators that clarify the impact of empowered leadership on VB. Job autonomy denotes the extent of discretion and freedom employees have in their work, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability for their responsibilities. Studies indicate that JA improves employee involvement in proactive behaviours, such as VB, by cultivating a sense of control and initiative (Gao & Jiang 2019; Pigeon, Montani & Boudrias 2017). The mediation effect of JA in the relationship between EL and VB remains under-examined, despite its significance. Some studies indicate that JA directly affects participation in decision-making and empowered behaviours; however, the degree of its mediating effect is ambiguous (Huntsman et al. 2021; Li, Chiaburu & Kirkman 2017).

Psychological empowerment, defined by employees' perceptions of significance, competence, self-determination and effect, serves as a significant mediator in this interaction. Employees who view themselves as competent and significant contributors to their work are more inclined to exhibit VB (Amundsen & Martinsen 2015; Younas et al. 2023). Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between different leadership styles and employee outcomes; nevertheless, its specific mechanisms in the context of EL and VB require further exploration (Aggarwal et al. 2020; Dust, Resick & Mawritz 2014). Current studies frequently analyse PE independently or in conjunction with other mediators like job satisfaction, resulting in a lack of comprehension regarding its interaction with JA in affecting speech behaviour (Ilyas et al. 2021).

This study seeks to enhance comprehension of the dynamic interplay among EL, JA, PE and VB through several contributions. First, it clarifies how empowering leadership (EL) stimulates voice behavior (VB) by drawing on social exchange and self-determination theory to explain the theoretical foundations of these links. Second, it integrates job autonomy (JA) and psychological empowerment (PE) into a single framework to explain how these two mediators jointly and separately channel the effects of EL on VB (Raub & Robert 2013; Younas et al. 2023). The study investigates these mediators concurrently to assess their individual and collective impacts on promoting VB (Ilyas et al. 2021; Pigeon et al. 2017). Third, it examines contextual elements like organisational structure, recognising that EL may produce varying results in mechanistic compared to organic settings (Dust et al. 2014). This research presents practical implications by identifying strategies to enhance JA and PE, allowing organisations to effectively use EL to cultivate a culture of open communication and ongoing improvement (Pigeon et al. 2017; Tian & Chae 2023). This study addresses research gaps, contributing to the literature on EL and VB and providing insights into how firms might augment staff proactivity and innovation through specific leadership

approaches. This study enhances theoretical comprehension and offers practical recommendations for corporate leaders and HR professionals seeking to foster settings that promote employee voice and organisational success.

Empowering leadership, defined by the delegation of authority, the promotion of autonomous decision-making and the facilitation of staff development, regularly exerts a beneficial impact on VB. Voice behaviour denotes the proactive initiatives undertaken by employees to articulate ideas, proposals or complaints aimed at enhancing organisational performance (Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2018; Raub & Robert 2013; Zhang et al. 2020). According to social exchange theory, EL cultivates a reciprocal dynamic in which employees perceive themselves as valued and encouraged, hence encouraging them to express their thoughts (Peng & Chen 2022; Qian et al. 2018). Moreover, feedback-seeking behaviour fostered by EL enhances this link, suggesting that employees who proactively solicit feedback are more inclined to articulate their views (Qian et al. 2018). According to job features theory, EL affects VB via job features including task significance and workload. The relevance of tasks encourages vocal behaviour by highlighting the value of labour, whereas an excessive workload may inhibit it because of increased stress (Tian & Chae 2023). From the self-cognitive perspective, EL augments employees' self-efficacy, thereby motivating them to exhibit VB. The relationship is influenced by organisation-based self-esteem, indicating the interplay between individual and organisational characteristics (Tian & Huang 2013).

A crucial mediating component in this relationship is PE, encompassing the characteristics of meaning, competence, self-determination and influence. Empowering leadership augments employees' intrinsic motivation and autonomy about their work, hence fostering proactive behaviours, such as VB (Pigeon et al. 2017; Raub & Robert 2013). Research indicates that PE mediates the connection between inclusive leadership and VB, implying that inclusive leaders enhance employees' sense of empowerment, hence increasing their likelihood to express themselves (Younas et al. 2023). Moreover, within the framework of general EL, PE serves as a mediator that enhances employees' inclination to proactively articulate recommendations or concerns (Pigeon et al. 2017; Raub & Robert 2013).

Job autonomy, defined as the extent of control and discretion employees possess regarding their work, serves as a crucial mediator. Empowering leadership enhances JA by allowing employees the liberty to make decisions, which subsequently affects their propensity to exhibit VB (Pigeon et al. 2017). Furthermore, harmonious enthusiasm, enhanced by JA, intensifies the mediating effect of EL on VB (Gao & Jiang 2019). This suggests that the interplay between autonomy and intrinsic motivation substantially enhances employees' proactive behaviour. Furthermore, psychological safety serves as a crucial mediator in this interaction. Employees are more inclined to express their thoughts when they have psychological safety, as they perceive support from

empowered leadership (Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2018; Tian & Chae 2023). The link is influenced by core self-evaluation, suggesting that employees with elevated self-evaluation are more inclined to exhibit VB (Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2018).

Notwithstanding the expanding corpus of literature on EL and VB, numerous study gaps persist. Firstly, numerous studies are context specific, concentrating on industries such as telecommunications in China, services in India or diverse sectors in Korea (Gao, Janssen & Shi 2011; Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2018; Tian & Chae 2023). Additional research is required to evaluate these findings in a broader range of scenarios. Secondly, most studies depend on cross-sectional data, which constrains the comprehension of long-term consequences. Longitudinal investigations may yield more profound insights into these patterns. Thirdly, despite the extensive proposal of moderated mediation models, there exists a necessity for more comprehensive frameworks that incorporate multiple mediators and moderators to thoroughly elucidate the intricate relationship between EL and VB (Gao & Jiang 2019; Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2018; Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2018). The following hypotheses are proposed.

## **H1: Empowering leadership influences employees' voice behaviour**

### **Empowering leadership and job autonomy**

Empowering leadership and JA are interconnected through multiple theoretical perspectives. Self-determination theory (SDT) posits that EL fulfils employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, fostering intrinsic motivation (Ju et al. 2019; Li et al. 2023b). By delegating authority, empowering leaders cultivate a sense of ownership, thereby enhancing JA. Social exchange theory suggests that EL nurtures reciprocal relationships, where employees feel valued, leading to increased engagement and performance. Here, JA acts as both a resource and motivational factor (Burhan & Khan 2024; Helland, Christensen & Innstrand 2020).

According to the job demand-resource (JD-R) theory, EL functions as a key resource, increasing engagement by offering autonomy, although it may also heighten job demands, potentially causing stress (Cheng et al. 2024; Li et al. 2023a). Situation strength theory (SST) highlights that JA strengthens EL's impact on behaviours like intrapreneurship by fostering creativity and initiative (Alam et al. 2023). Role theory further explains that JA allows role flexibility, influencing performance based on autonomy levels and leadership support (Cheng et al. 2024; Cheong et al. 2016). Job autonomy mediates and moderates EL's effects, linking leadership to discretionary behaviours and decision-making involvement (Pigeon et al. 2017). Thus, EL enhances JA, optimising motivation, engagement and performance.

## **H2: Empowering leadership influences job autonomy**

### **Empowering leadership and psychological empowerment**

The relationship between EL and PE is grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks. Empowerment theory asserts that

EL enhances intrinsic motivation by distributing power, fostering autonomy and providing support. This leadership style promotes self-sufficiency and competence, aligning organisational goals with employees' personal aspirations (Ravelonarivo, Dolce & Sarnin 2024; Schermuly et al. 2022). Empowering leadership cultivates trust and recognition, directly boosting PE among subordinates.

Social cognitive theory (SCT) highlights the cognitive mechanisms by which PE mediates the link between leadership and organisational outcomes, emphasising self-efficacy and perceived control (Fareed, Su & Aslam 2023). Additionally, social exchange theory suggests that EL fosters high-quality leader-employee relationships, reducing negative behaviours such as cynicism and deviance, which strengthens the positive impact of EL on PE (Lorinkova & Perry 2017). Empowering leadership directly enhances PE by promoting self-leadership and autonomy, leading to higher job satisfaction and effort (Amundsen & Martinsen 2015). Indirectly, EL drives creativity, work performance and organisational citizenship behaviours through PE's mediating role (Dust et al. 2014; Milhem et al. 2024; Sun et al. 2012).

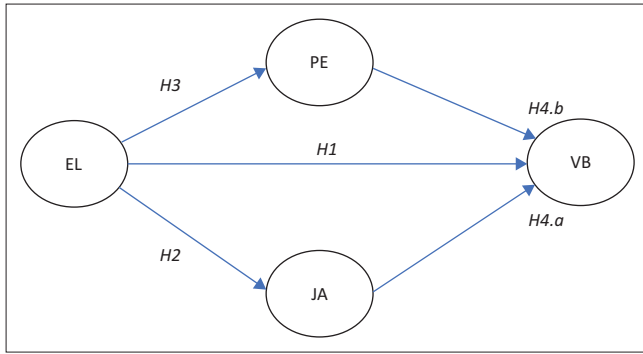
Moderating factors such as social structural empowerment and leader-member exchange (LMX) influence this relationship. Rigid hierarchies weaken EL's impact, while high-quality LMX amplifies it (Dennerlein & Kirkman 2023; Kwak & Jackson 2015). Thus, EL fosters PE by supporting autonomy, cognitive processes and reciprocal relationships, forming a foundation for hypotheses examining PE's mediating role in workplace dynamics.

## **H3: Empowering leadership influences psychological empowerment**

### **Mediating role of job autonomy and psychological empowerment**

The mediation roles of JA and PE in the relationship between EL and VB are well supported by theoretical frameworks. Job autonomy encompasses decision-making, procedural and temporal autonomy, with decision-making autonomy being the most influential in enhancing motivation. However, excessive schedule autonomy may sometimes lower motivation (Muecke & Iskele 2019). Empowering leadership fosters workplace autonomy by encouraging employee participation in decision-making and discretionary behaviours, thereby enhancing their sense of control and ownership (Pigeon et al. 2017).

Psychological empowerment, defined by meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, connects workplace autonomy to positive outcomes like engagement and job satisfaction (Al Doghan, Alayis & Abdelwahed 2022; Orgambidez et al. 2024). It transforms leadership-provided structural resources, such as autonomy, into behaviours beneficial for employees and organisations (Quiñones, Van Den Broeck & De Witte 2013). Psychological empowerment also moderates the JA-behavioural outcome link, reinforcing discretionary behaviours and decision-making participation (Pigeon et al. 2017). Moreover, PE amplifies job engagement, fostering



Source: Developed by the authors based on Dust, S.B., Resick, C.J. & Mawritz, M.B., 2014, 'Transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, and the moderating role of mechanistic-organic contexts', *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* 35(3), 413–433. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1904>; Ilyas, S., Abid, G., Ashfaq, F., Ali, M. & Ali, W., 2021, 'Status quos are made to be broken: The roles of transformational leadership, job satisfaction, psychological empowerment, and voice behavior', *SAGE Open* 11(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211006734>; Pigeon, M., Montani, F. & Boudrias, J.-S., 2017, 'How do empowering conditions lead to empowered behaviours? Test of a mediation model', *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 32(5), 357–372. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-09-2016-0292>; Raub, S. & Robert, C., 2013, 'Empowerment, organizational commitment, and voice behaviour in the hospitality industry: Evidence from a multinational sample', *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* 54(2), 136–148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965512457240>; Younas, A., Wang, D., Javed, B. & Haque, A.U., 2023, 'Inclusive leadership and voice behaviour: The role of psychological empowerment', *Journal of Social Psychology* 163(2), 174–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2022.2026283>

H, hypothesis; EL, empowering leadership; PE, psychological empowerment; JA, job autonomy; VB, voice behaviour.

**FIGURE 1:** Framework conceptual.

commitment and enthusiasm (Quiñones et al. 2013), although its role in moderating stress remains context dependent (Mostafa 2017). A supportive work environment enhances PE's influence on decision-making, as observed in clinical settings (Zeng et al. 2023).

Despite advancements, gaps remain in understanding how different autonomy forms and PE influence VB (Pigeon et al. 2017). Addressing these gaps can refine models explaining

how EL drives VB via JA and PE, reinforcing proactive employee behaviours crucial for organisational success.

**H4a:** JA mediates the relationship between EL and VB.

**H4b:** PE mediates the relationship between EL and VB.

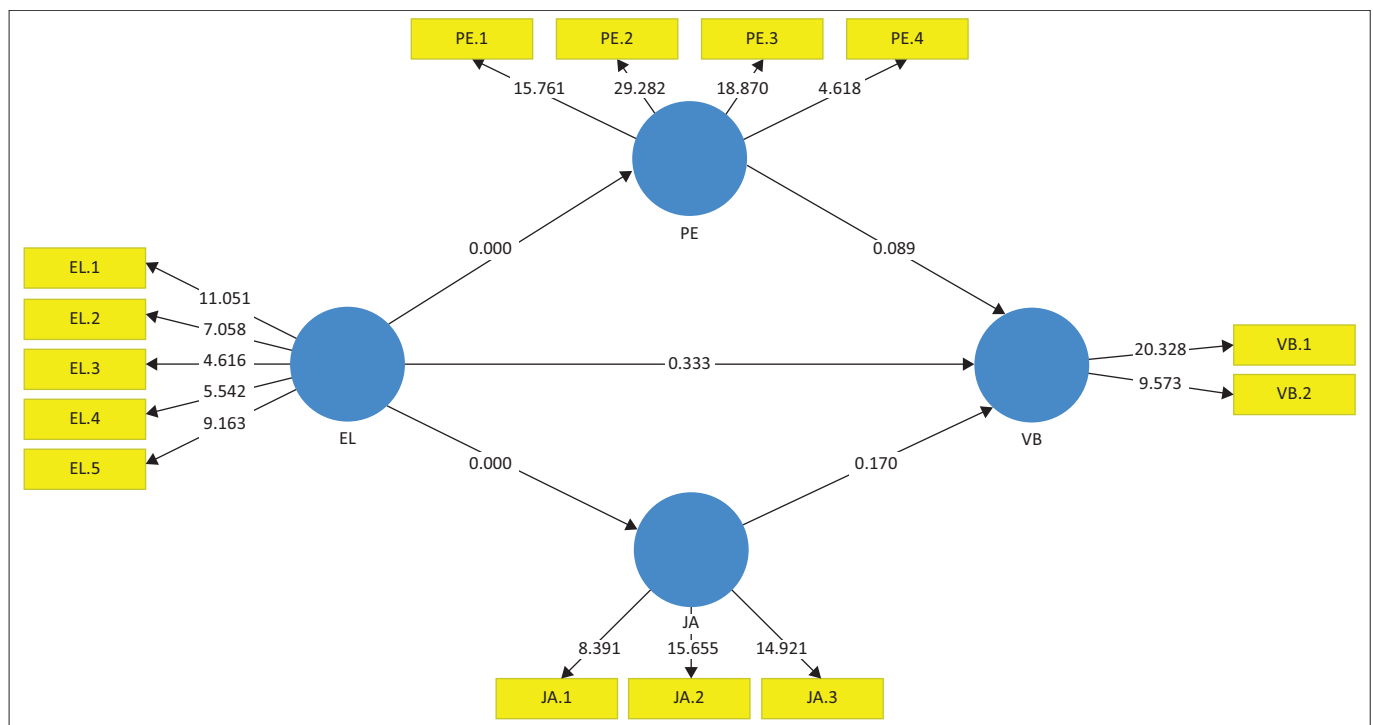
This study's conceptual framework (Figure 1) incorporates two mediation pathways to clarify the relationship between EL and VB. It contributes to the literature by exploring the impact of JA and PE on the psychological and environmental factors that influence VB. This model provides practical implications for organisations to develop EL programmes that focus not only on achieving short-term goals but also on fostering a proactive work environment.

## Research methods and design

This research employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey approach to investigate the interrelations between EL, JA, PE and VB. A cross-sectional methodology was chosen to capture employees' views and behaviours at a specific point in time, allowing for the analysis of correlations and potential mediating effects among these variables (Almazrouei & Bani-Melhem 2023; Kundu, Kumar & Gahlawat 2019; Pigeon et al. 2017). This design aims to understand the influence of leadership behaviours and workplace autonomy on empowerment and VB, aligning with the objectives of contemporary organisational behaviour research.

## Data collection

The study's target group consists of permanent personnel from state-owned firms (BUMN) situated in Makassar, South



H, hypothesis; EL, empowering leadership; JA, job autonomy; VB, voice behaviour.

**FIGURE 2:** Analysis results.



Sulawesi Province, specifically PT Telkom, PT Pelindo, PT PLN and PT Pertamina. A total of 209 employees engaged in completing the research questionnaire. Respondents were recruited by purposive and snowball sampling approaches to include persons with pertinent experiences in leadership and empowerment situations (Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2019; Kundu et al. 2019). This method facilitates access to a varied sample, reflecting different organisational contexts and improving the generalisability of the results. The determined sample size surpasses 200 respondents, deemed adequate to guarantee statistical power for analyses, especially in mediation and structural equation modelling studies. This criterion corresponds with other studies that have effectively utilised analogous sample sizes to investigate similar constructs and connections (Kundu et al. 2019; Pigeon et al. 2017). Respondents were requested to take an online survey disseminated through email and professional networks. To optimise response rates, periodic follow-up reminders were dispatched. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, with informed consent acquired from all respondents. Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained, guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents during the data collection procedure.

## Measurement

The study employed well-established instruments to measure the key constructs:

- **Empowered leadership:** The variable is evaluated utilising the EL scale (ELS) created by Amundsen and Martinsen (2014). The scale assesses leaders' actions in fostering autonomy, motivation and developmental assistance (Amundsen & Martinsen 2014; Ravelonarivo et al. 2024).
- **Job autonomy:** A scale measuring employees' autonomy, independence and discretion in job scheduling and execution was used (Kim & Yong 2018; Pigeon et al. 2017). This measure captures various aspects of autonomy that are crucial for workplace empowerment.
- **Psychological empowerment:** Spreitzer's (1995) PE instrument is assessed using the dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination and influence. This commonly utilised instrument thoroughly evaluates employees' PE (Hassan, Azmat & Uddin 2019; Mokhtarian & Mohammadi 2011; Oliveira et al. 2023).
- **Voice behaviour:** Speech behaviour is assessed by a scale that measures both promotive and prohibitive speech behaviours, evaluating the degree to which employees offer helpful suggestions or articulate concerns regarding organisational matters (Almazrouei & Bani-Melhem 2023; Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2019).

## Data analysis

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (CA) to ensure internal consistency, with prior studies confirming its robustness (Kundu et al. 2019; Mokhtarian & Mohammadi 2011; Prasanthi, Kumar & Mohammed 2023). Construct

validity was evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure that the factor structures aligned with theoretical components from previous research (Kundu et al. 2019; Ravelonarivo et al. 2024; Pigeon et al. 2017). Data analysis was conducted using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS, which was chosen for its effectiveness in handling complex models with multiple components and indicators (Valdez et al. 2023). Given that this is a cross-sectional survey, PLS-SEM was selected as the most appropriate analytical method. Additionally, bootstrapping was conducted to assess the significance of both direct and indirect effects.

## Ethical considerations

This study adhered to internationally accepted ethical research principles to safeguard respondents' rights and well-being. Full ethical approval was obtained from the Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar Ethics Committee (approval number 015/K-7/ST/UNISMUH/II/2025, granted 26 February 2025) before data collection commenced. Participation was entirely voluntary: all respondents provided informed consent after being clearly briefed on the study's aims, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To protect confidentiality and anonymity, coded identifiers were used instead of personal information, and all data were securely stored with access limited to authorised researchers. Respondents were assured that their answers would be used solely for academic purposes and would not influence their employment in state-owned enterprises (BUMN) in Makassar, Indonesia. The recruitment process was free from coercion, deception, or manipulation. Throughout the research, data were collected, analysed, and reported honestly and transparently, in full compliance with the approved protocol and with academic integrity standards.

## Results

### Profile of respondents

The respondents in this study comprised 209 permanent employees from four state-owned enterprises in Makassar City, South Sulawesi: PT Telkom, PT Pelindo, PT PLN and PT Pertamina. According to the company distribution, 39 employees (18.66%) were from PT Telkom, 51 employees (24.40%) from PT Pelindo, 62 employees (29.67%) from PT PLN and 57 employees (27.27%) from PT Pertamina. Respondents exhibit varied characteristics regarding age and tenure. Respondents are categorised into three primary age groups: those aged 21–30 years, predominantly present in PT Telkom and PT PLN; those aged 31–40 years, primarily located in PT Pelindo and PT Pertamina and individuals over 41 years, who are evenly distributed, particularly in PT PLN and PT Pertamina. Respondents with less than 5 years of service were predominantly at PT Telkom and PT PLN, those with 5–10 years of service were primarily at PT Pelindo and individuals with over 10 years of service were generally at PT Pertamina.

## Construct reliability and validity

Convergent validity is assessed by comparing the outer loading values of each measurement indicator with the corresponding variable it represents. Indicators with an outer loading value of less than 0.6 demonstrate weak efficacy in representing the variables within the established model (Hair et al. 2017). The external loading values derived from each indicator in this investigation support this approach, ensuring the robustness of the measurement model and are presented in Table 1.

Figure 2 presents the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) output. The five reflective indicators of empowering leadership (EL1–EL5) all load strongly on their latent construct, with *t*-values ranging from about 4.6 to 11.1, confirming measurement reliability. Job autonomy (JA) is measured by three items (JA1–JA3), each showing substantial loadings ( $\approx 8.4$ – $14.9$ ). Psychological empowerment (PE) is indicated by four items (PE1–PE4), with high *t*-values ( $\approx 4.6$ – $29.3$ ). Voice behaviour (VB) is represented by two items (VB1–VB2), again demonstrating robust loadings ( $\approx 9.6$ – $20.3$ ).

The outer loading values for each measurement instrument corresponding to each variable in our study model, as presented in Table 1, indicate that each instrument effectively represents its respective variable. No instrument had an outer loading value below 0.7, thus demonstrating that each instrument effectively characterises the latent variable it signifies. Based on the calculations carried out by the PLS Algorithm for the indicators in the following table, the average variance extracted (AVE) value and AVE squared value are obtained as in Table 2.

**TABLE 1:** Outer loading values of research variables.

Variable	Indicators	Outer loadings	Decision
EL	EL.1	0.833	Valid
	EL.2	0.879	-
	EL.3	0.890	-
	EL.4	0.858	-
	EL.5	0.726	-
JA	JA.1	0.904	Valid
	JA.2	0.899	-
	JA.3	0.820	-
PE	PE.1	0.834	Valid
	PE.2	0.880	-
	PE.3	0.889	-
	PE.4	0.840	-
VB	VB.1	0.943	Valid
	VB.2	0.903	-

EL, Empowering leadership; VB, voice behaviour; JA, job autonomy; PE, psychological empowerment.

**TABLE 2:** Value of average variance extracted, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha.

Variable	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha
EL	0.704	0.922	0.894
JA	0.766	0.907	0.847
PE	0.741	0.920	0.883
VB	0.852	0.920	0.829

EL, empowering leadership; VB, voice behaviour; JA, job autonomy; PE, psychological empowerment; AVE, average variance extracted.

Table 2 shows that all AVE values above the required 0.5 threshold, with the lowest AVE (EL) at 0.704. Based on the loading factor values in Table 1 and AVE values in Table 2, the study meets the criteria for convergent validity. Next, construct reliability is tested using composite reliability (CR) and CA. A construct is considered reliable if both CR and CA exceed 0.6 (Hair et al. 2017). The results show a CR value of 0.7 and a CA value above 0.6, confirming that all variables – EL, JA, PE and VB – are reliable.

## Structural equation model

The concluding phase of inferential statistical analysis in this study entails hypothesis testing. The method involves comparing the *t*-statistic values with the critical *t*-table values obtained from the relationships among variables in the proposed model. The theories were developed based on theoretical principles and previous studies. This study employs a 95% confidence level, establishing the significance threshold ( $\alpha$ ) at 0.05. This threshold minimises the probability of rejecting a correct null hypothesis (Type I error), hence augmenting the reliability and validity of the results (Hair et al. 2017). Hypotheses are deemed supported if the *t*-statistic surpasses the crucial *t*-value or if the *p*-value is below 0.05 (Hair et al. 2017).

The investigation illustrated in Table 3, indicated that EL does not exert a statistically significant direct influence on VB. The standardised coefficient (Std. Coeff) for this association was 0.081, accompanied by a *t*-value of 0.969 and a *p*-value of 0.333. Given that the *t*-value does not surpass the critical threshold and the *p*-value is above 0.05, the alternative hypothesis H1 is not supported. This suggests that although EL may create a supportive atmosphere, it does not directly influence VB.

The findings indicate a statistically significant and affirmative correlation between EL and JA, evidenced by a standard coefficient of 0.327, a *t*-value of 5.448 and a *p*-value of 0.000. These findings corroborate H2, demonstrating that EL significantly influences employees' perceptions of autonomy in their work. Leaders who delegate authority and encourage independence are likely to enhance JA among their subordinates. The correlation between EL and PE is also large and favourable, with a standard coefficient for this connection of 0.515, accompanied by a *t*-value of 11.778 and a *p*-value of 0.000. The findings corroborate H3, indicating that EL is a crucial catalyst for PE, allowing employees to perceive themselves as more competent, influential and autonomous in their positions.

**TABLE 3:** Partial least squares structural equation modelling path coefficients.

Path	Std. Coeff.	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Test-results
H1: EL $\rightarrow$ VB	0.081	0.969	0.333	Not supported
H2: EL $\rightarrow$ JA	0.327	5.448	0.000	Supported
H3: EL $\rightarrow$ PE	0.515	11.778	0.000	Supported
H4a: EL $\rightarrow$ JA $\rightarrow$ VB	0.042	1.288	0.198	Not supported
H4b: EL $\rightarrow$ PE $\rightarrow$ VB	0.077	1.626	0.105	Not supported

H, hypothesis; EL, empowering leadership; VB, voice behaviour; PE, psychological empowerment; JA, job autonomy; Std. Coeff., standard coefficient.

The mediating effect of JA on the connection between EL and VB was determined to be insignificant. The standardised coefficient for this indirect impact was 0.042, with a *t*-value of 1.288 and a *p*-value of 0.198. As the *t*-value and *p*-value do not satisfy the necessary criteria for significance, hypothesis H4.a is not supported. This indicates that whereas empowered leadership increases JA, the latter does not substantially moderate the relationship with VB in this scenario. The mediating effect of PE on the association between EL and VB was insignificant. The standardised coefficient for this indirect impact was 0.077, with a *t*-value of 1.626 and a *p*-value of 0.105. As these values do not achieve statistical significance, H4.b is not supported. This suggests that while empowered leadership enhances PE, this empowerment does not significantly result in greater vocal behaviour within the parameters of this study.

### Empowering leadership and voice behaviour

Although prior research has indicated that empowered leadership promotes VB by establishing a psychologically safe and supportive atmosphere (Jada & Mukhopadhyay 2018; Zhang et al. 2020), the present investigation revealed no significant direct effect. This gap may stem from contextual factors, such as cultural or organisational dynamics, which could attenuate the impact of leadership styles. Social exchange theory posits that EL fosters reciprocal interactions, prompting people to articulate their thoughts (Qian et al. 2018). Nonetheless, this reciprocity may necessitate further mediators, such as psychological safety or trust, to materialise as voice action. Moreover, the relevance of burden or tasks, as suggested by job features theory, may influence the promotion or suppression of speech behaviour (Tian & Chae 2023). If employees view their workload as onerous or their roles as undervalued, their likelihood of exhibiting VB may decrease, even with empowered leadership present.

### Empowering leadership and job autonomy

The notable correlation between EL and JA corresponds with SDT, which highlights the importance of autonomy in satisfying psychological needs and augmenting intrinsic motivation (Ju et al. 2019; Li et al. 2023a). Empowering leadership provides employees with increased decision-making ability and control over their responsibilities, therefore promoting JA. This association underscores the dual function of empowered leadership as a motivational asset, as delineated in JD-R theory (Li et al. 2023b). Notably, the findings support the notion that JA serves as both a driver and an outcome of EL. By permitting employees to organise their tasks and utilise autonomy, leaders foster a work atmosphere that promotes innovation and proactive behaviour (Alam et al. 2023).

### Empowering leadership and psychological empowerment

The strong positive correlation between EL and PE substantiates empowerment theory, which asserts that

leadership styles prioritising autonomy, support and competence augment employees' intrinsic motivation (Ravelonarivo et al. 2024). Empowering leadership significantly enhances employees' self-efficacy, competence and agency in their roles. Social cognitive theory clarifies this relationship by highlighting cognitive processes such as self-efficacy and perceived control as mediators of leadership efficacy (Fareed et al. 2023). Moreover, social exchange theory emphasises the significance of trust and mutual respect in enhancing the relationship between EL and PE (Lorinkova & Perry 2017).

### Mediating effects of job autonomy and psychological empowerment

Unexpectedly, neither JA nor PE significantly mediated the association between EL and VB. The findings indicate that whereas EL fosters autonomy and PE, other elements may be required to convert these qualities into VB. JA, as articulated by role theory, affords employees the latitude to delineate their responsibilities. The lack of substantial mediation suggests that autonomy alone may be inadequate to promote VB in the absence of psychological safety or organisational support (Cheng et al. 2024). Psychological empowerment, while closely linked to EL, may necessitate additional factors, such as inclusive leadership or high-quality LMX, to effectively facilitate VB (Dennerlein & Kirkman 2023; Younas et al. 2023).

The findings of this study have important implications for organisations, particularly state-owned enterprises (BUMN) in Makassar, Indonesia, seeking to enhance employee VB through leadership practices. While EL significantly increases JA and PE, its direct effect on VB is not evident, suggesting that additional organisational factors, such as psychological safety and supportive workplace culture, may be necessary to encourage proactive employee participation. This highlights the need for organisations to not only focus on leadership development programmes that enhance autonomy and empowerment but also create an environment where employees feel safe and supported in expressing their ideas and concerns. Managers should be trained to provide constructive feedback, actively listen to employees and foster trust to bridge the gap between empowerment and VB. Additionally, organisations should implement policies that reinforce an open communication culture and encourage proactive employee engagement. By addressing these factors, companies can maximise the effectiveness of EL in fostering a workplace culture where employees feel valued and encouraged to contribute, ultimately leading to improved organisational performance and innovation.

### Discussion

The findings of this study have important implications for organisations, particularly state-owned enterprises (BUMN) in Makassar, Indonesia, seeking to enhance employee VB through leadership practices. While EL significantly increases JA and PE, its direct effect on VB is not evident, suggesting



that additional organisational factors, such as psychological safety and supportive workplace culture, may be necessary to encourage proactive employee participation. This highlights the need for organisations to not only focus on leadership development programmes that enhance autonomy and empowerment but also create an environment where employees feel safe and supported in expressing their ideas and concerns. Managers should be trained to provide constructive feedback, actively listen to employees and foster trust to bridge the gap between empowerment and VB. Additionally, organisations should implement policies that reinforce an open communication culture and reward proactive employee engagement. By addressing these factors, companies can maximise the effectiveness of EL in fostering a workplace culture where employees feel valued and encouraged to contribute, ultimately leading to improved organisational performance and innovation.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the essential function of EL in improving occupational autonomy and PE. Nonetheless, its direct influence on vocal behaviour and the intermediary functions of autonomy and PE remain uncertain. These findings underscore the necessity for additional research to elucidate the intricacies of leadership dynamics and their impact on proactive employee behaviour. This research possesses multiple limitations. The cross-sectional design limits the capacity to deduce causal links. Longitudinal research may yield profound insights into the enduring consequences of empowered leadership. The study's emphasis on particular organisational circumstances may restrict the generalisability of its findings. Subsequent research ought to investigate other sectors and cultural contexts to corroborate these findings. Finally, the lack of substantial mediation underscores the necessity to investigate more mediators and moderators, including psychological safety, trust and workload. Creating comprehensive frameworks will improve our comprehension of the mechanisms influencing the connection between EL and VB.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to express their sincere gratitude to the employees of the state-owned enterprises (BUMN) in Makassar for their participation in the study. The author also acknowledges the support of the University of Makassar and the Faculty of Business Administration, who provided valuable insights throughout the research process. Special thanks towards Dr. Ir. H. Abd. Rakhim Nanda, whose guidance in the design and methodology of the study helped shape this research. Also, appreciation goes to the data collection team at the various BUMN offices in Makassar, whose effort in reaching out to respondents was invaluable.

## Competing interests

The author reported that they received funding from Muhammadiyah University, which may be affected by the

research reported in the enclosed publication. The author has disclosed those interests fully and has implemented an approved plan for managing any potential conflicts arising from their involvement. The terms of these funding arrangements have been reviewed and approved by the affiliated university in accordance with its policy on objectivity in research.

## Authors' contribution

M.R. is the sole author of this research article.

## Funding information

This research was funded by the Research Grant from the University of Muhammadiyah Makassar, under the Institutional Research Fund for Organizational Studies (Grant No. 105/2024).

## Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, M.R., upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available because of privacy restrictions involving respondents from state-owned enterprises.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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