

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Power to perform or to delay? Job insecurity moderates the effects of empowering leadership on work procrastination

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Abstract

Past research suggested that empowering leadership may decrease work procrastination and highlighted perceived job insecurity as detrimental to employee attitudes and behaviors. The present cross-sectional study (N = 378 white-collar employees from Romania and the Republic of Moldova) examined the relationship between empowering leadership and workplace procrastination, and the moderating effects of perceived job security controlling for other leadership styles and work-related variables that were previously found to be linked with procrastination. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the interaction between empowering leadership and perceived job security on workplace procrastination was significant. Simple slope analyses showed that the negative effect of empowering leadership on procrastination emerged only in employees with moderate job security. Oppositely, in those with low job security, empowering leadership was associated with higher procrastination. Finally, no significant association emerged between empowering leadership and procrastination in the high job security group. These findings extend current knowledge on the influences of empowering leadership by highlighting job security as a critical factor of the effects of this leadership style on work procrastination.

Keywords

work procrastination; empowering leadership; job insecurity; role ambiguity.

Introduction

Procrastination at work is defined as a self-regulatory failure to carry out an intended work task (Nguyen et al., 2013). In the present study, it is conceptualized as a negative and non-productive form of work-related activity.

Metin et al. (2016) developed the Procrastination at Work Scale (PAWS) to assess and examine specific forms of employee work behavior. Within this framework, procrastination at work refers to delaying work-related actions by engaging, either behaviorally or cognitively, in activities

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unrelated to work tasks, without the intention of harming the employer, colleagues, or clients. The authors distinguish between two main forms: soldiering and cyberslacking. Soldiering refers to avoiding work tasks through offline behaviors such as taking longer breaks or daydreaming, without intending to harm others or shift responsibilities onto colleagues. Cyberslacking, in contrast, involves using the internet or mobile devices for personal purposes during work hours, such as browsing social media or online shopping (Metin et al., 2016).

Procrastination at work affects both the organization and the employees, generating high costs (Nguyen et al., 2013), low quality of work caused by performing tasks in a hurry (Metin et al., 2018), decreased work performance and productivity (Metin et al., 2018). Employees who procrastinate at work, on the other hand, face high levels of stress (Wan et al., 2014), low job engagement (Metin et al., 2018), and emotional exhaustion (Gu et al., 2022). This broad range of detrimental effects emphasizes how crucial it is to identify the risk factors for work procrastination.

Leadership plays an essential role in shaping employees' motivation, behaviour, and engagement in work tasks. Leaders influence not only the way work is structured and resources are distributed, but also how employees perceive their roles, their confidence in their own abilities, and the psychological climate of the organization (Cheong et al., 2016; Fernández-Muñiz et al., 2017; Tummers & Bakker, 2021), factors considered important antecedents of workplace procrastination. This study focuses on empowering leadership, which has yet to be examined in relation to work procrastination. Empowering leadership has become increasingly important in the current economic context, as organizations rely on leadership practices that enhance employee motivation, self-efficacy and autonomy (Sun et al., 2025; Xiang et al., 2020). Furthermore, this study also considers job insecurity as a potential factor that may limit the effectiveness of empowering leadership on procrastination. Many employees perceive their job as insecure, an experience that was

found to have negative impacts on their work attitudes and behaviors. Nevertheless, there is a gap in the existing knowledge about whether job insecurity can also hinder the influences of positive organizational practices, such as empowering leadership, on counterproductive behaviors. The present study aims to address this gap by investigating the impact of empowering leadership on procrastination at work and the moderating effect of employees' job security on this impact.

Antecedents of workplace procrastination

Previous research suggests that workplace procrastination may be fostered by several negative psychological and organizational factors, including high levels of stress and fatigue, low work engagement, and reduced intrinsic motivation (DeArmond et al., 2014; Lin, 2018; Metin et al., 2018; Wan et al., 2014). Additionally, burnout, role overload, and psychological strain have also been identified as factors associated with higher tendencies toward procrastination at work (DeArmond et al., 2014; Gu et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2022; Sirois, 2023). At the organizational level, poor leadership, favoritism, bureaucracy, low organizational identification, and counterproductive work environments may further contribute to the development of workplace procrastination (De Clercq et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2022; Metin et al., 2018; Vveinhardt & Sroka, 2022).

Recent findings indicate the importance of team leadership for the occurrence of workplace procrastination. Specifically, leader-member exchange was found to reduce workplace procrastination by entailing high-quality relationships between leaders and their followers (De Clercq et al., 2022). Also, transformational leadership, paternalistic leadership (Göncü Köse & Metin, 2018), and inclusive leadership (Lin, 2018) have emerged as negatively associated with employees' procrastination behaviors. Other research findings further suggest that transactional and laissez-faire styles of leadership foster workplace procrastination (Bass, 2000; Musteață & Holman, 2025; Singh et al., 2021).

Empowering leadership and workplace procrastination

Empowering leadership focuses on delegating authority, providing support, encouraging autonomy and self-management (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015; Arnold et al., 2000), and a sense of psychological ownership (Kim & Beehr, 2017) among team members. Empowering leaders display trust in the capabilities of their team members and aim to facilitate their growth and development (Matsuo et al., 2019). This type of leadership has numerous benefits for the organization and its members, enhancing employees' general mental health (Tripathi & Bharadwaja, 2020) and work-related factors such as thriving at work (Li et al., 2016), satisfaction (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015), work engagement (Alotaibi et al., 2020), trust in the leader (Raziq et al., 2025), organizational commitment (Harris et al., 2014), organizational citizenship behavior (Raziq et al., 2025), individual innovative behavior and learning orientation (Mutonyi et al., 2020). Furthermore, empowering leadership increases psychological empowerment (Alotaibi et al., 2020; Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015; Tripathi & Bharadwaja, 2020), consequently fostering intrinsic motivation (Zhang & Bartol, 2010) and work effort (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015). Besides these psychological benefits, empowering leadership was also found to be associated with higher work performance (Vecchio et al., 2010) and task performance (Harris et al., 2014), better leader-member-exchange (Hassan et al., 2013) and stronger work group cohesiveness (Mutonyi et al., 2020). Moreover, several of factors listed above, such as intrinsic motivation (Lin, 2018), work engagement (Metin et al., 2018), organizational citizenship behaviors (Göncü Köse & Metin, 2018), or leader-member-exchange (De Clercq et al., 2022) were also found to have a significant influence in reducing procrastination in the workplace.

Although prior research has not directly examined the relationship between empowering leadership and workplace procrastination, self-determination theory provides a strong theoretical basis for expecting such an association. According to

this perspective, the satisfaction of employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhances intrinsic motivation and self-regulation, thereby reducing maladaptive behaviors such as procrastination (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2023). Empowering leadership is characterized by behaviors that promote autonomy, participation, and confidence in employees, which align closely with the fulfillment of these psychological needs (Arnold et al., 2000). Previous studies have shown that empowering leadership fosters psychological empowerment and psychological ownership (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015; Tripathi & Bharadwaja, 2020). In turn, research indicates that these psychological states are associated with lower levels of procrastination (Kausar et al., 2025). Furthermore, empowering leadership was positively linked to intrinsic motivation among employees (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), which is negatively associated with procrastination, as employees who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to engage proactively in their tasks and are less likely to delay or engage in non-work-related activities (Lin, 2018). Additionally, prior research indicates that empowering leadership reduces counterproductive work behaviors (Jacques et al., 2023) and specific procrastinating behavior at work, such as time theft or unauthorized non-work-related activities (Kim & Beehr, 2021; Lorinkova & Perry, 2017). Therefore, we anticipate a negative impact of empowering leadership on workplace procrastination, as these leaders empower employees by giving them the resources, guidance, and trust (Kim & Beehr, 2021) needed to take initiative and make decisions, therefore having the potential to prevent or decrease employee workplace procrastination.

H1: Empowering leadership is negatively related to workplace procrastination.

Perceived job security and workplace procrastination

The evolving nature of work has diversified the contexts in which employees operate, amplifying the complexity of these dynamics. Within this context, job insecurity has

emerged as a critical factor, being widely recognized as one of the most hazardous work stressors in the twenty-first century. Perceived job security is a set of emotions and perceptions about the durability of one's job in the current company in relation to the factors that may threaten it (Lazarus, 1990). The results of a meta-analysis (Sverke et al., 2002) indicate that job insecurity has detrimental consequences on employees' work and organizational attitudes, health, and, to some extent, their behaviors within the organization. Past research found that job insecurity negatively impacts task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, safety behavior, and counterproductive work behavior, as well as work motivation and effort, work engagement, burnout, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, presenteeism, and strain-related outcomes such as anxiety and work-life conflict (Charkhabi et al., 2024; Jiang, & Lavaysse, 2018), which are closely associated with self-regulation difficulties and avoidance behaviors such as procrastination (Göncü Köse & Metin, 2018; Gu et al., 2022; Lin, 2018; Metin et al., 2016; 2018; Wan et al., 2014).

This process can be further understood through Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which suggests that employment relationships are governed by reciprocal exchanges. When employees perceive job insecurity, they may interpret it as a failure of the organization to uphold its obligations, prompting them to reciprocate negatively. As a result, employees may reduce constructive behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behaviors, and increase destructive behaviors, including counterproductive work behaviors (Jiang et al., 2022). Furthermore, employees who perceive their jobs as insecure tend to lower their involvement in their work tasks (Cheng & Chan, 2008). This motivational effect aligns with the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), as job insecurity signals threats to valuable resources such as income, stability, and professional identity, leading employees to adopt resource-conservation strategies and thus lower their work efforts. In this context, procrastination may function as a short-term mechanism to preserve energy and

psychological resources, even though it is ultimately detrimental in the long term (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2022). Consequently, job insecurity may cancel or at least diminish the positive influence of empowering leadership on the key psychological states that deter procrastination, such as intrinsic motivation and psychological ownership (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). In this rationale, we anticipate that low job security deters the positive influence of empowering leadership in attenuating procrastination.

H2: Job security moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and workplace procrastination, such that the negative effect of empowering leadership on procrastination is weaker among employees with low job security compared to those with high job security.

Aims of the present study

The present study aims to examine the relationship between empowering leadership and workplace procrastination in a sample of white-collar employees in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. We expect employees who evaluate their leaders as displaying to a higher degree the behaviors characterizing empowering leadership to procrastinate less. We also aim to investigate the moderating effect of perceived job security in this pattern of relationships. While investigating these relationships, we also aim to control for the effects of other leadership styles that previous studies found to influence employees' tendency to procrastinate, i.e., transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles (Göncü Köse & Metin, 2018; Singh et al., 2021), as well as the variations in procrastinations associated to country, age (Gu et al., 2022), gender (De Clercq et al., 2022), tenure (Gu et al., 2022), employment status (full-time vs. part-time; Nguyen et al., 2013), and work model (office vs. remote; Hen et al., 2021).

Method

Participants and procedure

An online survey was conducted from June to December 2024 in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The survey was disseminated using researchers' professional and social networks, and mentioned as inclusion criteria being currently employed in a white-collar job, involving knowledge-based, managerial, or administrative work in an office or a similar setting, i.e., physicians, lawyers, engineers, teachers, psychologists, public clerks, human resources specialists, administration (supervisor, manager, director), finance (accountant), and technology (e.g., developer, system engineer). The survey included an informed consent section explaining the research goals and ensuring participants about data anonymity and confidentiality. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty to which the authors are affiliated (reference number 1178).

A total of 394 individuals completed the survey, out of which 16 did not meet the inclusion criteria and were excluded from the final sample, which included 378 participants, 46.3% ($N = 175$) working in Romania and 53.7% ($N = 203$) in the Republic of Moldova. Most respondents ($N = 276$, 73.0%) were female, and their age varied between 20 and 73 years ($M = 38.99$ years, $SD = 11.54$). The majority of the participants had at least a bachelor's degree (92.1%) and over 5 years of tenure (70.6%), with 93.9% having a full-time program. About 74.6% were working in the office, 20.1 % had a hybrid work model (combining remote work with on-site work), and 5.3% were working remotely (i.e., online).

Measures

Empowering leadership was measured using the 38-item Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (Arnold et al., 2000). Each item describes a behavior displayed by the leader. "My manager sets high standards for performance by his/her own behavior." Participants indicated to what extent it is used by their supervisor on a Likert scale from 1 = "Never" to 5 = "Always". (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$).

Job security was measured with the Job Security Scale (Oldham et al., 1986). An example item is: "I will be able to keep my present job as long as I wish." Participants rated the items on a Likert scale from 1 = "Totally disagree" to 7 = "Totally agree" ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Work procrastination was measured using the 12-item Work Procrastination Scale (Metin et al., 2016). Items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = "Never" to 6 = "Always". An example item is: "When I work, even after I make decision, I delay acting upon it." ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership were measures using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Form 6-S (Vinger & Cilliers, 2006). An example item is: "My manager enables others to think about old problems in new ways." The items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 = "not at all" to 4 = "frequently, if not always". In this study, Cronbach's α was 0.96 for transformational leadership, 0.86 for transactional leadership, and 0.70 for laissez-faire leadership.

The survey also included items collecting sociodemographic data, i.e., current country of residence (Romania vs. Republic of Moldova), age, gender, tenure (years of service in the current company: under 1 year, 1 to 3 years, 3 to 5 years, over 5 years), education, work program (full-time vs. part-time) and work model (office vs. hybrid vs. remote).

Data analysis

First, we analyzed the normality of the distributions of the study variables and examined their associations through Pearson correlations. Second, we used multiple regression analysis to investigate the moderating effect of perceived job security on the relationship between empowering leadership and workplace procrastination, while controlling for transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles, country, age, gender, education, tenure, employment status and work model. To this aim, we created the interaction term accounting for the moderating effect under scrutiny as the product between the scores on

the perceived job security and those on the empowering leadership scale, and we introduced it as predictor in the regression analysis. As work model is a categorical variable with more than two levels, we dummy coded it with “remote” as the reference group. Finally, we used simple slope analyses to examine the relationships between empowering leadership and workplace procrastination at specific values of perceived job security, i.e., low, moderate and high. All analyses were performed in SPSS 26.

Results

The descriptive statistics of the four main variables in our hypothesized model and the three leadership styles we measured to control their effects are presented in Table 1. All Skewness and Kurtosis values were within the 2/-2 limit, indicating the normality of the distributions (Hair et al., 2022). The Pearson correlations (see Table I) indicated weak positive relationships between workplace procrastination and all four leadership styles measured. Workplace procrastination was not significantly linked to job security.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between the main study variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Empowering Leadership	3.54	1.06	-.45	-.97	-					
2. Job Security	5.00	1.43	-.52	-.60	.48**	-				
3.Workplace Procrastination	1.82	1.18	.71	.30	.15**	-.06	-			
4.Transformational leadership	2.46	1.09	-.44	-.78	.79**	.45**	.11*	-		
5.Transactionall leadership	2.59	.95	-.53	-.30	.79**	.42**	.13*	.89**	-	
6.Laissez-faire leadership	2.25	.92	-.15	-.33	.59**	.31**	.11*	.69**	.64**	-

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

The results of the regression analyses indicate that the set of predictors explained 17% of the variance in procrastination, $F(13, 377) = 5.67, p < .001$. The effect of empowering leadership on procrastination was not significant, $b = .13; SE = .15; p = .39$, while the interaction between empowering leadership and job security was significant, $b = -.03; SE = .01; p = .03$. Therefore, we explored this moderation by examining the effect of empowering leadership on procrastination at each level of job security. To this aim, we split the sample in three groups, i.e., low (participants scoring lower than $M - 1 SD$ on the job security measure), moderate (participants with job security scores between $M - 1 SD$ and $M + 1 SD$) and high

(above $M + 1 SD$). The same set of variables were controlled in these analyses as in the previous. Results (see Table 2) showed that in employees with low job security, empowering leadership was a significant and positive predictor of procrastination. In the moderate job security group, empowering leadership had a negative effect on procrastination, while in the high job security group, this effect was not significant.

Table 2. Regression model for workplace procrastination at each level of job security

Variables	Job Security								
	Low			Moderate			High		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	B
Empowering Leadership	.66**	.19	.51*	-.51**	.16	-.44**	.34	.54	.26
Transformational leadership	-.18	.31	-.14	.13	.19	.12	-.47	.52	-.40
Transactional leadership	.18	.25	.13	.35*	.17	.27*	.30	.37	.23
Laissez-faire leadership	.01	.16	.01	.27*	.11	.21*	-.07	.29	-.04
Country	.16	.24	.07	-.09	.15	-.04	-.56	.33	-.24
Gender	-.27	.26	-.10	-.19	.17	-.07	-.86*	.41	-.31*
Age	-.03*	.01	-.30*	-.02**	.01	-.22**	-.02	.02	-.23
Education	-.02	.12	-.02	-.03	.09	-.02	-.33	.21	-.22
Tenure	-.17	.19	-.11	-.11	.10	-.09	.01	.25	.01
Employment status (full vs. part time)	-.06	.49	-.01	-.26	.30	-.06	-1.60	1.46	-.17
In-office vs. remote	.09	.34	.03	-.30	.17	-.12	-.01	.47	-.01
Hybrid vs. remote	-.72	.66	-.12	.05	.33	.01	-1.10	.94	-.20
Adjusted R ²		.38**			.15**			.11	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

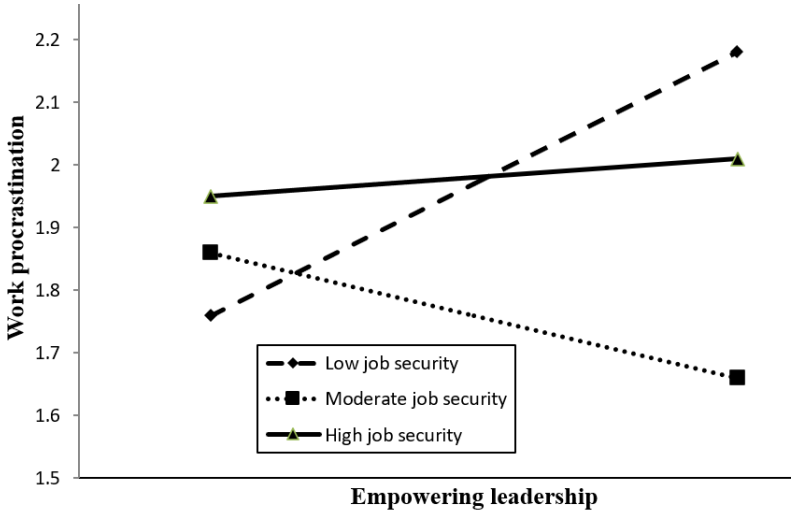


Figure 1 The relationship between empowering leadership and work procrastination in employees with low, moderate and high job security

Discussion

This study examined the impact of empowering leadership on procrastination at work and the role and job security in this relationship. Its main findings indicate that the relationship between empowering leadership and procrastination depends on employees' perceived job security. Specifically, we found that in employees with low job security empowering leadership had a positive association with procrastination, while the opposite relationship emerged in the moderate job security group. There was no effect of this leadership style on high job security employees' tendency to procrastinate at work.

Past research suggests that empowering leadership may decrease procrastination at work, mainly because it increases employees' work engagement, intrinsic motivation and work effort (Alotaibi et al., 2020; Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), which are negatively related to workplace procrastination (Lin, 2018; Metin et al., 2018). Moreover, other studies found negative links between empowering leadership and specific aspects related to procrastination, such as time theft, involvement in unauthorized non-work-related activities during paid work hours and psychological withdrawal from work duties (Kim & Beehr, 2021; Lorinkova & Perry, 2017). Nevertheless, our findings suggest that this negative effect may emerge only in employees with moderate job security. Oppositely, employees who perceive their jobs as insecure procrastinate more when they are managed in an empowering manner. This effect may emerge because of several unintended consequences of empowering leadership that could foster procrastination under circumstances of low job security. First, the high autonomy that this leadership style offers employees can increase their role ambiguity (Lin et al., 2023), and this uncertainty about their job was found to induce cyberloafing, i.e., the use of the internet for nonwork purposes during working hours (Peng et al., 2023). Relatedly, Hen (2018) found professional role ambiguity to stimulate procrastination. In general, this effect is cancelled by an opposite influence of empowering leadership, that of increasing

organization-based self-esteem (Peng et al., 2023). But critically, this type of self-esteem is drastically affected by low job security, as suggested by the negative effect of job insecurity on organizational commitment (e.g., Haq et al., 2022), while the positive effect of empowering leadership on procrastination via role ambiguity may remain unaffected.

Moreover, job insecurity decreases job involvement (Cheng & Chan, 2008), therefore these employees may have lower expectations regarding job empowerment. When employees' empowerment expectations are overestimated by leaders, they experience high role ambiguity and low intrinsic motivation (Humborstad & Kuvaas, 2013), which were previously linked to procrastination (Lin, 2018). Consequently, this may represent another route by which implementing empowering leadership practices of delegating authority and encouraging autonomy in work environments where employees perceive their jobs as insecure may foster procrastination. Finally, job insecurity is a psychologically straining experience, which often creates emotional exhaustion, i.e., employees' sense of fatigue and overwhelming because of this continuous stress (e.g., Piccoli & De Witte, 2015). Therefore, employees perceiving their jobs as insecure may react to the autonomy offered by empowering leaders contrarily to their managers' expectations, by focusing on acts aimed at regulating their negative emotional state instead of their work duties and consequently procrastinating their tasks.

Our findings further suggest that in the group of employees with high job security empowering leadership has no effect on work procrastination. This may be because these employees may feel more confident in exercising the increased autonomy offered by this leadership style, which could paradoxically lead to increased procrastination. Furthermore, empowering leadership can increase role overload (Lin et al., 2023), which was found to be positively linked to work procrastination (Huang et al., 2022). Another unintended but potentially relevant effect of this leadership style is that of

increasing employees' job induced tension, as a consequence of the high autonomy and ambiguity that it entails and that can psychologically burden employees (Cheong et al., 2016). Employees who feel secure about their jobs may react to this tension by taking more time to carefully consider their decisions, feeling confident enough to delay their work tasks without any fear of negative consequences.

These somewhat paradoxical effects of empowering leadership in interaction with job security are consonant with past findings highlighting several boundary conditions limiting the amplitude of the benefits of this leadership style. In their review of research examining the influences of empowering leadership on work-related outcomes in general, Cheong and colleagues (2019) highlighted three categories of factors moderating these effects, i.e., contextual factors (e.g., team experience), leader factors (e.g., trust in leader), and employee factors (e.g., resistance to change). Our findings contribute to this body of knowledge by emphasizing job security as a critical factor of the valence and intensity of the effects of empowering leadership on workplace procrastination.

This study has several limitations, including its cross-sectional design that cannot test causality among the model variables and its use of a self-report measure of work procrastination instead of actual objective measurements. Also, the inclusion of only white-collar employees in its sample limits the generalizability of its findings, since they represent a specific category of employees in terms of their work location, type of duties and educational background (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016). Moreover, further studies are needed to examine whether the pattern of relationships pinpointed by our findings adequately reflects the dynamics in employee samples from other countries. Also, the mediators we suggested as potentially intervening in the relationships between empowering leadership, job security and procrastination, such as role ambiguity or excessive empowerment relative to employee expectations, should be empirically examined by future research.

In terms of practical implications, our findings suggest that managers should

consider using empowering leadership depending on employees' job security, as this leadership style may foster procrastination in employees with insecure jobs. Furthermore, excessive empowerment at elevated levels of job security may result in diminished urgency and heightened procrastination. In general, managers must adapt their approach to guarantee that their empowerment practices foster employee motivation and effort instead of procrastination and guarantee that, while empowering employees, they nevertheless furnish adequate structure, guidance, and accountability. Practical measures may include establishing explicit objectives and timelines, consistent feedback or integrating performance indicators to ensure accountability, even for staff who perceive their employment as secure. Also, explicit communication to mitigate false apprehensions about job security is also recommended.

To conclude, the results of this study indicate that empowering leadership is negatively related to work procrastination in employees with moderate job security but has the opposite effect in those who perceive their jobs as insecure. In employees with high job security, empowering leadership emerged as unrelated to procrastination.

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