



Impact of Empowering Leadership on Helping Behavior: A perspective of Moral Obligation and Islamic Work Ethics

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of empowering leadership on helping behavior, the mediating effect of moral obligation, and the moderating effect of Islamic work ethics, based on social cognitive theory. For this purpose, we have collected data using simple random sampling with a sample size of 250 respondents. The unit of analysis constitutes frontline employees and senior managerial staff in the hospitality industry in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to improve the generalizability of the results. We find that empowerment is a process by which managers extend value and self-confidence to their employees, encouraging them to work ethically and honestly and to exhibit helping behavior at work. Social cognitive theory is used to underpin our conceptual model, positing that people learn and acquire behavior by observing others. Our findings reveal that hospitality workers express concerns about helping behavior, which is an effective strategy for increasing employee satisfaction and providing services that distinguish them from their competitors.

Keywords: Empowering leadership, helping behavior, moral obligation, Islamic work ethics, social cognitive theory.

JEL Classification: M2, M9, M50, M60.

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1. Introduction

Leadership behavior is regarded as a key antecedent for organizational citizenship behavior. Empowering leadership is directly linked to employees' service-oriented leadership style, which is positively associated with transformational leadership and the extra-mile role, aligning with the concept of social exchange (Auh et al., 2014). The literature suggests that leaders' empowerment exists primarily within the formal management structure, focusing on building trust and the authority granted by subordinates. This is where customer-empowering behavior occurs directly within the service delivery process. This is considered an area where leaders cannot continuously exert influence, which results in giving more autonomy, authority, and a sense of participation to employees at critical moments (Chen et al., 2024). Empowered leaders are exceedingly beneficial to organizations, encouraging employees to perform ethically, which in turn improves work performance.

According to the World Happiness Report for 2022, prosocial activities—such as helping, supporting, and donating—have increased globally since the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the period between 2017 and 2019 (Rowan, 2022). Hence, this study focuses on various trends, including prosocial behavior and employee wellbeing. Prosocial behavior is defined as a voluntary action that benefits others or society, demonstrating extra-mile behavior without personal gain (Gilbert & Basran, 2019). It includes helping, sharing and showing concern and empathy, bringing positive outcomes to the workplace. The empirical evidence suggests that this has beneficial effects, such as making others happy, prosocial spending on others, and even kindness-based meditations, which increase employees' prosocial engagement (Chen et al., 2024).

A key concept associated with prosocial behavior is the Islamic work ethic (Alqhaiwi et al., 2024). Past studies have highlighted the significance of Islamic work ethics, which define a set of principles and moral values, such as kindness and loyalty. The teachings of the Quran and Sunnah emphasize that Muslims should work hard by applying Islamic teachings and Quranic

law to their everyday life. Teachings on Islamic work ethics promote honesty and transparency, which are beneficial for all followers. Islamic ethical values differ from the Western concept of ethics in terms of beliefs, values, and their perception as they focus on the importance of the environment, which is an essential part of Islamic values and beliefs (Khalid et al., 2024).

Islamic work ethics encourage employees to voluntarily demonstrate positive conduct, such as being cooperative when others are in need and recognizing the importance of putting effort into activities that benefit other human beings. Strong Islamic work ethics can translate into an enhanced propensity for engaging in positive behavior and increased wellbeing, as such behavior fuels intrinsic joy and drives satisfaction (De Clercq et al., 2019). Islamic work ethics thus direct employees to demonstrate responsibility, fulfill their mandate, make rational decisions, and show honesty, faith, and discipline at work (Suryani et al., 2023). According to Akhmadi et al. (2023), Islamic work ethics are also associated with positive intentions and proactive behaviors, including organizational citizenship behavior, helping behavior, employee voice behaviors, innovative behavior, thriving in the workplace, and knowledge-sharing behaviors.

A meta-analysis by Gotowiec & van Mastrigt (2019) shows that there is a positive relationship between prosocial behavior and an individual's moral values. Helping a friend, participating in organizational voluntary programs, raising sustainability awareness, donating blood, showing concern, empathizing, and sympathizing are all examples of prosocial behavior. Morality is defined as the degree to which prosocial behavior is fundamental to a person's identity.

This study, grounded in social cognitive theory (SCT), analyzes the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' helping behavior, with moral obligation mediating this relationship. We further determine how Islamic work ethics moderate the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' moral obligation. SCT has made an important contribution to the processes of cognition, substitution, self-reflection, and self-regulation. In the field of organization, three aspects of SCT have received special attention: cognitive skills, behavioral and social abilities, and cultivating people's beliefs in their abilities to apply them effectively (Zhao & Zhou, 2021).

This study adds to the literature on employee helping behavior in the context of empowering leadership in the hospitality sector. This includes employees' proactive or reactive actions that respond to the needs of individuals at work. For example, customers may show distinctive needs and hospitality employees often go the extra mile to accommodate them. This helping behavior is a non-routine aspect of job behavior. Moreover, hospitality services often comprise concentrated, sequential efforts made by employees across various departments. Building teamwork and association is thus crucial for the successful delivery of services, which demonstrates that helping behavior is positively associated with service quality, organizational effectiveness, employee participation, and customer satisfaction (Hwang et al., 2021).

The first part of this study aims to assess the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' helping behavior by incorporating mediating and moderating models of moral obligation and Islamic work ethics. Following this, we review the literature relevant to our targeted variables of empowering leadership, helping behavior, moral obligation, and Islamic work ethics through the theoretical lens of SCT. The third part of the study discusses the study's methodological design. This is followed by a discussion of our findings and their implications.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

SCT provides a useful theoretical background for our conceptual model. It describes prosocial behavior as a form of behavior that is learned through the process of socialization and observational learning. Hence, these social behaviors are shaped through social interactions or through social learning processes. These social learning principles and patterns operate in the same way across different types of behaviors, demonstrating the same effect for prosocial and antisocial behavior (Busching & Krahé, 2020).

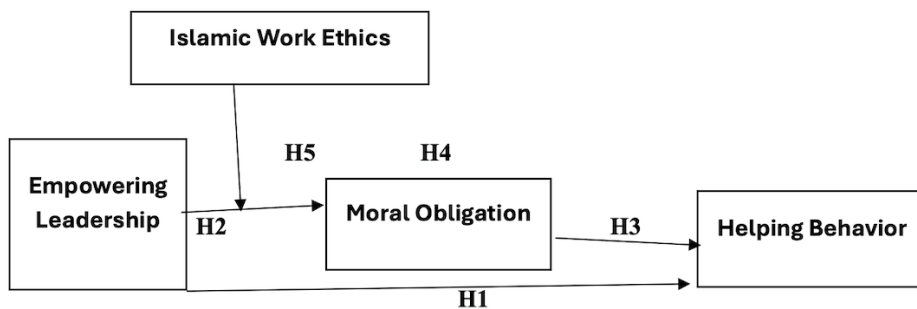
Drawing on SCT, when individuals are empowered, they are given authority, autonomy, and ownership to carry out their responsibilities and make useful decisions at the workplace (Sukoco et al., 2022). Moreover, SCT identifies various types of helping behavior that rely on social cognitive capacities as well as various types of motivation. Helping, showing concern for people, and comforting others reflect a recognition of psychological states such as anxiety, emotional distress, unmet desires, and unfulfilled goals that require distinctive behavioral responses. This is done by

sacrificing one's own limited resources and providing verbal or physical support to others (Stout et al., 2021). According to SCT, individuals' behaviors are shaped by their self-regulation, which can be influenced by moral standards and a code of conduct based on self-sanctioning. Moral standards such as Islamic work ethics thus activate cognitive self-regulatory processes and enforce moral obligation practices (Alqhaiwi et al., 2024).

2.1. Conceptual Model

Helping behavior is a voluntary mechanism through which employees and co-workers share useful information, fulfill customer requests, and address personal matters to outperform in the organization (Hwang et al., 2021). We propose that empowering leadership is statistically significant and positively related to employees' helping behavior. There is also a positive indirect effect whereby moral obligation mediates between empowering leadership and helping behavior. Additionally, Islamic work ethics moderate the positive association between empowering leadership and moral obligation, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework based on SCT



2.2. Empowering Leadership and Helping Behavior

Empowering leadership delegates authority to subordinates and fosters self-control, self-responsibility, and self-autonomy, thereby enhancing internal motivation (Chiang & Chen 2021). According to the literature, there is also a negative side to empowering leadership. For instance, studies have found that leaders' empowering behavior positively increases job performance, voice behavior, organizational commitment, knowledge-sharing behavior, and employees' extra effort. However, increasing evidence suggests that empowering leadership is not always beneficial in the workplace. For instance, a close examination of the concept

shows how these behaviors might lead to outcomes that are less positive and even negative (Sun & Akhtar, 2022).

Prosocial behavior is considered helping behavior in which people help others without expectation, for example, by giving their time to charities or caring for family and friends (Pfattheicher et al., 2022). Empowering leadership can positively influence the helping behavior of employees, leading to organizational citizenship behavior (Wang et al., 2023).

According to SCT, individuals do not learn every behavior that they observe, except for behaviors that can produce valued outcomes. SCT states that empowering leaders help achieve better task performance goals by underscoring affiliated helping behaviors, thereby helping to improve the effective functioning of the organization. In turn, employees experience competence and a sense of learning that can increase helping and set moral values at work (Chen et al., 2020).

In addition, empowering leaders in the top management motivate employees to show authority and autonomy in the workplace, which also helps the latter voice their thoughts. This helps employees understand the goals of the organization, letting them envision how their work contributes to it (Makwetta et al., 2021). Empowering leaders thus create interpersonal relationships that are beneficial for effective operations (Sun & Akhtar 2022).

Empowering leadership delegates authority and offers employees more autonomy in problem-solving and decision-making processes through which the latter perceive themselves as having a higher status at the workplace. In response to this behavior, they will repay the organization by engaging in extra-role behavior (Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, we form the following hypothesis.

H1: Empowering leadership is positively related to employees' helping behavior.

2.3. Empowering Leadership and Moral Obligation

Empowering leadership refers to behavior directed at individuals or teams in which authority is delegated to employees, thereby promoting self-directed autonomous behavior (Lin et al., 2023). Moral obligation occurs

when a person participates in a specific act born out of their obligation to perform prosocial behavior. This is then taken to be an individual predisposition—a tendency to help another individual in the workplace (Müller et al., 2021).

According to social exchange theory, individual behaviors are shaped by self-sanctions and a moral code of conduct. These underlying codes of conduct activate the individual's cognitive self-regulation processes for adhering to moral standards (Alqhaiwi et al., 2024). According to the literature, empowering leadership heightens followers' propensity to achieve the organization's mission, which involves the extent to which a follower feels a moral obligation to support such a mission. Empowering leaders foster favorable relationships marked by moral obligation and reciprocity, whereby followers are encouraged to repay their leaders in ways that benefit the organization (Wang et al., 2023). Decuyper & Schaufeli (2021) identify various styles of leadership, including servant, authentic, ethical, and empowering leadership. These styles share a common goal: to be a moral manager who supports employees' self-determination. This helps foster positive exchange among employees and supportive behavior. This aligns with shifts from more inspirational to more moral leadership, with a framework that actively relies on ethical norms, values, morality, empathy, and service. Accordingly, we present the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a positive relationship between empowering leadership and moral obligation.

2.4. Moral Obligation and Helping Behavior

Moral obligation is defined as the obligation of an individual to perform or not perform an act. The literature indicates that when an individual engages in unethical behavior, they are more likely to consider their own feelings of moral obligation and responsibility than external pressure (Lai et al., 2024).

Employee helping behavior is a voluntary act that helps coworkers overcome behavioral and work-related barriers that indirectly affect the organization. It aims to meet the organization's needs by achieving high performance levels. This can include meeting goals and objectives, sharing resources, and cooperating with colleagues. Improving employees' helping behavior is considered an effective strategy for increasing customer

satisfaction by offering more competitive services (Zhao & Guo, 2019). Additionally, as Müller et al. (2021) observe, an individual's moral and personal norms are strong determinants of prosocial behavior. Based on this discussion, we present the following hypothesis.

H3: Moral obligation is positively related to employees' helping behavior.

2.5. Empowering Leadership, Moral Obligation and Helping Behavior

As discussed above, empowering leadership focuses on increasing employees' participation in decision-making and on providing greater autonomy. This, in turn, can lead to high in-role behavior (Kundu et al., 2019). Moral obligation concerns the extent to which an employee feels obligated to act morally or immorally when faced with an ethical dilemma and has a strong impact on their ethical behavior and decision-making. Empowering leaders thus develop favorable relationships that are marked by strong mutual obligation and reciprocity at work (Zhang et al., 2021).

In the hospitality industry, extra-mile and helping behaviors are directed toward sharing useful information and fulfilling extraordinary requests. The literature on employees' helping behavior underscores the importance of corporate social responsibility activities, leader-member exchange behavior, job satisfaction, and servant leadership.

Prosocial behavior is associated with a broad range of behaviors such as helping, sharing, and cooperating, in which employees consider it a moral obligation to benefit others or themselves (De Groot & Steg, 2009). In addition, employees sense a moral obligation to respond to social exchange behaviors. Individuals who engage in moral behavior or pro-organization behavior are more likely to gain long-term benefits from their organization (Wang et al., 2023). Based on the above discussion, we derive the following hypothesis.

H4: Moral obligation mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and helping behavior.

2.6. Moderating Role of Islamic Work Ethics

Islamic work ethics denote the fundamentals of what is right and wrong according to the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. They also promote the self-interest of individuals economically and psychologically by

increasing the latter's social prestige and reaffirming their faith. Ethics in Islam cover all facets of life—moral, physical, and spiritual. Practicing Islamic work ethics prevents employees from misusing their empowerment in the workplace (Mubarak et al., 2002).

Organizations can increase their overall effectiveness to the extent that they rely on voluntary employee behavior, which enables employees to outperform in the workplace, while Islamic work ethics enhance collaboration and promote morally responsible conduct (De Clercq et al., 2018). Employees who show concern for moral obligation in their organization are also, in one sense, aligned with Islamic work ethics (Wu et al., 2021). Accordingly, we present the following hypothesis:

H5: Islamic work ethics moderate the relationship between empowering leadership and moral obligation.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This section describes the sampling techniques used, the size of the sample, time horizon, measurement of scale items, and unit of analysis. Our aim is to derive causal relationships in the context of empowering leadership by identifying the mediating effect of moral obligation and the moderating role of Islamic work ethics on employees' helping behavior.

The data collected is quantitative and our research approach deductive. We have used simple random sampling techniques to acquire responses that help reduce the likelihood of introducing selection bias. The level of analysis centers on front-line employees and managerial staff in the hospitality sector, including hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and event management firms based in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

A sample of 250 respondents was drawn following Hair et al. (2017), who use the rule-of-thumb method for better generalizability of results. This is a longitudinal study that relies on a time lag method in which primary data is collected at three different intervals (T1, T2, and T3). At T1, data on demographic factors and empowering leadership was collected (with a response rate of 70%). At T2, data on moral obligation and Islamic work

ethics was collected (with a response rate of 80%). At T3, data on helping behavior was collected (with a response rate of 75%). The analysis was carried out using various statistical tools and packages, including SPSS (V.23.0), Process Model 4, and SMARTPLS (V.4.1.1). The analytical methods used included reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity, followed by a descriptive analysis. Other techniques included Pearson correlation, structural equation modeling, discriminant analysis, regression analysis, and process model 7. These techniques were used for direct, indirect, and moderation analysis.

3.2. Scales and Measures

All items were measured on a five-point uniform scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), given that the Likert scale is considered an effective method for measuring employee behavior. All validated items were adapted from previously recognized scales to ensure the validity and reliability of the key variables.

Items measuring empowering leadership (EL) were measured using a 20-point item scale adapted from Na-Nan et al. (2020). The scale reliability of these items was measured using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of $\alpha = 0.75$, considered sufficient. Moral obligation (MO) was measured using an eight-point item scale adapted from Beugre (2012). The scale reliability of this item was $\alpha = 0.88$ (Axtell et al., 2007). Helping behavior (HB) was measured using four-point items, the scale reliability of which was measured using Cronbach's alpha, which was highly significant ($\alpha = 0.79$). The Islamic work ethics variable (IWE) was measured using a 17-item 17-point scale adapted from Islam et al. (2021). The scale reliability of this variable was $\alpha = 0.95$, indicating high reliability.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Normality of Data

Once the coding and data entry was completed, we assessed the conditions for data normality. Linear relationships were assumed for the independent and dependent variables involved in this study. All outliers and residuals were detected and removed from the dataset to meet the conditions for data normality. All missing values were duly filled and handled using various strategies and the arithmetic mean of the scale items. No

multicollinearity was observed, as only a single independent variable was involved in this study, and the data did not follow the multivariate analysis.

To make the data normal, the computed variables were taken to their positive square roots, natural logs, and inverses, and randomness was assessed using descriptive statistics and measures of central tendency. Herman’s single-factor test was conducted to assess the presence of common method bias using SPSS V.23. This test assesses whether the data was collected from a single source with the same study population at the same time. The total variance explained after extracting the sum of square loadings was found to be 35.46%, which is less than 50%, confirming that there was no problem with CMB in the existing dataset.

4.2. Pearson Correlation Analysis

EL has a strong relationship with HB ($r = 0.142^*$, $p < 0.01$), providing initial evidence to support H1. Furthermore, we observe that EL is positively and significantly associated with MO ($r = 0.255^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), which provides initial support for H2. We see that the relationship between MO and HB is positive and significant ($r = 0.509^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), which allows us to accept H3. In addition, the mediating relationship between HB and the outcome is positive and significant ($r = 0.426^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), which supports H4. The moderating relationships are also found to be positive and significant ($r = 0.499^{**}$, $p < 0.01$, and $r = 0.569$, $p < 0.01$), which provide initial evidence supporting H5 (Table 1).

Table 1: Correlation and scale reliability

Var	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Gender	1									
Age	-.304**	1								
Education	-.170	.578**	1							
Experience	-.398**	.627**	.517**	1						
Income	-.693**	.042	-.184**	.97	1					
Firm size	-.391**	.552**	.327**	.442**	-.026	1				
EL	-.308**	-.183**	-.52	-2.81**	.534**	.35	1	(.755)		
MO	-.516**	.013	.268**	.158**	.244**	.255**	.155**	1	(.86)	
IWE	-.294**	-.374**	-.217**	-.258**	.308**	.167**	.499**	.569**	1	(.96)
HB	-.562**	.206**	.361**	.115**	.191**	.142**	.426**	.509**	.42**	.95

Note: Correlation is significant at $r = 0.00^{**}$ and $p < 0.001$ where $N = 250$. The scale reliability of related variables is stated in parentheses. ** = correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.3. Control Variables

The demographic factors involved in this study were held constant to limit the influence of outcomes. Variations in demographic elements were controlled for, using one-way ANOVA. A control variable test was conducted on the variables HB and MO, controlling for all demographic factors involved. The results of the one-way ANOVA test for the difference in means among groups indicate a significant difference in HB (dependent variable) across gender ($F = 81.16, p < 0.05$), education ($F = 57.51, p < 0.05$), experience ($F = 8.70, p < 0.05$), income ($F = 94.92, p < 0.05$), and firm size ($F = 68.70, p < 0.05$), but no significant difference was found for age ($F = 17.1, p > 0.05$). Similarly, the results obtained for MO (mediating variable) using one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference across gender ($F = 44.74, p < 0.05$), age ($F = 9.54, p < 0.05$), education ($F = 81.12, p < 0.05$), experience ($F = 32.02, p < 0.05$), and firm size ($F = 31.13, p < 0.05$), but no significant difference for income level ($F = 56.70, p > 0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 2: One-way ANOVA test results

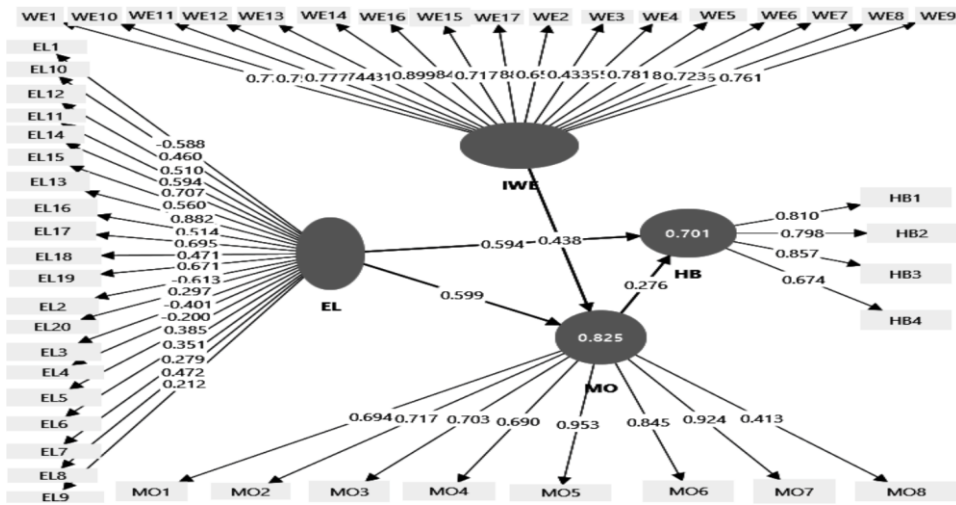
Sources of variation	HB		MO	
	P value	F-Stat	P value	F-Stat
Gender	.000	84.2	.000	44.74
Age	.054	17.10	.003	95.37
Education	.000	57.51	.000	81.12
Experience	.002	8.71	.000	32.02
Income level	.000	94.92	.061	56.70
Size of organization	.001	68.70	.001	31.13

HB = helping behavior, MO = moral obligation.

4.4. Path Analysis Diagram (Reporting Measurement Model)

Figure 2 illustrates the confirmatory factor value of the default model for direct and indirect relationships for 49 scale items representing four variables, including EL, HB, MO, and IWE. These were obtained using SMRTPLS (V.4.1.1). All factor loadings are > 0.30 and the structural equation model estimates are retained and accepted as items. The PLS-SEM path coefficients show that the regression values between EL and HB were 0.594, between MO and HB were 0.276, and between EL and MO were 0.599. For the moderating variable IWE, the value was 0.438.

Figure 2: Graphical output of full measurement model



4.5. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Table 3 summarizes the reliability and convergent validity results of the constructs. Cronbach’s alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) were considered acceptable with values surpassing 0.70, signifying high reliability. The internal consistency for each construct was also deemed acceptable as it met the necessary requirements. A convergent validity test requires standardized loadings and the instrument exhibits convergent validity, with AVE loadings meeting established norms across constructs at the specific level.

Table 3: Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	A	CR	AVE
EL	0.75	0.884	0.273
HB	0.79	0.840	0.621
IWE	0.95	0.965	0.561
MO	0.88	0.914	0.577

α = Cronbach’s alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance explained.

4.6. Discriminant Validity

Table 4 presents the discriminant validity results by utilizing the HTMT and Fornell-Larcker criterion. The HTMT ratio measures the average correlation among items within the same construct and across constructs

that fall within 0.9. We use the Fornell-Larcker criterion to evaluate the square root of the AVE for inter-construct correlation. The highest AVE of the HB variable was found to be 0.823, whereas the AVE of IWE was lowest at 0.749, respectively.

Table 4: Discriminant validity results

Construct	HTMT ratio			Fornell-Larker criterion			
EL				0.523			
HB	0.842			0.823	0.788		
IWE	0.641	0.553		0.526	0.583	0.749	
MO	0.843	0.870	0.660	0.829	0.768	0.752	0.760

EL = empowering leadership, HB = helping behavior, IWE = Islamic work ethics, MO = moral obligation.

4.7. Preacher and Hayes Process (Model 7)

In Table 5, the results indicate that EL is positively and significantly related to HB, as 43% of the variation in HB is accounted for by EL (p -value = 0.000; β = 0.327, $p > 0.001$). This supports H1. The relationship between EL and MO is also significant, with 65.5% of the variation in MO accounted for by EL (p = 0.025, β = 0.152, $p > 0.001$). Furthermore, the relationship between MO and HB is significant, as 71% of the variation in HB is accounted for by MO (p = 0.031, β = 0.370, $p > 0.001$).

Table 5: Direct effects of variables

Variable	β	R	R2	P	T	ULCI	LLCI
IV to DV							
EE to HB	.327	.426	.330	.000**	.9389	.008	-.054
IV to med							
EE to MO	.152	.655	.430	.025	17.31	.211	.094
Med to DV							
MO to HB	.370	.709	.503	.031	20.07	.415	.323

Note: Hayes Process model 7, $p < 0.05$, p value = 0.000 sig, $t > 2$, ULCI = upper-level confidence interval, LLCI = lower-level confidence interval, ** = significant, β = beta estimate, EL = empowering leadership, HB = helping behavior, MO = moral obligation.

Table 6: Conditional indirect effects of variables

Variable	Beta	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
EE, MO, HB	.494	.048	.396	.582

Note: N = 250, standardized indirect effects of X on Y, bootstrap = 5,000, LLCI = lower-level confidence interval, ULCI = upper-level confidence interval, EL = empowering leadership, MO = moral obligation, HB = helping behavior.

Table 6 presents the standardized indirect effect of x on y, along with the regression coefficients. We applied the Hayes PROCESS (model 4) to obtain the bootstrap estimate of the mediation of MO between EL and HB, supporting H4. This is further confirmed by the result of the regression coefficients, along with a beta estimate of 0.494, a boot SE of 0.048, and values LLCI = 0.396 and ULCI = 0.582.

Table 7: Moderated regression analysis

Variable	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
EL	8.627	.000	.283	.449
IWE	7.697	.000	.352	.596
EL*IWE	2.846	.000	.107	.204
R2	.520			
F	62.049			
P	.000			

Table 7 assesses the moderating role of IWE in relation to EL and MO to test H5. We observe that IWE tends to increase the effect on MO through EL, as the regression coefficients are found to be significant ($t > 2$ and $p < 0.05$). Hence, an empowering leadership style combined with moral obligation can be considered a significant predictor of Islamic work ethics. This is because the t-stat is greater than -2 and 2 , and the p-value is also significant ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the beta estimate is $\beta = 2.846$, confirming H5.

4.8. Graphical Interaction of Moderation Variable

By applying various terms of interaction between the independent variable and the moderating variable, we achieve the conditional effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Figure 3 depicts the positive interaction between IWE, EL and MO. This further validates our moderation hypothesis (see also Table 8).

Figure 3: Graphical interaction plots of moderation analysis

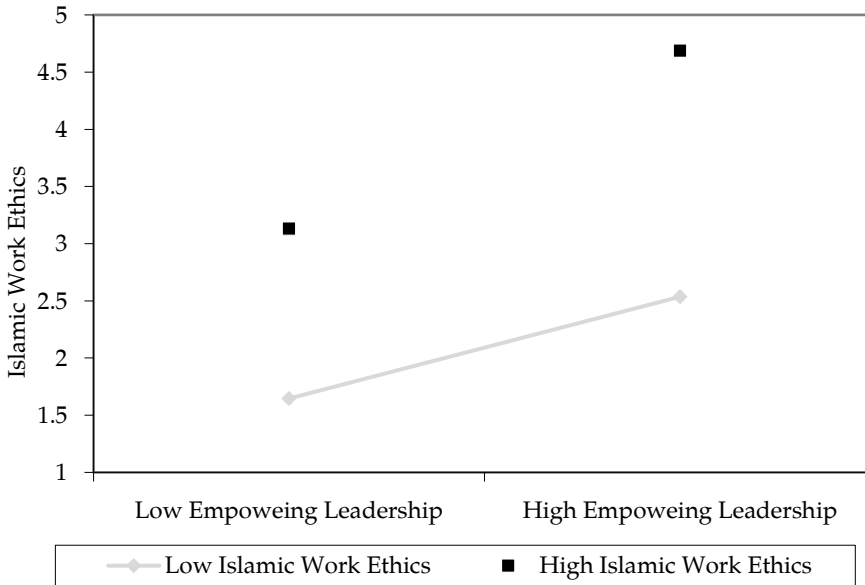


Table 8: Interaction term and moderation analysis

Variable	R2	F	DF1	DF2	P
EL*IWE	.081	47.118	1	396	.000

Note: N = 250, interaction term moderation analysis by multiplying EL*IWE. EL = empowering leadership, IWE = Islamic work ethics.

5. Discussion of Findings

Empowering leadership aims to shape team members’ perception of their empowerment by delegating more autonomy, authority, and opportunities to them, thereby enhancing their citizenship behaviors. We find sufficient evidence to support the relationship between empowering leadership and employee helping behavior. The results of our first hypothesis are aligned with previous research (Li et al., 2017). This suggests that one way to unlock citizenship behavior is to share power among employees, in turn, enhancing their motivation as well as their adaptability, self-determination and self-efficacy. Positive leadership, including empowering leadership, has a significant positive influence on individual and team outcomes, increasing task performance, citizenship behavior, and other employee outcomes (Smallfield et al., 2020).

Likewise, the relationship between empowering leadership and moral obligation is significant and positive, thus supporting our second hypothesis. Empowering leadership creates an association between employees' formal job duties and in-role job performance. Employees perceive their organization as supporting them while supervisors trust them to perform their duties autonomously through high-quality exchange relationships that give employees a sense of moral obligation to reciprocate. This benefits the organization, which reinforces such exchange relationships (Hai & Park 2024). When empowering leadership encourages a moral obligation to the organization, this allows employees to make reasoned, independent, and responsive decisions at the workplace and uphold the organization's core values and principles (Zhang et al., 2021).

In addition, the relationship between moral obligation and helping behavior is significant and positive in line with De Groot and Steg (2009), who suggest that employees must be aware of behavioral consequences before feeling responsible for and acknowledging their own contributions. This relationship increases the employee's moral obligation to perform prosocial behavior. Thus, personal and moral obligation are taken as determinants of prosocial behavior. More importantly, employees who are committed to showing a sense of moral obligation are also committed to reciprocity. Employees who see that they are being cared for at work internalize their commitment to the organization and exhibit reciprocity and motivation, which may generate more extra-role behaviors (Leung, 2008).

The relationship between empowering leadership and helping behavior is mediated by the moral obligation to help the organization's employees. Empowering leadership enables participatory decision-making, provides information, demonstrates genuine concern for employees, and offers training. The result of our fourth hypothesis is in line with Lin et al. (2023), who combine ethics and performance judgments as individual determinants of empowering leadership. This helps support morally correct behavior and trustworthy job performance in the workplace, thereby encouraging leaders to take on the additional role of empowering behavior as a moral obligation.

Finally, the relationship between empowering leadership and moral obligation is moderated by Islamic work ethics, which are not only a religious obligation but also extend to moral, spiritual, physical, and worldly matters (Salahudin et al., 2016). The results of this study are in line with

Atiya et al. (2024), who argue that Islamic work ethics are based on moral principles that determine what is right or wrong.

There is a significant relationship between religiosity and altruism, suggesting that religious beliefs and practices are strong motivators of helping behavior. This implies that individuals with a higher level of religious belief are more likely to engage in acts of kindness and helping others, driven by moral and ethical teachings. Empowering leadership, when combined with Islamic work ethics, enhances employees' job performance (Okafor et al., 2024).

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' helping behavior—an issue that has not been studied adequately despite its importance for the productivity and functioning of organizations. We find a positive relationship between empowering leadership and employees' helping behavior. Moral obligation acts as a mediating variable between empowering leadership and helping behavior while Islamic work ethics increase the impact of empowering leadership. This study has important implications for organizations that wish to overcome bureaucratic constraints to strengthen employees' helping behavior.

In addition to making a theoretical contribution to the literature on empowering leadership, this study has several practical implications. First, empowering leadership can be achieved through better training and management coaching sessions. Senior management should inform employees of the negative implications of behaviors that could damage their performance (Asim et al., 2023). Helping behavior is also beneficial for increasing leaders' effectiveness. Employees may view helping behavior as a religious obligation, which increases learning when they believe that their supervisor can help complete tasks (Chen et al., 2020). Moreover, the literature on moral psychology suggests that morality-related beliefs and practices are precursors of ethical conduct, including helping behavior. Employees who feel a moral obligation engage in prosocial behaviors regardless of personal gains or losses (Hwang et al., 2021).

These findings should be considered in light of several limitations that present opportunities for future research. First, while we measured our

variables using a five-point Likert scale, future research could develop innovative scale responses that directly quantify the frequency of the associated variables, thereby increasing precision and applicability. Second, positive leadership styles such as empowering leadership foster friendly social interaction and increase job satisfaction, which can positively impact employees' mental state. HR departments and management executives should develop training programs, preferably with the assistance of experts, to distribute power among employees and develop their decision-making skills. Third, it is essential for future researchers to explore other types of discretionary and positive work behaviors, such as voice behaviors, ethical behavior, and organizational loyalty, under the influence of empowering leadership.

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