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### Abstract

This study explores the crucial role of empathy in leadership style, focusing on its impact on employee well-being. A comprehensive analysis aims to inform leadership practices to develop a positive workforce environment, enhancing the overall organizational well-being. Empathetic leadership involves understanding followers' emotions and taking proactive, caring actions. The leadership style works with the mediation of distributive justice, which creates a perception of fair and equal allocation of resources and rewards in the organization. Such leadership style promotes positive relationships, enhanced teamwork, and increased organizational productivity. Empathetic leaders possess skills crucial for adapting global trends and creating supporting work environments, particularly in adapting to organizational change. Employee well-being is crucial for organizational success, which is significantly influenced by empathetic leadership with the perception of distributive justice, resulting in higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and an overall enhanced work environment.

**Keywords:** Empathetic Leadership, Distributive Justice, Well-being, Mediation

### 1. Introduction

The dynamic nature of modern businesses requires that management and multinational corporations develop a long-term competitive advantage by generating effective strategies (Lamsa & Pucetaite, 2006).

Gaining empathy and preserving employees' trust within firms are two ways to be successful in the present global economy. According to Undung and Guzman (2009), empathy is a valuable tool for building leadership qualities essential for producing reliable and driven workers. Empathy is a fundamental aspect of human interaction crucial in personal and professional realms (Zahavi, 2010; Goldman, 2006). Empathy's significance in the workplace is underscored by its potential to foster support, motivation, and enhanced performance (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Ibrahim & Rasheed, 2024). Gruber and Reppel (2010) assert that empathy enables workers to fully comprehend the thoughts and perspectives of others, improving productivity and enjoyment at work.

This study's main objective is to examine the role empathy plays in effective leadership. Exploring the impact of empathetic leadership on employee well-being with a focus on the effects of distributive justice. By exploring these dimensions, we aim to provide insights that can inform leadership practices and contribute to developing healthier work environments, enhancing overall organizational well-being.

According to Hetherington (2009), empathy is crucial as it enables workers to recognize and express their feelings, thoughts, and concerns. Empathy is a crucial component in building trust and enhancing organizational performance (Feng, Lazar, & Preece, 2004). According to Colquitt et al. (2001). The fairness in resource distribution, assessing whether employees receive what they perceive as their organizational rewards and resources, is defined as distributive justice. When employees observe that organizational resources are fairly distributed, they are more likely to feel valued and respected, leading to higher organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and motivation (Cropanzano et al., 2001). The inequality in resource allocation can cause a sense of injustice, hatred, and reduced employee engagement (Greenberg et al., 1993). Employees strive for fairness in the rewards they receive within the organization and can perceive a sense of inequality if this distribution is disrupted (Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

The connection between leadership and employee well-being has been extensively studied, as highlighted by Nielsen and Taris (2019). Tepper (2000) contributes insights into the stress-inducing aspects of leader-subordinate interactions, emphasizing the critical role leader's play in shaping employee well-being. Positive emotions and a subjective sense of overall job satisfaction are called well-being at work. According to Fisher (2014) social ties have been proposed as a crucial element of an individual's positive work experiences. As such, they should be included in conceptualizations of well-being at work and in general. Employee well-being in the workplace is a critical factor for organizational success and individual satisfaction (Abid et al., 2023; Butt et al., 2020; Saks, 2020; Ashfaq & Abid, 2022; Yousaf et al., 2019; Abid et al., 2020; Hasan et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Ilyas et al., 2022, 2023; Rath, 2024; Aydemir, 2024). Providing a supportive work environment that prioritizes employee health and happiness contributes to higher productivity, engagement, and retention (Grant et al., 2019). Research indicates that employees who perceive their leaders with empathetic skills report higher levels of job satisfaction, engagement, and overall enhanced well-being (Eisenbeiss & Knippenberg, 2020).

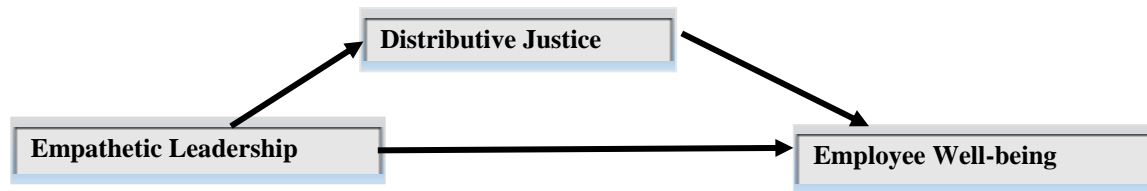
Organizations need to adapt their leadership approaches within the dynamics of modern work environments, where factors like remote work, diverse team structures, and technological advancements significantly influence leadership dynamics and employee well-being. Most studies on empathetic leadership and well-being lack a contextualized exploration of various factors that can highly affect overall organizational well-being (Westerman, 2018). Organizations need to adapt their leadership approaches within the dynamics of modern work environments, where factors like remote work, diverse team structures, and technological advancements significantly influence leadership dynamics and employee well-being. Most studies on empathetic leadership and well-being lack a contextualized exploration of various factors that can highly affect overall organizational well-being (Westerman, 2018).

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**Figure 1: The Research Model**

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Empathetic Leadership and Employee Well-being**

The significance of employee well-being in the leadership context has gained more insights in studies over the past ten years (Nielsen K&Taris TW, 2019). Several literature reviews and meta-analyses have been done in this field (Nyberg A, Bernin P,&Theorell T, 2005). They all demonstrate the connection between an employee's well-being and their manager's leadership.

Employee well-being appears to be positively correlated with certain leadership philosophies, including transformational, relationship-oriented, and supportive leadership (Ashfaq et al., 2019, 2022, 2023; Munir et al., 2024). Despite coming from various leadership theories, these styles have one thing in common: they are all characterized by managers acting with care, support, and empathy. Research indicates that one of the most frequent causes of stress in businesses is the interaction between leaders and their subordinates (Landeweerd & Boumans, Citation1994; Tepper, Citation 2000; Xiong, 2024). Affective well-being, which includes job satisfaction, general well-being, and burnout, is frequently used to assess well-being at work (Skakon et al., 2010). Since emotional well-being is a part of good mental health and promotes work-life balance, organizational commitment, employee engagement, and job satisfaction, it is the subject of special attention in this study (Sirgy and Lee, 2016).

H1: Empathetic leadership is positively associated with employee well-being.

### **2.2. Distributive Justice and Empathetic Leadership and Employee Well-being**

The term distributive justice revolves around allocating resources, rewards, and opportunities for development on the basis of equality (Colquitt et al., 2013). According to Cropanzano (2017), distributive justice and empathetic leadership have a multifaceted and interconnected impact on employee well-being. Employees who perceive distributive justice within an organization experience higher job satisfaction and overall well-being. This satisfaction is created by implementing fair and equal treatment in resource distribution, creating a sense of commitment to the organization (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Similarly, empathetic leadership fosters a healthy work environment and promotes job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Liu et al., 2019). Empathy in leadership also creates a supportive relationship among employees that encourages emotional support and understanding, which also maintains well-being in the workplace (Lam et al., 2016).

H2: Empathetic leadership positively correlates with employee well-being and the mediation of distributive justice.

### **2.3. Distributive Justice and Employee Well-being**

Justice plays a crucial role in every individual's life, such as in society, the workplace, or at home. Justice is also perceived as fairness; justice is an action in compliance with the rules and laws (Maiese, 2003). Similarly, fair allocation of available resources to all employees in an organization that encourages a positive mindset of competition among the employees is called distributive justice. John Rawls (1971) gave the theory of distributive justice, known as justice as fairness. According to this theory, the principle of justice is essential as it develops awareness among people in their original position dealing with the governing societal norms and rules and those unaware of their position in society. This enhances the perception of what is good and what is fair. Without distributive justice, employees will feel that they are being mistreated and start questioning the inequality system (Maiese, 2003). This can further lead to the perception of discrimination. Discrimination at the workplace significantly impacts mental, physical, and overall employee performance.

Distributive justice and employee well-being are closely intertwined, strengthening an organization's relationship. (Greenberg, 2001). A leader with an empathetic nature is more likely to understand the importance of fair distribution of resources and ensure a fair decision-making process in an organization (Brockner et al., 2000). The distribution based on equal and fair resources contributes to a positive work culture where employees feel valued and respected (Bies & Tripp, 2001).

H3: distributive justice is positively related to employee well-being.

### **2.4. Empathetic Leadership and Distributive Justice**

According to Colquitt et al. (2001), a sense of trust and confidence in the organization is encouraged, leading to organizational commitments and overall well-being. Eisenbeiss and Knippenberg (2015) have stated that empathetic leadership is important in understanding and responding to their employees' needs. Additionally, empathetic leaders lead to more equitable outcomes and higher levels of perceived distribution justice as they are more likely to consider the impact of their actions on the employees (Leroy et al., 2015). Distributive justice and empathetic leadership are crucial elements of an organization that encourages a work environment of fairness, collaboration, and understanding (Bass et al., 2003). Organizations can create a culture of trust and respect and enhance organizational well-being (Eisenbeiss & van Knippenberg, 2015). According to Smith, Johnson, and Davis (2020), empathetic leadership and distributive justice describe organizational behavior and are the key drivers of employee satisfaction, trust, and effective performance. Empathetic leadership is crucial in promoting distributive justice within the workplace as it characterizes the qualities needed to understand, support, and connect its employees. (Jones & Smith, 2018). This empathetic approach encourages open communication and teamwork, which are essential for achieving organizational goals (Garcia & Martinez, 2016). According to Adam's (1963) theory of equity, the employees compare their efforts or skills with the outcomes such as salaries or recognition and relate to the ratio between them. Organizations can contribute to distributive justice by providing equal

opportunities, an unbiased reward system, and promoting a fair performance evaluation system (Bies & Moag, 1986; Ahmad & Ali, 2016).

H4: Empathetic leadership is positively related to distributive justice.

### 3. Survey and Measures

#### 3.1. Empathetic Leadership

The service industry workers responded about their perception regarding their supervisor and empathetic leadership using the Mayfield et al. (2017) 5-item measure. Sample items included "My supervisor shows trust in me." The items were responded to through a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### 3.2. Distributive justice

The items of distributive justice were used to measure the extent to which outcomes are considered equitably distributed. Moorman et al. (1991) presented the 3- items scale for distributive justice. A sample item included, "I consider my workload to be quite fair." The items were responded to through a 5- 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### 3.3. Employee Well-being

Employee well-being was assessed with 5 items using the scale developed by Diener et al. (2010). Sample items included "Our organizational culture encourages a balance between work and family life." The items were responded to through a 5- 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### 4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using PROCESS macro by Hayes (2013) and smart PLS. For mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, correlation, and regression analysis, smart PLS was used. For testing mediation and moderation, PROCESS macro Model 5 was employed. According to Hayes et al. (2013), the process estimates specific indirect effects.

#### 4.1. Convergent Validity

The degree to which each construct is measured and theoretically ought to be connected is seen to be related to each other, known as convergent validity. Factor loadings, reliability analysis, and composite reliability following Hair et al., 2010, can be used to investigate convergent validity. Additionally, the average variance extracted was considered a statistic that might help prove validity. Since the convergent validity can be examined, it can guarantee that the mediating or dependent variables correlate well with one another inside their parent factor. The value must be more than 0.5 in average variance extracted. Table 4.3 in the study's attachment contains the AVE data.

**Table 1: Construct Validity**

Constructs	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability (rho-a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
DJ	0.702	0.713	0.835	0.628
E	0.871	0.872	0.907	0.661
EI	0.828	0.845	0.885	0.659
EW	0.763	0.766	0.841	0.515

\*DJ= distributive justice, EL=empathetic leadership, EI=emotional intelligence, EW=employee wellbeing.

Most social scientific research considers a score of 0.70 or above acceptable (Secer et al., 2013). The reliabilities of both variables are higher as of this work in Table 4.2 above (emotional intelligence Cronbach alpha=0.828<0.7, distributive justice Cronbach alpha=0.702<0.7 and employee well-being Cronbach alpha=0.763<0.7) than 0.07, therefore all the items related to variables internal consistency are in good condition.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

Constructs	Standard deviation	Excess kurtosis	Skewness	Number of observations used
DJ	1.000	0.509	-0.576	249.000
EL	1.000	1.945	-1.052	249.000
EI	1.000	2.532	-1.137	249.000
EW	1.000	0.917	-0.576	249.000

\*DJ= distributive justice, EL=empathetic leadership, EI=emotional intelligence, EW=employee wellbeing.

The mean, standard deviation, kurtosis, and skewness for the study variable are shown in the above table. The distributive justice standard deviations used are, respectively, 1. For empathetic leadership, the standard deviation is 1. The standard deviation for emotional intelligence is 1. For employee well-being, its standard deviation is 1. The values of kurtosis and skewness are for distributive justice, empathetic leadership, emotional intelligence, and employee well-being. These values are 0.509, 1.945, 2.532, 0.917 and -0.576, -1.052, -1.137, -0.576, respectively. Every value for kurtosis and skewness falls between -2 and +2. As a result, the data indicates that there is no irregularity in the data.

#### 4.2. Correlation Analysis

A statistical method for determining the link between two variables is correlational analysis.

The table shows that the relationship between distributive justice and empathetic leadership is positive, moderate, and highly significant ( $r = 0.559, p < 0.01$ ). According to the table, the relationship between emotional intelligence and empathetic leadership is positive and highly significant ( $r = 0.322, p < 0.01$ ), and the relationship between employee well-being and emotional intelligence is positive, highly significant, and moderate at ( $r = 0.287, p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 3: Correlation Analysis**

Construct	DJ	EL	EI	EW
DJ	1.000			
EL	0.559	1.000		
EI	0.488	0.322	1.000	
EW	0.570	0.565	0.287	1.000

### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing :

Mediation analysis was performed using PROCESS Macro by Hayes, model 5, to assess the indirect effect of empathetic leadership on employee well-being through distributive justice (i.e., Hypothesis 4). Table 4 displays the results of the mediation model.

In **hypothesis 1**, we propose that there is a positive correlation between empathetic leadership and employee well-being. Table 4.10 shows that empathetic leadership positively predicted employee well-being ( $\beta = 0.372, SD = 0.070, LLCI = -.3399, ULCI = .2452$ ). Hence, hypothesis 1 is supported.

In **hypothesis 2**, we postulated that empathetic leadership positively correlates with employee well-being through the mediator distributive justice. The analysis indicates a significant indirect effect of Empathetic leadership on employee well-being through the mediator Distributive Justice ( $\beta = 0.2068, SD = 0.043, LLCI = .1393, ULCI = .2823$ ). This suggests that empathetic leadership indirectly influences employee well-being through its impact on distributive justice.

In **hypothesis 3**, we stated that distributive justice positively affects employee well-being. Based on the analysis, the standardized indirect effect of distributive justice on employee well-being is  $\beta: 0.376, SD = 0.072, LLCI = 0.1425, \text{ and } ULCI = 0.2869$ . The results obtained through analysis conclude that distributive justice significantly relates to employee well-being.

In **hypothesis 4**, we stated that empathetic leadership and distributive justice have a positive impact. The study predicts that higher levels of empathetic leadership are associated with higher levels of distributive justice in the organization as the p-value shows  $p < 0.001, \beta = 0.561, SD = 0.052, LLCI = 0.1393, \text{ and } ULCI = 0.2823$ . Therefore, empathetic leadership and distributive justice are essential in promoting a positive work environment.

**Table 4: Hypothesis Testing**

Direct Effect	$\beta$	SE	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
H1: Empathetic Leadership → Employee Wellbeing	0.372	0.1772	-0.2675	0.0001	-0.3399	-0.2452
H2: Empathetic Leadership → Distributive justice	0.5722	0.0544	10.5206	0.000	0.4824	0.6620
H3: Distributive Justice → Employee Wellbeing	0.3614	0.599	6.0311	0.000	0.2625	0.4604
Indirect Effect	Effect	Boot SE		Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
H4: EL → DJ → WB	0.2068	0.0436		0.1393	0.2823	

## 5. Discussion and Implication

The primary objective of this study was to examine the mediating influence of distributive justice on the relationship between empathetic leadership and employee well-being. The paper thoroughly examines the research topic, its objective, the approach used to conduct the study, and the methods employed for data analysis. Furthermore, this study presents recommendations for future research directions and analyzes its implications and limitations. The advantage of this study's findings that may be utilized as future reference is its theoretical implications. Additionally, it was determined that the selected questionnaire contained valid and highly dependable items. This study has demonstrated that empathetic leadership positively influences employee well-being and understanding the indirect effect of both variables through the mediating impact of distributive justice.

### 5.1. Practical implications

This study empirically investigates the role of distributive justice as a mediator in the relationship between empathetic leadership and employee well-being. Furthermore, our study sheds light on the potential moderating effect of emotional intelligence, a variable overlooked in previous research. We demonstrate that empathetic leaders build trust within the organization and facilitate effective problem-solving and adaptation during difficult times. The organization must invest in a leadership development program, cultivating empathy among leaders through training sessions, feedback, and coaching. Similarly, organizations should strive to ensure fair allocation of rewards and resources, strengthening the positive impact of empathetic leadership on employee well-being.

### 5.2. Future Recommendations

A longitudinal study should examine the long-term impact of empathetic leadership on employee well-being. Future researchers should test another mediating factor to learn what other variables could mediate the link between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Organizations need to invest in a leadership development program that cultivates empathy among leaders through training sessions, feedback, and coaching. Exploring the role of technology-mediated empathetic leadership could be a promising avenue for future research. With the increasing reliance on digital communication platforms in the workplace,

understanding how empathetic leadership can be effectively conveyed and experienced through technology-mediated channels is crucial for modern organizational dynamics.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper has contributed to understanding the critical role of empathetic leadership in promoting employee well-being with the mediation of distributive justice and moderation of emotional intelligence. Leaders who demonstrate empathy towards their employees create a supportive work environment for their followers. The role of distributive justice in allocating resources or rewards reinforces the positive effect of empathetic leadership on employee well-being. Overall, the study's objective and hypothesis were fully satisfied.

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