

## How Sequential Organizational and Psychological Mechanisms of Servant Leadership Foster Employee Creativity?

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**Abstract:** In a rapidly evolving work environment, employee creativity has become increasingly important for sustaining organizational innovation, particularly among Generation Z employees. While prior research has linked servant leadership to creative performance, the psychological processes underlying this relationship remain unclear. This study investigates whether perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment sequentially explain the influence of servant leadership on employee creativity. Using data from 224 Generation Z working students in Batam, Indonesia, the proposed model was tested through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis revealed that servant leadership strengthens perceived organizational support, psychological empowerment, and employee creativity. Furthermore, perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment operate as sequential mediators connecting servant leadership with employee creativity. These findings underscore the value of supportive and empowering workplace conditions in encouraging creativity among Generation Z employees.

### INTRODUCTION

Continuous innovation and adaptation have become essential for organizations seeking to remain competitive and sustainable amid changing market conditions. According to Ali & Fadi, (2023), employee creativity (EC) has evolved into a strategic resource that supports innovation, productivity, job quality, and overall organizational effectiveness. Previous studies have also highlighted that EC enhances organizational sustainability by strengthening innovative capabilities, increasing motivation, improving flexibility, and fostering a more supportive work environment (Hidayat et al., 2023; Rustiawan et al., 2023).

The importance of EC is further reinforced by the growing presence of Generation Z in the workforce. According to the BPS Kota Batam (2026), Generation Z represents 27.94% of Indonesia's population and constitutes a substantial proportion of new labor market entrants. The growing presence of Generation Z in the workforce has introduced a generation characterized by

technological agility, innovative thinking, and a strong commitment to ongoing learning, qualities that support organizational innovation and competitiveness (Pichler et al., 2021).

This phenomenon is particularly relevant in Batam, a rapidly growing industrial city with an economic growth rate of 6.76% in 2025 (BPS Kota Batam, 2026). The expanding employment opportunities encourage many Generation Z individuals to combine work and higher education to gain professional experience and improve financial independence. However, balancing academic and work responsibilities often creates role conflicts, workload pressures, and physical and psychological fatigue (Fernanda & Grasiawaty, 2021; Sari & Reviandani, 2026). Consequently, Generation Z working students represent a unique and important population for examining the factors that foster EC in contemporary organizational settings.

EC is well known for being a major force behind innovation and organizational performance. In a variety of settings, empirical research continuously shows a favorable correlation between EC and organizational outcomes (Alay & Sener, 2023; Jawwad & Zabir, 2024; Pramudita et al., 2025). But the efficacy of creativity varies depending on the type of workplace. Putra et al., (2025) discovered that the impact of creativity to performance may differ based on organizational conditions and job characteristics, with more restricted effects seen in routine administrative tasks. These results underline the need for more research to determine the elements that encourage employee creativity and the circumstances in which creativity produces significant organizational benefits.

Among the leadership approaches examined in organizational research, Servant Leadership (SL) has received substantial attention for its capacity to cultivate conditions that support employee growth and empowerment. Findings from prior studies suggest that such leadership behaviors are associated with stronger Employee Creativity (EC) across a wide range of organizational environments (Irawati & Anindita, 2025; S. Zada et al., 2023). However, the mechanisms through which servant leadership stimulates creativity remain an important area of inquiry. Perceived Organizational Support (POS) may serve as an important underlying mechanism, as it captures employees' perceptions of how far the organization acknowledges their value and supports their overall well-being (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2024). According to Organizational Support Theory, POS fulfills employees' socio-emotional needs and reinforces perceptions of organizational care and recognition (Eisenberger & Huntington, 1986). Employees who perceive their organization as supportive often demonstrate higher levels of engagement and commitment, while also showing a greater willingness to generate and implement creative ideas (Akgunduz et al., 2023). When leaders invest in employee growth, provide opportunities for empowerment, and show genuine concern for their employees, individuals are more likely to view the organization as supportive, such perceptions have been linked to a variety of positive workplace outcomes (Robertson et al., 2023; Shetty et al., 2022; Utami et al., 2025).

In addition to its direct influence on employee attitudes and behaviors, POS acts as a key antecedent of PE by enhancing employees' perceptions of organizational care, trust, and resource support. When employees perceive their work as meaningful, feel capable of performing their tasks, possess autonomy in decision-making, and believe their actions can make a difference, they are more likely to approach their work with confidence, initiative, and creativity (Aldabbas et al., 2021; Shaleh et al., 2024; M. Zada et al., 2022). Although previous studies have confirmed positive relationships among SL, POS, PE, and EC, research examining these variables within a sequential mediation framework remains limited, particularly among Generation Z working students who must balance academic and work responsibilities. To advance understanding of

employee creativity, this study investigates how Servant Leadership (SL) influences Employee Creativity (EC) through the sequential mediating effects of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and Psychological Empowerment (PE).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has become one of the most popular and significant frameworks among the primary theories describing human motivation, well-being, and personal development (Kessler, 2013). Because it offers a thorough knowledge of how fundamental psychological requirements and natural developmental tendencies affect motivation, behavior, and personality development, the theory is still very relevant today. SDT has gained popularity as a theory for explaining motivational processes by highlighting self-regulation and psychological development as essential components of human functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zhao & Wu, 2021).

From an SDT perspective, individuals' attitudes and behaviors are shaped by the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. SDT proposes that individuals function more effectively when they feel capable of accomplishing their tasks, experience meaningful connections with those around them, and have the freedom to direct their own decisions and behaviors (Park, 2021). Meeting these requirements has a positive impact on behavioral outcomes and fosters psychological well-being.

Additionally, as a result of these psychological needs, SDT makes a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. An activity is driven by intrinsic motivation when individuals choose to engage in it because the experience itself is rewarding and personally meaningful. On the other hand, external incentives, expectations, or outcomes that are unrelated to the activity itself are what drive extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zhao & Wu, 2021).

### **Servant Leadership**

Servant Leadership (SL) is characterized by a commitment to nurturing employees' growth, enhancing their sense of empowerment, and supporting their well-being, with the belief that organizational success emerges from the development of its people (Gandasacita et al., 2024; Rao, 2025). SL places a higher priority on serving people and fostering personal and professional development than traditional leadership techniques, which concentrate on authority and control (Nabawi et al., 2023). Servant leaders promote trust, engagement, and greater organizational attachment through actions including empathy, stewardship, moral decision-making, and dedication to staff development (Agusta & Azmy, 2023; Cai et al., 2024; Jin & Ikeda, 2024; Yarbrough et al., 2024). These results boost workers' psychological reserves and enhance the efficacy of the company (Ragnarsson et al., 2023).

### **Perceived Organizational Support**

POS grounded in Organizational Support Theory (OST), refers to employees' perceptions of how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Ramadhani, 2023). Since its introduction by Eisenberger & Huntington, (1986), POS has been extensively applied across various organizational contexts and is commonly reflected through fairness, supervisor support, and organizational rewards that signal recognition and concern for employees (Ghaniyyaturrahmah & Djamhoer, 2023; Hutabarat, 2025). POS develops through employees' evaluations of organizational practices, including recognition, supportive working conditions,

responsiveness to employee concerns, welfare support, and career development opportunities (Nanda & Nio, 2025; Rahmadani et al., 2024).

### **Psychological Empowerment**

PE is a motivational state that enhances employees' intrinsic motivation by increasing their sense of competence, autonomy, meaningfulness, and influence at work (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2023). Psychological Empowerment (PE), as conceptualized by Spreitzer, captures the extent to which employees view their work as meaningful, feel capable of performing their responsibilities, exercise autonomy in decision-making, and believe they can influence organizational outcomes (Oliveira et al., 2023). Previous studies consistently show that PE contributes to positive outcomes, such as higher work engagement, stronger organizational commitment, improved performance, greater retention, and reduced turnover intentions (Herdiman & Tirtoprojo, 2024; Llorente-Alonso et al., 2023; Scharfschwerdt, 2025).

### **Employee Creativity**

EC is a strategic organizational capability that promotes innovation, adaptability, and sustainable performance (Ersoy, 2023). It refers to the generation of novel and useful ideas resulting from the interaction between individual attributes and organizational factors, including leadership, empowerment, fairness, and organizational culture (Eduardo, 2025; Halinski et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2025). EC serves as an important organizational resource that enables the generation of novel products, services, and work practices, thereby strengthening an organization's ability to compete and adapt in rapidly changing environments (Lua et al., 2023). In addition, employees are more likely to produce creative ideas and develop effective solutions when they are granted greater discretion in their work and actively involved in organizational decision-making processes (Tang et al., 2025).

### **The Effect of Servant Leadership on Perceived Organizational Support**

Employees are more likely to perceive organizational support when leaders consistently demonstrate concern for their growth, well-being, and professional development. By encouraging participation, providing guidance, and acting with integrity, servant leaders create work environments that signal organizational appreciation and care. Evidence from Ekmekcioglu & Öner, (2024; Lu et al., (2024; Wijaya et al., (2024) indicates that such leadership behaviors are associated with stronger perceptions of organizational support. Higher levels of POS have subsequently been linked to favorable employee outcomes, including stronger engagement, innovative behavior, citizenship behavior, and performance. Taken together, these findings suggest that servant leadership contributes meaningfully to the development of POS. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Servant Leadership positively influences Perceived Organizational Support.

### **The Effect of Perceived Organizational Support on Psychological Empowerment**

Supportive organizational environments can strengthen employees' sense of empowerment by reinforcing their confidence in performing work tasks, increasing their discretion in decision-making, and enhancing their perception that their work is both meaningful and influential. Consequently, higher levels of POS are often associated with stronger PE. By providing recognition, socio-emotional resources, and organizational trust, POS enhances employees' confidence and perceived control over their work roles. Previous studies consistently report a

positive relationship between POS and PE across different organizational settings and methodological approaches (Aziz et al., 2024; Siangchokyoo & Klinger, 2022). Supporting this argument, Azzahra et al., (2025) reported that organizational support contributes to positive psychological experiences among employees. Collectively, these findings indicate that POS provides an important foundation for the development of PE. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Perceived Organizational Support positively influences Psychological Empowerment.

### **The Effect of Psychological Empowerment on Employee Creativity**

A strong sense of empowerment can create conditions that encourage creativity by enabling employees to view their work as meaningful, exercise discretion in their actions, and believe in their ability to make valuable contributions. Under such circumstances, employees are more likely to act proactively, experiment with new possibilities, and develop original solutions to workplace challenges. Previous studies consistently report a positive relationship between PE and EC across various organizational contexts, including hospitality, management, and corporate (Tang et al., 2025). Although some evidence suggests that this relationship may operate through mediating mechanisms such as affective commitment (Hasanein & Elrayah, 2025), the overall literature supports PE as an important driver of EC. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Psychological Empowerment positively influences Employee Creativity.

### **The Effect of Servant Leadership on Employee Creativity Mediated by Perceived Organizational Support and Psychological Empowerment**

SL is expected to enhance EC through the sequential mechanisms of POS and PE. By prioritizing employee well-being, development, and empowerment, servant leaders foster perceptions of organizational support, which subsequently strengthen employees' sense of competence, autonomy, meaning, and impact. These psychological resources encourage creative thinking and innovative behavior in the workplace. Prior studies have identified POS and PE as important mediating mechanisms linking SL to positive employee outcomes, including creativity (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2024; Ganeva & Pusparini, 2024; Saleem & Mateou, 2025). Moreover, (Marianggodo & Muhid, 2026) highlighted PE as a recurring pathway through which SL promotes creativity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Servant Leadership positively influences Employee Creativity mediated by Perceived Organizational Support and Psychological Empowerment.

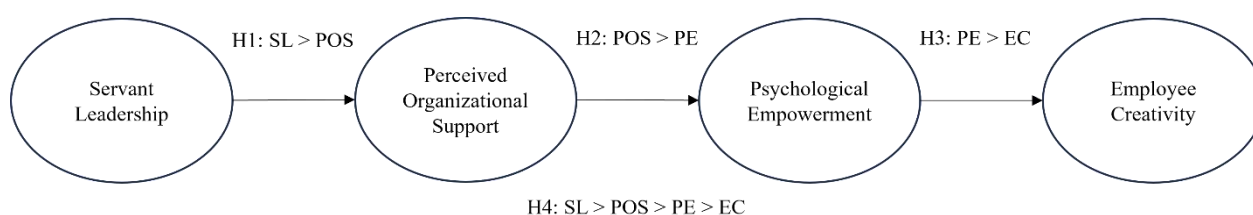


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the relationships among the variables. The population consisted of Generation Z individuals in Batam City - Indonesia, while the sample comprised working students from this generation. Following the ten-times rule for PLS-SEM proposed by Joseph F. Hair et al., (2022), a minimum sample size of 220 respondents was required. Data were collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The data were analyzed using the PLS-SEM technique and processed with SmartPLS version 3.0.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of 224 respondents, of whom 64.73% were female and 35.27% were male. In terms of work experience, the largest group had worked for more than 6 to 12 months (33.04%), followed by those with more than 1 to 2 years (26.79%) and over 2 years of experience (26.79%). Respondents with less than 6 months of work experience represented the smallest segment of the sample (13.40%). Overall, the sample was primarily composed of female employees with at least six months of work experience.

**Table 1. Respondents Profile**

| Category               | Description    | Quantity | Percentage |
|------------------------|----------------|----------|------------|
| <b>Gender</b>          | Male           | 79       | 35,27%     |
|                        | Female         | 145      | 64,73%     |
| <b>Work Experience</b> | < 6 month      | 30       | 13,40%     |
|                        | > 6 – 12 month | 74       | 33,04%     |
|                        | > 1-2 year     | 60       | 26,79%     |
|                        | > 2 year       | 60       | 26,79%     |

Table 2 presents the outer loading values for the measurement model constructs, indicate that all indicators of SL, POS, PE, and EC load above 0.70, confirming convergent validity (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). While several indicators namely SL1 (0.398), SL3 (0.608), SL5 (0.650), and SL7 (0.588), fall below the recommended threshold, suggesting weaker contributions to the construct. Therefore, these indicators were removed from further analysis. Overall, the majority of indicators demonstrate acceptable convergent validity.

**Table 2. Outer Loading**

|             | Servant Leadership | Perceived Organizational Support | Psychological Empowerment | Employee Creativity |
|-------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>SL1</b>  | 0.398              |                                  |                           |                     |
| <b>SL2</b>  | 0.793              |                                  |                           |                     |
| <b>SL3</b>  | 0.608              |                                  |                           |                     |
| <b>SL4</b>  | 0.771              |                                  |                           |                     |
| <b>SL5</b>  | 0.650              |                                  |                           |                     |
| <b>SL6</b>  | 0.727              |                                  |                           |                     |
| <b>SL7</b>  | 0.588              |                                  |                           |                     |
| <b>POS1</b> |                    | 0.813                            |                           |                     |
| <b>POS2</b> |                    | 0.828                            |                           |                     |
| <b>POS3</b> |                    | 0.636                            |                           |                     |
| <b>POS4</b> |                    | 0.839                            |                           |                     |
| <b>POS5</b> |                    | 0.867                            |                           |                     |

|      | Servant Leadership | Perceived Organizational Support | Psychological Empowerment | Employee Creativity |
|------|--------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| POS6 |                    | 0.869                            |                           |                     |
| POS7 |                    | 0.841                            |                           |                     |
| POS8 |                    | 0.854                            |                           |                     |
| PE1  |                    |                                  | 0.864                     |                     |
| PE2  |                    |                                  | 0.832                     |                     |
| PE3  |                    |                                  | 0.862                     |                     |
| EC1  |                    |                                  |                           | 0.844               |
| EC2  |                    |                                  |                           | 0.856               |
| EC3  |                    |                                  |                           | 0.889               |
| EC4  |                    |                                  |                           | 0.863               |

Table 3 summarizes the psychometric evaluation of SL, POS, PE, and EC. The reported Cronbach's Alpha, rho\_A, Composite Reliability, and AVE values all surpassed the recommended cut-off levels (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022), indicating that the measurement instruments demonstrate acceptable consistency and adequately capture the intended constructs. These results provide sufficient support for proceeding with the structural model assessment.

**Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha, composite Reliability, Rho A, AVE**

|                                  | Cronbach's Alpha | rho_A | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Employee Creativity              | 0.886            | 0.891 | 0.921                 | 0.745                            |
| Perceived Organizational Support | 0.935            | 0.936 | 0.947                 | 0.718                            |
| Psychological Empowerment        | 0.813            | 0.816 | 0.889                 | 0.727                            |
| Servant Leadership               | 0.745            | 0.749 | 0.854                 | 0.662                            |

Table 4 displays the discriminant validity assessment based on the Fornell–Larcker approach. The diagonal values representing the square roots of AVE exceed the inter-construct correlations, indicating that each construct SL, POS, PE, EC is more strongly associated with its own indicators than with other constructs. These results support the distinctiveness of the measurement constructs and provide evidence of adequate discriminant validity (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 4. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)**

|                                  | Employee Creativity | Perceived Organizational Support | Psychological Empowerment | Servant Leadership |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Employee Creativity              | 0.863               |                                  |                           |                    |
| Perceived Organizational Support | 0.679               | 0.848                            |                           |                    |
| Psychological Empowerment        | 0.692               | 0.708                            | 0.853                     |                    |

|                           | Employee Creativity | Perceived Organizational Support | Psychological Empowerment | Servant Leadership |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Servant Leadership</b> | 0.694               | 0.731                            | 0.697                     | 0.813              |

Table 5 presents the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> values of the endogenous constructs. POS records the highest adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value (0.532), indicating that 53.2% of its variance is explained by the model, followed by PE (0.499) and EC (0.476). These results suggest that the model explains approximately half of the variance in each construct, demonstrating moderate explanatory power and satisfactory predictive capability.

**Table 5. R Square**

|                                         | R Square Adjusted |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Employee Creativity</b>              | 0.476             |
| <b>Perceived Organizational Support</b> | 0.532             |
| <b>Psychological Empowerment</b>        | 0.499             |

Table 6 presents the PLS-SEM model fit indices. The SRMR value of 0.109 is slightly above the recommended threshold of 0.08, suggesting that the model fit is not optimal. Nevertheless, the NFI value of 0.834 indicates an acceptable level of fit for PLS-SEM. Given that PLS-SEM primarily emphasizes predictive accuracy and explanatory power, the model can be considered adequate for subsequent structural analysis.

**Table 6. SRMR**

|                   | Estimated Model |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| <b>SRMR</b>       | 0.109           |
| <b>d_ ULS</b>     | 1.831           |
| <b>d_ G</b>       | 0.389           |
| <b>Chi-Square</b> | 462.011         |
| <b>NFI</b>        | 0.834           |

Table 7 presents all proposed relationships are significant ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $t > 1.96$ ), supporting the research hypothesis. SL positively influences POS ( $\beta = 0.731$ ,  $t = 21.197$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), while POS significantly affects PE ( $\beta = 0.708$ ,  $t = 13.356$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). PE also has a significant positive effect on EC ( $\beta = 0.692$ ,  $t = 12.239$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Additionally, the indirect effect of SL on EC through serial mediation of POS and PE is significant ( $\beta = 0.358$ ,  $t = 8.436$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Overall, all hypotheses are supported.

**Table 7. Hypothesis**

|                                           | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics ( O/STDEV ) | P Values |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| <b>H1: SL -&gt; POS</b>                   | 0.731               | 0.734           | 0.034                      | 21.197                   | 0.000    |
| <b>H2: POS -&gt; PE</b>                   | 0.708               | 0.710           | 0.053                      | 13.356                   | 0.000    |
| <b>H3: PE -&gt; EC</b>                    | 0.692               | 0.697           | 0.057                      | 12.239                   | 0.000    |
| <b>H4: SL -&gt; POS -&gt; PE -&gt; EC</b> | 0.358               | 0.363           | 0.042                      | 8.436                    | 0.000    |

The findings support the proposed sequential mediation model, demonstrating that SL enhances EC through POS and PE. All hypotheses were supported, highlighting the importance of leadership behaviors that emphasize employee development, well-being, and empowerment in fostering creativity.

The results indicate that SL significantly influences POS ( $\beta = 0.731$ ,  $t = 21.197$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1. This finding suggests that employees perceive greater organizational support when leaders demonstrate empathy, ethical behavior, and commitment to employee growth. Consistent with Organizational Support Theory (OST), leaders act as organizational representatives whose supportive actions signal that the organization values employee contributions and well-being. This result aligns with previous studies showing that SL strengthens POS and promotes positive employee outcomes (Cai et al., 2024; Wijaya et al., 2024).

The significant positive relationship between POS and PE ( $\beta = 0.708$ ,  $t = 13.356$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) lends support to H2. This result suggests that organizational support extends beyond the provision of resources and recognition, shaping employees' psychological experiences at work. Employees who perceive stronger support are more likely to feel capable, self-directed, and purposeful in carrying out their responsibilities. From a theoretical perspective, this finding can be understood through the complementary insights of Organizational Support Theory (OST) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). While OST emphasizes reciprocal employee–organization relationships, SDT suggests that supportive environments satisfy employees' psychological needs and strengthen intrinsic motivation. The result is consistent with Aziz et al., (2024), who found that organizational support enhances employees' sense of empowerment.

Furthermore, PE significantly influences EC ( $\beta = 0.692$ ,  $t = 12.239$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H3. According to SDT, employees who perceive greater autonomy, competence, and purpose are more likely to engage in creative problem-solving and innovative behaviors. Empowered employees possess the confidence and discretion needed to explore new ideas and challenge conventional practices. This finding corroborates prior research identifying PE as a key driver of creativity and innovation (Tang et al., 2025).

Most importantly, H4 confirms that SL indirectly influences EC through the sequential mediating roles of POS and PE ( $\beta = 0.358$ ,  $t = 8.436$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The finding demonstrates that leadership fosters creativity by first creating a supportive organizational environment, which subsequently strengthens employees' psychological resources and intrinsic motivation. This result supports the complementary roles of OST and SDT in explaining how leadership translates into creative outcomes. While OST explains the development of perceived support, SDT clarifies how such support enhances empowerment and creativity. The finding is consistent with recent studies emphasizing supportive organizational conditions and empowerment as critical mechanisms linking leadership and creativity (Park, 2021; Tang et al., 2025).

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by integrating OST and SDT into a unified framework explaining employee creativity. Practically, the findings suggest that organizations should cultivate SL behaviors and strengthen organizational support systems to enhance employees' psychological empowerment and creative performance, particularly among Generation Z employees who highly value autonomy, meaningful work, and developmental support.

## CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that SL contributes to EC both directly and indirectly through the sequential influence of POS and PE. Employees who perceive stronger organizational support are more likely to feel empowered in their work, creating conditions that encourage creative contributions. By linking Organizational Support Theory (OST) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study offers an integrated explanation of how leadership behaviors translate into creative outcomes.

The results suggest that organizations can foster creativity by strengthening supportive leadership practices and creating work environments that enhance employees' sense of autonomy, capability, and purpose. These efforts may be particularly relevant for Generation Z employees, whose creativity often flourishes in supportive and empowering settings. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's cross-sectional design and its focus on Generation Z working students in Batam. Future studies may strengthen the evidence base by adopting longitudinal or experimental designs and examining the proposed model across broader organizational and demographic contexts.

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