

# Resilience at the Workplace through Empowering Leadership.

## A comparative analysis

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to do an exploratory research on how empowering leadership can influence the resilience levels in 3 urban City Hall from the North-East of Romania and see if there are significant differences. The perception upon the empowering leader behavior can offer insight with regards to the probability of leaving the workplace, the dynamic of their communication and interaction between leader and follower but also within their teams.*

*The Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) analyses the leader's ability to lead by example, to show concern for their employees and be involved in their work, to coach, guide and involve them in the decision-making process to improve their commitment, levels of motivation and ensure that they will not leave their job in case of adversity.*

*The modeling dimension from the ELQ instrument seems to have the lowest values, meaning that "leading by example" is not a common characteristic in the said public institutions, thus this can affect the quality of the group and how they perceive their leader as being efficient and adequate for the job. In the same train of thoughts, the goal focus also received a low score in comparison with the other dimensions, hence, coordination and the interest that the leaders have for the quality of their followers' work can also have a direct influence on the level of efficiency within the public institutions.*

Keywords: empowering leadership, resilience, quality of the workplace, ELQ, workplace resilience, resilient leader.

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to do an exploratory research on how empowering leadership can influence the resilience levels in 3 urban City Hall from the North-East of Romania and see if there are significant differences. The reason is to see if the level of development of the region has an influence on their capacity to overcome adversity and to investigate their relationship and dynamic at the workplace. The perception upon the empowering leader behavior can offer insight with regards to the probability of leaving the workplace, the dynamic of their communication and interaction between leader and follower but also within their teams.

The Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) analyses the leader's ability to lead by example, to show concern for their employees and be involved in their work, to coach, guide and involve them in the decision-making process to improve their commitment, levels of motivation and ensure that they will not leave their job in case of adversity.

Thus, an organization is more inclined in being resilient if there is an empowering leadership behavior that supports the team's ability to thrive, increase performance, be motivated and committed to the leader's vision by having confidence in his/her guidance and coaching methods.

It is interesting to see the level of resilience in the aforementioned public institutions especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and having a follow-up, comparative study as further research.

This first step can also support further research on doing comparative analysis not only from the same region, but to look at multiple ones to have a brighter image on how one can implement an empowering leadership behavior to further support resilient capabilities and understand which are the main key elements that support one's success as opposed to one's failure to lead a resilient organization (level of development, quality of life, poverty levels, etc.).

## **2. Literature Review**

Concepts such as leadership, teamwork, and institutional resilience are often used in order to increase performance and efficiency at the workplace and also to create an inclusive environment that can support a smart and continuously learning development.

Thus, when we talk about resilience, we talk about the ability to face adversity and to develop a positive adaptation to new changes (Foerster and Ducheck, 2018), thus learning new abilities that can help one reduce their negative consequences or impact in the future. Depending on one's ability to be flexible, learn and develop an organic system, where change is easily accepted or not, becoming resilient can be an easy process or a more difficult one. At the same time, depending on how well developed an institution or community is, the losses can be more significant than less developed communities or institutions because there are more stakes at play.

When talking about resilient leaders on the other hand, we talk about the leader's behavior in certain situations, therefore contextual leadership and their ability to face difficult or urgent matters in a way that the team is well coordinated and there is a certain focus upon the goal, a focus that is known equally by everyone. The dynamic and

complex process in which the leader is situated can show their level of resilience through different factors such as behavioral, situational and also, individual (Foerster and Duchek, 2018).

Moreover, a resilient leader must present a set of clear values, to set a common understanding for success and which are the means to reach it, be effective and efficient in judgement in actions, be in constant communication with their team and be engaged in their belief system. Furthermore, as Farrar (2017) mentions, a resilient leader must be opened to change and accept it as a part of a natural path towards a sustainable development. Even though changing culture might seem difficult, especially if we talk about rigid institutions, it must not be ignored. If done so, then facing adversity will be more difficult and will result in more negative consequences or a longer time to recover, overcome and learn from said adversity.

The Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) developed by Arnold *et. al.* (2000) looks at how can leaders empower their teams to perform not by being part of the team but by providing leadership (p. 250) so that the team can feel encouraged and safe to share ideas, set goals and focus on the assigned task more efficiently. Moreover, 'subordinates should also develop adequate motivation for working autonomously' (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014, p. 7), making them accountable for their own tasks and ensuring that they are aware of their own responsibilities but at the same time offering them the required confidence.

Empowering leadership doesn't mean only to empower your employees to work on their own, but also to 'develop empowering leadership skills, resilience, healthy relationships and conflict management skills while achieving productive goals' (Tau *et. al.*, 2018, p. 2) and to face adversity with ease, being opened to change and to help people to thrive, especially through difficult times.

Thus, within the ELQ survey we have eight main dimensions which are *delegation, initiative, goal focus, efficacy support, inspiration, coordination, modeling* and guidance, that will be presented in the following lines.

*Delegation* refers to the leaders' ability to offer authority to subordinates to engage and initiate different tasks without their supervision or better yet, without them micro managing the employee's activity.

*Initiative* is associated with the leaders' ability to let employees so initiative on their own, without having them be assigned different tasks or responsibilities.

Being *goal focused* from the ELQ perspective means that the leader is interested in how well their team can achieve the set goals and they make sure that the team is aware and equally understands the goals of the institution.

Offering *efficacy support* from the leader means that the leader can make objective assessments and help the team improve by analyzing their strengths and weaknesses and develop a learning system through which they can improve their skills.

Being a leader that *inspires* their team is crucial in forming a strong and united team. This is possible only if they are enthusiastic about the future and if they are able to encourage their team through the power of example or if they are constantly communicating with their team.

*Coordination* and group management are essential elements in maintaining a strong team and making sure, as a leader, that everyone is in line with the vision and mission of the organization. Moreover, an empowering leader makes sure that the objectives of their employees are in line with the objectives of the company.

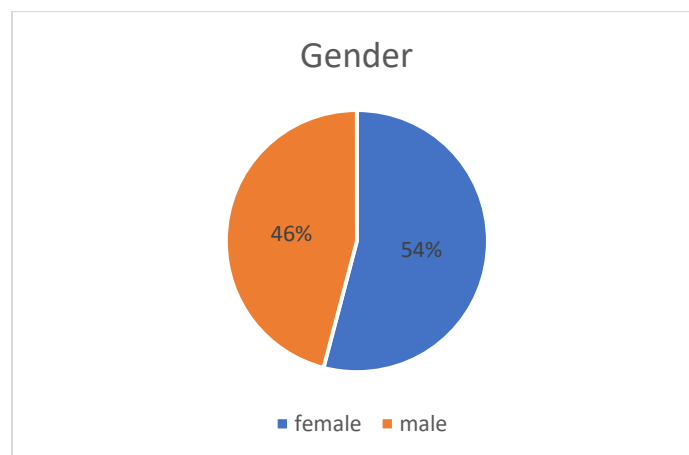
*Modeling* or leading by example ‘refers to a set of behaviors that show the leader’s commitment to his or her own work as well as the work of their team members’ (Arnold *et. al.*, 2000, p. 254).

Last but not least, it is important for an empowering leader to *guide* their employees, to show them how they can better organize themselves, their work and tasks and how they can develop within their institution. Thus, is important for an empowering leader not only to show how things are done within the institution, but also offer support, allow them participate in the decision-making processes, interact with them and offer guidance whenever needed to make sure that they offer high performance and increase their efficiency.

### 3. Methodology

The research was developed on 3 City Halls from the North-East region of Romania and the surveys were sent online, through e-mail. The e-mails were sent between May-August 2021 but only 78 surveys were filled out in total, from the 3 institutions, thus the approach of the paper changed due to the limited number of filled out surveys. The survey had 24 affirmations regarding the eight dimensions and they had to give them a score from 1 (highly disagree) to 5 (highly agree). Also, they had four questions for demographic information regarding age, gender, the position (all were in execution) and regarding their studies. Most had undergraduate studies and some a Master’s degree.

Hence, instead of doing a comparative analysis on the 3 institutions, the analysis will focus on the gender indicator to see if there are substantial differences in interpreting and understanding the concept of empowering leadership. At the same time, it will be interesting to see if some issues are more visible to one gender or the other. Moreover, due to the quite balanced distribution, this can give us a clear image on how they interpret the dimensions and how present are them within their institution.

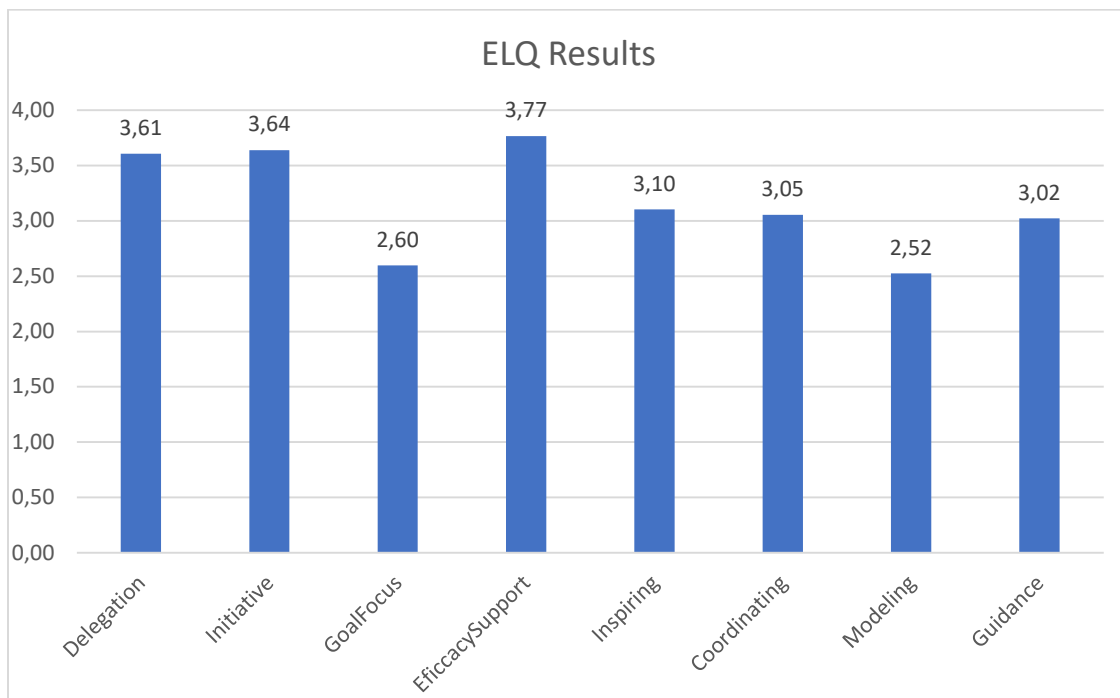


Graphic 1. Gender distribution

Regarding the age range of the respondents, the average age is 46.7, where the minimum age is 25 years old and the maximum is 66 years old. This can give us a large coverage in terms of experiences at the work place, individuals that are working there for a longer or shorter period of time.

#### 4. Results

In analyzing the data, it was interesting to see that most of the dimensions were present and some received quite a high score, especially for the *efficacy support* dimension, which had an average of 3.77 out of 5. Meaning that the leader is assertive to their needs and is opened to support their strengths and support their improvement. Moreover, their perspective is that the leader is opened to tell them whenever their tasks need to be re-evaluated and offers advice on how they can use their strengths to their advantage.

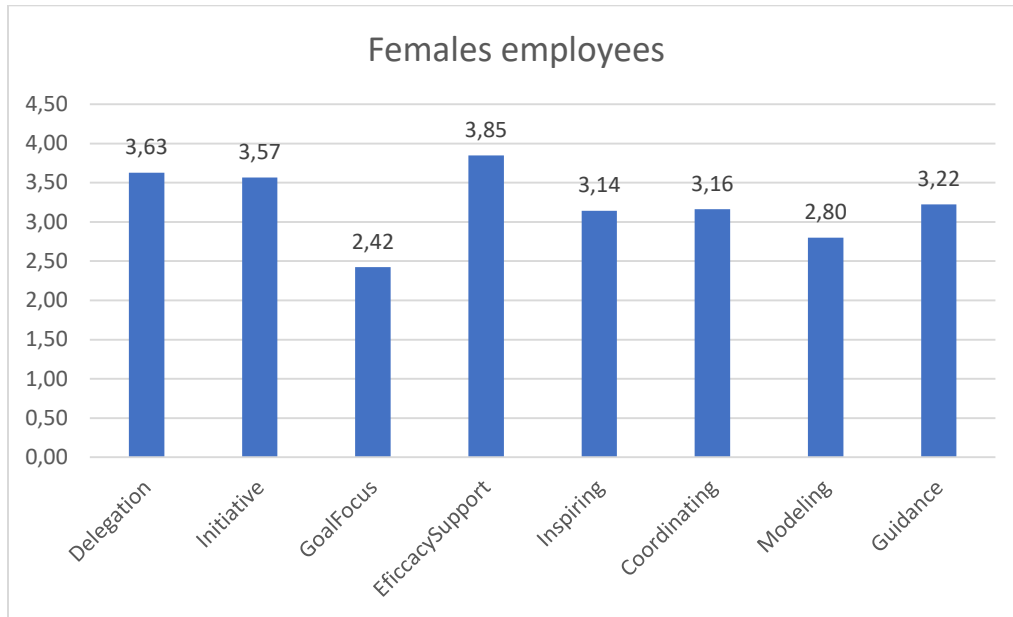


Graphic 2. ELQ general results. Source: author's interpretation

At the same time, the *initiative* dimension received a good score of 3.64 out of 5. This is related to the leaders' ability to empower them in showing initiative and start projects on their own. This is very important especially in this context because this shows a sign of trust from both parts and a sign of open collaboration. The fact that the leader is able to *delegate* and support their decisions is crucial to becoming resilient and to be open to change.

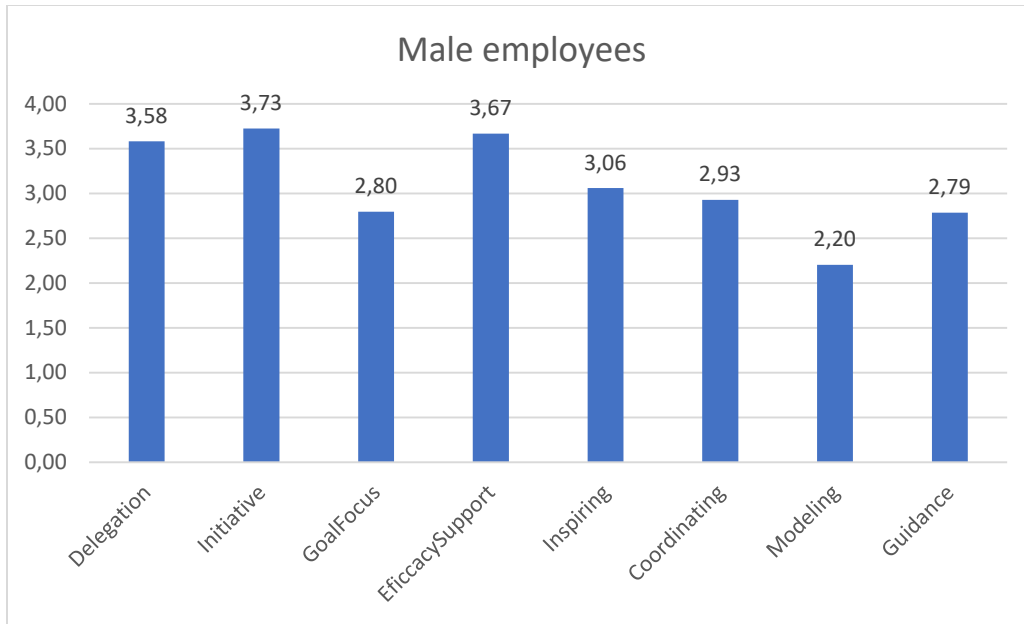
The lowest scores were obtained by the *modeling* dimension, meaning that even though the leader is open to delegate work, to show support and to guide people when needed, the power of example is not so present from their perspective. This can turn into a negative element on the long term because it can demotivate people and make them less interested in the institutions' goals. This is also related to the *goal focus* dimension because if there is not a common understanding of the goals and of what success means to the team, then they can go and act in different direction, making the institution more susceptible for adversities.

From the perspective of gender, we can see that the female employees obtained a similar score to the general one. Meaning that *goal focus* and *modeling* received the lowest scores (2.42 and 2.80 respectively). This can have a serious impact on the long term because if the leader cannot empower them through the power of example and by being actively involved in their activities, not only giving advice from afar. Also, *inspiring* employees is another crucial aspect that must be taken care of by an empowering leader because if the team does not believe in your vision, then it will take longer to achieve it, it can become difficult and sometimes resistance to change could become the main element that can weaken the team.



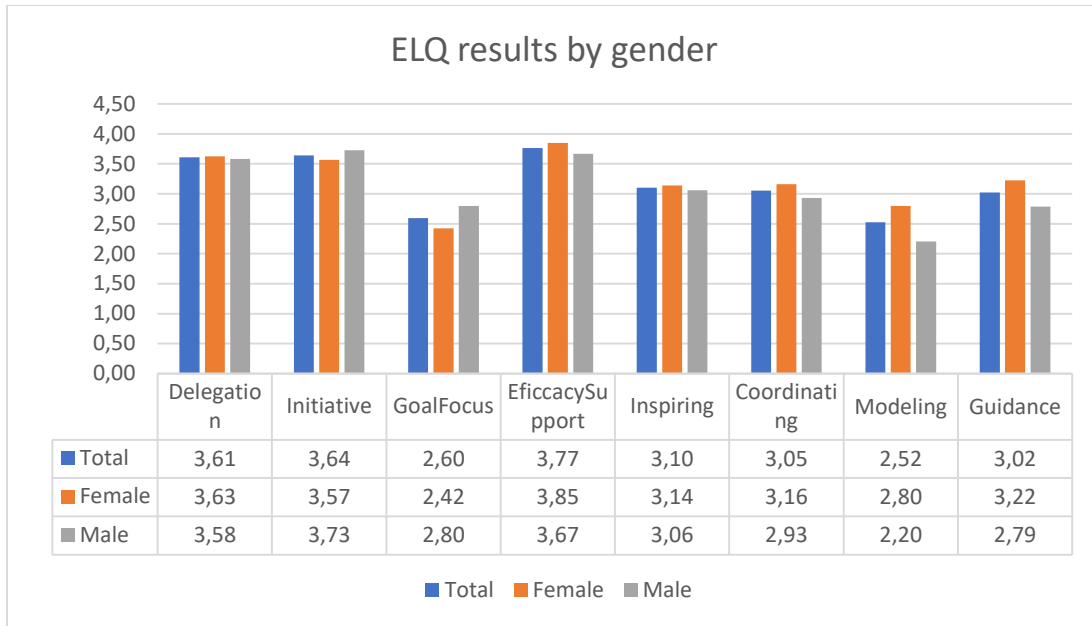
Graphic 3. ELQ results – female employees. Source: author’s interpretation

From the male employees’ perspective, we can notice the scores being slightly lower, besides the same dimensions aforementioned, we can see that the *guidance* dimension received a 2.79 score out of 5, meaning that, from their perspective, the leader is not that involved in offering their perspective of things, of how the employees can better organize their work and how can they do their tasks more efficient. This is important to notice because the role of a leader is to inspire, guide and support their followers to reach their highest potential. The same idea goes for the *coordination* dimension (a score of 2.93) because the leader must coordinate the team in the direction of reaching the mission of the organization. But if the employees do not have the feeling of working in a harmonic way, then this can represent a weaker link in the system, being opened to failing and not able to understand how to recover and overcome.



Graphic 4. ELQ results – male employees. Source: author's interpretation

In trying to compare the mean with the average of each genders' answers, we do not see very noticeable differences between the two, except for three dimensions which are *modeling*, with a difference of 0.60 points between the two genders. Being public institutions, it is understandable why the leader is not that involved and does not lead by the power of example, but at the same time, due to rapid changes, those that lead must become more flexible, must adapt faster to change and also must be more involved in the actions of their team and show how things are perceived by them. It is important for the team to see the leader actively involved in their activities, to set the direction and *guide* (a difference of 0.44 points between the answers) them on the right path. This way, they will have a better understanding of their roles and will be more *goal focused* (difference of 0.37 points) and devoted to reach the organizational mission.



Graphic 5. ELQ by gender. Source: author’s interpretation

Even though the differences were quite small between the general average and between the genders, it is noticeable the fact that not even one dimension reached a score of 4 or the maximum of 5 points, the highest being 3.77 (*efficacy support*). This can raise further questions on how strong the empowering leadership is present in the three City Halls and how aware are the individuals regarding this element, especially due to its importance in becoming more resilient, opened to change and flexible when it comes to the unknown or even when trying to improve and develop themselves or the institution, its relation with citizens, with different stakeholders and the image that is reflected into the community.

Thus, there is potential but if the leaders do not realize the importance of becoming more flexible, more opened and more adaptable, then the organization can suffer on the long term.

## 5. Limitations

The main limitations of this study are related to the limited number of respondents from each City Hall, meaning that the analysis could not explore the situation in a more in-depth approach and develop a suitable comparative analysis to observe if there are significant differences between different City Halls from the same region.

Thus, this research can represent a first step in continuing the exploration at a higher level, trying to see if there are differences in interpretation in different regions (for example North-East and North-West regions) and try to further understand the implications of an empowering leadership, how present is the concept in Romanian City Halls and what actions should be developed in order to implement it to support resilience at an institutional level.



## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

This exploratory research wanted to see the extent to which the concept of empowerment leadership is present in 3 different City Halls from the North-East regions of Romania. It was interesting to note that the scores were average and after further inspection one can say that there is potential to develop empowering leadership, but at the same time there is a lot to work too.

It is important to note that some public institutions are not so open to change, can be somewhat rigid and this can become an impediment in trying to introduce relatively known concepts such as becoming a leader that leads by the power of example, becoming more involved in the teams' activity, try to guide them and offer them support and autonomy in order to reach their highest potential. These are just some elements that can strengthen the team and indirectly the institution. If everyone is on the same path, has a common understanding of the vision and mission and tries to learn from different things, then becoming more resilient will be an organic transition.

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