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THE IMPACT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEES' JOB SATISFACTION: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF JOB CHARACTERISTICS

Abstract: In an increasingly uncertain and competitive environment, organizations striving for sustainable success are required to adopt an entrepreneurial orientation that fosters adaptability and innovativeness. Entrepreneurial orientation represents an organization's strategic direction and its ability to identify and exploit market opportunities through specific decision-making styles and strategic procedures. The successful implementation of such orientation depends on leaders who apply an entrepreneurial leadership style.

Entrepreneurial leadership refers to leaders who are willing to take risks, exploit opportunities, and stimulate creativity in value creation and strategic processes. Entrepreneurs as leaders exert significant influence on their employees and prior research suggests that entrepreneurial leadership positively affects employees' job satisfaction. An important aspect of entrepreneurial leadership is encouraging employees to display self-initiated behavior which may be associated with the degree of autonomy and other work-related characteristics experienced by employees. Job characteristics, including autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, and feedback, relate to the scope and nature of tasks as well as to the way work is performed. According to the Job Characteristics Theory higher levels of autonomy, task variety, task significance, and feedback represent important predictors of job satisfaction. Moreover, entrepreneurial leaders may shape employees' perceptions of job characteristics through processes of social influence and environmental framing, given their unique position within both the objective and social work environment.

Although previous studies confirm the positive relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and job satisfaction, as well as between job characteristics and job satisfaction, limited research has examined whether job characteristics serve as a mediating mechanism through which entrepreneurial leadership influences job satisfaction. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and job satisfaction and to test the mediating role of job characteristics in this relationship.

Data will be collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed to employees across various organizations in the Republic of Serbia. The questionnaire will consist of scaled items measured on a five-point Likert scale. It is expected that entrepreneurial leadership and job characteristics will positively influence job satisfaction, with job characteristics demonstrating a significant mediating effect. These findings have theoretical implications for expanding the knowledge base and enriching the literature on leadership, entrepreneurship, and job design, particularly

in the context of the Republic of Serbia, where research on the relationships among these variables remains limited. The practical implications of the findings relate to providing guidance for managers and HR professionals in fostering autonomy, responsibility, and meaningful work in order to enhance employee job satisfaction.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial leadership, Job satisfaction, Job characteristics

1. INTRODUCTION

Employees' job satisfaction represents a key factor of organizational success in a dynamic and competitive environment (Gašić, Jevtić, Berber, & Aleksić, 2025). Satisfied employees demonstrate higher levels of effort, improved skills, and contribute to overall organizational performance (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Numerous studies confirm that job satisfaction is strongly related to productivity, performance, and organizational effectiveness (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Organizations therefore increasingly focus on understanding the factors influencing job satisfaction in order to maintain employee commitment and achieve sustainable success (Muttalib, Danish, Zehri, 2023). Leadership is one of the most important determinants of job satisfaction (Kauppila, 2025), as different leadership styles can produce significant outcomes at individual and organizational levels (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). While most research emphasizes transformational leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Putra, 2022), entrepreneurial leadership remains underexplored (Yang, Pu, Guan, 2019; Kreiner, Sajfert, Anđelić, Jančev, Živković, 2021). Entrepreneurial leadership, characterized by opportunity recognition, innovation, and adaptability can enhance job satisfaction by increasing autonomy, creativity, and a sense of purpose (Nawaz, Wenqi, Akhtar, 2025). In addition, job characteristics are an important predictor of job satisfaction, as job design significantly shapes employee attitudes and outcomes (Milovanska-Farrington, 2023; Kerekes, Zaharie, Rațiu, 2023). However, despite existing research on these relationships, the mediating role of job characteristics between entrepreneurial leadership and job satisfaction has not been sufficiently examined. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the impact of entrepreneurial leadership on employees' job satisfaction and the mediating role of job characteristics. The results indicate a significant positive effect of entrepreneurial leadership on both job characteristics and job satisfaction, as well as a statistically significant partial mediation effect. These findings contribute to the literature by extending understanding of entrepreneurial leadership as an underexplored construct.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Job satisfaction

Employees are considered a key source of productivity, and their job satisfaction plays a crucial role in organizational success (Madugu & Ogundeji, 2023). Satisfied employees tend to be more motivated, engaged, and committed to their work (Qasim & Syed, 2012). Job satisfaction can be understood as a multidimensional construct reflecting employees' attitudes, emotions, and evaluations of their work (Locke, 1976) and it is positively associated with well-being and performance (Jevtić & Gašić, 2024). Various factors influence job satisfaction, including financial compensation, coworker support, work environment, career advancement, and leadership. Research highlights that higher salaries, supportive colleagues, and a positive work environment significantly enhance satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw, Rich, 2010). Additionally, opportunities for advancement and effective leadership further strengthen employee commitment and satisfaction (Mishra, 2013; Madugu & Ogundeji, 2023).

2.2. Entrepreneurial leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership, commonly defined as leader behavior focused on recognizing and exploiting opportunities, has gained increasing attention in the literature (Chandranathan, 2025). Early definitions emphasized goal setting, empowerment, and organizational cohesion, while more recent approaches define it as influencing employees toward achieving goals through opportunity recognition and exploitation (Renko, El Tarabishy, Carsrud, Brännback, 2015). This leadership style plays a crucial role in helping organizations adapt to dynamic and uncertain environments, thereby enhancing competitiveness and long-term success. By fostering innovation, autonomy, and proactive behavior, entrepreneurial leaders encourage employees to go beyond formal roles and actively contribute to organizational goals (Nawaz, Wenqi, Akhtar, 2025; Frese & Gielnik, 2014). Moreover, such leaders significantly shape employees' job perceptions and performance by creating a supportive and stimulating work environment (Stephan, Strauss, Gorgievski, Wach, 2024). Consistent with broader leadership research, entrepreneurial leadership can strongly influence employee motivation and job satisfaction, making it an important factor for both individual and organizational outcomes (Kauppila, 2025; Olutade, Liefoghe, Olakunle, 2015).

2.3. Job characteristics

The job characteristics model, developed by Hackman and Oldham, explains how job design influences employee motivation and satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Job characteristics represent structural and content related aspects of work that shape employee behavior and attitudes, emerging as a response to earlier models of work specialization (Zhao, Ping, Zhu, Ji, Wang, Wang, 2024). The model identifies five core dimensions, task identity, task

significance, skill variety, autonomy, and feedback, that enhance the meaningfulness of work and improve motivation and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). These characteristics also support the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, including autonomy, relatedness, and competence, which are essential for positive employee outcomes (Stylen, 2013). As a result, job characteristics play a key role in increasing job satisfaction, while insufficient fulfillment of these needs may lead to stress and lower satisfaction levels (Rajasekhar & Vijayasree, 2012)

3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Entrepreneurial leadership is an important determinant of employees' job satisfaction, as leadership style shapes employee performance, engagement, and relationships with supervisors (Madugu & Ogundeji, 2023; Iqra & Tahir, 2025). High quality leader-employee relationships contribute to greater job satisfaction, as employees become more motivated and willing to invest effort in their work (Saeed, Ali, Rashid, 2023). In this context, entrepreneurial leadership fosters creativity, proactivity, and engagement, making it a valuable resource for increasing job satisfaction (Bilal, Chaudhry, Sharif, Shafique, Shahzad, 2022).

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Entrepreneurial leadership has a statistically significant impact on employees' job satisfaction.

Entrepreneurial leadership also plays a key role in shaping job characteristics, particularly in dynamic environments where innovation is essential (Adu, Boakye, Yeboah, Twumasi, 2024). By promoting autonomy and flexibility, such leaders encourage employees to take initiative and pursue challenging goals, thereby enhancing their perception of job roles (Ngo & Zainal Badri, 2025). Through social influence and communication, entrepreneurial leaders shape how employees interpret their work, emphasizing key characteristics such as autonomy and task significance (Stephan, Strauss, Gorgievski, Wach, 2024).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Entrepreneurial leadership has a statistically significant impact on job characteristics.

Job characteristics are strongly linked to employees' job satisfaction, as explained by the job characteristics model, which highlights dimensions such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). These characteristics influence employees' motivation, attitudes, and work outcomes, including job satisfaction. Prior research confirms a positive and significant relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction (Milovanska-Farrington, 2023; Fatema, 2024). Although mediation effects have been examined in the context of transformational leadership (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), such relationships remain underexplored for entrepreneurial leadership (Adu, Boakye, Yeboah, Twumasi, 2024). Given that entrepreneurial leaders shape both the work environment and job characteristics (Stephan, Strauss, Gorgievski, Wach, 2024), the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Job characteristics mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and employees' job satisfaction.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to identify the impact of entrepreneurial leadership on job satisfaction, as well as the mediating effect of job characteristics in the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and job satisfaction, an empirical study was conducted in the period from March 12 to April 15, 2026, within the Republic of Serbia. In order to collect primary data and examine employees' attitudes toward entrepreneurial leadership, job satisfaction, and job characteristics, a survey method was applied. Within this method, an online interview technique was used, with a questionnaire serving as the research instrument. For the purpose of primary data collection, an original questionnaire was developed based on widely accepted instruments for measuring the variables included in the research model. The variable entrepreneurial leadership was measured using eight items, adapted from Renko, El Tarabishy, Carsrud, Brännback (2015). Job characteristics were measured using four items, all selected from the section Task characteristics (*Decision making autonomy, Task significance, Task variety and Feedback from job*), adapted from Morgeson and Humphrey (2006). In accordance with the study of Korff et al. (2017), job satisfaction was measured using six items adapted from Kwiotkowska & Gebczynska (2022). Respondents' answers were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates disagreement with the statement and 5 indicates complete agreement. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The internal consistency of the items used to measure the variables entrepreneurial leadership, job satisfaction, and job characteristics was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In addition, regression based mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS, Model 4. Entrepreneurial leadership was entered as the independent variable, job characteristics as the mediator, and job satisfaction as the dependent variable. The significance of the indirect effect was tested using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals.

RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Sample characteristics

Out of a total of 152 respondents, 54.6% (83 respondents) were female, while 45.4% (69 respondents) were male. The largest proportion of respondents were up to 28 years of age (53.9%), 33.6% were between 28 and 44 years old, while the smallest share of respondents were between 45 and 60 years old (12.5%). Regarding the level of education, 13.2%

of respondents completed secondary education, 43.4% completed college or undergraduate studies, while 43.4% completed master's or doctoral studies. In terms of income level, 7.2% of respondents earn up to 70,000 RSD, 58.2% earn between 70,000 and 150,000 RSD, while 34.2% earn more than 150,000 RSD. Furthermore, among the surveyed individuals, 61.8% were employed in non-managerial positions, while 38.2% held managerial positions. The largest number of respondents had up to 5 years of work experience (58.6%), followed by those with 5 to 20 years of experience (31.6%), while the smallest proportion had more than 20 years of work experience (9.9%). The functional areas in which respondents predominantly work include IT (21.7%), followed by management (19.1%), finance and accounting (15.1%), human resources (14.4%), marketing and sales (13.3%), production (8.6%), and research and development (7.9%). Additionally, the majority of employees work exclusively on-site (54.6%), followed by hybrid work arrangements (35.9%) and remote work (9.9%).

4.2. Reliability analysis

Table 1 presents the results of the reliability analysis of the observed variables. The internal consistency of the applied scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The obtained values for all observed variables (entrepreneurial leadership, job satisfaction, and job characteristics) exceed the threshold of 0.60. It can be concluded that the applied scales are reliable.

Table 1: Results of reliability analysis

Variables	Cronbach's α
Entrepreneurial leadership	0.615
Job satisfaction	0.684
Job characteristics	0.749

Source: Authors research

4.3. Analysis of direct and indirect relationships between variables

The results of the mediation analysis show that entrepreneurial leadership has a statistically significant positive effect on job characteristics ($B = 0.4984$, $SE = 0.0763$, $t = 6.5298$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of entrepreneurial leadership are associated with more favorable perceptions of job characteristics. Furthermore, job characteristics have a statistically significant positive effect on job satisfaction when entrepreneurial leadership is included in the model ($B = 0.4837$, $SE = 0.0773$, $t = 6.2555$, $p < 0.001$). The direct effect of entrepreneurial leadership on job satisfaction also remains statistically significant after including job characteristics as a mediator ($B = 0.5193$, $SE = 0.0819$, $t = 6.3402$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that job characteristics may play a mediating role in the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and job satisfaction.

Table 2: Results of the mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4

Direct effect	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Entrepreneurial leadership → Job characteristics	0.4984	0.0763	6.5298	<0.001	0.3476	0.6492
Job characteristics → Job satisfaction	0.4837	0.0773	6.2555	<0.001	0.3309	0.6365
Direct effect: Entrepreneurial leadership → Job satisfaction	0.5193	0.0819	6.3402	<0.001	0.3575	0.6812

Source: Authors research

The bootstrap analysis confirmed the significance of the indirect effect of entrepreneurial leadership on job satisfaction through job characteristics. The indirect effect was positive and statistically significant (Effect = 0.2411, BootSE = 0.0587), with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranging from 0.1364 to 0.3673. Since the confidence interval does not include zero, the indirect effect is statistically significant. Therefore, job characteristics significantly mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and employees' job satisfaction.

Table 3: Bootstrap results for the indirect effect

Indirect effect	Effect	BootSE	BootLCI	BootULCI
Entrepreneurial leadership → Job characteristics → Job characteristics	0.2411	0.0587	0.1364	0.3673

Source: Authors research

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of the study confirm that entrepreneurial leadership has a significant positive impact on employees' job satisfaction, supporting prior research on the importance of leadership style as a key determinant of satisfaction (Bilal, Chaudhry, Sharif, Shafique, Shahzad, 2022). In addition, entrepreneurial leadership significantly influences job characteristics, highlighting the role of leaders in shaping employees' perceptions of their work environment (Stephan, Strauss, Gorgievski, Wach, 2024). The findings also show that job characteristics positively affect job satisfaction, in line with the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and previous empirical studies (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Kerekes, Zaharie, Rațiu, 2023; Fatema, 2024). The main contribution of this study lies in confirming the mediating role of job characteristics in the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and job satisfaction. The results indicate partial mediation, extending existing research, primarily focused on transformational leadership (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), by incorporating entrepreneurial leadership as a less explored construct.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that entrepreneurial leadership has both direct and indirect effects on employees' job satisfaction. By fostering innovation, autonomy, and engagement, entrepreneurial leaders enhance job satisfaction not only directly but also indirectly through shaping job characteristics. A key contribution of this study is the confirmation of the partial mediating role of job characteristics, suggesting that leadership influences employee satisfaction both directly and through the design of work and the work environment. Theoretical contributions are reflected in extending existing research by incorporating job characteristics as a mediator in the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and job satisfaction, providing deeper insight into the mechanisms through which leadership affects employee attitudes. From a practical perspective, the results highlight the importance of aligning leadership style with effective job design. Managers should focus on increasing employee autonomy, enriching job content, clearly communicating the purpose of tasks, and supporting initiatives such as job crafting, mentoring, and continuous learning, all of which contribute to higher job satisfaction. The main limitation of the study is the sample restricted to employees from the Republic of Serbia, which limits generalizability, as well as the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. Future research should expand the model by including additional variables such as organizational commitment, work engagement, or psychological empowerment, and examine moderating factors like organizational culture. Comparative studies across different contexts are also recommended to enhance the broader applicability of the findings.

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