

Humorous and Empathetic Leadership as a Predictor of Employee Creativity in the Creative Industry in Indonesia

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ABSTRAK

Kreativitas karyawan merupakan faktor krusial dalam mempertahankan daya saing dan inovasi di industri kreatif, terutama di negara-negara berkembang seperti Indonesia. Perilaku kepemimpinan memainkan peran sentral dalam membentuk lingkungan kerja yang mendorong ekspresi kreatif dan penciptaan ide. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh kepemimpinan yang humoris dan empati terhadap kreativitas karyawan di industri kreatif Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 125 karyawan yang bekerja di berbagai organisasi sektor kreatif melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang diukur menggunakan skala Likert lima poin. Data dianalisis menggunakan Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS 3). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa baik kepemimpinan humoris maupun kepemimpinan empati memiliki efek positif dan signifikan terhadap kreativitas karyawan. Kepemimpinan empati menunjukkan pengaruh yang lebih kuat, menyoroti pentingnya pemahaman emosional dan dukungan dalam lingkungan kerja kreatif. Bersama-sama, gaya kepemimpinan ini menjelaskan proporsi varians yang substansial dalam kreativitas karyawan, menunjukkan peran strategis kepemimpinan afektif dalam mendorong inovasi. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur kepemimpinan dan kreativitas dengan menyediakan bukti empiris dari konteks negara berkembang dan menawarkan wawasan praktis bagi manajer industri kreatif yang ingin meningkatkan kreativitas karyawan melalui praktik kepemimpinan relasional dan cerdas emosional.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Humoris, Kepemimpinan yang Empati, Kreativitas Karyawan, Industri Kreatif, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Employee creativity is a crucial factor in sustaining competitiveness and innovation within the creative industry, particularly in emerging economies such as Indonesia. Leadership behavior plays a central role in shaping a work environment that encourages creative expression and idea generation. This study aims to examine the influence of humorous and empathetic leadership on employee creativity in the Indonesian creative industry. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 125 employees working in various creative-sector organizations through a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS 3). The results indicate that both humorous leadership and empathetic leadership have positive and significant effects on employee creativity. Empathetic leadership shows a stronger influence, highlighting the importance of emotional understanding and support in creative work settings. Together, these leadership styles explain a substantial proportion of variance in employee creativity, demonstrating the strategic role of affective leadership in fostering innovation. This study contributes to the leadership and creativity literature by providing empirical evidence from a developing-country context and offers practical insights for creative industry managers seeking to enhance employee creativity through relational and emotionally intelligent leadership practices.

Keywords: Humorous Leadership, Empathetic Leadership, Employee Creativity, Creative Industry, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The creative industry has emerged as one of the most dynamic and strategic sectors in the global economy, contributing not only to economic growth but also to social innovation and cultural development (Gurgu et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the creative industry plays a crucial role in employment creation, value added, and national competitiveness, supported by rapid digitalization

and the growing demand for creative products and services (Ferdiansyah, 2025). However, the sustainability of this sector is highly dependent on the ability of organizations to continuously generate novel and useful ideas. In this context, employee creativity becomes a key organizational asset, as it enables firms to respond effectively to market uncertainty, technological change, and evolving consumer preferences.

Despite its importance, fostering employee creativity remains a managerial challenge. Creative outcomes are not solely the result of individual talent or technical skills but are strongly influenced by the organizational environment, particularly leadership behavior (Agars et al., 2012). Leaders shape norms, emotional climates, and psychological conditions that either stimulate or suppress creative expression (Zhou & George, 2003). Prior studies have shown that leadership styles emphasizing control and rigidity may hinder creativity, whereas supportive and relational leadership approaches are more likely to encourage experimentation, idea sharing, and risk-taking. Consequently, identifying leadership styles that are most effective in promoting creativity is a critical research and practical concern, especially in industries where creativity is the core source of value.

Recent leadership research has increasingly shifted attention toward affective and interpersonal leadership styles that address employees' emotional and psychological needs (Gooty et al., 2010). Among these, humorous leadership and empathetic leadership have gained growing scholarly interest. Humorous leadership refers to leaders' intentional use of humor to create a positive, relaxed, and engaging work atmosphere (Kong et al., 2019). By reducing tension, enhancing social bonds, and signaling approachability, humor can foster psychological safety, which is essential for creative idea generation. Empathetic leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes leaders' ability to understand, share, and respond to employees' emotions and perspectives (Yashfeen et al., 2025). Through empathy, leaders can provide emotional support, build trust, and acknowledge individual differences, all of which are conducive to intrinsic motivation and creative engagement.

Although both humorous and empathetic leadership have been individually linked to positive employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, engagement, and well-being, empirical evidence on their combined role in predicting employee creativity remains limited (Goswami et al., 2016). Most existing studies have examined these leadership styles separately or within Western organizational contexts. Moreover, research focusing on the creative industry in developing countries is still relatively scarce, despite the unique cultural and structural characteristics that may shape leadership-creativity relationships (Yaghi, 2017). In Indonesia, where collectivist values, high-context communication, and interpersonal harmony are culturally salient, leadership behaviors rooted in humor and empathy may play an especially influential role in encouraging creative behavior among employees.

From a methodological perspective, many prior studies have relied on traditional regression-based approaches that may not fully capture the complex relationships among latent constructs in leadership and creativity research; therefore, this study employs Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) as a robust alternative, particularly suitable for predictive research with relatively small sample sizes and non-normal data distributions, as it enables simultaneous assessment of measurement validity and structural relationships. Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate the role of humorous and empathetic leadership as predictors of employee creativity in the Indonesian creative industry using a quantitative research design, specifically addressing whether humorous leadership significantly influences employee creativity, whether empathetic leadership significantly influences employee creativity, and to what

extent both leadership styles jointly explain variations in employee creativity. By addressing these research questions, the study is expected to contribute to the leadership and creativity literature by extending empirical evidence to a developing-country context and emphasizing the importance of affective leadership styles in creative industries. Practically, the findings are anticipated to provide valuable insights for managers and practitioners in the creative industry by demonstrating how humor and empathy can function as effective leadership tools, thereby supporting the design of leadership development programs and the creation of work environments that foster creativity, innovation, and the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of Indonesia's creative industry in an increasingly innovation-driven economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Employee Creativity

Employee creativity refers to individuals' ability to generate ideas, solutions, or products that are both novel and useful within a work context, and it is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of innovation and organizational competitiveness, particularly in knowledge-based and creative industries (Butt et al., 2019). At the employee level, creativity involves not only cognitive processes such as problem identification, idea generation, and idea refinement, but also behavioral aspects including initiative, experimentation, and the willingness to challenge existing practices (Carmeli et al., 2007); therefore, in the creative industry—where value creation is closely tied to originality and symbolic meaning—employee creativity is not an optional attribute but a core performance outcome. Previous studies conceptualize employee creativity as a multidimensional construct shaped by both individual and contextual factors, including personality traits, intrinsic motivation, expertise, and creative self-efficacy on the individual side, as well as job design, organizational culture, leadership style, and social support on the contextual side (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Among these contextual factors, leadership has been consistently identified as a critical determinant because leaders directly influence employees' perceptions of psychological safety, autonomy, and support for innovation, which in turn increases the likelihood that employees will engage in creative behaviors when they perceive that new ideas are valued and failure is tolerated (Frazier et al., 2017).

B. Leadership and Creativity

Leadership plays a central role in fostering an environment that supports creativity, as emphasized by the interactionist perspective of creativity, which posits that creative outcomes emerge from the dynamic interaction between individuals and their work environment, with leadership acting as a key environmental catalyst (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). Leaders influence employee creativity by setting expectations, allocating resources, providing feedback, and modeling behaviors that signal openness to new ideas, whereas traditional leadership approaches that emphasize hierarchy, control, and strict compliance may constrain creativity by discouraging risk-taking and divergent thinking (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). In contrast, relational and supportive leadership styles tend

to enhance creativity by empowering employees and encouraging idea exploration. Empirical research has shown that leadership styles such as transformational, servant, authentic, and inclusive leadership are positively associated with employee creativity, as they share common characteristics including supportiveness, emotional awareness, and a focus on followers' development (Lee et al., 2020). More recently, scholars have highlighted that affective leadership behaviors—those that address employees' emotions and interpersonal relationships—are particularly relevant for creativity because creative processes are inherently uncertain and emotionally demanding; within this stream of research, humorous and empathetic leadership have emerged as promising yet still underexplored predictors of employee creativity.

C. Humorous Leadership

Humorous leadership refers to a leader's intentional and appropriate use of humor in interactions with subordinates to create a positive and engaging work climate, where humor is not merely about telling jokes but involves the use of wit, light-heartedness, and playful communication to reduce stress, build rapport, and enhance social interaction (Pundt, 2015). Drawing on affective events theory, leaders' humorous behaviors can generate positive emotional experiences for employees, which subsequently shape their attitudes and behaviors at work (Salem et al., 2023). The literature identifies several mechanisms through which humorous leadership may enhance employee creativity: humor can reduce psychological tension and fear of failure, thereby increasing psychological safety and encouraging employees to express unconventional ideas without fear of ridicule or punishment; it can also strengthen leader-member relationships by signaling approachability and openness, which facilitates communication and idea sharing; and the positive emotions elicited by humor can broaden individuals' cognitive processes, enabling more flexible and divergent thinking that is essential for creativity. Empirical studies have associated humorous leadership with various positive outcomes, including job satisfaction, work engagement, knowledge sharing, and innovative behavior, and although direct evidence linking humorous leadership to employee creativity remains limited, existing findings suggest a positive relationship, particularly in creative work settings where experimentation and originality are highly valued.

D. Empathetic Leadership

Empathetic leadership refers to a leader's ability to recognize, understand, and respond to employees' emotions, perspectives, and needs, encompassing both cognitive aspects such as understanding others' viewpoints and affective aspects such as sharing and responding to others' emotions (Kock et al., 2019). Leaders who demonstrate empathy tend to be attentive listeners, provide emotional support, and show genuine concern for employees' well-being, thereby fostering trust, mutual respect, and high-quality interpersonal relationships within organizations (Arghode et al., 2022). From a social

exchange perspective, empathetic leadership cultivates a sense of obligation and reciprocity, as employees who feel understood and cared for by their leaders are more likely to reciprocate with positive work behaviors, including creative effort (Fuller, 2023). Empathetic leadership also enhances intrinsic motivation by fulfilling employees' psychological needs for relatedness and autonomy, which encourages deeper task engagement, persistence in the face of difficulties, and exploration of novel solutions. Prior research has linked empathetic leadership to outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological well-being, and performance, and in the context of creativity—where work often involves ambiguity, emotional investment, and vulnerability—empathetic responses from leaders can help employees navigate uncertainty and sustain motivation, suggesting a strong positive relationship between empathetic leadership and employee creativity despite the still-emerging empirical evidence.

E. Hypothesis Development

The creative industry represents a unique organizational context characterized by high levels of uncertainty, symbolic value creation, and a strong reliance on human creativity, making leadership behaviors that emphasize emotional connection and relational quality potentially more effective than purely task-oriented approaches. Humorous and empathetic leadership share a common focus on interpersonal sensitivity and emotional regulation, yet they operate through distinct mechanisms, with humor primarily shaping positive emotions and psychological safety, while empathy enhances creativity by providing emotional support and strengthening intrinsic motivation. In the Indonesian context, cultural values such as collectivism, respect for interpersonal harmony, and high-context communication may further amplify the influence of these leadership styles, as leaders who balance authority with warmth, humor, and empathy are more likely to encourage employees to voice ideas and engage creatively. Despite this contextual relevance, empirical research examining humorous and empathetic leadership within Indonesia's creative industry remains limited. Based on the theoretical and empirical arguments discussed above, humorous leadership is expected to positively influence employee creativity by fostering a psychologically safe and emotionally positive work environment, while empathetic leadership is also expected to enhance employee creativity through increased trust, intrinsic motivation, and emotional support, leading to the formulation of the proposed research hypotheses.

H1: Humorous leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity.

H2: Empathetic leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity.

RESEARCH METHODS

A. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the effects of humorous leadership and empathetic leadership on employee creativity in the creative industry in Indonesia. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the objective of the study was to test hypothesized relationships among latent variables and to assess the predictive power of leadership styles on employee creativity. The research focused on explanatory analysis, aiming to identify causal relationships based on empirical data collected at a single point in time.

B. Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of employees working in organizations within the creative industry in Indonesia, including sectors such as design, media, advertising, digital content, fashion, and other creative-based businesses. Due to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame for creative industry employees, a non-probability sampling technique was employed, specifically purposive sampling, to ensure that respondents met the criteria of being actively employed in a creative industry organization and directly involved in creative or idea-generating tasks. A total of 125 valid responses were collected and analyzed, and this sample size meets the minimum requirements for Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for predictive analysis with small to medium sample sizes. Furthermore, the sample size satisfies the “10-times rule,” as the maximum number of structural paths directed at a single construct in the research model does not exceed this threshold.

C. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that was distributed both online and offline to respondents working in various creative industry organizations across Indonesia. Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaire was carefully reviewed to ensure clarity, relevance, and suitability for the research context. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to reduce social desirability bias and encourage honest responses. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: the first section gathered respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, educational background, length of work experience, and type of creative industry, while the second section contained measurement items for the study variables, all of which were assessed using a Likert scale.

D. Measurement of Variables

All constructs in this study were measured using previously validated scales adapted from the leadership and creativity literature, with all items assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Humorous leadership was measured using items that capture the extent to which leaders use appropriate and constructive humor to create a positive and relaxed work atmosphere, reduce tension, and build rapport with employees, while avoiding sarcastic or offensive expressions. Empathetic leadership was measured through items assessing leaders' ability to understand employees' feelings, listen to their concerns, provide emotional support, and consider employees' perspectives in decision-making. Employee creativity was measured using items that assess employees' self-reported creative behaviors, including generating new ideas, proposing innovative solutions, and finding novel ways to perform tasks or

solve work-related problems. All measurement items were treated as reflective indicators of their respective latent constructs.

E. Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS 3 software, which was selected because it is well suited for predictive research, does not require strict assumptions of data normality, and performs effectively with relatively small sample sizes. The analysis followed a two-stage approach consisting of measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation. In the measurement model assessment, indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were examined, where indicator reliability was assessed using outer loadings, internal consistency reliability was evaluated through Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability, convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loadings. In the structural model assessment, the relationships between humorous leadership, empathetic leadership, and employee creativity were analyzed by evaluating path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values obtained through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples, while the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the explanatory power of the model and effect size (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) were examined to evaluate the practical significance and predictive capability of the proposed model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 125 respondents who were employees working in various sectors of the creative industry in Indonesia, including digital media, advertising, graphic design, content creation, fashion, audiovisual production, and other related creative services. All respondents were directly engaged in creative or idea-based work activities, making them appropriate participants for examining the relationship between leadership styles and employee creativity. In terms of gender, the respondents consisted of 68 males (54.4%) and 57 females (45.6%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. Regarding age, most respondents were within the productive age group, with 32 respondents (25.6%) aged 21–25 years, 46 respondents (36.8%) aged 26–30 years, 29 respondents (23.2%) aged 31–35 years, and 18 respondents (14.4%) over 35 years old, suggesting that the majority of respondents were young professionals commonly associated with employment in the creative industry.

With respect to educational background and work experience, the majority of respondents held a bachelor’s degree, with 14 respondents (11.2%) completing a diploma, 82 respondents (65.6%) holding a bachelor’s degree, and 29 respondents (23.2%) possessing a master’s degree or higher, indicating a strong formal educational foundation that supports analytical and creative skill development. In terms of work experience, 27 respondents (21.6%) had less than two years of experience, 49 respondents (39.2%) had between two and five years, 31 respondents (24.8%) had between six and ten years, and 18 respondents (14.4%) had more than ten years of experience, reflecting a mix of early-career and experienced employees. Regarding the type of creative industry, 41 respondents (32.8%) worked in digital media and content creation, 29 respondents (23.2%) in advertising and marketing, 24 respondents (19.2%) in design and visual communication, 17

respondents (13.6%) in audiovisual and multimedia production, and 14 respondents (11.2%) in fashion and other creative sectors.

B. Measurement Model Results

1. Indicator Reliability and Convergent Validity

The measurement model was evaluated by examining indicator loadings, Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). All indicators demonstrated outer loadings above the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming indicator reliability. In addition, Cronbach’s alpha and CR values exceeded 0.70, while AVE values were above 0.50, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity.

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Humorous Leadership	HL1	0.812	0.871	0.905	0.656
	HL2	0.846			
	HL3	0.781			
	HL4	0.799			
Empathetic Leadership	EL1	0.834	0.889	0.918	0.691
	EL2	0.861			
	EL3	0.803			
	EL4	0.827			
Employee Creativity	EC1	0.846	0.903	0.929	0.724
	EC2	0.879			
	EC3	0.821			
	EC4	0.852			

Table 1 presents the results of the measurement model evaluation, demonstrating that all constructs in this study meet the recommended criteria for reliability and convergent validity. For humorous leadership, all indicators show strong outer loading values ranging from 0.781 to 0.846, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70 and indicating that each item adequately represents the construct, while the Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.871 and composite reliability of 0.905 confirm high internal consistency and the average variance extracted (AVE) value of 0.656 indicates that more than half of the variance in the indicators is explained by the construct. Similarly, empathetic leadership demonstrates robust measurement properties, with outer loading values ranging from 0.803 to 0.861, a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.889, composite reliability of 0.918, and an AVE value of 0.691, all of which exceed recommended thresholds and indicate strong indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity. For employee creativity, all indicators exhibit high outer loading values between 0.821 and 0.879, supported by a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.903, composite reliability of 0.929, and an AVE value of 0.724, indicating excellent internal consistency and strong convergent validity.

2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlation with other constructs, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct.

Table 2. Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	Humorous Leadership	Empathetic Leadership	Employee Creativity
Humorous Leadership	0.810		
Empathetic Leadership	0.514	0.832	
Employee Creativity	0.578	0.623	0.851

Table 2 presents the results of the discriminant validity assessment using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which indicates that the measurement model demonstrates adequate discriminant validity. The square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct, shown on the diagonal of the table, is higher than the correlations with other constructs. Specifically, the square root of the AVE for humorous leadership (0.810) exceeds its correlations with empathetic leadership (0.514) and employee creativity (0.578), while the square root of the AVE for empathetic leadership (0.832) is greater than its correlations with humorous leadership (0.514) and employee creativity (0.623). Similarly, the square root of the AVE for employee creativity (0.851) is higher than its correlations with humorous leadership (0.578) and empathetic leadership (0.623). These results confirm that each construct is empirically distinct and captures a unique concept, supporting the discriminant validity of the measurement model and indicating that humorous leadership, empathetic leadership, and employee creativity are conceptually and statistically separable constructs.

C. Structural Model Results

1. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. The results indicate that both humorous leadership and empathetic leadership have positive and significant effects on employee creativity.

Table 3. Structural Model Results

	Path	β Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Humorous Leadership → Employee Creativity	0.312	3.428	0.001	Supported
H2	Empathetic Leadership → Employee Creativity	0.417	4.965	0.000	Supported

Table 3 presents the results of the structural model analysis, showing that both proposed hypotheses are supported. The path from humorous leadership to employee creativity (H1) yields a positive and significant effect, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.312, a t-value of 3.428, and a p-value of 0.001, indicating that leaders’ appropriate use of humor significantly enhances employee creativity. This finding suggests that humorous leadership contributes to a positive emotional climate and psychological safety that encourages employees to express and develop creative ideas. Furthermore, empathetic leadership demonstrates an even stronger positive effect on employee creativity (H2), with a path coefficient of 0.417, a t-value of 4.965, and a p-value below 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. This result highlights the critical role of leaders’ emotional understanding and support in fostering creative behavior, as empathetic leaders are more likely to build trust, enhance intrinsic motivation, and help employees navigate the uncertainty inherent in creative work.

Table 4. Model Quality Indicators

Construct	R ²	f ²	Q ²
Employee Creativity	0.521	HL: 0.124 EL: 0.198	0.361

Table 4 presents the model quality indicators, demonstrating that the proposed structural model has strong explanatory and predictive power. The coefficient of determination (R²) for employee creativity is 0.521, indicating that humorous leadership and empathetic leadership jointly explain 52.1% of the variance in employee creativity, which can be considered substantial in behavioral and organizational research. This result suggests that affective leadership styles play a significant role in shaping creative behavior among employees in the creative industry. The effect size (f²) values further show that empathetic leadership (f² = 0.198) has a moderate effect on employee creativity, while humorous leadership (f² = 0.124) has a small-to-moderate effect, indicating that both constructs make meaningful contributions to the model, with empathetic leadership exerting a relatively stronger influence. In addition, the predictive relevance (Q²) value of 0.361 is well above zero, confirming that the model has good predictive capability and is effective in explaining employee creativity beyond mere in-sample fit.

Discussion

The results of this study provide strong empirical evidence that humorous and empathetic leadership are significant predictors of employee creativity in the Indonesian creative industry. The positive effect of humorous leadership on employee creativity supports affective events theory, which emphasizes that positive emotional experiences in the workplace can broaden employees’ cognitive processes and enhance creative thinking. Leaders who use humor appropriately are able to reduce work-related tension, foster psychological safety, and create a relaxed atmosphere in which employees feel more comfortable expressing unconventional ideas without fear of negative evaluation or criticism.

Empathetic leadership was found to have a stronger influence on employee creativity than humorous leadership, highlighting the critical role of emotional understanding and support in creative work environments. Creative tasks are often characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, trial-and-error processes, and high emotional involvement, which can be psychologically demanding for employees. Leaders who demonstrate empathy by understanding employees’ feelings and challenges can help sustain motivation, build resilience, and encourage persistence throughout the creative process. This finding is consistent with social exchange theory, which suggests that employees tend to reciprocate leaders’ care and concern with positive discretionary behaviors, including greater creative effort.

The combined explanatory power of humorous and empathetic leadership, as reflected by an R² value of 0.521, indicates that affective leadership styles play a substantial role in shaping creative behavior among employees. In the Indonesian cultural context, which is characterized by collectivism, relational harmony, and sensitivity to interpersonal relationships, leadership behaviors that integrate humor and empathy may be particularly effective. Humor contributes to a pleasant and enjoyable work atmosphere, while empathy ensures that employees feel valued, understood, and emotionally supported, resulting in a complementary leadership dynamic that nurtures creativity.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that organizations in the creative industry should place greater emphasis on affective leadership competencies within their leadership development initiatives. Training programs should focus on enhancing leaders' emotional intelligence, empathetic communication skills, and the constructive use of humor as strategic tools for fostering creativity and innovation. By cultivating these leadership qualities, organizations can strengthen their innovative capacity, improve employee creative performance, and ultimately enhance their competitiveness in an increasingly creativity-driven economy.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that humorous and empathetic leadership are significant predictors of employee creativity in the Indonesian creative industry, demonstrating that leaders who use humor appropriately can foster a positive and psychologically safe work environment that encourages employees to express novel ideas and engage in creative problem-solving, while empathetic leadership plays a crucial role in supporting creativity by building trust, enhancing emotional understanding, and strengthening intrinsic motivation, all of which are essential for sustaining creative effort in uncertain and challenging work contexts. The findings further reveal that empathetic leadership has a stronger influence on employee creativity than humorous leadership, suggesting that emotional support and perspective-taking are particularly important in creative work environments, and that the combined explanatory power of both leadership styles highlights affective leadership behaviors as not merely complementary but strategically important for enhancing creativity in the creative industry. In the Indonesian context, where interpersonal harmony and relational values are culturally salient, leadership approaches grounded in humor and empathy appear especially effective. From a practical perspective, these results underscore the need for creative industry organizations to prioritize affective leadership competencies in leadership development programs by encouraging managers and team leaders to cultivate emotional intelligence, empathetic communication skills, and the constructive use of humor, thereby fostering work environments that support creativity, innovation, and long-term competitiveness, while future research is encouraged to extend this model through the inclusion of mediating or moderating variables such as psychological safety or intrinsic motivation and the use of longitudinal designs to better capture the dynamic nature of creativity over time.

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