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# Reflections of self-concept clarity at work: the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the relationship between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation

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## Abstract

**Background** We examined the relationships between self-concept clarity, a relatively new addition to the organizational behavior literature, and the well-established constructs of psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation. We also aim to examine if psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation. By integrating self-determination theory and conservation of resources theory, the study offers a novel perspective on how internal psychological resources shape work-related motivation.

**Methods** We implemented A cross-sectional study design to test the hypothesis. We collected data from 345 full-time employees across various sectors in the Marmara region, in Türkiye.

**Results** The findings reveal that self-concept clarity, as a personality trait, is associated with employees' sense of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact in the workplace, enabling them to feel psychologically empowered. Furthermore, self-concept clarity is positively related to intrinsic motivation. The results also demonstrate that psychological empowerment plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation.

**Conclusions** This study serves as a foundation for the examination of self-concept clarity in the organizational behavior literature, particularly in relation to employee motivation.

**Keywords** Self-Concept Clarity, Intrinsic Motivation, Psychological Empowerment, Self-Determination Theory

“Someone asked a dervish: No one here knows you, what will you do? He answered: ‘I am a stranger; they may not know me, but I know who I am. What if the situation were reversed and I were blind to myself? What would I do then?’” (*Mesnevi*, VI, 4331–3).

## Background

Knowing oneself is the basic knowledge of being human. As stated in the quote, if an individual believes they know themselves, they may feel confident, even in the absence

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of recognition from others. On the other hand, if they are not certain about their identity, they might feel lost. We do not have to be a dervish, saint, or philosopher to give importance to knowing ourselves. Indeed, knowing ourselves and having a stable identity may lead to greater differences in our well-being than we think [1, 2]. Looking back and examining the studies that have been done on personality and self, we saw that scholars give greater importance to discovering how one's sense of self affects one's behaviors and attitudes in various social settings [3, 4]. Self-concept clarity (SCC) is one of those important self-concepts, meaning "the extent to which the contents of an individual's self-concept are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable" [5]. Past studies revealed that self-concept clarity may positively affect well-being, social life, and self-esteem [5–7]. However, self-concept clarity is a less considered subject in work settings. Investigating self-concept clarity (SCC), psychological empowerment (PE), and intrinsic motivation (IM) together, we aim to shed light on a fundamental question: How does individuals' internal clarity about themselves contribute to psychological states that encourage motivation in organizational settings? Understanding this relationship is particularly valuable in today's work environments, where sustaining intrinsic motivation is essential for creativity, resilience, and long-term engagement. In the current study, we examined self-concept clarity in the work context.

Individuals working in today's dynamic and complex organizational environment want to work in organizations where they learn and develop their potential, take responsibility, and have autonomy in certain areas. Employees of organizations with these features feel psychologically empowered and have higher job satisfaction, performance, and intrinsic motivation [8, 9]. The fact that empowerment positively affects individual and organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, creativity, and firm innovation [10, 11] ensures that research on the subject continues to be noteworthy. Existing research primarily examines PE as a mediator between leadership styles (e.g., transformational leadership, authentic leadership) and intrinsic motivation [10]. However, there is a growing interest in understanding how internal, self-related variables—such as personality traits and self-concept—relate to these constructs [12, 13]. Spreitzer [8] argues, in her nomological network, that not only organizational variables but internal variables can serve as important antecedents to psychological empowerment. Given Spreitzer's emphasis on the importance of examining a comprehensive nomological network, exploring individual variables' interaction with PE will contribute to a more holistic understanding of empowerment, as it extends beyond situational and organizational

influences alone. By incorporating this view, the study aims to explore how internal self-related variables, in this study SCC, contribute to the multifaceted experience of empowerment.

Self-concept clarity (SCC) is a personality trait that is significantly related to the individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors [3–5]. While prior studies focus on personality traits or self-efficacy, SCC offers a unique perspective by capturing an individual's overall sense of self-consistency, which may be particularly influential in shaping workplace adaptation [7]. Situating SCC within Organizational Behavior (OB) requires recognizing its relevance to key work-related phenomena. Self-concept clarity has been linked to enhanced decision-making, reduced stress, meaningfulness, and increased intrinsic motivation [4, 14–16], all of which are crucial in organizational settings. While prior research such as the work by Oh and Roh [16] has explored the indirect link between SCC and work motivation through perceived work meaningfulness, this study extends the current understanding by focusing on psychological empowerment as a broader and multidimensional construct that encompasses meaning, autonomy, competence, and impact. Therefore, rather than being the first to address the mediating mechanisms linking SCC to work motivation, this research positions itself as a complementary and expanding effort in a still limited but growing body of work.

According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, individuals who seek achievement and satisfaction tend to develop and protect personal resources that empower them in their environment and enhance their motivation and well-being. Personal resources reduce the psychological and physical costs associated with job demands while enhancing job resources that foster individual growth and well-being. Self-concept clarity (SCC), which is associated with psychological well-being [5] also serves as a mediator in the relationship between stress and subjective well-being. Therefore, this study proposes that SCC functions as a personal resource, like self-esteem and locus of control, and suggests that SCC be included in the category of personal resources within the framework of COR theory. SCC can serve as a personal resource that positively influences an individual's perceptions of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact—the core dimensions of psychological empowerment—as well as their intrinsic motivation, which reflects a person's engagement in their work. Given that SCC has been conceptualized both as a personality trait and a state, and is associated with high self-esteem and optimism [5] as well as internal locus of control [17], it is noteworthy that—despite related traits such as self-esteem, optimism, and locus of control being frequently studied

in OB, SCC itself has received limited attention. Consequently, analyzing SCC in relation to employee attitudes and behaviors, along with organizational outcomes like performance and motivation, can offer a more comprehensive understanding within the field of Organizational Behavior.

Accordingly, we examine the relationship between SCC, PE, and IM to investigate whether SCC plays a role in enhancing employees' psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation. We also test the mediating role of PE in the association between SCC and IM.

### **Self-concept clarity, psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation, and COR theory**

Self-concept clarity is the extent to which individuals have a clear and consistent understanding of themselves [5]. Baumgardner [18] noted its meaning as the clarity and consistency of one's thoughts and judgments about oneself. The concept emerged with the rise of the self-concept in social psychology literature, and studies on the subject have increased in the last twenty years. The first studies aimed to measure the relationship between self-concept clarity and other psychological concepts such as self-esteem, personality, and cognitive characteristics [2, 5, 17–19]. Like other personality traits and self-views affecting human behaviors and attitudes [20, 21], SCC can affect an individual's emotional reactions, behaviors, and attitudes [3, 4]. Some studies have noted its relevance in organizational behaviors and attitudes [14, 22, 23]. However, it is a subject that has only recently entered organizational behavior literature.

Spreitzer [12] emphasizes that both work conditions and personal characteristics shape individuals' perceptions of psychological empowerment and influence their motivation. In her nomological model, internal variables such as self-esteem and locus of control are proposed as important antecedents of psychological empowerment. Supporting this, studies have shown that individuals with a high internal locus of control or positive self-views are more likely to feel empowered in the workplace [13, 17]. Similarly, personality traits such as conscientiousness and extraversion—central to the Five-Factor Personality Theory—is positively linked to psychological empowerment [20, 21, 24, 25]. In line with this perspective, self-concept clarity (SCC), which reflects the extent to which individuals have a clearly defined and consistent self-view, is also considered likely to play a role in shaping empowerment perceptions.

Research has found that SCC relates to psychological adjustment, relationships, and well-being [5, 26–28]. Similarly, previous research has found that low self-esteem and low SCC relate to individuals being less able to cope with stress in the short and long term [15].

In addition, low levels of SCC were found to be related to increased depression and anxiety [29]. On the other hand, a study stated that a high level of SCC encourages people to participate in satisfied and committed relationships because it provides more information about themselves [30]. Thus, these studies show that high SCC has a positive effect on the individual and is a coping resource for negative feelings and situations. In the work context, it can be helpful to consider SCC as a construct affecting peoples' views and motivation. As people with high self-concept clarity have a clearer view of themselves, they can have more tolerance to uncertainty [7]. This clarity may allow them to construct a stronger sense of meaning, autonomy, competence, and impact—key components of psychological empowerment—even in less structured or stressful work settings. Therefore, SCC may act as a psychological resource that enables individuals to perceive empowerment in varying organizational contexts, beyond the influence of external conditions alone.

In organizational settings, SCC may be an important internal resource that helps individuals tolerate ambiguity and navigate complex work environments [7]. This clearer self-understanding can support the perception of psychological empowerment—defined as one's sense of meaning, autonomy, competence, and impact—even in the absence of ideal external conditions. This idea can be explained by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. COR theory is a motivation and stress theory that emphasizes individuals' efforts to get, preserve, and protect the resources they value. Personal resources help employees cope with challenging work conditions, enhance productivity, and reduce fatigue and burnout [31–33] while simultaneously promoting their overall well-being [32]. From this perspective, SCC can be viewed as a personal resource within the framework of COR theory [34] which contributes to resource acquisition motivation, enhances well-being, and reduces stress and burnout. Accordingly, SCC may serve as an internal psychological framework that strengthens individuals' ability to assess their work experiences and fosters resilience and adaptability in fluctuating work conditions, therefore we expect SCC to be positively associated with PE—an experience described as both situational and self-driven [12].

Psychological Empowerment is a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses four key dimensions: meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact [7]. In other words, PE can be experienced when individuals perceive their work as meaningful, believe in their ability to perform well, feel that their actions can significantly influence organizational outcomes, and have the freedom and discretion in how they carry out their tasks [8]. Both internal and external factors can affect one's feeling

empowered. An important one is one's self-view and identity [12]. Having a clear and consistent view of self might affect our journey of making sense of the world. There are studies in the literature supporting this idea. A study observed that self-concept clarity positively correlates with perceived meaningfulness in life [35]. Another study conducted in the work context found that self-concept clarity is an antecedent of work meaningfulness [16]. According to Webster & Kruglanski [36], individuals who seek predictability and order in their physical and psychological world perceive the world as purposeful and meaningful when they have a clear and consistent view of themselves. This may enable the individual to find their job and role in the organization more important and meaningful.

Studies have shown that high self-concept clarity enables a person to exhibit more confident behaviors in various dimensions of the self. A study conducted in a laboratory environment determined that participants with high self-concept clarity made more accurate predictions about their performance in the applied driving ability task [37]. It has been observed that individuals who have clear and consistent information about their make more accurate decisions and do not feel the need to imitate others [38], facilitate the person's ability to receive feedback regarding their behavior [39], and are more able to cope with negative evaluations, conflict, and stress [40]. Individuals with high self-concept clarity can make more accurate evaluations of their performance, so they might feel more competent and successful. If employees feel little or no autonomy in their work and think that they are simply carrying out the directives of upper management, they will feel less powerful [41]. A study by Ugurlar and Wulff [42] revealed that people with high self-concept clarity can differentiate their goals from others and act towards their goals that are relatable to autonomous decision-making. Diehl and Hay [43] also found a positive relationship between the autonomy dimension of well-being and self-concept clarity. Inferring from this literature, people with clear self-concepts might feel more autonomous, meaningful, and competent, making them feel psychologically empowered.

H1: Self-concept clarity is positively related to psychological empowerment.

Although most research focused on the effects of extrinsic factors on work motivation, the internal states of people are also important for intrinsic work motivation. By highlighting the gap in the literature Watanabe and Kanazawa [44] examined a model in which a personality-based perspective of intrinsic motivation is central. According to the results of the study, conscientiousness, and openness to experience positively affected intrinsic

motivation. Over time, studies related to the topic have increased. Saleh, Ashari, and Kosnin [45] indicated that intrinsically motivated students tend to be more resilient, overcome greater challenges, and achieve better outcomes in their academic pursuits than those who are extrinsically motivated. According to a study by Tlili et al. [46] extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness personality traits positively affect students' intrinsic motivation levels.

According to COR theory, the acquisition, or the possibility of gaining novel resources generates motivation, while resource loss or threat of loss leads to stress [32, 34]. Personal resources play a key role in enhancing work engagement while supporting employees' well-being and positive work-related attitudes such as intrinsic work motivation [32, 47]. People's self-concept and self-related views also affect their intrinsic motivation. Prabhu, Sutton, and Sauter [48] found that self-efficacy, openness to experience, and perseverance are positively related to intrinsic motivation. Tabernero and Hernández [49] also found a significant positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. As stated above SCC can be seen as a personal resource that is positively related to intrinsic motivation [16] by providing a clear self-view that reduces stress related to uncertainty. It is evident from the literature that the personality and self-views of people can be a significant antecedent of intrinsic motivation. Accordingly, we hypothesized that self-concept clarity may positively associated with intrinsic motivation.

H2: Self-concept clarity is positively related to intrinsic motivation.

### **Self-determination theory, psychological empowerment, and intrinsic motivation**

Self-determination theory focuses on internal processes that are effective in personality development and the formation of individual behaviors. According to this theory, there are three basic needs required for well-being. These are autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are universal and necessary for psychological health and development [50]. Also, satisfying these basic psychological needs of the individual is particularly important for forming and maintaining intrinsic motivation [51, 52]. Similarly, psychological empowerment can increase intrinsic motivation because it means the person is strong in meaning, competence, autonomy, and sense of impact.

Scholars have found significant positive relationships between psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation [53, 54]. Drawing on job characteristics and self-determination theory, Gagné, Senecal, and Koestner [55] aimed to examine the relationships between task



characteristics, intrinsic motivation, and psychological empowerment by distributing questionnaires to participants working in two different telephone companies in Canada. According to the results of this study, task characteristics (task meaningfulness and receiving feedback) positively affected psychological empowerment. Also, meaningfulness and autonomy dimensions of psychological empowerment positively affected intrinsic motivation [55].

These two concepts have become significant in creativity research. A study examining the relationships between leadership, psychological empowerment, employee participation, and intrinsic motivation utilized survey data from professional employees and their supervisors at a large information technology company in China. The findings of this study indicated that empowering leadership positively influenced psychological empowerment, which, in turn, positively impacted both employees' intrinsic motivation and participation in the creative process [53]. Similarly, scholars worldwide revealed a significant positive relationship between creativity, PM, and IM [17, 54, 56]. When we look at Turkish literature, we see studies in various fields, although more limited. One of these studies examined the relationship between psychological empowerment and teacher motivation and found that there was a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment [57]. According to the literature, we hypothesize that there is a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation.

H3: Psychological empowerment is positively related to intrinsic motivation.

Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that psychological empowerment is a key mediator in the relationship between leadership styles-like empowering, transformational, authentic, and intrinsic motivation [53, 58–61]. However, research examining psychological empowerment as a mediator between personality or self-related variables and intrinsic motivation remains scarce. We thoroughly examined self-determination theory and developed a hypothesis accordingly.

According to Ryan and Deci [62], people form identities to satisfy their basic needs (relatedness, autonomy, and competence), which makes them feel intrinsically motivated. Expanding the idea, people try to secure their places in society by developing and maintaining their identity, which requires understanding their position and roles in society. Also, people want to feel successful, productive, and wise by forming an identity that enables them to behave toward success and productivity. Having their beliefs, interests, and values as part of their identity makes people feel autonomous. Scholars found

that self-concept clarity positively affected a sense of identity; thus, it can be said that “personal identity and other aspects of self are largely reciprocal,” and both have positive effects on human psychology, such as well-being and living a meaningful life [63–65]. Accordingly, having a clear and consistent concept of self could enhance satisfaction of needs, feeling psychologically more powerful which makes people feel intrinsically motivated.

H4: Psychological empowerment has a mediating role in the relationship between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation.

## Methods

### Participants

To examine our hypotheses, we collected data from full-time employees working in companies. We distributed 345 Surveys to individuals working across various sectors in the Marmara region, the center of Türkiye's industrial and service sectors, using the Google Forms application. We shared the survey with participants via email and through various social media groups and provided all respondents with an informed consent form that outlined the purpose of the study, emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, and assured confidentiality. We included only those participants who gave their informed consent in the study. Responses were automatically collected in a spreadsheet via the Google Forms platform. We initially collected a total of 340 surveys and retained 332 for analysis after excluding incomplete or invalid responses.

### Measurement

The “Self-Concept Clarity Questionnaire” developed by Campbell and colleagues [5] was used to measure the clarity and consistency of the participants' views about themselves. Sümer and Güngör [66] translated the questionnaire into Turkish. Participants answered the questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, as “(1) Strongly disagree”, “(2) Disagree”, “(3) Undecided”, “(4) Agree”, “(5) Strongly agree”. The questionnaire consists of a single dimension and a total of twelve statements. Cronbach alpha of the scale is 0.819. Example items for the self-concept clarity scale are: “My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another (Reversed item)” and “Sometimes I feel that I am not really the person that I appear to be.”

In the third section, the “Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire” developed by Spreitzer [12] was used to measure how much individuals feel psychologically empowered. Çekmecelioğlu, Günsel, and İlhan [67] translated the questionnaire into Turkish. Participants answered the questionnaire using a 5-point

Likert scale, as “(1) Strongly disagree”, “(2) Disagree”, “(3) Undecided”, “(4) Agree”, “(5) Strongly agree”. It comprises twelve statements and four dimensions: meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact. Cronbach alpha of the scale is 0.881. Example items for Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire are: “*The work I do is meaningful to me*” and “*I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.*”

Finally, the “Intrinsic Motivation Survey” adapted by Tierney et al. [68] from Amabile et al.’s [69] intrinsic motivation scale was used to measure the intrinsic motivation levels of the participants. Çekmecelioğlu, İlhan, and Günsel [70] translated the questionnaire into Turkish. Participants answered the questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, as “(1) Strongly disagree”, “(2) Disagree”, “(3) Undecided”, “(4) Agree”, “(5) Strongly agree”. It consists of a single dimension and a total of five statements. Exploratory factor analysis showed that one of the items had low factor loading (0.34). Due to the low factor loading of the item in the intrinsic motivation scale, we removed it from the analysis. Cronbach alpha of the scale is 0.847 after removing it. Example items for intrinsic motivation scale: “*I enjoy finding solutions to complex problems.*” and “*I enjoy coming up with new ideas for products.*”

**Table 1** Bivariate correlations among the study variables

Variables	Mean	S.D	1	2	3
1. Psychological Empowerment	4.19	0.57	(-)		
2. Self-Concept Clarity	3.87	0.65	.252**	(-)	
3. Intrinsic Motivation	4.11	0.77	.412**	.204**	(-)

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

## Results

### Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among study variables

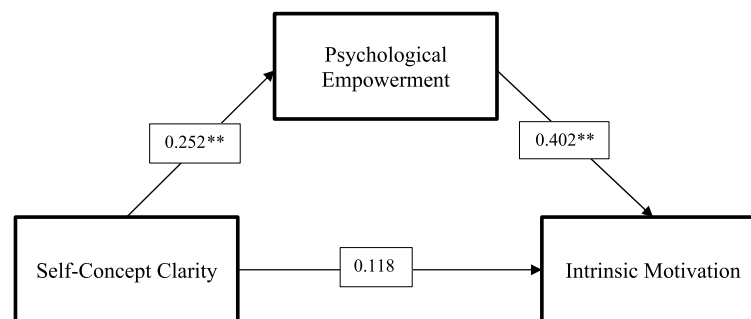
We conducted descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations analysis in SPSS 28.0, to see means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the variables. The psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation scale had relatively high mean values (see Table 1). The means of the remaining scales were close to the midpoint.

We conducted correlation analyses to determine the level, direction, and strength of the relationship between the variables in this study. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of dependent, independent, and intervening variables and correlations between them. When the results of the correlation analysis are examined, a positive relationship was found between self-concept clarity and psychological empowerment ( $r=0.158$ ), between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation ( $r=0.186$ ), and between intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment ( $r=0.344$ ).

### Hypothesis testing

To test the Hypothesized model, we conducted the bootstrapping analysis using the PROCESS macro for SPSS [71]. This method effectively estimates direct, indirect, and moderated effects within a unified analytical framework [72]. Specifically, we employed the technique developed by Hayes [73] to examine whether employees’ perceptions of psychological empowerment mediate the relationship between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation. The research model developed for this study is illustrated in Fig. 1.

Table 2 summarizes the regression analyses evaluating the direct, indirect, and mediated relationships among self-concept clarity, psychological empowerment, and intrinsic motivation. The results demonstrate



Note: \*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Fig. 1** Mediating effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation shown on the mediation model. Note: \*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 2** Hypothesis results

Effect, Variable	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	SE	t	p
Direct effect of mediator (psychological empowerment) on intrinsic motivation	0.402	.2004	0.075	7.9059	.0000
Direct effect of predictor (SCC) on mediator (psychological empowerment)	0.252	.0636	0.047	4.7362	.0000
Total effect of predictor (SCC) on intrinsic motivation	0.220	.0485	0.705	4.0992	.0001
Direct effect of predictor (SCC) on intrinsic motivation with inclusion of the mediator (psychological empowerment)	0.118	.2004	0.066	2.3260	.0206
Value	M	SE		LCL 95%CI	UCL 95%CI
Indirect effect of predictor (SCC) on intrinsic motivation	0.101	0.0278		0.0509	0.1594

Unstandardized regression results are reported. *N* = 332, Bootstrap sample size = 5000. *B* Standardized coefficient estimates, *SE* Standard Error

that self-concept clarity is significantly and positively associated with psychological empowerment ( $\beta=0.252$ ,  $SE=0.047$ ,  $t=4.7362$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), thereby supporting H1.

Also, a significant positive direct relationship was found between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation ( $\beta=0.220$ ,  $SE=0.705$ ,  $t=4.0992$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), providing support for H2. Moreover, psychological empowerment shows a positive and significant association with intrinsic motivation ( $\beta=0.402$ ,  $SE=0.075$ ,  $t=7.9059$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), providing support for H3.

The significance of the indirect effect of self-concept clarity on intrinsic motivation, mediated by psychological empowerment, is further supported by the bootstrap analysis. The indirect effect ( $\beta_{\text{indirect}}=0.101$ ,  $SE=0.0278$ , 95% CI [0.0509, 0.1594]) does not include zero, confirming the mediating role of psychological empowerment. Thus, H4 is supported by these results.

## Discussion

Individuals exist as distinct selves, integrating mental, emotional, and behavioral processes within the context of social life. The self, as a construct designed to give life meaning and aid in its navigation, plays a significant role in shaping behaviors and perceptions during daily interactions. Self-concept clarity, which refers to individuals having clear and consistent views about themselves, has been shown to positively influence their self-confidence and overall well-being [5, 26]. However, the influence of self-concept clarity on individuals' attitudes and behaviors in the workplace has not been sufficiently explored. Therefore, this study examines the workplace implications of self-concept clarity, focusing on its potential role in enhancing psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation.

Research indicates that personal traits characterized by positive self-evaluations, including locus of control, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and emotional stability, are frequently associated with psychological empowerment [8, 9, 13, 74]. Additionally, personality dimensions such as conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and

openness positively influence psychological empowerment, while neuroticism has been found to have a negative impact [75–77]. Positive evaluations of personality traits significantly contribute to an individual's psychological empowerment. In this context, the concept of self-concept clarity—encompassing the structural dimensions of self-concept and reflecting the extent to which the self is well-defined and integrated [78, 79] emerges as a positive personality trait. This study demonstrates that self-concept clarity, as a personality trait and self-evaluation, is significantly associated with psychological empowerment—a critical factor linked to job attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as well as organizational performance [20, 80]. The findings of the study indicate that self-concept clarity influences psychological empowerment, highlighting its significance. This result can also be explained by COR theory. According to this theory, individuals strive to prevent resource loss and attempt to accumulate resources to create a buffer against potential future losses [34]. Several studies have demonstrated that employees possessing personal resources such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, hope, resilience, and optimism are more likely to exhibit positive work attitudes [32, 81, 82] demonstrate greater flexibility and openness to learning, and are inclined to sustainably develop their personal resources [83]. SCC, as an internal resource, may play a buffer role in negative and stressful conditions, since people who have high SCC may cope with stress and negative conditions more efficiently. As a result, people with high SCC may feel more empowered by reducing stress, and related uncertainty. Individuals with a clear understanding of themselves perceive their work as more meaningful and important, believing that they contribute value to their organization and society [84–86]. With heightened self-concept clarity, individuals are more likely to participate in decision-making processes related to their department and organization, take proactive steps to advance organizational goals, assume responsibilities,

and contribute meaningfully to their team and organization. Research has shown that psychological empowerment enhances employees' creative behaviors and promotes firm innovation, thereby elevating organizational competitiveness [11, 12]. Consequently, organizations comprising individuals who feel empowered tend to be more productive and competitive. Despite the prominence of psychological empowerment as a key topic in organizational behavior, its antecedents and outcomes being widely explored, its relationship with self-concept clarity remains underexamined. In this context, this research contributes to the psychological empowerment literature by addressing this gap.

Our research findings indicate that self-concept clarity is positively related to intrinsic motivation. This result highlights that self-concept clarity, a stable personality trait strongly associated with self-esteem and self-awareness, increases intrinsic motivation—defined as the drive derived from the inherent interest, curiosity, and excitement elicited by the task itself. Given that intrinsic motivation is recognized as a key factor in fostering creative behavior in the workplace, the significance of self-concept clarity as a critical concept becomes particularly evident. Intrinsic motivation is considered a fundamental factor in enhancing employees' creative behavior in the workplace, underscoring the critical importance of self-concept clarity. Supporting this perspective, a related study on self-concept clarity examined its influence on employees' perceptions of their work's meaningfulness. The findings revealed that individuals with a clearer and more consistent sense of self were more likely to perceive their work as meaningful [16]. As previously noted, the relationship between self-concept clarity, intrinsic motivation, and psychological empowerment has not been extensively studied. However, prior research has established that low self-esteem and diminished self-concept clarity impair individuals' ability to cope with stress both in the short and long term [15]. Additionally, low levels of self-concept clarity have been found to increase depression and anxiety [29], whereas high self-concept clarity has been consistently associated with greater well-being and adaptability [5, 26, 27]. Research indicates that self-concept clarity is associated with academic performance [87] and professional success. Accordingly, self-concept clarity, which provides individuals with greater self-awareness and fosters stability and consistency, appears to enhance not only academic performance but also life satisfaction and overall well-being [88]. This study contributes to the organizational behavior literature by identifying self-concept clarity as a factor that increases intrinsic motivation—a key driver of employee engagement, performance, and creative behavior in the workplace.

The findings of this study indicate that psychological empowerment enhances individuals' intrinsic motivation. According to self-determination theory, humans are inherently inclined to explore, learn, and engage in behaviors that provide intrinsic satisfaction from an early age [51]. In this context, psychological empowerment, which reflects individuals' perceptions of themselves in relation to their work environment, fosters intrinsic motivation by enabling them to feel strong in terms of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact. This intrinsic motivation stems from internal sources such as self-esteem and self-satisfaction [89, 90]. Numerous studies have identified positive relationships between psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation [19, 53, 55, 56]. Psychological empowerment has been a prominent topic in organizational behavior literature. Research has demonstrated that psychological empowerment is positively associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, task performance, contextual performance, and creative performance [91–93]. Additionally, psychological empowerment has been [11]. As evidenced both in this study and numerous others, psychological empowerment is widely recognized as a critical factor that enhances positive work attitudes, motivation, organizational performance, and innovation.

It was found that psychological empowerment fully mediated the relationship between self-concept clarity and intrinsic motivation. In other words, individuals with a clearer self-concept are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological empowerment, which in turn enhances their intrinsic motivation. This suggests that self-concept clarity operates through the sense of empowerment individuals feel in their environments, thereby fostering more autonomous and intrinsically motivated behaviors. The idea comes from Ryan and Deci's [62] work which explains how people form identities to satisfy their basic needs -autonomy, competence, and relatedness-. When individuals perceive their self-concept as stable and consistent, they are likely to experience a greater sense of empowerment, which enhances their ability to satisfy these fundamental needs and increases overall intrinsic motivation.

This research contributes to the theoretical framework by establishing a connection between the concept of self-concept clarity and Self-Determination Theory, thereby enhancing the body of knowledge in this domain. The findings demonstrate that self-concept clarity supports identity development in individuals. Deci and Ryan [62] suggest that, according to the Self-Determination Theory, identity formation stems from individuals' fundamental psychological needs. Identity development and formation reinforce feelings of competence, leading individuals to pursue roles and activities where they



can acquire knowledge, skills, and a sense of efficacy. The results of this study contribute to the theory by revealing that self-concept clarity positively affects psychological empowerment.

Furthermore, having a clear self-concept fulfills individuals' need for autonomy by allowing them to cultivate their interests, values, and capacities. In this context, self-concept clarity contributes to identity development by fostering feelings of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact in workplace settings. Simultaneously, it enhances intrinsic motivation through psychological empowerment, underscoring its dual role in supporting identity development and promoting psychological strength.

### Limitations and recommendations for future research

Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, the results should be interpreted with caution since we cannot interpret causal relationships. While theoretical grounding supports the hypothesized direction from SCC to psychological empowerment to intrinsic motivation, causal conclusions cannot be definitively drawn without longitudinal or experimental data. Future research can design longitudinal or experimental studies to see causal relationships. Also, since it is a self-report survey study, which can lead to a social desirability effect, people tend to draw a better image of themselves. Specifically, perceptual data, like individuals' psychological states, attitudes, or perceptions—such as self-concept clarity, empowerment, or motivation—tend to change with time, and may fluctuate depending on contextual or situational factors. Therefore, relying solely on data collected at a single point in time may not capture the dynamic nature of these constructs. Repeated measurements across different time points would provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of how these variables interact over time and help establish stronger evidence for causal relationships. Also, since we conducted this study in Türkiye, Marmara region, we cannot be able to generalize them to other countries that have different economic and cultural contexts.

The primary recommendation for future studies is the need for further exploration of the concept of self-concept clarity. Specifically, research can focus on examining the process underlying the relationship between self-concept clarity and motivation, stress may be added in line with the COR theory. This can contribute to theory and enhance the explanation power of the research model. Additionally, future studies could investigate how supportive or obstructive work environments influence employees' identity development and self-concept clarity. Investigating organizational and individual antecedents together would provide deeper insights into the

contextual factors that shape and enhance employee attitudes in organizational settings.

### Conclusion

In summary, this study explores the concept of self-concept clarity, a relatively recent addition to the organizational behavior literature, within the workplace context. By investigating its relationship with employees' intrinsic motivation and perceptions of psychological empowerment, the research brings attention to this emerging topic and serves as a foundation for further examination of self-concept clarity's influence on employee attitudes and behaviors.

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### Authors' contributions

Meryem Özcan is the corresponding author. She has made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work, and analysis of the data; drafted the work and substantively revised it. AND to have approved the submitted version (and any substantially modified version that involves the author's contribution to the study); Prof. Hülya Gündüz Çekmecelioğlu has made substantial contributions to the design of the work, the acquisition of data, drafted the work. AND to have approved the submitted version (and any substantially modified version that involves the author's contribution to the study); AND to have agreed both to be personally accountable for the author's own contributions and to ensure that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work, even ones in which the author was not personally involved, are appropriately investigated, resolved, and the resolution documented in the literature. Gönül Konakay has made substantial contributions to the acquisition of data, and drafted the work. AND to have approved the submitted version (and any substantially modified version that involves the author's contribution to the study); AND to have agreed both to be personally accountable for the author's own contributions and to ensure that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work, even ones in which the author was not personally involved, are appropriately investigated, resolved, and the resolution documented in the literature. Acknowledgments I would like to thank Prof. Ayşe Günsel and Jale Balkaş for their valuable assistance during the analysis phase of this work.

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### Data availability

The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study are available in the Harvard Dataverse repository, doi:10.7910/DVN/EGCOJW.

### Declarations

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study was approved by the Kocaeli University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee, with the approval number 2020/14, decision number 18. The study follows ethical guidelines for scientific research and publication. Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequence. The data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire, and participants were required

to give their consent before starting the survey. The questionnaire included demographic questions, self-concept clarity, psychological empowerment, intrinsic motivation.

#### Consent for publication

Not applicable.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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