



## Towards an entrepreneurial leadership based on kindness in a digital age

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Entrepreneurial leadership  
Kindness  
Innovative  
SMEs  
Competences  
Mindfulness

### ABSTRACT

This study identifies the main competencies required for an entrepreneurial leadership style in the digital age and for effectiveness in innovative organisations. A total of 119 leaders in the technology sector were surveyed. Seven latent variables that give meaning to a new style are identified through a factor analysis. The results show that Teamwork, Motivation and Risk-taking have a direct and significant impact. They are the most developed competencies and, therefore, the ones that have the greatest impact on the Kinder Leadership style (that is, one based more on kindness, caring, gentleness, and graciousness towards colleagues). Creativity and Caring for Others had the least effect. A number of tools are offered for improving the competences with the lowest impact and pushing towards kind entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurial attitude improves the quality of the entrepreneurial ecosystem for business management.

### 1. Introduction

In a dynamic, fluctuating economy that is increasingly unpredictable, making for a fast-changing business environment, organisations have to change their management style. They must change their social behaviour and evolve towards a business leadership that breaks away from classical concepts of business leadership (Sandybayev, 2019). Economic, political and social crises share common characteristics, whether they are detrimental or beneficial in the short term. All crises lead to uncertainty, instability and insecurity, both at work and in the personal sphere. But they are also engines of change, adaptation, regeneration and propulsion into a new era, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit (Boonsiritomachai & Sud-On, 2021). The recent Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the drive for digitalisation in the workplace and the promotion of telework (Nosratzadeh & Edrisi, 2022). Individuals must learn to adapt to the new environment and become more flexible in how they work. More specifically, this responsibility lies mainly with the management of the company (see Table 1).

During the new era of digitalisation and in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, departments led by effective people with a highly developed EQ are being reinforced (Batool, 2013; Mathew & Gupta, 2015; Li, Gupta, Loon, & Casimir, 2016; Goleman, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Atiku and Randa (2021) argue that this circumstance gave rise to 'ambidextrous' leadership, i.e. leadership that combines previous

leadership styles and new adaptations with a direct impact on innovation in high-tech firms. They confirm that leaders adopt an ambidextrous leadership style to drive innovative performance within the organisation. This leadership is primarily focused on promoting creativity, continuous improvement and resource efficiency. Allas and Schaninger (2020) state that the most productive individuals tend to have high levels of technical skills and personal drive. However, only 30% of them tend to become leaders who prioritise and support employee satisfaction (Allas & Schaninger, 2020). They are starting to encourage flexibility, active listening and respect for employees (Cui, 2021). Ambidextrous leadership also encourages intrapreneurship, initiative, participation and teamwork (Greenockle, 2010). Authors such as Lawton-Misra and Pretorius (2021) point out that the pandemic highlighted the need to develop people-oriented leadership focused on care, empathy and compassion, and to break with formalities and develop closer boss-employee relationships. Many companies rely on complementary training for middle management in order to accelerate this development and improve team management skills (Soliman, 2022).

Since 1990, there has been talk of transformational leadership, consisting of four behavioural capabilities: inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealised influence and individualised consideration (Avolio et al., 1999). Gupta and Singh (2013) also noted that a transformational leader can easily meet the needs of their team members and encourage them towards more creative performance. However, the literature addressing the new behaviours of leaders and the new era of

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**Table 1**  
Questionnaire variables.

1. Degree of honesty.
2. Degree of appreciation of others for their work.
3. Degree of concern for others.
4. You usually hold meetings with your work team.
5. As a leader, degree of trust with your team.
6. Degree of empathy with your team members.
7. Degree of freedom to participate and let your collaborators give their opinions.
8. You feel that your team members trust each other.
9. Degree of active listening when meeting with others.
10. You like to work in a team.
11. You consider yourself to be critical of yourself and others.
12. You are seen by others as a person of reference and inspiration.
13. It is easy for you to integrate teams.
14. You consider yourself a risk taker.
15. You like to take risks.
16. You feel satisfied with the work you do.
17. You go to work happy, and you try to make others feel it in order to spread your happiness.
18. You are concerned about what others think of you.
19. You are satisfied with your co-workers.
20. You feel that your work is valued.
21. You care about others.
22. You spend even a small amount of time having individual conversations with each member of your team.
23. Do you practice any kind of meditation technique?
24. Degree to which you identify your own emotions and feelings.
25. Degree of resilience to conflict.
26. You are aware of the present.
27. You motivate your employees.
28. You try to create a participatory working environment.
29. You encourage creativity and innovation.
30. You try to organise leisure activities outside the work environment.

Source: Own elaboration.

digitalisation and post-pandemic Covid-19 is scarce. [Hernández \(2021\)](#) discusses the creation of a more effective leadership style in which the leader is kinder or gentler with their team members and seeks to highlight and develop their main competencies. In this paper, politeness is defined as demonstrating or behaving with kindness and courtesy. How to be kind, and to what extent, will depend on the individual's personal and work situation. [Markey, Ventura, Donnell, and Doody \(2021\)](#) advocate fostering ethical, charismatic, compassionate and inspirational leadership. This involves subordinates being supported with respect, empathy and awareness, in pursuit of both enhanced work performance and an ethical work environment. [Ling, Hammond, and Wei \(2020\)](#) confirm that ethical leadership by founder-CEOs helps to improve the ambidexterity of small and new firms. They argue that this is possible through the promotion of team satisfaction and advice-seeking behaviour on the part of the top management. According to [Markey et al. \(2021\)](#), ethical leaders are committed to entrepreneurial leadership as this encourages innovative behaviour in their subordinates, which makes it easier to establish the ideal culture and climate for fostering innovation. Encouraging their subordinates to share ideas and gain trust also helps create innovative environments ([Malibari & Bajaba, 2022](#)). Accordingly, in order to understand a Kinder Leadership style, we need to define the competences that constitute it. For the purposes of this study, a person practising a kind leadership style inspires others and promotes participation, initiative and cooperation among team members. They have a contagious positive attitude towards others, helping them feel satisfied with their work and leading colleagues to feel satisfied with their work. They are interested in others, they actively listen to others and they take on new, sometimes risky, challenges.

All of this begs the question: what competencies do current leaders have? Is there movement towards Kinder leadership? How do leaders feel about their teams? Do companies offer tools that facilitate the adaptation of leadership to current changes? Do they offer tools that facilitate the adaptation of leadership to the current changes? This study explores whether the leadership style presented by current managers

differs from the transformational one and whether the pandemic has impacted changing leaders' behaviours, and how they relate to their team members. It has two aims. The first is to find out whether there is a kind entrepreneurial leadership style in a sample from the technology sector. The second is to identify the competencies that are noteworthy and which need to be improved. This will help us to understand the extent to which a leadership oriented towards kindness is evolving.

The article is structured as follows. First, an introduction to the topic, on the demise of toxic bosses and the new kindness-oriented way of leading. Second, an extensive review of the literature is offered, with emphasis on the competencies that stand out in middle managers as good leaders. Thirdly, the methodology used and the hypotheses for this study are explained. The fourth section analyses the results obtained after the data is collected through a questionnaire. Finally, the conclusions are outlined, including the limitations of the study and proposals for future lines of research.

## 2. Theoretical framework: The literature

### 2.1. The importance of the leader in business organisations

It is recognised that middle managers, being in positions of responsibility and having the duty to manage high-performance teams, face great pressure and can tend to harden their leadership style ([Shah, Afshan, Mirani, & Solangi, 2022](#); [Ng, Zhang, & Chen, 2021](#)), becoming toxic leaders. This directly affects their subordinates ([Sharma & Nair, 2020](#)). Disrespectful behaviour developed hierarchically takes a mental toll on employees. This has economic repercussions for organisations. The Global Health Care Outlook report estimates that poor mental health is a secondary consequence of poor leadership and can cause knock-on effects such as increased absenteeism, job desertion, unnecessary turnover and presenteeism. This can cost companies as much as \$2,000 per employee per year. Absenteeism is the key variable in business productivity ([DeVaro, 2022](#)). Specifically, in Spain, according to the Quarterly Labour Cost Survey Report (ETCL) of the National Statistics Institute (INE), in the fourth quarter of 2021 there was a loss of 5.9% of agreed hours and 4.4% in absenteeism due to TI (Temporary Disability). It worsened slightly in all sectors compared to previous periods, partly caused by the increase in new variant infections.

Top managers stand at the top of the organisational pyramid and must pass on the objectives and new challenges to the operational core; in between the two profiles are the middle management personnel ([Fardale et al., 2019](#)). In addition to ensuring that subordinates understand and have the means to cope with the new change, team leaders must lead by example. They receive information from above and below, and are most at risk of being subjected to high levels of stress ([Mathisen et al., 2011](#)). In addition, they must show a more open attitude towards understanding, empathy, presence and transparency towards their subordinates in order to avoid the physical and psychological consequences of stress ([Hayes & Cocchi, 2022](#)). Displaying an entrepreneurial attitude also makes team management easier. Personal attitude and behaviour are the main factors of the entrepreneurial mindset ([Baluku et al., 2021](#)). [Kansheba and Wald \(2021\)](#) state that an entrepreneurial attitude improves the quality of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and stimulates productive entrepreneurial activities. However, not all managers have an entrepreneurial mindset. Leaders or middle managers in charge of subordinates must develop entrepreneurial attitudes. [Anwar, Jamal, Saleem, and Thoudam \(2021\)](#) confirm that the individual must possess an entrepreneurial attitude and intentions.

Therefore, it is important that the management of the company knows how to detect the problem of an unhealthy work environment early enough to be able to implement an action plan and find a solution. There is a wealth of research that shows that a healthy work environment depends to a large extent on the relationship between colleagues and their managers ([Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006](#); [Chandrasekar, 2011](#); [Wesselink, Blok, & Ringersma, 2017](#); [Oakman, Kinsman, Stuckey,](#)

Graham, & Weale, 2020). Marshall, Meek, Swab, and Markin (2020) confirmed that there is a significant relationship between having resources and information available (that is, preparing a self-efficacy mechanism) and the indicators of well-being (happiness, life satisfaction and psychological well-being). In addition, it favours the development of an entrepreneurial spirit. Generating organisational well-being and health should be a priority for superiors in charge of leading work teams. One of the measures to achieve this is abandoning the toxic leadership style and pursuing entrepreneurial leadership centred on humility and gentleness (Alanezi, 2022; Rehbock, Hubner, Knipfer, & Peus, 2022).

## 2.2. Social entrepreneurial leadership in innovative enterprises

According to the classical view, the most common traditional leadership styles identified to date range from the authoritarian through the democratic to the *laissez faire*. Charismatic, transformational and transactional leadership are also found along that spectrum (Bonache Pérez & Ibarra Güell, 2002; Zhang & Fjermestad, 2006). There is much evidence that the traditional command-and-control, authoritarian mode of leadership is giving way to more consultative and deliberative styles. These new ways of leading a business—based on flexible collegiality and encouraging participation—are found to gain success more by asking and understanding than by giving orders. Moleró, Cuadrado, Navas, and Morales (2007) showed a high correlation between transformational leadership, relationship-oriented leadership, democratic leadership and task or service-oriented leadership. It is also argued that entrepreneurial leadership influences innovative work behaviour and helps subordinates gain recognition (Bagheri, 2017). It also improves the management of work teams and job satisfaction and encourages extra effort. Wang and Walumbwa (2007) supported the moderating effect of a transformational style on relationships between individuals; it favours work flexibility and organisational commitment. Franco and Haase (2016) found that a participative leadership style has a greater effect on collaborative entrepreneurship, and job satisfaction plays an important role in moderating the emergence of collaborative entrepreneurship. They also found, though, that to achieve collaborative entrepreneurship, leaders need to focus on improving organisational commitment and fostering employee collaboration.

Social entrepreneurial leaders are individuals who manage and create organisations, including innovative entrepreneurial enterprises whose main objectives focus on developing their internal customers (their subordinates) and promoting social change (Prabhu, 1999). The leader of an organisation uses his legitimate rights derived from his status but, as an entrepreneurial leader, should use his influence benignly vis-a-vis his subordinates (Sandybayev, 2019). In other words, an entrepreneurial leader has more options to manage a team more effectively than simply a leader who abuses his or her authority to manage teams. Entrepreneurial leadership has a significant, positive impact on employee teamwork in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the technology sector. The combination of creative, self-sufficient subordinates and innovation-focused leaders makes for innovative work behaviour (Akbari et al., 2020). Mokhber, Vakilbashi, Zamil, and Basiruddin (2016) encourage entrepreneurial leaders and organisations to focus on managing their subordinates well, so that their employees possess a high level of confidence and self-efficacy and are thus ready to achieve innovative behaviour.

## 2.3. The impact of new technologies on leadership style

Business activities are being transformed by digital technologies. Digital technologies are increasingly having a direct impact on the strategies of small businesses. However, due to their size, small businesses may find it more difficult to cope with new digital challenges (Ferreira, Cruz, Veiga, & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2022). Today, especially given the important role played by technologies, technology-driven

leadership change is more likely to occur when companies increase their technological investments (Landini et al., 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic has also necessitated new approaches to leadership (Yawson, 2020). Brassey and Kruyt (2020) predicted early that in these unexpected circumstances, some company leaders would be unable to practice integrative consciousness. Fear would prevent them from making decisions, and they would resort to habitual responses to unfamiliar problems. Wilson and Proctor-Thomson (2013) argued that this is an era of seeking to improve leadership, of the type that can offer solutions to problems. Bagheri, Newman, and Eva (2022) encourage creativity and state that business leadership is a way to encourage innovative behaviour in workers. They claim that this is done through the mediating mechanisms of creative self-efficacy and passion for invention.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted many sectors worldwide and generated a New Normal. It has also accelerated the adoption of new technologies and digital platforms, where companies have had to change their organisational and working designs (Saura et al., 2022). All this has forced the use of new technologies, through digital tools, to perform routine tasks, improve brand positioning and promote companies of different sizes (Ramadani et al., 2022). With the New Normal, a new leadership style is beginning to emerge, a combination of existing and newly-developing types of managerial skills. Akbari and Pratomo (2021) addressed the impact of technologies and new patterns of communication between leaders and their team members. They emphasised adaptive and technology-savvy leadership and the strong skills of constant and fluid communication. They also identified a gap between leaders who are ready to change their mindset and members who are not ready due to work overload or physical-mental exhaustion. New leaders must also possess other competencies and skills directly demanded by the digitalisation of the environment. These are strategic and conceptual thinking, the demonstration of intellectual integrity, and new ways of influencing and generating commitment and loyalty among members. In addition to demonstrating high social influence, innovation and leadership bring transformation in the new environment (Al-Habsi, Luo, & Zighan, 2022), but the traits and skills of traditional leadership styles must remain.

Another factor that is changing leadership style is related to environmental and health issues and sustainable digital transformation. Nyagadza (2022) argues that sustainable digital transformation is influenced by factors that trigger digital businesses to look for new ways to create value and make structural changes. Wang, Tian, Wang, and Peng (2022) investigate how the academic experience of CEOs affects the sustainable growth of firms, particularly high-tech firms. The number of green businesses is increasing, and consumers are demanding green products. The impact of mandatory investment standards on CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) in companies located in emerging economies must also be taken into account (Balon et al., 2022). Verma and Kumar (2021) address the relationship between green entrepreneurship and different leadership styles. They found that charismatic, transformational, visionary leadership, in which the leader is simultaneously a servant of his team, has a significant influence on entrepreneurial activity. In addition, environmental changes encourage the imitation of rivals, so leaders tend to imitate to maintain their leadership (Sharapov & Ross, 2019). Sharapov and Ross (2019) found that as environmental changes become more frequent, imitation of competitors prevails. On the other hand, and closely related to sustainability, is innovation. Banmairuroy, Kritjaroen, and Homsombat (2022) showed that knowledge-oriented leadership directly affected sustainable competitive advantage. It also indirectly affected sustainable competitive advantage through the factors that make up organisational innovation.

However, no studies to date have conceptualised the new leadership style composed of all the above competencies. Very few studies deal with a new entrepreneurial leadership style oriented towards kindness, or with a new style of leadership that is friendly and oriented towards

the gentleness of the individual. Many studies mention that it will exist in the near future, but there are no studies that name this new leadership style. This is why some main competences were defined in the previous section: these are the ones that this study takes into account in order to characterise it as kind or gentle entrepreneurial leadership.

### 3. Methodology

Firstly, a contact meeting was held with the senior managers of the leaders who participated in the study. Secondly, the competencies were defined that would later define 'Kinder Leadership'. Third, the questionnaires were sent to the participating leaders, who were given fifteen days to reply to the questionnaire, after which the statistical analysis of the data was conducted, producing the results. Lastly, feedback is offered to the leaders on their results, along with improvement suggestions and tools to strengthen their competencies.

#### 3.1. Data collection

A sample of 119 leaders (managers, coordinators, supervisors and CEOs) were surveyed, 22% of whom were women and 78% men, between 35 and 65 years of age. All belong to the technology sector, from 24 Spanish companies, both SMEs and multinationals. The online questionnaire was sent to the corporate email addresses of each participant; it was answered online and returned via email. The data collection was carried out between September 2021 and July 2022. This time frame was chosen because the New Normal began to stabilise after the Covid-19 pandemic, when the restrictions on business and daily life had subsided, and the study intended to observe changes in the medium term.

All respondents were CEOs or directors, managers or supervisors and coordinators or middle managers. The first inclusion criterion for participants was—because leadership style was being analysed in a digital era, after the pandemic, and we wished to contrast before and after—the interviewees must have been in the same company before the pandemic. Secondly, they had to have experience in that role: it was established that all respondents had achieved team management positions in the last five (5) years, and they had remained in the current company for at least three (3) years. People with more than six (6) years of experience as middle and senior managers were excluded.

#### 3.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was intended to assess whether there is effective leadership based on kindness (Hernández, 2021) and the person's willingness to respond to their work teams. The choice of competencies was based on the review of the literature previously carried out. Following the definition of effective leadership by Hernández (2021), it is understood that an effective leader feels free, is creative, self-confident, flexible and interdependent and encourages teamwork. Moreover, effective leaders enjoy what they do, are healthy, know how to manage their emotions in every situation, express themselves openly and positively, and take care of their relationships. The questionnaire began with general or control questions: sector of work, position and years of work experience in a senior position. Then, thirty (30) variables were used as the basis for questions on the following competencies: teamwork, concern for others, motivation, influence, job satisfaction, risk-taking and creativity.

Teamwork relates to the individual's willingness to participate and have a say as an integrated group member, so that the task can be carried out without individual interests prevailing. This shows the leader's appreciation of, concern for, and trust in his or her team.

Concern for others is based on listening to the rest of the team and paying full attention to their needs and behaviours. Paying attention to team members makes them feel at ease with their work, their work methods and their colleagues, and appreciate their leader.

Motivation means working for personal satisfaction, showing a positive attitude to any situation, tackling feelings of frustration in the group, and keeping the team members motivated. This is achieved by creating a participative work environment, which promotes initiative and innovation. It involves spending time with each member and understanding their emotional state, promoting the need to achieve a goal successfully and not to fail.

Influence means that the leader demonstrates a high degree of resilience and problem-solving, always setting an example. The leader becomes a point of reference for the team members, who feel inspired to replicate what he/she does and how he/she does it.

Job Satisfaction is the good feeling achieved from work performed: a positive, happy attitude, which is contagious and makes people happy to go to work. I.

Risk-taking is the ability to manage difficult situations with ease. People with this ability know how to think about the problem, reflect, decide and act according to logical criteria. They are not afraid of making unwise decisions: they step forward with courage and ingenuity.

Creativity is demonstrated by proposing imaginative and original solutions and activities (e.g. outdoor exercises, team training programmes, meditation practice, etc.). Leaders with this capacity encourage team members to innovate and identify alternatives to traditional methods and approaches.

The questionnaire was constructed in-house, using variables inspired by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ, Form 5x) (Avolio et al., 1995, Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). The responses range from 1 to 5 on a Likert scale, where 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Quite a lot and 5 = A lot. This scale was selected because it is the most widely used in social science and leadership studies (Antonakis et al., 2003).

After data collection and analysis of the information, a session was held with the leaders of each company to give them a report on what had been detected. They are informed of the competences in which they stand out, and those that need to be improved are examined in depth. This is followed by guidelines for improvement and recommendations for techniques and tools to be implemented in their day-to-day work and team management.

#### 3.3. Statistical method

Firstly, a factorial analysis was carried out with SPSS, determining that the questionnaire contained up to 8 factors, of which it was considered that only seven were necessary, since the variance explained with them is 72.19%. Thus, the matrix of rotated components shows which item corresponds to each created factor. Based on this criterion, the different latent variables (factors) of the structural equation model were calculated using PLSmart 4.0. It was verified that almost all item loadings were up 0.5 points (Table 2). Then, once the statistical feasibility of the factor analysis had been determined, a partial least squares model was carried out.

The statistical method adopted is a structural equation model, which analyses the relationships between numerous variables or factors, giving quantitative estimates of the direct and indirect effects of these relationships. Seven latent variables (variables constructed through the observed factors but not directly observed) are derived from the thirty-item questionnaire. Table 2 below shows the items that make up the seven latent variables in the proposed model. Some items have not been incorporated into the model because they are not significant: their information was collected in other items.

### 4. Analysis of results

For the proposed model to be adequate, it must meet the requirements of reliability and validity using statistical criteria already defined by Hair et al. (2017). This means measuring convergent validity (which is defined by factor loadings), internal consistency reliability

**Table 2**  
Descriptions of the variables which create constructs.

Construct	Items
Teamwork	2. Degree of appreciation of others for their work.
	3. Degree of concern for others.
	5. As a leader, degree of trust with your team.
	6. Degree of empathy with your team members.
Motivation	7. Degree of freedom to participate and let your collaborators give their opinions.
	22. You spend even a small amount of time having individual conversations with each member of your team.
	27. You motivate your employees.
	28. You try to create a participatory working environment.
Creativity	29. You encourage creativity and innovation.
	23. Do you practice any kind of meditation technique?
Influence	30. You try to organise leisure activities outside the work environment.
	12. You are seen by others as a person of reference and inspiration.
Job satisfaction	25. Degree of resilience to conflict.
	26. You are aware of the present.
Risk taking	16. You feel satisfied with the work you do.
	17. You go to work happy, and you try to make others feel it in order to spread your happiness.
Concern of others	14. You consider yourself a risk taker.
	15. You like to take risks.
	9. Degree of active listening when meeting with others.
	19. You are satisfied with your co-workers.

Source: Own elaboration.

(composite reliability, Cronbach’s Alpha), Average Variance Extracted) and discriminant validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio [HTMT]). The latter calculates the actual correlation between two latent variables: if they were perfectly reliable, their ideal values should be less than 0.9. The results of these tests show whether the model is valid, reliable and robust. Likewise, the goodness of fit of the model is 0.097 (Standardised Root Mean Square Residual [SRMR]); this parameter should be less than 0.08, but in the absence of a consensus in the literature, values below 0.1 give an acceptable goodness of fit, according to Sarstedt et al., (2014).

Tables 3 and 4 show how these requirements are met, defining the model created as valid, reliable and robust. Despite some values being in lower ranges than desired, these variables or factors are necessary for creating the latent variable or are compensated by the results of other statistical criteria.

Fig. 1 presents the model proposed in this study. The second-order variable “Leader Style” is influenced by the latent variables observed around it, showing in Fig. 1 the beta coefficient with which the latent variable influences the dependent variable and, in brackets, the p-value. In all cases the latent variables have a direct and significant impact, with the “Teamwork” variable (0.417) together with “Motivation” (0.310) and “Risk Taking” (0.271) having the largest effect size and, therefore, the greatest impact on Kinder leadership style. The smallest effect size is found in the variable “Creativity” (0.052), followed by “Concern of others” (0.097).

The analysis of the path coefficients described in Table 5 shows the intensity of the effects between the dependent and independent variables. A bootstrapping technique was used to find the reliability of the path coefficients on the hypothesised relationships. In addition, the R2 of the second-order “Leader style” construct is 0.999, close to unity.

### 5. Discussion, conclusions and suggestions

This study had two aims: to identify a new entrepreneurial leadership style centred on the development of kindness and—by surveying technology sector bosses, coordinators and managers—to identify the most outstanding competencies and those that require further study.

After the statistical analysis and detection of the predominant leadership style, a mixture of leadership styles mentioned in previous literature, a meeting was held with the leaders to pass on the information gathered. A strong emphasis was placed on the competencies to be

**Table 3**  
Factor loadings, construct, reliability and validity.

Constructs and items	Loadings	Composite reliability	Cronbach’s alpha	Average variance extracted
	> 0.5	> 0.7	> 0.6	> 0.5
Teamwork		0.825	0.748	0.453
Item 2	0.407			
Item 3	0.581			
Item 5	0.844			
Item 6	0.750			
Item 7	0.535			
Item 13	0.809			
Concern of others		0.846	0.672	0.736
Item 9	0.944			
Item 19	0.761			
Motivation		0.871	0.803	0.634
Item 22	0.565			
Item 27	0.826			
Item 28	0.887			
Item 29	0.864			
Influence		0.822	0.685	0.608
Item 12	0.738			
Item 25	0.852			
Item 26	0.743			
Job satisfaction		0.951	0.902	0.907
Item 16	0.972			
Item 17	0.932			
Risk Taking		0.941	0.875	0.889
Item 14	0.937			
Item 15	0.949			
Creativity		0.72	0.223	0.563
Item 23	0.730			
Item 30	0.944			
Leader style		0.862	0.835	0.253
LS	1.000			

Source: Own elaboration.

worked on, and a series of tools were proposed to improve the less outstanding competences.

The individuals surveyed present high levels of kindness (Hernández, 2021) but, in some cases, they can be improved. Taking Molero et al. (2007) as a reference, it is confirmed that the kindness-oriented entrepreneurial style includes the characteristics of, and is an advance on, the democratic, transformational and charismatic styles. The competencies that show the highest indices are Teamwork, Motivation and Risk-taking. That is, in the sample analysed, the individuals encourage participation in their work teams and allow their team members to give their opinion. They also appreciate their subordinates, care about them and have full confidence in what they do. They also have a positive attitude towards solving problems and complex situations, feel comfortable with their work and do it for personal satisfaction. They also feel they can keep their subordinates motivated, which makes them different. They enhance the work environment by encouraging initiative and innovation. They say that they spend time with each team member to find out how they are doing and to remind them of the common goals they have set. Finally, they succeed because they feel good in complex situations: they tend to identify a problem, reflect, consider possible solutions and act. They are not afraid to fail, as they see a mistake as a learning experience. All these competencies have already been collected by various authors in the literature, but they are included in different leadership styles.

On the other hand, the competencies that should be further developed are innovation and creativity. Al-Habsi et al., (2022) state that they are indispensable in the new society and should stand out from the rest of the competencies. To encourage innovation and creativity among their team members and themselves, leaders are advised that studies such as Núñez, Romero, Sánchez, and Aránega (2018) and Gómez, Gámez, Perez, and Mele (2019) apply Outdoor Training as a tool that not only develops skills but also helps to encourage creativity, spending time

**Table 4**  
Discriminant validity – Heterotrait – monotrait ratio (HTMT) matrix.

	Concern of others	Creativity	Influence	Job satisfaction	Leader Style	Motivation	Risk Taking	Team Work
Concern of others								
Creativity	0.162							
Influence	0.499	0.331						
Job satisfaction	0.099	0.184	0.33					
Leader Style	0.306	0.224	0.626	0.5				
Motivation	0.223	0.314	0.365	0.281	0.73			
Risk Taking	0.114	0.035	0.286	0.471	0.887	0.485		
Team Work	0.275	0.04	0.422	0.157	0.857	0.357	0.862	

Source: Own elaboration.

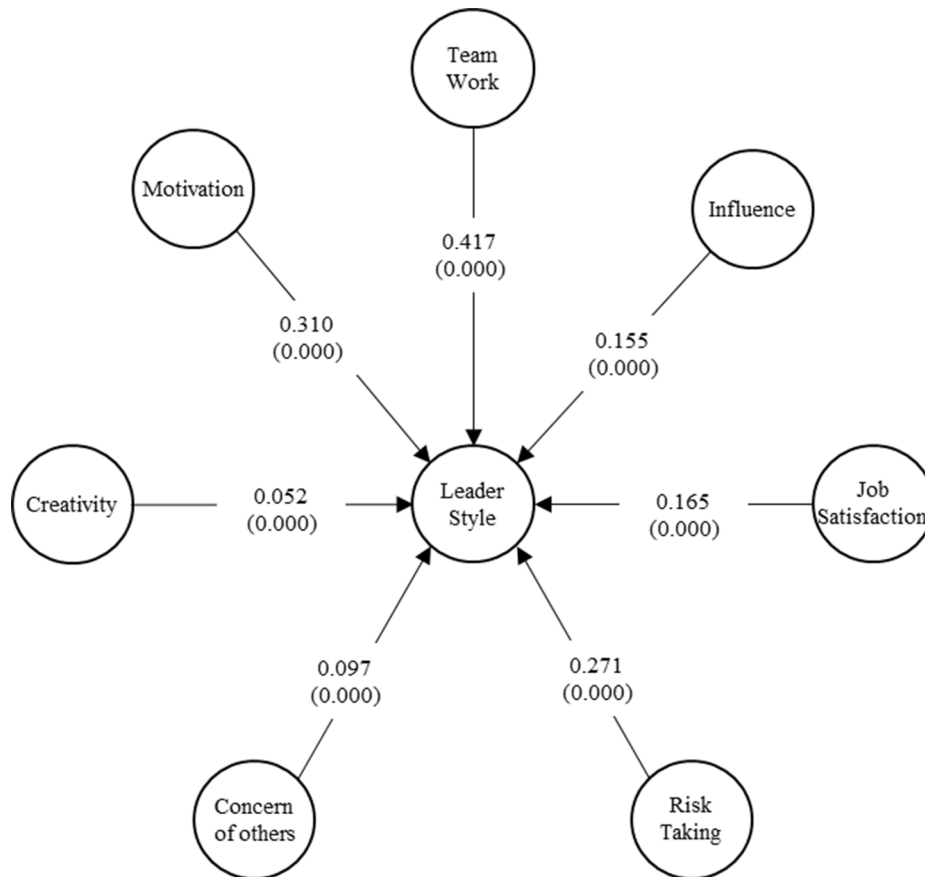


Fig. 1. Structure of the partial least squares model proposed.

**Table 5**  
Path coefficients and p values.

	Original sample (O)	P values
Concern of others -> Leader Style	0.097	0.000
Creativity -> Leader Style	0.052	0.000
Influence -> Leader Style	0.155	0.000
Job satisfaction -> Leader Style	0.165	0.000
Motivation -> Leader Style	0.310	0.000
Risk Taking -> Leader Style	0.271	0.000
Team Work -> Leader Style	0.417	0.000

Source: Own elaboration.

with team members in a different way. Conducting activities away from the workplace (where routine, rushing, and the demands of customers or suppliers do not allow for a moment’s pause) helps leaders to get at information not detected at work and build organisational commitment. M. Franco and H. Haase (2016) showed a negative correlation between collaborative entrepreneurship and lack of organisational commitment.

A second competence that needs to be further developed is Concern for others. Previous studies have shown that Mindfulness can be a powerful tool for fostering emotional awareness and improving relationships with others. Aránega, Núñez, and Sánchez (2020) showed that Mindfulness helps to develop emotional intelligence. They used Mindfulness to help a group of workers acquire self-awareness and thus improve the work environment. They produced improvements in all the dimensions addressed, especially in Observation, Acting with Self-Awareness and Not Judging Others. By the end of the programme, Mindfulness had helped improve the workers’ well-being and their relationships with their team members. Lippelt, Hommel, and Colzato (2014) showed that meditation has differential and dissociable effects (they vary between individuals, cultures, etc., and can be separated and analysed), which help to develop cognitive (control) processes such as attentional selection, conflict monitoring and divergent and convergent thinking. Being kind is a way of being that must be carefully nurtured: professional-personal situations can be improved if people’s emotional states are strong.

Kindness must be practised. Studies such as Menardo et al. (2022) offer meditation as a support tool to strengthen one's state of mind. For example, the practice of Mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2015) helps a person to focus on himself, specifically on improving his self-awareness (Aránega et al., 2019) and to become kinder (Salzberg, 2011). It is a powerful tool for achieving personal satisfaction that will be passed on to one's followers. At the same time, there are other habits that help individuals to feel good about themselves, such as leading a healthy life, playing sports regularly, and loving themselves (Rahimi-Ardabili et al., 2018; Carta et al., 2021; Schulze et al., 2022).

One conclusion of this research is that meditation techniques will help leaders achieve greater well-being and to introduce novelty into their routines. Nowadays, and more so after the pandemic, increasing numbers of companies are implementing Mindfulness in offices. The literature on Mindfulness in the workplace is growing exponentially, particularly in the corporate world (Qiu and Rooney, 2019).

Finally, following Porffrio, Carrilho, Felício, and Jardim (2021), it is concluded that new leadership plays an especially crucial role in continuing the digital transformation: any organisation with good leaders will contribute to improvements in business characteristics and team management.

## 6. Theoretical contribution and social implications

The present study contributes to raising the interest of researchers in promoting existing competences and other competences originating from digitalisation and post-pandemic Covid-19. From a theoretical perspective, the research provides a definition of leadership style in the new digital and technological era. So far, no study has been found that attempts to give a name to the new leadership style that is emerging. Some studies discuss the emergence of a combination of leadership and the development of competences demanded by the sector, as mentioned in the literature review. But there is no record of naming the leadership style. Therefore, the present research has sought to originate the new concept of Kinder Leadership: an entrepreneurial leadership style based on kindness.

A second contribution is the tools suggested to promote and maintain the leadership style. The observed sample stands out for having a leadership style that emphasises teamwork, motivation and risk-taking. But there are other competencies, such as innovation and creativity, which need to be improved. According to Akbari et al. (2020), innovation is fundamental for team management. Furthermore, this study can serve as a guide for future researchers, offering them a theoretical perspective on identifying the emotional competencies in an entrepreneurial leadership style based on kindness, and taking as a reference the tools suggested for achieving these competencies.

## 7. Limitations and future lines of research

The first limitation is that certain competences that were thought would be relevant, and therefore had to be analysed, turned out not to be relevant. Examples are active listening, accurate assessment and empathy, which could not be used in the model. This sector is constantly booming and growing very fast, so the choice of inclusion and exclusion criteria was complex. Another possible limitation is that the model could not use many managers who have risen to their team-leading position quickly (and do not stay in the company for more than three years).

New research by the present authors will conduct Mindfulness-based training for the same sample used in this study, in order to complement the results obtained in the present work and to give continuity to the research. It has been identified that the participants have no experience with meditation or mind-body sessions, so the next steps will aim to improve their well-being further and help them to maintain their friendly character in the company and their good attitude in managing their teams. We will also promote the results at lower levels, in order to observe and compare the differences achieved with a second

intervention. The comparison could then allow us to find out whether or not the samples follow the same trend.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Alba Yela Aránega:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Validation, Writing-original draft. **Clara Gonzalo Montesinos:** Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology. **María Teresa del Val Núñez:** Supervision, Writing - review & editing.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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