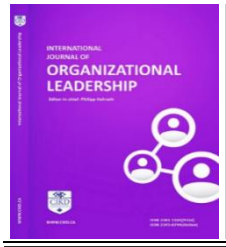

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Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior: The Role of Readiness for Organizational Change in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between Servant Leadership (SL) and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) among employees in Pakistan, a collectivistic culture, with a focus on the moderating role of Readiness for Organizational Change (ROC). A cross-sectional, quantitative design was used to collect data from 480 employees across different industries using simple random sampling. SL, IWB and ROC were measured using these standardized scales with reliability confirmed by Cronbach's alpha (α = .99 for all scales). Hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that SL significantly predicts IWB, and Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between SL and IWB . IWB was significant but negatively predicted by ROC, with moderation analysis revealing buffering and that high change readiness predicts IWB only in the absence of excessive change readiness. It illustrates the way in which the change field in a Pakistani collectivist context influences the adoption of IWB through balanced change management. The practical implications are to utilise SL to boost IT innovation in Pakistan and to manage the ROC to aid creative outcomes strategically. The study adds insight to the leadership literature by validating SL's impact in a non-Western context and emphasizing the importance of context, cultural and organizational context in shaping innovation.

Today, innovation is becoming a cornerstone of organizational success, where competitive advantage does not lie primarily in capital or resources but in reconfiguring infrastructure to foster adaptability and creativity. In such an environment, employees' ability to demonstrate Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) has emerged as a critical determinant of survival and growth (Mahmood & Mubarik, 2020). The significance of this topic extends beyond generic arguments that innovation is "necessary." What makes it especially important in emerging economies like

Pakistan is the tension between collectivist cultural norms and the adoption of leadership models, such as Servant Leadership (SL), that originated in more individualistic societies. This contextual difference provides a fertile ground for exploring how leadership interacts with cultural and organizational factors to drive innovation.

In highly dynamic, competitive global markets, innovation is increasingly employee-driven, with knowledge workers shaping organizational prominence through novel ideas (Afsar & Umrani, 2019). Organizations worldwide experiment with multiple approaches to nurture IWB, and leadership style is consistently identified as a primary driver (Khan et al., 2022). Yet, most research remains Western-centric, overlooking how non-Western contexts, where hierarchy, collectivism, and resource constraints prevail, may reshape the dynamics between leadership and IWB. This study contributes to closing that gap.

Research demonstrates that leadership profoundly influences proactive and innovative employee behaviors (Yao et al., 2014). Among leadership styles, SL has gained attention for its orientation toward serving others, fostering trust, and creating supportive workplaces (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). By emphasizing service, accountability, and empowerment, SL creates conditions conducive to both employee and organizational performance (Liden et al., 2014; Walumbwa et al., 2010). However, scholars note that the psychological mechanisms connecting SL to IWB remain underexplored, particularly in Asian contexts where relational dynamics are culturally nuanced (Munawar et al., 2024).

An important pathway linking SL and IWB is Perceived Organizational Support (POS), which reflects employees' belief that their organization values their contributions and well-being (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Servant leaders foster such support by encouraging self-development and risk-taking in safe, trust-based environments (Sun, 2019). Studies confirm that POS can mediate the SL–IWB relationship (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2024). Moreover, Readiness for Organizational Change (ROC) may moderate this relationship, as adaptive cultures are more conducive to transforming servant leadership principles into tangible innovation (Smallfield et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Recent research shows that while SL may enhance openness to change, outcomes are context-dependent and occasionally paradoxical in rigid organizations (Latif et al., 2024).

In Pakistan, emerging studies confirm the relevance of SL for fostering innovation (Jan et al., 2021; Khattak et al., 2023), yet the literature is sparse and scattered across sectors such as healthcare and banking. This research contributes to the field by situating SL and IWB within Pakistan's collectivist cultural context and proposing that cultural orientations toward hierarchy and group identity shape how employees respond to servant leadership and organizational change initiatives. In doing so, it provides an empirically grounded, context-specific analysis that expands the cross-cultural validity of SL–IWB frameworks. This study examines the direct effect of SL on IWB among employees in Pakistan and investigates the moderating effect of ROC on the relationship between SL and IWB. The following two research questions will be answered: 1) Does SL positively influence IWB among employees in Pakistan? 2) Does ROC moderate the relationship between SL and IWB among Pakistani employees?

Literature Review

Servant Leadership

SL represents a shift from traditional leader-centered models to a follower-focused approach that emphasizes growth, well-being, and empowerment. Greenleaf (1970, 2002) framed SL as leadership that prioritizes service over authority. Contemporary interpretations highlight its ethical, relational, and developmental dimensions (Eva et al., 2019). SL practices—such as humility, accountability, and mentorship—create psychologically safe environments conducive to innovation (Liden et al., 2008).

Recent empirical work strengthens this view. For instance, Ekmekcioglu and Öner (2024) found that SL fosters IWB indirectly through POS and an innovative organizational culture. Yet, other studies caution that SL's effectiveness is highly context-specific. Latif et al. (2024) observed paradoxical outcomes in which conformity pressures weakened the expected SL–IWB link.

The strengths of existing studies lie in confirming SL's positive impact across diverse sectors, but gaps persist. Much of the evidence remains Western or cross-sectional, limiting causal inference. Moreover, the Pakistani context—marked by collectivist norms, hierarchical workplaces, and limited innovation infrastructure—remains underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by theorizing how SL interacts with contextual moderators, such as ROC.

Innovative Work Behavior

Innovation is essential for organizational competitiveness (Al-Omari et al., 2020). Early studies linked it primarily to technological advancement (Marquis, 1969; Schmookler, 1957), but later perspectives expanded it to include idea generation, promotion, and implementation (Amabile, 1983; Urabe et al., 1988). IWB captures these individual-level efforts to create and apply novel ideas (Kleysen & Street, 2001; Lambriex-Schmitz et al., 2020).

Recent scholarship adds nuance by emphasizing psychological and contextual enablers. Munawar et al. (2024) highlighted the role of psychological safety in strengthening SL's influence on IWB. Khattak et al. (2023) reported that organizational learning mediates the SL–IWB link in Pakistan's high-tech sector. Similarly, Jan et al. (2021) demonstrated that creative self-efficacy explains how SL enhances IWB in a developing Asian context. These findings show that IWB is not a straightforward behavioral outcome but is shaped by mediators (trust, efficacy, learning) and moderators (safety, culture).

However, gaps remain. Most studies employ single-sector designs (e.g., healthcare, banking, or technology), leaving questions about cross-industry generalizability unanswered. Moreover, few address how cultural dynamics in collectivist societies condition employees' willingness to engage in risk-taking behaviors that IWB demands. This study responds by situating IWB explicitly within Pakistan's cultural and institutional realities.

Readiness for Organizational Change

In volatile environments, ROC is pivotal to survival and success (Ford et al., 2021). ROC captures both structural (resources, routines) and psychological (beliefs, attitudes) preparedness for change (Holt & Vardaman, 2013). High ROC enables adaptability and innovation, while low ROC leads to resistance and inertia (Piotrowska-Bożek, 2019).

Emerging evidence underscores ROC's role in shaping leadership outcomes. Latif et al. (2024) found that servant leadership enhanced readiness for change, but only in supportive environments, revealing boundary conditions. In Pakistan, studies such as Shafi et al. (2021) demonstrate that leadership styles interact with cultural norms to influence readiness, with Islamic work ethics moderating this process. Although not directly focused on SL, these insights suggest that ROC may amplify or dampen leadership's effect on innovation.

The strengths of current ROC research lie in its conceptual integration of structural and psychological dimensions. Yet, little is known about how ROC interacts with leadership in collectivist, resource-constrained economies. This gap is central to the present study, which investigates ROC as a moderator of the SL–IWB relationship, thereby extending existing models to underrepresented cultural contexts.

Hypotheses Development

Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior

Innovation is now central to organizational success (Tsuji et al., 2018). SL plays a critical role in enabling IWB by encouraging creativity and empowering employees (Liden et al., 2014). From the perspective of social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960), when leaders prioritize follower well-being, employees reciprocate by engaging in innovative actions.

The empirical evidence, however, is not uniform. Some studies confirm strong positive associations between SL and IWB (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Yoshida et al., 2014). Others highlight mediating mechanisms such as trust, job crafting, and creative self-efficacy (Jan et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021). For example, Munawar et al. (2024) found that psychological safety and servant leadership jointly enhanced innovative behavior in Lahore, Pakistan, suggesting that contextual moderators shape outcomes. Similarly, Khattak et al. (2023) demonstrated that servant leadership promoted IWB through leader-member exchange and organizational learning, but cautioned that the effects varied across high-tech firms. These findings reveal both strengths—robust cross-sector evidence—and weaknesses—limited exploration of cultural contingencies—that this study seeks to address.

H1: *Servant leadership has a positive relationship with innovative work behavior.*

Moderating Role of Readiness for Organizational Change

An organization's readiness to embrace change may be a feature affecting SL's promotional effectiveness regarding IWB. Research shows that leadership styles, such as SL, can affect employees' ROC by making them more open to change (Burbur, 2023; Sulastiana et al., 2023). But the relationship is mixed; some have found no significant relationship (Sindu Prawira, 2021), and other studies suggest that variability in leadership impact is due to its organizational context.

IWB has been linked to ROC as an organization that creates opportunities for adaptability and supports creative problem-solving, which leads to innovation (Aboobaker & KA, 2021; Chang et al., 2018; Sung & Kim, 2021). The impact of SL on IWB is amplified by a culture of change, which fosters an environment for experimentation and the implementation of ideas. Organizational readiness to embrace change is expected to condition the strength of the SL–IWB relationship. Servant leaders may increase employees' openness to change (Sulastiana et

al., 2023), yet evidence is mixed. Some studies show strong positive effects (Aboobaker & KA, 2021; Sung & Kim, 2021), while others report null or paradoxical results (Latif et al., 2024). This inconsistency suggests that ROC may act as a boundary condition, amplifying or constraining the effectiveness of SL depending on organizational culture and resource availability. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: *Readiness for organizational change moderates the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior.*

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 2004), which posits that individuals' self-concept is shaped by their membership in valued groups. Servant leaders cultivate belonging, trust, and collective identity, aligning personal and organizational goals. In high-readiness environments, these group identities are reinforced by adaptive norms that reward innovation, creating a causal pathway from leadership behaviors to innovative outcomes. Conversely, in low-readiness environments, rigid structures may decouple servant leadership efforts from innovation, weakening the theorized relationship. This framework justifies the proposed moderated relationship by embedding SL and IWB within both the psychological and structural dynamics of organizational change.

Method

Research Design

The research design is a cross-sectional research design, which involved quantitative (structured questionnaires) in data collection. The data set was thoroughly analyzed using statistical methods to examine the relationship between Servant Leadership (SL) and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), with Readiness for Organizational Change (ROC) as a moderating factor. To test for a correlation between SL and IWB, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed. Hierarchical regression analysis was done to evaluate the moderating role of ROC.

Participants

To meet the criteria for an item-to-response ratio of 1:10, this study uses a simple random sampling method to select a representative sample of 480 employees from different organizations. The sample captures a varied population, both male and female, from the public and private sector organizations.

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants aged 18 or older.
- Participants employed in their current organization for at least one year.
- Participants who provide informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

- Participants under 18 years of age.
- Participants employed in their current organization for less than one year.
- Participants not reporting to a leader.
- Participants who do not complete the survey.
- Participants who do not provide consent.

- Participants with mental instability.

Measures

Servant Leadership Scale. Servant leadership will be measured using a seven-item scale developed by Liden et al. (2015), derived from their original 28-item scale (Liden et al., 2008). An example item is, "My leader prioritizes my career development." Responses are recorded on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of .90, indicating high reliability (Liden et al., 2015).

Innovative Work Behavior Scale. Innovative work behavior will be assessed using a six-item scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994). An example item is, "I seek out new methods, techniques, or ideas in my daily work." Responses are collected on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale's Cronbach's alpha was reported as .80, reflecting good reliability.

Readiness for Organizational Change Scale. Readiness for organizational change will be measured using the 28-item Readiness for Organizational Change Scale (ROCS) developed by Jo and Hong (2023). The scale assesses four dimensions: individual motivation for change, individual capacity for change, organizational motivation for change, and organizational capacity for change. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale. The scale's internal consistency was reported as .88, indicating strong reliability.

Ethical Considerations

The participants were very well informed about the purpose of the study, procedures, benefits and risks, and were able to make well-informed decisions about whether to participate. Furthermore, personal data and information from respondents were stored safely and anonymized. No physical, psychological, or emotional risks were likely to be experienced based on the study, and precautions were taken to limit exposure to any possible sources of discomfort. Participants were assured that they would not be pressured into any involvement. Data treatment was ethical, and it was anonymized to prevent detection and unauthorized disclosure. The research was conducted with objectivity, without bias in the outcome.

Procedure

The research process began with obtaining approval from the university administration. Under the guidance of a supervisor, the research topic was finalized, and a brief proposal was submitted to the department for approval. Upon approval, participants were recruited using a simple random sampling method. Potential participants were provided with an informed consent form, briefed on their rights (including confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any time), and invited to participate. Participants completed a set of three questionnaires, which took approximately 10 minutes. Upon completion, participants were thanked for their contribution. The collected data were systematically compiled and analyzed using SPSS statistical software to examine the relationships between the variables.

Analysis

The data will be analyzed using SPSS Statistics 29. A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis will be conducted to assess the relationship between servant leadership and innovative

work behavior. Hierarchical regression analysis will be used to evaluate the moderating effect of readiness for organizational change on the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The age of participants ranged from 20 to 39 years, with a mean age of 26.27 years (*SD* = 3.34). Work experience ranged from 1 to 9 years, with a total of 2.42 years (*SD* = 1.30).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviation of Age and Work Experience (N=480)

Variables	*M*	*SD*
Age	26.27	3.34
Work Experience	2.42	1.30

Note. M= Mean, *SD*= Standard Deviation

The demographic analysis in Table 2 indicates a balanced gender distribution, with 56.5% male (N=271) and 43.5% female (N=209) participants. Educationally, the majority held a bachelor's degree (50.6%, N=243), followed closely by a master's degree (47.3%, N=227). Only 0.4% (N=2) had an intermediate education, and 1.7% (N=8) held a Ph.D. Regarding industry distribution, the healthcare sector had the highest representation (18.3%, N=88), followed by education (17.1%, N=82), finance (16.7%, N=80), technology (15.0%, N=72), retail (12.3%, N=59), manufacturing (2.7%, N=13), government (2.1%, N=10), and other sectors (15.8%, N=76).

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of Demographic Variables of Participants (N=480)

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Male	271	56.5
Female	209	43.5
Education		
Intermediate	2	0.4
Bachelors	243	50.6
Masters	227	47.3
Ph.D.	8	1.7
Industry		
Education	82	17.1
Technology	72	15.0
Healthcare	88	18.3
Finance	80	16.7
Retail	59	12.3
Manufacturing	13	2.7
Government	10	2.1
Others	76	15.8

Note. N= Number of frequencies, %= Percentage.

Psychometric Analysis

The reliability analysis in Table 3 assessed the internal consistency of the scales used in the study. All scales demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .99 for Servant Leadership (SL), Readiness for Organizational Change (ROC), and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB).

Table 3

Psychometric Properties of Servant Leadership, Readiness for Organizational Change, and Innovative Work Behavior (N=480)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*Ranges*	*α*
Servant Leadership	45.78	15.07	7-49	.99
Readiness for Organizational Change	91.36	40.43	28-140	.99
Innovative Work Behavior	24.37	6.38	11-30	.99

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, α= Cronbach Alpha

Testing of Main Hypotheses

This section examines the relationships between SL, ROC, and IWB among employees. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Hierarchical Multiple Regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis in Table 4 revealed significant positive relationships among the variables. Servant leadership showed a strong positive correlation with innovative work behavior ($r = .91, p < .01$) and a moderate positive correlation with readiness for organizational change ($r = .70, p < .01$). Similarly, readiness for organizational change was positively correlated with innovative work behavior ($r = .58, p < .01$).

Table 4

Inter-Correlations Among Servant Leadership, Readiness for Organizational Change, and Innovative Work Behavior (N=480)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Servant Leadership	-	.70**	.91**
2. Readiness for Organizational Change		-	.58**
3. Innovative Work Behavior			-
M	45.78	91.36	24.37
SD	15.07	40.43	6.38

Note. M= Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Hierarchical Multiple Regression

The hierarchical multiple regression in Table 5 was conducted in three steps to assess the predictors of IWB. In Step 1, demographic variables (age, gender, education, work experience, and industry) were entered. Age ($\beta = -.29, p < .01$) and industry ($\beta = -.15, p < .01$) were significant negative predictors, while work experience ($\beta = .35, p < .01$) was a significant positive predictor of IWB. The model accounted for 9.8% of the variance ($F = 10.21, p < .01$). In Step 2, servant leadership was added, emerging as a significant positive predictor of IWB ($\beta = .92, p < .01$). The model variance increased to 85% ($F = 453.38, p < .01$), indicating that SL strongly predicts IWB.

In Step 3, readiness for organizational change was included, showing a significant negative predictive effect on IWB (β = -.90, $p < .01$). The model variance increased slightly to 87% (F = 392.86, $p < .01$), suggesting that ROC influences IWB, though its negative coefficient indicates a complex relationship.

Table 5

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Demographic Variables, Servant Leadership, and Readiness for Organizational Change on Innovative Work Behavior (N=480)

Variable	*B*	95% CI		*SEB*	*B*	R^2	ΔR^2
		LL	UL				
Step 1						.08	.09**
Age	-.56	-.81	-.32	.12	-.29**		
Gender	.15	-1.04	1.34	.60	.01		
Education	-.03	-1.46	1.38	.73	-.00		
Work Experience	1.71	1.13	2.28	.29	.35**		
Industry	-.40	-.65	-.15	.12	-.15**		
Step 2						.85	.75**
Servant Leadership	.39	.37	.40	.01	.92**		
Step 3						.87	.01**
Readiness for Organizational Change	-.14	-.18	-.10	.02	-.90**		

Note. B= Unstandardized Coefficient Beta, ß = Standardize Coefficient Beta, F= Variance of Mean, SE= Standardized Error, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit, R^2= Coefficient of Determination, ΔR^2= Adjusted R Square, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Moderation Analysis

The moderation analysis in Table 6 and Figure 1 examined the role of ROC in the relationship between SL and IWB. The results indicate that SL was a significant positive predictor of IWB (β = .58, $p < .01$). ROC was a significant negative predictor (β = -.05, $p < .01$), suggesting that higher ROC may reduce IWB in certain contexts. However, the interaction term (SL x ROC) was significant (β = .004, $p < .01$), indicating a buffering effect of ROC on the SL-IWB relationship. The model accounted for 89% of the variance (F = 1381.55, $p < .001$).

Table 6

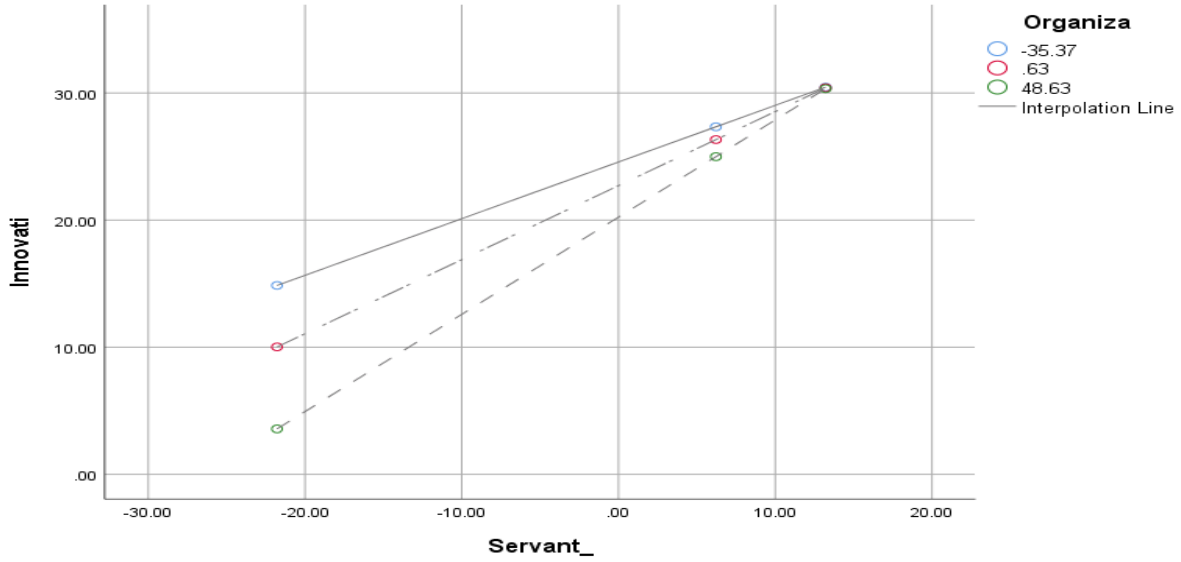
Regression Analysis Examining Servant Leadership and Readiness for Organizational Change on Innovative Work Behavior in Employees Moderation Analysis (N=480)

Variable	Innovative Work Behavior		
	B	*SE*	95%CI
Constant	22.74***	.13	[22.48,23.01]
Servant Leadership	.58**	.01	[.55, .60]
Readiness for Organizational Change	-.05***	.004	[-.05, -.004]
Servant Leadership x Readiness for Organizational Change	.004***	.00	[.003,.004]
R^2	.89		
F	1381.55***		

Note. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1

Interaction Plot of Servant Leadership and Readiness for Organizational Change on Innovative Work Behavior



Discussion

The relationship between Servant Leadership (SL) and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) has garnered increasing attention in organizational research, yet the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors driving this connection remain underexplored, particularly in non-Western settings. While prior studies have established a link between SL and IWB, much of the literature originates from individualistic cultures, often overlooking the influence of cultural dynamics on leadership effectiveness. Pakistan, characterized by its collectivistic culture, presents a unique context where values such as group harmony, collective well-being, and mutual support are prioritized over individual achievement. These cultural attributes may align closely with the principles of SL, which emphasize serving others, fostering empowerment, and creating a supportive environment. However, this alignment requires empirical validation to confirm its impact on fostering IWB.

This study addresses this research gap by examining the relationship between SL and IWB within the Pakistani context, with a specific focus on the moderating role of Readiness for Organizational Change (ROC). By adopting a quantitative approach, the study investigates whether SL promotes IWB among employees and how ROC influences this relationship. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of leadership dynamics in collectivistic cultures and offer practical insights for organizations, particularly in Pakistan's rapidly evolving sectors, such as Information Technology (IT), where innovation is critical to competitiveness.

Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior

The first hypothesis was that servant leadership will have a positive relationship with innovative work behavior. Similar to the hypothesis, the correlation analysis found a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between SL and IWB (r = .91, p < .01). This implies that as leaders put servant leadership practice, the employees are more likely to show innovative behaviors, for example, generating novel ideas, exploring new techniques, and implementing creative solutions, thus creating ideas to meet the expectations of the employees as well as creating ideas to serve customers. This finding was further validated by the hierarchical multiple

regression analysis, where SL was a significant positive predictor of IWB (β = .92, $p < .01$; $\Delta R^2 = .75$, $p < .01$). The high variability in SL influence (HR̃ = 75%) is a strong indicator of robust effects of innovation fostering on the employee level.

This further accords with existing literature in underscoring the role that SL plays in forming such an environment that opens the door to innovation. According to Yoshida et al. (2014), SL creates a safe and positive setting where employees can freely express their ideas, thereby enhancing IWB. Just as Panaccio et al. (2015) argued, SL engages in social exchange that encourages innovative behaviors by focusing on meeting followers' needs. To be specific, in the Pakistani case study, Rasheed et al. (2016) find a positive relationship between IWB and SL in a commercial bank, indicating that SL's focus on empowerment and trust suits employees. According to Jaiswal and Dhar (2017), was found to increase IWB by building employees' confidence, as it allows them to showcase their creative potential.

These findings are reinforced by additional studies across a number of different settings. According to Opoku et al. (2019), SL encourages employees to establish insider status and stimulates them to engage in innovative behaviors. Based on Wang et al. (2019), they found that team support amplifies the positive effect of SL on IWB, which is an effective form of leadership in knowledge-intensive environments, as noted by Iqbal et al. (2020). Khan et al. (2021) suggested that SL affects the phases of idea generation and innovation implementation to treat creativity holistically. SL is linked to an increased self-conception among followers, which in turn stimulates IWB, as suggested by Zeng and Xu (2020), while Zhu and Zhang (2020) suggest that SL facilitates knowledge sharing, an important driver of innovation.

The insights from the current study, extended to the Pakistani context, confirm that SL is a universal catalyst for IWB, even in a collectivistic culture. SL's servant-oriented approach, which focuses on empowering employees and their development, is similar to the approach the government of Pakistan has stressed: collective well-being and group cohesion. The presence of such cultural congruence increases the effectiveness of SL in promoting IWB, as employees believe that leaders' supportive behaviors are congruent with societal values. In this study, the strong correlation and predictive power of SL indicate that its ability to transform organizational cultures by promoting innovation is of immense value in sectors where creativity has paramount importance.

Moderating Role of Readiness for Organizational Change

The second hypothesis posited that readiness for organizational change moderates the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior. The correlation analysis initially supported a positive relationship between SL and ROC ($r = .70$, $p < .01$) and between ROC and IWB ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), suggesting that organizations with higher readiness for change may foster environments conducive to innovation. However, the hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed a counterintuitive finding: ROC negatively predicted IWB (β = -.90, $p < .01$). Further moderation analysis clarified this relationship, showing that SL significantly predicted IWB (β = .58, $p < .001$), while ROC exhibited a significant but negative predictive effect (β = -.05, $p < .001$). The interaction term (SL x ROC) was also significant (β = .004, $p < .001$), indicating a buffering effect of ROC on the SL-IWB relationship. This suggests that ROC moderates the relationship, but its influence may not always enhance the positive effects of SL on IWB.

These findings align with prior research to some extent but also introduce nuances specific to the Pakistani context. Burbur (2023) found that SL positively influences employee performance and organizational change, suggesting a constructive collaboration between SL and ROC. Sulastiana et al. (2023) similarly concluded that SL enhances readiness for organizational transformation, with ROC acting as a moderator in certain contexts. Tanno and Banner (2018) emphasized SL's role as an agent of change, directly influencing ROC. However, Sindu Prawira (2021) reported a non-significant relationship between SL and ROCsuggesting variability in how leadership influences change readiness across settings.

In this study, it is particularly intriguing that ROC has a negative predictive effect on IWB. IWB was found to be positively associated with ROC (Chang et al., 2018), and ROC was identified as a mediator and moderator between human resource practices and innovation. Similarly, Sung and Kim (2021) pointed out that change management factors promote innovation. Aboobaker and KA (2021) also stressed the role of ROC in mediating the effect of learning orientation on IWB. However, the current study's findings indicate that elevated levels of ROC may not be enhancing SL's impact on IWB. Such could be due to contextual factors present in Pakistani organizations that may be biased to change readiness, which can make it uncertain or resistant, thus stifling innovative efforts.

The buffering effect of ROC may be related to the fact that stability, group cohesion, and avoidance of rapid change are more important in Pakistan's collectivistic culture. By equating change readiness with being disruptive, organizations may produce employees willing to engage in risky, innovative behavior. Meanwhile, in mildly stressful ROC environments, SL's approach to supportiveness and empowerment may offer greater encouragement to IWB, as the environment is perceived as non-threatening, while still ensuring the employee feels motivated to experiment. This completeness underscores the need for a symmetrical change management that is sufficient to balance initiatives aimed at increasing readiness with those of leaders primarily aimed at promoting innovation.

Practical Implications

This study has practical significance for organizations in Pakistan, particularly in dynamic sectors such as information technology where innovation is central to competitiveness. Findings suggest that Servant Leadership (SL) can be a strategic tool for enhancing Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), especially in collectivist cultures where values of harmony and mutual support align with SL principles. Leaders who invest in employee development, foster empowerment, and encourage experimentation can create environments that support creativity and collaboration.

For IT firms operating in fast-changing global markets, SL offers a pathway to build trust, encourage knowledge sharing, and promote creative problem-solving (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Opoku et al., 2015). However, the moderating role of Readiness for Organizational Change (ROC) highlights a challenge: while adaptability facilitates innovation, excessive change pressures can overwhelm employees, particularly in cultures that value stability. Managers should therefore adopt balanced change management practices that combine clear communication, employee participation, and training to build adaptability (Bhatti et al., 2022). Pakistani organizations are encouraged to invest in leadership development programs centered on SL principles. Training should emphasize employee well-being, trust-building, and openness

to new ideas (Wang et al., 2019). Additionally, organizations must scrutinize their change management approaches to ensure that ROC supports, rather than hinders, the positive impact of SL on IWB. By integrating SL with structured change frameworks, IT firms can sustain innovation while managing the pressures of rapid technological and market shifts (Alajhar & Salam, 2022).

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to theory by examining the SL–IWB relationship in a collectivist cultural setting and demonstrates that SL is a robust predictor of IWB beyond Western contexts. It underscores the cultural alignment between SL and collectivist values, extending leadership theory to non-Western environments.

The moderating role of ROC provides a novel theoretical dimension, showing that leadership effectiveness depends on organizational context. Contrary to the assumption that readiness for change universally promotes innovation, results suggest that in collectivist cultures, high ROC can have complex effects, balancing stability with adaptability. Grounded in social identity theory, this study confirms that SL fosters belonging and trust, motivating employees to engage in innovative actions that enhance group identity. ROC enriches this lens by illustrating how contextual readiness shapes the strength of identity-based processes.

Future theoretical work should explore additional mediators (e.g., psychological safety, trust) and moderators (e.g., organizational culture, employee engagement) to deepen understanding of SL's effect on IWB. Cross-cultural comparisons between collectivist and individualist settings remain essential to clarify contextual differences.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in Pakistan, limiting generalizability to individualist or hybrid cultural contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference. Longitudinal research is needed to examine whether SL sustains innovation over time. Third, reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias. Fourth, the study focused on a limited set of organizations, potentially missing variation across industries.

Future research should address these gaps by employing mixed-methods approaches, including interviews and longitudinal designs, to capture the lived experiences of employees under SL. Expanding to sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, and education will enhance generalizability. Potential moderators, such as leadership authenticity, organizational culture, and gender dynamics, also warrant further exploration, given mixed findings in collectivist contexts.

Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence of a strong positive relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior in the Pakistani context, highlighting the applicability of SL in a collectivistic culture. The findings confirm that SL, with its focus on employee empowerment and collective well-being, is a powerful driver of innovation and closely aligns with Pakistan's cultural values. The moderating role of readiness for organizational change introduces a nuanced perspective, suggesting that while ROC influences the SL-IWB

relationship, its impact may be complex, with excessive change readiness potentially buffering innovation in certain contexts.

Despite its limitations, the study lays a foundation for future research to explore the SL-IWB relationship across diverse cultures, industries, and methodologies. By addressing these gaps, researchers can further unravel the complexities of servant leadership and its impact on innovation, contributing to both academic knowledge and organizational practice. The findings underscore the transformative potential of servant leadership in fostering innovative work behavior, offering organizations a pathway to thrive in dynamic, competitive environments.

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