

# The Impact of Leadership Styles on Innovative Work Behavior: The Mediating Role of Readiness for Change in Business Schools

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## The Impact of Leadership Styles on Innovative Work Behavior: The Mediating Role of Readiness for Change in Business Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of leadership styles, specifically digital and transformational leadership, in fostering innovative work behavior (IWB) among business school faculty within the Asian cultural context. In the post-COVID-19 business environment, innovation and adaptability are critical; however, limited research has explored these dynamics in higher education, particularly in business schools. Data was collected from 525 faculty members across business schools in Rawalpindi and Islamabad using a Likert scale survey. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS software to analyze the direct and indirect relationships between variables through a two-path model. The findings indicate model fit for perceived model. The hypothesis of direct relationship between IVs and DV are found significantly positive. However, the mediating effects do not support the mediating hypothesis. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers and the Higher Education Commission in promoting innovative work behavior among faculty, thereby strengthening academia-industry collaboration.*

**Keywords:** Readiness for Change, Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), Leadership Styles, Business Schools, Structural Equation Modeling

**JEL Classification Codes:** 121, 125, 221

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving environment, businesses face unprecedented challenges driven by the accelerating pace of technological and digital advancements. The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified this transformation by accelerating digitization, shifting employee expectations, and compelling companies to rethink their strategies. As a result, organizations are increasingly seeking an innovative and creative workforce equipped with the tools necessary to navigate this complexity (Dyer et al., [2020](#)).

Traditionally perceived as an inherent trait, creativity is now regarded as a skill that can be nurtured through the right organizational culture and leadership

(Amabile & Pratt, [2016](#)). It serves as the foundation for innovative work behavior (IWB), which not only involves the generation of novel ideas but also their promotion, implementation, and adaptation. Literature on creativity identifies various contributing factors, such as individual differences, leadership styles, organizational characteristics, and work attitudes that influence employees' readiness to change, a precursor to adopting innovative work behavior.

Business scholars emphasize the importance of fostering creativity and IWB to ensure long-term sustainability and competitive advantage (Liu et al., [2020](#)). This focus is especially relevant in higher education institutions, which are under increasing pressure to enhance IWB among faculty and staff to stay competitive and relevant. These institutions, as agents of change, must meet rising student expectations and adapt to the global nature of education by integrating digital technologies into pedagogy, research, and administration (Stoyanova & Stoyanov, [2024](#)).

Amid such shifts, leadership emerges as a critical factor in fostering IWB. Leadership styles, particularly digital and transformational leadership, play a pivotal role in shaping employee behavior in dynamic environments. Digital leadership offers contemporary approaches aligned with technological transformation, while transformational leadership fosters a proactive and visionary stance toward innovation (Zhang et al., [2023](#)). Leaders who effectively guide change facilitate employees' readiness, which in turn drives IWB.

Despite its importance, developing a creative and innovative workforce is not without challenges. Barriers such as organizational resistance to change, limited leadership support, and inadequate innovation resources can hinder creativity (Lee et al., [2022](#)). Readiness to change remains essential to overcoming these barriers. As highlighted by Chen et al. (2024), readiness for change acts as a critical mediator linking leadership behavior to innovative outcomes. However, the relationship between leadership styles and readiness for change remains underexplored, representing a "black box" in literature.

Moreover, limited research has examined employee perceptions of factors supporting IWB in Asian business schools, particularly in collectivist cultures. Much of the existing literature is grounded in individualist societies, leaving a gap in understanding how leadership operates in more communal, resource-constrained contexts where risk-taking is often discouraged.

While several studies have investigated the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior (IWB) (Li et al., [2019](#)), the emerging role of digital leadership remains relatively underexplored (Erhan & Uzunbacak, [2022](#)). Moreover, there is a growing need to examine mediating variables that

explain how leadership influences IWB, with scholars calling for deeper investigation into these mechanisms (Masood & Asfar, [2017](#)). One such critical variable is readiness to change, a psychological state reflecting employees' willingness and preparedness to adopt new behaviors and ideas, which has been identified as a key mediator in the leadership–IWB link (Chen et al., 2024). Gottfredson ([2025](#)) further emphasizes that fostering a learning-oriented mindset is essential for promoting innovation, underscoring the importance of readiness to change in this process.

However, the expression of readiness to change is not culturally uniform. In individualist cultures, it often arises from a desire for autonomy and self-development (Hofstede, [2001](#)). In contrast, collectivist cultures, such as those prevalent in Asia, emphasize group harmony, stability, and respect for authority, which may hinder openness to change unless leaders actively foster trust, psychological safety, and shared purpose (Triandis, [1995](#)). Despite its importance, the mediating role of readiness to change in collectivist environments remains under-researched.

Furthermore, most existing studies are rooted in Western contexts, resulting in a limited understanding of how employees in Asian business schools, often operating within collectivist and resource-constrained settings, perceive the antecedents of IWB. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how transformational and digital leadership styles influence readiness to change and, in turn, shape innovative work behavior among academic staff in Asian higher education institutions. This research not only addresses a significant gap in literature but also offers culturally relevant insights for fostering innovation in collectivist organizational settings.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPEMENT**

### **2.1. Transformational Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior**

Transformational leadership is multi-facet concept that involves helping to create emotional relations with its followers and these relations are expected to lead to creativity among employees (Bahagia, et al., [2024](#)). According to literature transformational leaders motivate employees to go beyond their job descriptions to accomplish their goals. While innovative work behavior is a cognitive of individuals that leads employees to go beyond the established routines at work. Employees with innovative work behavior discover and secure resources to fetch new ideas. The results of a study of Watts et al. ([2020](#)) prove the positive relationship between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior. Similarly, the results of study of Mayastinasari, & Suseno, ([2023](#)) clam the

positive and significant impact of transformational leadership on innovative work behavior, therefore:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Transformational Leadership has significant positive impact on Employ Innovative Work Behavior.

## **2.2. Digital Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior**

Digital workplaces are heading beyond technological advancement like organization's digital culture, advanced and digital tools which make people work in fast paced changing environment where the traditional leadership approaches are no longer sufficient. Organizations need leaders rather managers who are beyond customary skills especially when beside external stakeholders, the internal stakeholders start realizing the need for change. Therefore, the leaders are desired to focus on the need for change and to build flexible digital oriented workplaces as digital leadership has deep roots for fostering innovative work behavior. The literature on innovation in higher education defines it as improvement in ideas and processes to advance the procedures involved in higher education system. Digital leadership goes beyond using digital devices such as mobile, computers etc. It involves building marketing, sharing information and supporting digital network (Yusof, et al, [2019](#)). Leaders with digital mindset have a key role in innovative work behavior at workplace. The results of the study of Erhan & Uzunbacak., ([2022](#)) clam the positive and significant impact of digital leadership on innovative work behavior, therefore:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Digital Leadership has significant positive impact on Employ Innovative Work Behavior.

## **2.3. Readiness for Change with Leadership Styles and Innovative Work Behavior**

Regardless of the plethora of literature examined for leadership styles and their associations with employees' innovative behavior, still this relationship is black box and was not sufficiently investigated (Alheet, [2021](#)). Innovative work behavior refers to generating, realizing and implementing novel ideas at workplace. Which helps improve organizational performance. Innovative work behavior is discretionary extra role behavior and goes beyond the job description for employee performance (Amankwaa, 2019). The literature on transformational leadership suggests that this discretionary behavior is one of the key antecedents of employee innovative work behavior (Alheet, [2021](#)) as it helps in reshaping the work environment through influencing the current assets as incentives and developing new assets like employee learning skills (Lee, et al., [2020](#)). This type of leadership helps employees to change their perceptions of change and go beyond expectations and personal interests as readiness to change. Readiness to

change is the cognitive process consisting of beliefs, attitudes and intentions to adopt the change (Armenakis et al., [1993](#)). The research on readiness for change posits that the position of readiness to change is different among different nations. Like in collectivist culture the change is less acceptable than individualist culture. Therefore, if the leaders in collectivist countries encourage the employees for adoption of the need of time through transformational and digital leadership styles subsequently the innovative work environment is more likely to occur. Hence:

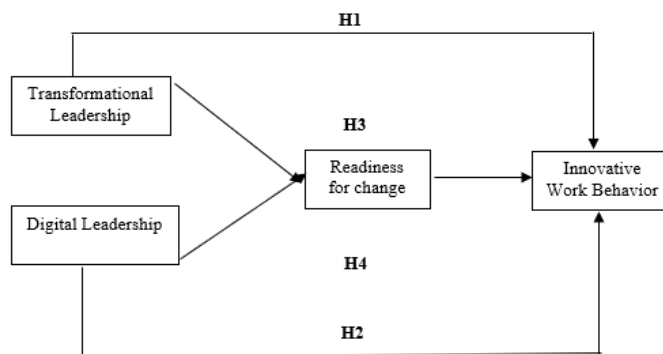
**H<sub>3</sub>:** Readiness for Change mediates between Transformational leadership and Innovative Work Behavior.

Among the several factors the leadership style the leadership style has a key role for building employee perception, attitude and that can evoke the innovative work behavior of employees to achieve desirable innovative outcomes (Wu & Lin, [2017](#)). The digital leaders also play key role in readiness to change as they are adaptable and change oriented and look forward. According to Muniroh et al. ([2022](#)) digital leadership encourages innovative culture, helping creativity and knowledge development. Thus:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Readiness for Change mediates between Digital leadership and Innovative Work Behavior

### 3. PERCEIVED MODEL

**Figure 1: Perceived Model**



**Source:** Author's own.

#### 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative cross-sectional research design was followed for the under-discussion study as it is appropriate and convenient to investigate and save time and cost. A perceived two- path model was designed with Innovative Work Behavior as Dependent variable (DV). Digital Leadership and Perceived Need for Change were taken as independent variable whereas readiness to change served as mediator between Perceived Need for Change and Innovative Work Behavior. Prior research on leadership suggests that transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on innovative work behavior; therefore, Transformational Leadership was examined as an independent variable in relation to Innovative Work Behavior in Path One, while Digital Leadership was considered as an independent variable with Innovative Work Behavior in Path Two. Additionally, Readiness to Change was included as a mediator in both pathways.

The study was conducted on the employees of business schools of the twin city Rawalpindi Islamabad. The individual variables of this study were taken as gender, age, education and experience. The questionnaire-based survey was used for collecting data. The convenience sampling method was used. 525 responses were received out of 600 hundred questionnaires. The questionnaires were adopted that were used in previous research. The scale of Ajabar et al (2021) with 06 items was adopted for Digital Leadership, the scale of Erhan et al. (2022) was adopted for Innovative Work Behavior with 04 items, 04 items were adopted from scale of Readiness for Change by Bouckennooghe et.al, (2009) and the scale of Transformational Leadership was taken from Carless et al., (2000) with 7 items. All the variables were measured on the Likert scale. The analysis was conducted using SEM on AMOS software to examine the direct and indirect relationship of variables used in the perceived model.

##### 4.1. Cronbach Alpha Results

Results of Cronbach alpha of four items of 1st independent variable Transformational leadership are found 0.6, four items of 2nd independent variable Digital Leadership are 0.8, while of dependent variable Innovative Work Behavior is 0.8 and of mediator Readiness for Change is also 0.8 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Cronbach alpha**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Cronbach alpha</b>
Transformational leadership	0.6
Digital Leadership	0.8
Readiness for Change	0.8
Innovative Work Behavior	0.8

**Source:** Author's own.

#### 4.2. Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity of SEM Model

The results model fit convergent validity and discriminant validity of SEM Model was estimated and found in acceptable fitness range with CMIN/DF=1.96, GFI=0.91, AGFI=0.87, CFI=0.90, NFI= 0.94, and RMSEA=0.06. The convergent validity was found in the accepted range of equals and more than 0.5 level whereas as discriminant validity was also found in the valid range as described in table 2

**Table 2: Convergent Validity & Discriminant Validity**

<b>Convergent Validity</b>		<b>Discriminant Validity</b>			
<b>Latent Variables</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>Transformational leadership</b>	<b>Digital Leadership</b>	<b>Readiness for Change</b>	<b>Innovative Work Behavior</b>
<b>Transformational leadership</b>	0.633	<b>0.796</b>			
<b>Digital Leadership</b>	0.586	0.558	<b>0.766</b>		
<b>Readiness for Change</b>	0.512	0.551	0.774	<b>0.715</b>	
<b>Innovative Work Behavior</b>	0.6.56	0.532	0.642	0.559	<b>0.811</b>

**Source:** Author's own.

#### 4.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is applied test whether a set of observed variables correctly measures a predefined set of latent constructs based on the values of factor loading (FL) and Squared Multiple Correlation (SMC). If the values of observed variables items are found less than 0.50 in factor loading (FL) and 0.20 in Squared Multiple Correlation (SMC) is excluded for the further analysis of SEM.

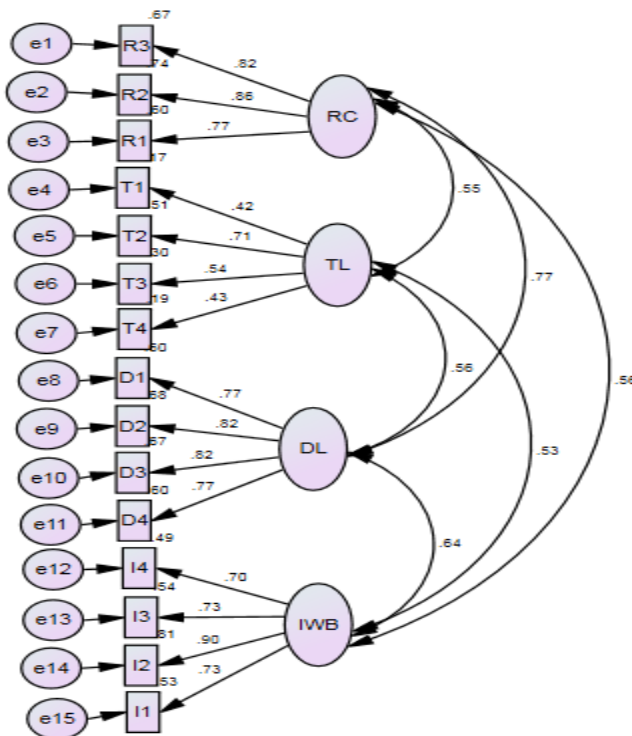


The results CFA of Transformational Leadership found items of 5, 6 and 7 less than standard values. The item 5 and 6 of Digital Leadership and items 4 of Readiness for Change also dropped due to less than standard values

#### 4.4. Measurement Summary Model

Figure 3 presents the measurement of the analysis of observed and latent variables used on the perceived model. The results of measurement summary model depict the acceptable fitness of model with CMIN/DF=1.95, GFI=0.91, AGFI=0.87, CFI=0.90, NFI= 0.94, and RMSEA=0.07.

**Figure 2: Measurement Summary Model for Latent Variables**

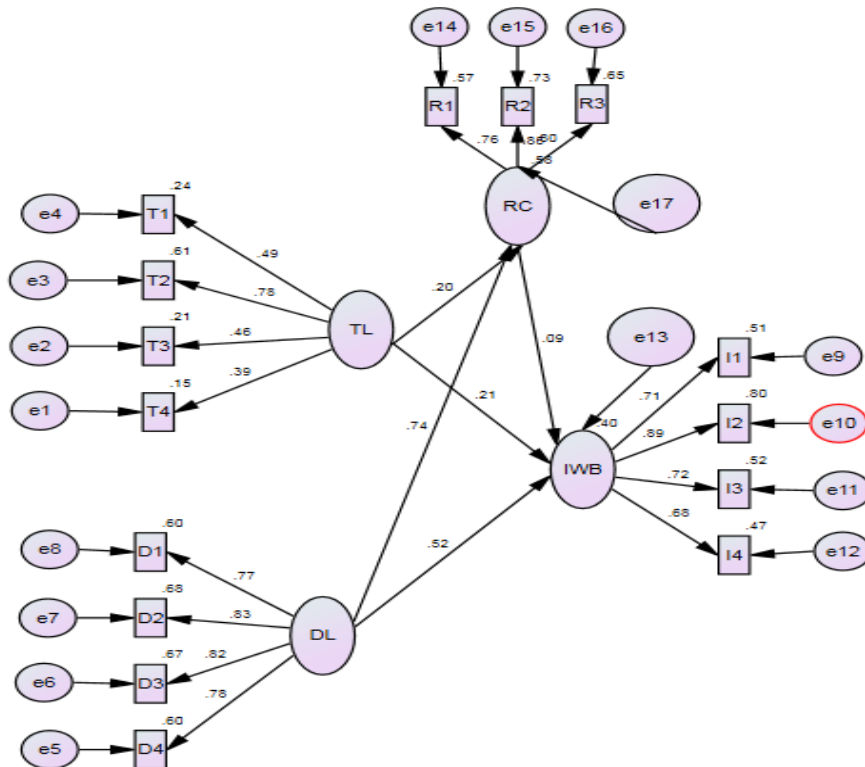


Source: Author's own.

#### 4.5. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Figure 4 presents the measurement model of the study. The model was estimated, and results depicted the acceptable fitness of the model with CMIN/DF=2.4, GFI=0.89, AGFI=0.85, CFI=0.92, NFI= 0.87, and RMSEA=0.08, which depicts that perceived model is correct.

**Figure 3: Structural Model for Latent Variables**



**Source:** Author's own

In table 3, the path analysis shows that Transformational Leadership (TL) positively influences Relational Coordination (RC) with a beta coefficient of 0.323 ( $p = 0.012$ ). Distributed Leadership (DL) also positively influences RC with a stronger beta coefficient of 0.604 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 3: Output Results & Significance of Variables**

Variables	Beta Coefficient	Estimates	P Values	Interpretation
RC <--- TL	0.323	0.20	0.012	Significant
RC <--- DL	0.604	0.70	0.001	Significant
IWB <--- RC	0.112	0.09	0.456	Not Significant
IWB <--- DL	0.506	0.52	0.001	Significant
IWB <--- TL	0.404	0.21	0.028	Significant

**Source:** Author's own.

The path from Readiness for Change (RC) to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) is positive but not significant as P value is above 0.05 ( $\beta = 0.112$ ,  $p = 0.456$ ). Digital Leadership (DL) has a significant positive path to IWB as P value is less than 0.05 ( $\beta = 0.506$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and Transformational Leadership (TL) also shows a significant positive path to IWB and has P value is less than 0.05 ( $\beta = 0.404$ ,  $p = 0.028$ ).

**Table 4: Hypotheses Testing & Interpretation**

Sr	Hypothesis	Results
1	Transformational Leadership has a significant positive impact on Employ Innovative Work Behavior.	Accepted
2	Digital Leadership has significant positive impact on Employ Innovative Work Behavior.	Accepted
3	Readiness for Change mediates between Transformational leadership and Innovative Work Behavior	Not Accepted
4	Readiness for Change mediates between Digital leadership and Innovative Work Behavior	Not Accepted

**Source:** Author's own.

The results reveal that both transformational leadership and digital leadership have significant direct effects on innovative work behavior. In particular, digital leadership demonstrated a strong positive impact on innovative work behavior,

therefore hypothesis 1: Transformational Leadership has a significant positive impact on Employ Innovative Work Behavior and hypothesis 2: Digital Leadership has a significant positive impact on Employ Innovative Work Behavior, both are associated with higher relational coordination within the organization. Therefore, the corresponding hypotheses are accepted. However, readiness itself did not significantly predict innovative behavior. As a result, the hypothesis 3: Readiness for Change mediates between Transformational leadership and Innovative Work Behavior and hypothesis 4: Readiness for Change mediates between Transformational leadership and Innovative Work Behavior as mediators are not supported.

Readiness to change plays a crucial role in fostering innovative work behavior (IWB), particularly across different cultural contexts. In individualist cultures, where personal initiative and autonomy are highly valued, employees with high readiness to change are more likely to engage in IWB, as they are motivated by personal achievement and recognition (Janssen, [2000](#)). However, in collectivist cultures, the mediating role of readiness to change between leadership and innovative work behavior (IWB) can often be weaker or even insignificant. This is because, in such contexts, individual attitudes toward change may be outweighed by the influence of group norms, collective values, and the desire to maintain social harmony (Hofstede, [2001](#)). Consequently, even if individuals personally feel ready for change, their willingness to engage in innovative behavior often depends on the endorsement and support of the group.

Finally, the finding suggests that the independent variable influences the dependent variable directly, without needing the mediator. After refining the model through CFA and removing weaker items, the mediator may have lost some of its influence.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of how innovative work behavior is important in the business schools particularly in the Asian cultural environment. The study also emphasizes the importance of preparing faculty for the challenges of a rapidly evolving digital and technological landscape. The rejection of mediating effects of readiness for change clarifies the difference of cultures. This research also reinforces the contextual sensitivity of leadership findings by suggesting that the effectiveness of leadership behaviors cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural and institutional context in which they occur. Literature on individualists suggests more inclination of readiness to change for innovative behavior as compared to collectivist. The results of hypothesis show that the countries like Pakistan the transformational and digital leadership styles can effectively encourage employees to embrace change

by aligning organizational goals with collective values and providing support rather than on initiating change on their own. This cultural orientation may limit the influence of individual psychological state like readiness for change.

The finding of study not only confirms the importance of direct leadership effects but also draws attention to cultural reinterpretation of commonly studied construct such as readiness for change in non-western organizational context. The rejection of readiness to change as a mediator suggests that, in collectivist cultures, leadership's direct influence on innovation may be more potent than individual readiness, urging organizations to adopt a more strategically proactive approach. This insight calls for business school leadership to make strategic decisions that prioritize leadership-driven innovation, focusing on fostering a culture of innovation through transformational and digital leadership rather than depending on individual readiness for change. Therefore, the implications of this research are valuable for policymakers and educational institutions in promoting a culture of innovation, which is essential for both academic advancement and better alignment with industry needs. The study suggests that enhancing transformational and digital leadership through training and knowledge sharing can further encourage innovative behavior among faculty and improve the quality of graduates in business schools.

## **6. RESEARCH LIMITATION & FUTURE RECOMENDATIONS**

As global economic trends are forcing all the sectors and organizations to keep their employees abreast and ready to change, business schools cannot be an exception. Business schools are key indicators for providing skilled employees to the organizations. Therefore, it is essential for their leadership to cultivate an environment of readiness for change to build innovative employees. The study contributes to the literature on Digital Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Readiness for Change and Innovative Work Behavior through cultural context. Rather than a limitation, this result provides valuable insight into the nature of the relationship and suggests that future research could explore other possible mediators or moderators. Likewise, this study was conducted among the private business school faculty, however, future comparative type study and be spread on public sector. This study has some limitations too. As the study is not funded so the time and resource constraints did not let the researcher obtain data from other parts of the state. In future other personal and cultural antecedents can be explored with a given perceived model. Multilevel and longitudinal type study can bring deep understanding of the model designed.

## 7. IMPLICATIONS

This study offers significant insights across three dimensions: managerial, policy, and academic, each highlighting critical factors for fostering innovative work behavior. Managerially, leaders must develop digital and transformational skills to motivate employees' readiness for change and foster innovation in today's fast-paced environment. From a policy perspective, business school administrators and higher education commissions should create strategies and allocate resources that support innovative work behavior among faculty, who are essential for producing a responsible and skilled workforce. Policies should also promote trust, collaborative decision-making, and gradual change that respects collectivist cultural values to reduce resistance. Academically, this research fills an important gap by examining how different leadership styles influence innovative work behavior, especially within collectivist contexts, offering new insights for future studies.

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