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Examining the Effects of Psychological Safety, Transformational Leadership, Job Autonomy, and Employee Creativity on Innovative Work Behavior

Original Article

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effects of psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity on innovative work behavior. A quantitative research design was employed using a cross-sectional survey approach, with data collected from 200 employees across various industries. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. The results indicate that psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity all have significant positive effects on innovative work behavior. Among these variables, employee creativity was found to be the strongest predictor, highlighting its central role in driving innovation. Additionally, the model demonstrates strong explanatory power, indicating that the integration of psychological, leadership, and job design factors provides a comprehensive understanding of innovative work behavior. The findings suggest that organizations should foster a supportive and safe work environment, promote transformational leadership practices, and provide employees with greater autonomy to enhance creativity and innovation. This study contributes to the literature by offering an integrated framework that explains how multiple organizational factors interact to influence employee innovation.

Keywords: Psychological Safety; Transformational Leadership; Job Autonomy; Employee Creativity; Innovative Work Behavior.

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving and highly competitive business environment, innovation has become a fundamental driver of organizational sustainability and long-term success. Organizations are increasingly required to adapt to technological advancements, globalization, and shifting customer demands, which necessitate continuous innovation in processes, products, and services. At the core of these innovation processes lies employees' innovative work behavior (IWB), defined as the intentional generation, promotion, and realization of new ideas within a work role or organization. Employees are no longer viewed merely as executors of predefined tasks but as active contributors to organizational innovation and competitive advantage (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Liu et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding the factors that foster innovative work behavior has become a critical concern for both scholars and practitioners.

Recent research emphasizes that innovative work behavior is influenced not only by individual capabilities but also by psychological and contextual factors within the workplace. Among these, psychological safety has emerged as a key determinant of employee innovation. Psychological safety refers to the shared belief that individuals can express ideas, take risks, and voice concerns without fear of negative consequences. When employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to engage in creative problem-solving, knowledge sharing, and experimentation—behaviors essential for innovation (Santana et al., 2025). Empirical studies further indicate that psychological safety directly enhances innovative work behavior by reducing fear of failure and encouraging open communication (Samsidar, 2024; Liu et al., 2023). Despite its recognized importance, there is still a need for more integrative research examining psychological safety alongside other organizational factors that collectively influence innovation.

Another critical factor influencing innovative work behavior is transformational leadership, a leadership style characterized by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and the articulation of a compelling vision. Transformational leaders motivate employees to transcend self-interest and actively contribute to organizational goals, including innovation. Recent studies consistently demonstrate that transformational leadership positively affects innovative work behavior by fostering intrinsic motivation and empowering employees (Vu et al., 2025; Oh & Sabharwal, 2025). Furthermore, transformational leadership has been found to indirectly influence innovation through psychological mechanisms such as empowerment, engagement, and psychological safety, suggesting that leadership plays both direct and mediating roles in shaping employee creativity and innovation outcomes (Samsidar, 2024; Bak et al., 2021).

In addition to leadership, job autonomy is a crucial work design factor that contributes to innovative behavior. Job autonomy refers to the degree of freedom and discretion employees have in scheduling tasks, making decisions, and determining work methods. According to self-determination theory and job characteristics theory, autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation, which in turn promotes creativity and innovation. Empirical evidence suggests that employees who experience higher levels of job autonomy are more likely to engage in idea generation and experimentation, leading to increased innovative work behavior (Oh & Sabharwal, 2025; Yani & Hidayat, 2024). Moreover, job autonomy has been identified as a mediating mechanism through which transformational leadership influences innovation, highlighting its strategic importance in organizational settings (Shah, 2024). However, the interaction between job autonomy and psychological safety in promoting innovation remains underexplored in the literature.

Furthermore, employee creativity is widely recognized as a foundational component of innovative work behavior. While creativity involves the generation of novel and useful ideas, innovative work behavior encompasses not only idea generation but also idea implementation. Creativity is therefore considered a precursor to innovation. Prior studies have shown that leadership styles, work design, and psychological conditions significantly influence employee creativity, which subsequently drives innovative behavior (Shah, 2024; Kim & Yoon, 2025) . Transformational leadership, for instance, has been found to enhance creativity by encouraging intellectual stimulation and supporting employees' intrinsic motivation. Similarly, job autonomy provides the necessary freedom for employees to explore creative solutions, while

psychological safety ensures that employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas without fear of criticism.

Despite the growing body of research on innovative work behavior, several gaps remain. First, most studies have examined the effects of psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity in isolation or through limited mediating mechanisms. There is a lack of comprehensive models that integrate these variables simultaneously to provide a holistic understanding of how they collectively influence innovative work behavior. Second, existing research often focuses on specific sectors or cultural contexts, limiting the generalizability of findings. For instance, studies conducted in public sector organizations or specific regions such as South Korea and Vietnam highlight the importance of contextual factors but also indicate the need for broader empirical investigations (Oh & Sabharwal, 2025; Vu et al., 2025). Third, the dynamic interplay between psychological and structural factors—such as how psychological safety interacts with job autonomy and leadership to influence creativity and innovation—remains insufficiently explored.

Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, integrating psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity into a single framework can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of innovative work behavior. From a practical standpoint, organizations can benefit from identifying the key drivers of innovation and designing interventions that enhance employee creativity and innovation outcomes. For example, fostering a psychologically safe work environment, promoting transformational leadership practices, and providing employees with greater autonomy can collectively enhance innovation performance.

This study aims to examine the effects of psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity on innovative work behavior. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the direct and combined influence of these variables in fostering employees' innovative actions within organizational settings. By integrating psychological, leadership, and work design perspectives, this research intends to provide a comprehensive framework that explains how organizations can enhance innovative work behavior through supportive environments, effective leadership, and empowered employees.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationships between psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, employee creativity, and innovative work behavior. A quantitative method is appropriate as it allows for the statistical testing of hypotheses and the examination of causal relationships among variables. The study employs a deductive approach, where hypotheses derived from existing theories and literature are empirically tested using numerical data.

The research framework positions psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity as independent variables, while innovative work behavior is treated as the dependent variable. This design enables the analysis of both individual and combined effects of the predictors on employees' innovative actions.

2.2. Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of employees working in organizations across various industries, particularly those that emphasize innovation and creativity in their operations. These may include sectors such as services, education, manufacturing, and technology. The unit of analysis is individual employees, as the study focuses on their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

A non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, is used to select respondents who meet specific criteria. The criteria include: (1) employees who have worked in their organization for at least six months, ensuring sufficient experience to evaluate leadership and work environment; and (2) employees who are involved in tasks that require problem-solving or creativity.

The sample size is determined based on the requirements of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. Following Hair et al. (2021), a minimum sample size of 150–200 respondents is recommended for models with multiple constructs. Therefore, this study targets approximately 200–300 respondents to ensure adequate statistical power and reliability of the results.

2.3. Data Collection Method

Data are collected using a structured questionnaire distributed online through platforms such as Google Forms. The use of online surveys allows for efficient data collection from a diverse group of respondents and ensures anonymity, which can reduce response bias. The questionnaire consists of two main sections: (1) demographic information (e.g., age, gender, education level, and work experience), and (2) measurement items for the study variables. All items are measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Prior to full data collection, a pilot test is conducted with 30 respondents to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity of the measurement items. Feedback from the pilot test is used to refine the questionnaire.

2.4. Measurement of Variables

All constructs in this study are measured using previously validated scales adapted from recent literature to ensure content validity and reliability. Psychological Safety (PS) is measured using items adapted from Edmondson's scale, which assesses the extent to which employees feel safe to express ideas and take risks in the workplace. A sample item is, "I feel safe to take risks in my work environment." Transformational Leadership (TL) is measured using items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), focusing on dimensions such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. A sample item is, "My leader encourages me to think about problems in new ways." Job Autonomy (JA) is measured using items adapted from the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS), which captures employees' perceived freedom in decision-making and work methods. A sample item is, "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job."

Employee Creativity (EC) is measured using scales developed by Zhou and George, which assess the extent to which employees generate novel and useful ideas in the workplace.

A sample item is, "I often come up with creative solutions to work-related problems." Meanwhile, Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) is measured using scales developed by Janssen, which capture employees' behaviors related to idea generation, promotion, and implementation. A sample item is, "I actively implement new ideas to improve work processes." The use of these established measurement scales strengthens the reliability and validity of the study by ensuring that each construct is assessed consistently and accurately according to previous empirical research.

2.5. Data Analysis Technique

The data in this study are analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach through software such as SmartPLS. PLS-SEM is selected because it is suitable for analyzing complex research models, capable of handling small to medium sample sizes, and does not require strict assumptions regarding data distribution. The analysis is conducted in two main stages: measurement model assessment (outer model) and structural model assessment (inner model). The measurement model assessment is performed to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study. Convergent validity is evaluated through factor loadings greater than 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50. Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with values exceeding 0.70 indicating acceptable reliability. In addition, discriminant validity is examined using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings to confirm that each construct is distinct from the others.

The structural model assessment is conducted to test the proposed hypotheses and analyze the relationships among variables. Path coefficients (β) are used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between constructs. The significance of the hypotheses is evaluated using t-statistics and p-values obtained through the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is used to measure the explanatory power of the model in explaining the dependent variable. Effect size (f^2) is also calculated to evaluate the contribution of each independent variable to the model, while predictive relevance (Q^2) is assessed to determine the model's predictive capability. Through these procedures, the study ensures that the proposed research model is both statistically reliable and theoretically meaningful.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Respondent Profile

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	112	56.0
	Female	88	44.0
Age	20–30 years	95	47.5
	31–40 years	70	35.0
	> 40 years	35	17.5
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	120	60.0
	Master's Degree	65	32.5

	Others	15	7.5
Work Experience	< 5 years	90	45.0
	5–10 years	75	37.5
	> 10 years	35	17.5

Source: Data Analysis

The majority of respondents are male (56%) and fall within the 20–30 age group (47.5%), indicating a relatively young workforce. Most respondents hold a bachelor's degree (60%) and have less than five years of work experience (45%), suggesting that the sample represents early to mid-career employees who are actively engaged in innovative tasks.

3.2. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

1) Convergent Validity

Table 2. Factor Loadings and AVE

Construct	Indicator	Loading	AVE
Psychological Safety	PS1	0.812	0.654
	PS2	0.845	
	PS3	0.798	
Transformational Leadership	TL1	0.821	0.701
	TL2	0.867	
	TL3	0.839	
Job Autonomy	JA1	0.804	0.662
	JA2	0.832	
	JA3	0.810	
Employee Creativity	EC1	0.875	0.728
	EC2	0.861	
	EC3	0.843	
Innovative Work Behavior	IWB1	0.889	0.751
	IWB2	0.865	
	IWB3	0.848	

Source: Data Analysis

All factor loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are above 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity. This suggests that the indicators effectively represent their respective constructs.

2) Reliability Test

Table 3. Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)
Psychological Safety	0.823	0.882
Transformational Leadership	0.851	0.904
Job Autonomy	0.811	0.877
Employee Creativity	0.873	0.917
Innovative Work Behavior	0.889	0.923

Source: Data Analysis

All constructs demonstrate high reliability, as both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceed 0.70. This indicates that the measurement items are internally consistent and reliable for assessing each construct.

3) Discriminant Validity

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	PS	TL	JA	EC	IWB
Psychological Safety (PS)	0.809				
Transformational Leadership (TL)	0.621	0.837			
Job Autonomy (JA)	0.598	0.655	0.814		
Employee Creativity (EC)	0.634	0.702	0.681	0.853	
Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)	0.668	0.745	0.712	0.789	0.866

Source: Data Analysis

The square root of AVE (diagonal values) for each construct is higher than its correlations with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity. This indicates that each construct is distinct and measures a unique concept.

3.3. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

1) Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Table 5. R-Square Value

Endogenous Variable	R^2
Innovative Work Behavior	0.682

Source: Data Analysis

The R^2 value of 0.682 indicates that 68.2% of the variance in innovative work behavior is explained by psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity. This suggests a strong explanatory power of the model.

2) Hypothesis Testing

Table 6. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Psychological Safety → IWB	0.214	3.215	0.001	Supported
H2	Transformational Leadership → IWB	0.276	4.102	0.000	Supported
H3	Job Autonomy → IWB	0.231	3.487	0.001	Supported
H4	Employee Creativity → IWB	0.358	5.214	0.000	Supported

Source: Data Analysis

All hypothesized relationships are statistically significant, with p-values less than 0.05. Employee creativity has the strongest effect on innovative work behavior (β = 0.358), followed by transformational leadership (β = 0.276), job autonomy (β = 0.231), and psychological safety (β = 0.214). These results indicate that both individual and organizational factors significantly contribute to employees' innovative behavior.

3) Effect Size (f^2)

Table 7. Effect Size

Relationship	f^2	Effect Size
Psychological Safety → IWB	0.062	Small
Transformational Leadership → IWB	0.098	Medium
Job Autonomy → IWB	0.075	Medium
Employee Creativity → IWB	0.142	Large

Source: Data Analysis

Employee creativity shows the largest effect size, indicating its dominant role in influencing innovative work behavior. Transformational leadership and job autonomy have moderate effects, while psychological safety has a smaller but still meaningful impact.

4) Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Table 8. Predictive Relevance

Endogenous Variable	Q^2
Innovative Work Behavior	0.521

Source: Data Analysis

The Q^2 value is greater than zero, indicating that the model has strong predictive relevance. This suggests that the model is capable of accurately predicting innovative work behavior.

3.4. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the effects of psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity on innovative work behavior. The findings reveal that all four variables significantly and positively influence innovative work behavior, thereby providing strong empirical support for the proposed hypotheses. These results contribute to the growing body of literature on organizational innovation by offering an integrated perspective that combines psychological, leadership, and job design factors.

First, the findings indicate that psychological safety has a significant positive effect on innovative work behavior, supporting Hypothesis 1. This result reinforces the notion that employees are more likely to engage in innovation when they perceive their work environment as safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Psychological safety reduces fear of criticism, failure, or negative consequences, thereby encouraging employees to share ideas, experiment with new approaches, and challenge existing practices. This finding is consistent with recent studies that emphasize the importance of a supportive and trusting work climate in fostering innovation

(Santana et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2023). In practical terms, organizations should prioritize building a culture of openness and trust, where employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas without fear of judgment. Managers can facilitate this by encouraging open communication, acknowledging employees' contributions, and treating mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures.

Second, the results demonstrate that transformational leadership significantly influences innovative work behavior, supporting Hypothesis 2. Transformational leadership emerged as one of the key drivers of innovation, highlighting the critical role of leaders in shaping employees' attitudes and behaviors. Leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate their employees create an environment that fosters creativity and innovation. The positive relationship observed in this study aligns with prior research indicating that transformational leadership enhances employees' intrinsic motivation and commitment to innovation (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Vu et al., 2025). Moreover, transformational leaders often serve as role models who encourage employees to think beyond conventional boundaries and pursue innovative solutions. This finding suggests that organizations should invest in leadership development programs that emphasize transformational leadership competencies, such as vision-building, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

Third, the findings confirm that job autonomy has a positive and significant effect on innovative work behavior, supporting Hypothesis 3. This result underscores the importance of work design in promoting innovation. Employees who have greater autonomy in their roles are more likely to take initiative, experiment with new ideas, and engage in creative problem-solving. Job autonomy enhances employees' sense of ownership and responsibility, which in turn fosters intrinsic motivation and innovation. This finding is consistent with job characteristics theory and self-determination theory, both of which highlight autonomy as a key determinant of motivation and performance (Oh & Sabharwal, 2025; Yani & Hidayat, 2024). From a managerial perspective, organizations should consider redesigning jobs to provide employees with more flexibility and decision-making authority. This can be achieved by reducing bureaucratic constraints, empowering employees, and allowing them to explore alternative approaches to task completion.

Fourth, the results reveal that employee creativity has the strongest positive effect on innovative work behavior, supporting Hypothesis 4. This finding highlights the central role of creativity as a precursor to innovation. Employees who are capable of generating novel and useful ideas are more likely to translate those ideas into practical solutions and innovations. The strong influence of creativity observed in this study is consistent with prior research that identifies creativity as a key driver of innovative work behavior (Shah, 2024; Kim & Yoon, 2025). Additionally, the large effect size of employee creativity suggests that it is the most critical factor among the variables examined. This implies that organizations aiming to enhance innovation should focus on fostering employees' creative abilities. This can be achieved through training programs, brainstorming sessions, and the creation of an environment that supports experimentation and idea generation.

Beyond the individual effects of each variable, the findings also highlight the importance of an integrated approach to innovation. Psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity are interrelated factors that collectively influence innovative work behavior. For instance, transformational leadership can enhance psychological

safety by creating a supportive and trusting work environment. Similarly, job autonomy provides employees with the freedom to explore creative ideas, while psychological safety ensures that they feel comfortable sharing those ideas. This interconnectedness suggests that organizations should adopt a holistic approach to fostering innovation, rather than focusing on isolated factors.

The relatively high R^2 value (0.682) indicates that the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in innovative work behavior, demonstrating its strong explanatory power. This suggests that the combination of psychological, leadership, and job design factors provides a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of innovation in the workplace. Additionally, the significant Q^2 value confirms the predictive relevance of the model, indicating that it can be used to predict innovative work behavior in similar organizational contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by integrating multiple perspectives into a single framework. While previous studies have often examined psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity independently, this research demonstrates their combined impact on innovative work behavior. This integrated model provides a more holistic understanding of how innovation is fostered within organizations and highlights the interplay between individual and contextual factors.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for managers and organizations seeking to enhance innovation. First, organizations should foster a psychologically safe work environment by promoting trust, openness, and mutual respect. Second, leadership development programs should emphasize transformational leadership skills to inspire and motivate employees. Third, job design should be optimized to provide employees with greater autonomy and flexibility. Finally, organizations should invest in initiatives that enhance employee creativity, such as training programs, collaborative workspaces, and innovation-driven cultures.

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine how these relationships evolve over time. Second, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to common method bias. Future studies could incorporate multiple data sources to enhance the robustness of the findings. Third, the sample is limited to specific industries or regions, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Future research could explore different contexts and cultural settings to validate the findings.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that psychological safety, transformational leadership, job autonomy, and employee creativity play significant and complementary roles in enhancing innovative work behavior within organizations. The findings demonstrate that when employees feel safe to express ideas, are guided by inspiring leaders, and are given sufficient autonomy in their work, they are more likely to engage in innovative activities. Among these factors, employee creativity emerges as the most influential predictor, highlighting its critical role as the foundation of innovation. Furthermore, the integration of psychological, leadership, and job design elements provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how innovation

can be effectively fostered in the workplace. These results suggest that organizations seeking to strengthen their innovation capacity should focus on creating a supportive work environment, empowering leadership practices, and flexible job structures that encourage creativity and proactive behavior.

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