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RESEARCH PAPER

Lead Bold, Creative Fearless: The Paradoxical Leaders Path to Creative Performance: The intervening role of Psychological Safety

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between paradoxical leadership and creative performance, with a focus on the mediating effect of psychological safety. The paradoxical leadership fosters creativity in a very creative and bold way that influence the creative performance of employees, with the key mediating effect of psychological safety. A sample of 300 employees from the top 15 IT Companies participated in this study. Using a cross-sectional approach, the study collects data at one particular moment in time. The sample was analyzed by using structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This study found that paradoxical leadership has a positive relationship with creative performance. The study also revealed that psychological safety is a strong mediator that influences the relationship between paradoxical leadership and creative performance. The findings of this study assist upper management in developing plans for improving relationships between leaders and their team members by offering a psychologically safe setting, which results in high creativity in Pakistani IT companies. The further study may concentrate on investigating the impact of supplementary mediators, such as cultural context, team behavior, on the relationship between the PL and CP.

KEYWORDS Paradoxical Leadership (PL), Creative Performance (CP), Psychological Safety (PS), Social Learning Theory

Introduction

Many businesses are under pressure to constantly innovate their existing systems of work and products in response to the competitive global market's rapid changes. Thus, it is necessary to strengthen the company's uniqueness and creativity, personnel encounter new challenges, disparity, and obstacles (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2013). Prior studies have demonstrated that the significance of PL promote organization progress (Waldman et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020) as well as helping staff members innovative thinking (Franken et al., 2023; Zhang & Liu, 2021). Prior researcher have pointed out PL is a leadership approach that integrates seemingly conflicting activities to satisfy organizational objectives and individual employee needs (Madaan et al., 2024). Meanwhile, this kind of leadership acknowledges companies frequently confront paradoxical requirements, especially resolving speedy gain regarding a long-term viability. Consequently, leaders must skillfully tackle the aforementioned confounding contradictions (Franken et al., 2020). Building upon this knowledge of paradoxical leadership, effective leaders may build on this strategy to drive organizational success. Paradoxical leader must diagnose the point needed to help the organization by encouraging employees and identifying new ways to perform activities, resulting in more creativity. Paradoxical leadership fosters resilience in organizations by promoting adaptability in the face of challenges and changes (Pearce & van Knippenberg, 2024). In rapidly evolving industries, organizations must constantly adjust their strategies and

operations to stay competitive. Creative performance denotes an opportunity of which individuals or teams to develop unique and valuable notions, solutions, or products within an organizational context (Wang & Lau, 2022). It includes a wide variety of behaviors, from problem solving and innovation to artistic expression, and is often considered a critical driver of organizational success in dynamic and competitive environments. (Anderson et al., 2014).

Creative performance indicates the ability to generate innovative and suitable outputs that give an advantage over competitors to firms within the organization landscape (Liu et al., 2024). Creative performance is characterized by the prominent development of creativity which have changed into uncertain issues to improving tasks and increasing organization's effectiveness (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Creative performance offers an innovative ground for the business. Creative performance is posited to result from both individual and organizational factors (Li et al., 2020). Leadership is a significant organizational factor that is widely acknowledged and fostering creativity and innovation within the team members.

Thus, this Research supports that leaders who balance contradictory behaviors can enhance creativity. By embracing paradox, leaders can leverage the benefits of both worlds, (e.g. organizational objectives and individual employee need) driving innovation and growth (Yang et al., 2024). PL is characterized by the integration of divergent but interrelated behaviors designed to concurrently meet business objectives and address employee needs that incentivizes staff members to increase their performance in a motivating manner can improve the creative performance (Zhang et al., 2015). PL significantly improves creative performance by integrating potentially contrary components, such as the stability and change, to establish a setting that fosters creativity. Leaders facilitate the exploration of novel concepts and the utilization of extant knowledge by cultivating ambidexterity, thereby facilitating creative breakthroughs (Xue et al., 2020). This leadership style promotes iterative learning, which is characterized by continuous development, learning from failure, and experimentation as essential components of the creative process. PL exploit the creative capabilities of their staff by managing paradoxes and anxiety, enabling workers to transcend where they are at ease, to embrace challenge assumptions, and generate novel thoughts that accelerate the creativity of company.

SLT (Social learning theory) may helps in establishing the link with PL and CP (Ahn et al., 2020). Personnel develop novel perspective and creative practices by observing and imitating their respective followers . PL, resolved ambiguities and turmoil, and serve as meaningful inspirations, proving the vital importance of innovation, boldness, and distinctive thinking. Then, staff members embrace those qualities which are especially motivated to indulge in creative activities, encourage presumption, and articulate novel solutions (Lian et al., 2022). PL could mold staff mindsets, norms, and habits using SLT, encouraging an inventive workplace that improves CP. Thereby using social learning theory , organization may maximize the full benefits of paradoxical leadership, fostering an employees to be more creative, and encouraged to drive organizational creativity. Expanding upon the theoretical framework provided by Social Learning Theory (SLT) in exploring the connection within PL and CP, this research additionally utilize SLT to clarify the interactions among PL and psychological safety.

PL, explained as the combination of contradictory but collaborative behaviors, assists in fostering psychological safety among individuals. Thus accepting and

managing conflicts, paradoxical leaders develop an atmosphere in which individuals feel at ease taking chances, expressing their thoughts, and developing skills from inaccuracies (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The mentioned leadership style fosters creative thinking, accepts errors, and enhances interdependence, so creating a psychologically secure environment (Edmondson, 1999). Studies indicate that leaders demonstrating paradoxical behaviors might improve staff members' feeling of safety, enabling them to participate in actions that may otherwise be seen to be harmful (Carmeli et al., 2010). Thus, paradoxical leadership is expected to enhance psychological safety.

SLT illustrates the effect of paradoxical leaders on psychological safety. Social Learning Theory posits that people acquire and replicate actions via the observation and imitation of trustworthy mentors (Bandura, 1977). Paradoxical leaders, by their acts and attitudes, convey to workers the acceptability of embracing paradoxes and undertaking calculated risks. Consequently, Social Learning Theory posits that the acts of paradoxical leaders will influence workers' feelings of psychological safety by observational learning and imitation.

Given the proposed link between PL and CP, it's essential to investigate the process by which PS subsequently affects CP, a critical element in this research paradigm. PS has been positively associated with CP, that may encouraging personnel willingness to pursue creative notions, as well as actively involved in the process of uncertainties, despite worrying of negative repercussions (Edmondson, 1999). Workers are highly likely to exhibit inventive acts, especially the development of creative ideas and synthesis of inventive approaches, once they perceived their safety (Amabile, 1988). Previous scholars confirms that PS supports a setting appropriate for learning growth, advancement, and creative (Carmeli et al., 2013). According to this particular context, personnel tend to be prone to challenge the prevailing circumstances, employ innovative ideas, and share their novel concepts with their collogues, these qualities that is essential for CP (Hirak et al., 2012). As a result, PS may be intended to enhance CP.

SLT underlines the influence of PS and CP. Social Learning Theory asserts that worker learn and repeat activities by way of their peer observing or replication of their followers in a friendly and trustworthy setting (Bandura, 1977). While teammates observe that their coworkers are recognized regarding inventive initiatives rather than criticized for difficulties, then they tend to be more likely to inclination comparable creative pursuits. Besides, SLT asserts that personnel are highly inclination in inventive behaviors as they predict positive rewards, particularly in situations that are psychologically comfort (Bandura, 1977).

The belief towards workers that interpersonal relationships inside the company seem fair while the company would assume oversight on their subordinates behavior is referred to as psychologically well-being (Edmondson, 1999). PS has a positive cognitive view that workers possess about their employment activities, facilitating the way they express themselves (Frazier et al., 2017). IIt's essential to recognize that workers with elevated PS understand the limitations on acceptable conduct while also feeling secure with revealing their truly essence within those limits (Gong et al., 2012; Hirak et al., 2012). Studies in the past have identified the mediator function underlying of PS on the association among the way of leadership approaches and personnel performance (Hu et al., 2018). For instance, studies by Dhar (2015), discovered that inclusive leaders stimulates PS, thus improving job crafting. Likewise, Liu et al. (2024), research indicates that ethical leaders supports PS, which enhances creativity among workers. Besides, Hirak et al. (2012), contend that servant leaders nurtures psychologically well

being, hence enhancing creativity. More importantly, Carmeli et al. (2010) determined that worker learn and development are facilitated by psychological safety, finally, Yin et al. (2020), it was shown that psychological safety is fostered by the acts of the paradoxical leader, which in turn affects the viewpoint of workers and their thoughts for enhancement.

Moreover, Hetland et al. (2018), psychological safety, mediating the impact of paradoxical leadership and employee creativity. Finally, Gong et al. (2012), posit that psychological safety, mediating the association among transformational leadership and creativity self-efficacy. These mediators explain the detailed procedures by which leadership styles influence employee attitudes and actions. On the basis of previous studies, no one can identifying the mediating role of psychological safety between the paradoxical leadership and creative performance.

Thus, this study posits substantial mediator: psychological safety the focus is mainly why psychological safety is significant mediator for this study. By incorporating Psychological Safety as mediator, this research suggest that elucidate the intricate mechanisms underlying the Paradoxical Leadership-Creative Performance nexus. Psychological Safety serves as a critical mediator, as it enables employees to navigate the cognitive dissonance and emotional ambivalence inherent in Paradoxical Leadership, fostering a sense of security and trust that allows them to embrace creative risks and explore novel solutions (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004).

Psychological safety facilitates the connection among paradoxical leadership and creative performance through fostering an atmosphere in which workers feel secure in taking risks, expressing ideas, and tinkering without fear of repercussions. Paradoxical leaders, who reconcile apparently opposing qualities like structure with liberty, create a feeling of confidence and safety between workers, enabling them to participate in creative endeavors without concern or self-censorship (Zhang & Han, 2019). Consequently, staff members are more inclined to investigate alternative choices, question presumptions, and cultivate unique concepts, so improving creative performance. Therefore, significantly fostering psychological safety, paradoxical leaders unleash workers' creative potential, allowing them to excel in an atmosphere defined by unpredictability and experimentation.

Social Learning Theory (SLT) posits that workers learn and replicate behaviors through the observation and learning from their leaders (Bandura, 1977). Under the framework of paradoxical leadership, psychological safety serves as a mediator by fostering an atmosphere in which workers feel at ease to observe, learn from, and emulate the leader's behavior, especially regarding risk-taking, creativity, and innovative problem-solving. When workers see the leader's behaviour and feel psychologically protected, employees are more inclined to adopt the leader's principles and actions, ultimately demonstrating enhanced creative performance. Lian et al. (2022) documented that virtual learning and teaching by example of leaders, workers build a sense of autonomy and trust in their capacity for creative endeavors, so improving their creative performance. As a result, cultivating psychological safety, paradoxical leaders provide an atmosphere favorable to social learning, allowing workers to learn, practice, and increase their creative talents. Ultimately, it will lead to creative performance.

This study offers multiple contributions to the current body of studies on leadership and creativity. Firstly, it uncovers a correlation among PL and CP, illustrating that managers who exhibit mutually exclusive and complimentary behaviors can

improve personnel's ability to create innovative solutions, which encourages remarkable creative performance outcomes. Secondly, employing social learning theory, this study has introduced an innovative approach and enhanced the comprehension of paradoxical leadership and creative performance. The present research examines the role of psychological safety as a mediator in the link among PL and CP. This adding responds to earlier studies (Javed et al., 2019; Plomp et al., 2019) indicating that PS promote a setting where staff members feel empowered to challenge and propose innovative solutions, thereby enhancing creative performance. Finally, this study has explored the aforementioned relationship within the context of leaders and their subordinates in Pakistan's IT sectors, which has been infrequently addressed in earlier research.

The next portions of the article are structured are following. Section 2 indicates the theoretical framework, literature review and articulates the research hypotheses. The third sections address the study methodology and findings. Sections 4 to 5 describe the discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review

Literature Background and Hypotheses Development

This research is reinforced by SLT (Blau, 2017), as it is based on social behaviors. SLT has evolved into a predetermined structure defining the mechanisms underlying observant learning and psychological replication emphasizing the relevance of social components, enthusiasm, and training that affecting worker thought and action (Muldoon et al., 2022). The notion of paradoxical leaders has been elucidated and examined, chiefly via the lens of SLT. (Bandura, 1977). SLT clarifies that workers adopt new attitudes and ideas by watching and imitating the lifestyles of those individuals, especially leaders, who are crucial in demonstrating and promoting the behaviours. On the basis of SLT (Ahn et al., 2020), PL stimulate unrestricted interaction and cooperation, therefore promoting a knowledge of creativity and risk-taking. It additionally aligns with the principles of SLT, as workers are greater likely to demonstrate inventive conduct especially if they observe helpful behavior to their peers (Akers & Jennings, 2015). The connection within SLT to PL builds a solid basis for enhancing CP, as followers receive support in navigating difficulties by means of an array of PL behavior. The following comprehensive understanding highlights the substantial role of social connections to supporting creative thinking within the business.

PS becomes a fundamental element for a thriving workplace which stimulates imaginative thinking, teamwork and the psychological wellness of personnels (Liu et al., 2023). Organisations may nurture an attitude of ongoing enhancement and innovation by creating an environment in which workers feels confident in expressing their thoughts, adopting opportunities, and acquiring knowledge through errors (Harvey, 2014). Managers whose emphasize PS for exemplify behavior which support authenticity and confidence facilitate the development of a workplace that is highly productive and favorable for each workers as well as the business (Fürstenberg et al., 2021).

SLT presents a robust framework for explaining the intermediary function of PS in the connection with PL and CP. The theory was formulated by Bandura (1977), claims that followers obtain novel traits via the observation especially from those with authoritative or influential roles (Rivera et al., 2021). The mediaiton effect of

PS by corroborated SLT . PL showcase excellent handling of complicated and confusing circumstances of their workers (Fürstenberg et al., 2021).

Thus summary, of SLT proposes a solid as well as rigorous structure for grasping the processes that may connect the PL with PS and CP. Once, worker are greater motivated to participate with CP, resulting in enhanced workers and business outcome, when they see and replicate their followers behaviours and feels psychological prepared taking chances and try new things.

Hypothesis Development

Paradoxical Leadership and Creative Performance

In the modern age, its essential to comprehend the association among managerial traits and organizational creativity. In particular, specific components including intellectual capabilities, internal drive, psychological awareness, and willingness to adapt novel situations. Exterior variables encompass the types of leadership, in which diverse philosophies such as ethical, inconclusive, transformational, and ambidextrous leaders are employed to wield legitimate and symbolic authority, hence substantially enhancing creativity (Gong et al., 2012; Zhang & Liu, 2021).

The present study indicates that paradoxical leadership whose reconcile opposing behavioral patterns (e.g inconclusive and transformational) may promote creative performance.

With adopting paradox, leaders can use the advantages of both dimensions, (contradiction and stimulating) which may fostering team innovation (Madaan et al., 2024). Zhang et al. (2015) articulated like an inconsistency of leaders guided according to the Yin-Yang ideology, highlighting the synthesis of dichotomy. The PL approach seems contradictory; nonetheless, it effectively integrates the specific needs of workers with a the intended goal for business growth and innovation. PL is defined as a combination of contrary but interrelated actions that need a balance of organizational principals and workers needs (Zhang et al., 2015).

CP refers as the ability to generate novel worthwhile notions or strategies under a particular context, often offering innovative remedies to complex problems (Carmeli et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2024). subsequently, it may combines intellectual skills especially it may varied conceptual and imaginative thought, as well as attributes including collaboration and trying new things. Previous studies have examined CP in relation to several factors, like inconclusive (Jung et al., 2022), authentic leadership style (Newman et al., 2018), and ethical (Liu et al., 2024). No studies currently available on paradoxical leadership and creative performance. Consequently, the present research examined this correlation via the use of SLT. Social Learning Theory states that knowledge acquisition occurs within a social context as well as it strengthened from observation, imitation (Maisto et al., 1999). The goal of this idea could have been effectively linked to the bond with PL and CP. PL, defined as the ability in accepting and reconcile conflicting demands, that develops a situation where numerous ideas are appreciated (Devi, 2024). Leaders that embrace this behavior act as role models, showcasing innovative behaviors employees may see and replicate (Pearce & van Knippenberg, 2024).

In this setting, Social Learning Theory posits that staff members are inclined to absorb the actions and attitudes shown by their paradoxical leaders. Through demonstrating the balance among challenging needs, like as stability to innovation or independence to control, these leaders may influence individuals in their particular creative endeavors (Akers & Jennings, 2015). The inverse effect to SLT (Ahn et al., 2020), suggests that this dynamic is continuous; when workers participate in creative performance, their innovative contributions may subsequently support and change the leader's paradoxical behaviors.

Consequently, paradoxical leadership, determined by a combination of presumably contrary yet interdependent that may significantly impacts creative performance in organizations by nurturing an environment that promotes both flexibility and discipline (Zhang et al., 2015). This leadership strategy recognizes and accepts organizational conflicts, such as the balance between certainty and uncertainty or control and independence, hence empowering staff members to manage complication and ambiguity circumstances for innovative creation (Yang et al., 2024). Paradoxical leaders provide behavioral security and promoting risk-taking, to their subordinates. This duality mitigates the uncertainty of failure, which may encourage the creative performance. Moreover, paradoxical leaders improves individual and team creative performance by promoting flexible thinking, learning practices, and cross-boundary cooperation (Li et al., 2020). This rationale support the proposed positive correlation between paradoxical leadership and creative performance. Therefore, paradoxical leaders cultivate a dynamic organizational environment that facilitates the development, improvement, and effective implementation of creative ideas, thereby fostering creative performance of the organization. Thus, this study may postulate that

Hypothesis 1: Paradoxical leadership has a positive association with Creative Performance.

Paradoxical Leadership and Psychological Safety

The PL encourages independence and versatility among staff members providing them ownership of their workplace procedure and the freedom to oversee different responsibilities according to their preferences (Fürstenberg et al., 2021). The paradoxical leaders limits the freedom and autonomy of employees by setting clear job requirements and expecting high levels of performance from followers (Zhang et al., 2015). For instance, while the leader permits errors, staff recognize that their inaccuracies will be pardoned provided they endeavor to meet objectives instead of seeking own interest. PL, delineates the parameters for suitable and proper staff conduct (Bandura, 1977).

Furthermore, paradoxical leadership behaviors can enhance psychological safety by promoting a culture of learning and adaptability (Zhang et al., 2022). Leaders who embrace contradictions, such as encouraging both experimentation and a focus on results, signal to employees that mistakes are an acceptable part of the learning process (Zhang & Liu, 2021). Social Learning Theory (SLT) illustrates the impact of paradoxical leaders on psychological safety. Social Learning Theory posits that people acquire and replicate actions via the observation and imitation of trustworthy mentors (Bandura, 1977). Paradoxical leaders, by their acts and attitudes, convey to workers the acceptability of embracing paradoxes and undertaking calculated risks. Consequently, Social Learning Theory posits that the acts of paradoxical leaders will influence workers' feelings of psychological safety by observational learning and imitation (Ahn et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 2: Paradoxical leadership has a positive association with Psychological safety.

Psychological safety and creative performance

PS is an understanding that staff members may express and use their true essence without apprehension of adverse outcomes to their self-worth, position, or career development (Edmondson, 1999). A robust sense of psychological safety enables individuals to feel at ease, seeing their work environment as secure for psychosocial uncertainty, hence fostering open participation in sharing expertise and solving issues, which fosters creativity (Frazier et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2018). This study emphasize on the development of creative performance and its underlying mechanism of organizational psychological safety, primarily through team work. According to the perspective of cognition, this feels more appropriate for this research to point out the psychological safety associated with individual contributions and involvement within the team by minimizing interpersonal risks. Recent research shows the impact of mechanism of PS primarily focus on this connection with innovation outcomes, engagement, sharing of knowledge, worker expressing behaviors, and team development within organizations (Chen et al., 2024; Newman et al., 2018). However, it is a significant deficiency in the study of the mechanisms underlying PS in the fields of creative performance. Based on that employees enhance organizational creative performance by autonomously addressing practical issues (Plomp et al., 2019), mitigating related interpersonal risks and encouraging sharing knowledge and coordinated tasks are emerging as critical challenges for task advancement.

This research posits that psychological safety may enhance creative performance, since workers those who experience psychological wellness are more inclined to participate in creative activities, including discussing novel concepts, committing prudent risks, and to acquire knowledge from errors. This feeling of security cultivates an environment of innovation, whereby workers are at ease with exploring novel methodologies and enhancing one another's ideas. Consequently, psychological safety fosters heightened inventive thinking, greater teamwork, and improved inventive solutions. Psychological safety empowers workers by alleviating worry and tension linked to creative performance.

SLT elucidates the impact of PS on creative performance (Akers & Jennings, 2015). SLT posits individuals acquire and replicate behaviors via the observation and imitation of others within a secure and nurturing environment (Bandura, 1977). When team members see that their peers are acknowledged for innovative endeavors and not condemned for challenges, they are more engaged to participate in similar unique and creative ideas. Moreover, Social Learning Theory posits individuals are greater engaged to demonstrate creative activities As they foresee advantageous outcomes, which is supported by a psychologically secure setting (Bandura, 1977). Consequently, our hypothesis posits that

Hypothesis 3: There exists a positive correlation between psychological safety and creative performance.

Mediating role of psychological safety between paradoxical leadership and creative performance.

The concept of mediation involving paradoxical leadership, psychological safety, and creative performance offers a persuasive framework for comprehending approaches to leadership influence employee outcomes. PL is characterized to coordinate by supervisor providing guidance while also presenting challenges (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004), allows a novel setting which can supports PS. Study reveals that while supervisors offers their traits, with teammates and they feel encouraged to express opinions and accept challenges, eventually cultivating a feeling of comfort in the workplace (Edmondson, 1999).

SLT provides a compelling framework for understanding the facilitating interaction of these factors, elucidating the procedures via the workers gain learning and modify their tasks according to the job requirement. Through the observation of supervisors as well as coworkers, personnel may assimilate novel cognitive and behavioral patterns

(Zhang et al., 2015; 2022) which eventually enhance creative performance of the organization.

In a nutshell SLT is closely intertwined with association of PL, PS and CP via getting the approaches that workers gain information from their social relationships, the present research will give greater insight into the processes via how such factors interact to influence one another. These insights may be exploited to develop and improve more efficient style of leadership and will support creativity and innovation. Thus, we hypothesize.

Hypothesis 4: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between paradoxical leadership and creative performance.

Theoretical Framework

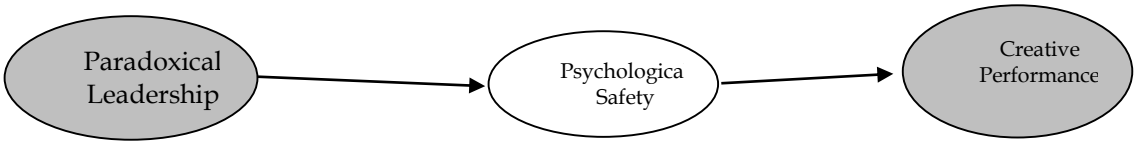

Fig. 1. Hypothesized Research Model

Material and Methods

Research Design

This research employed a cross-sectional design to gather data and evaluate the stated hypotheses. The cross-sectional survey captures data at a certain moment, accurately evaluating the present state of leadership traits and collaboration in information technology companies. This study is intended to use quantitative methods to evaluate the hypothesis and examines the links among the variables in the study (Bobrytskyy & Stříteský, 2024). The present study utilizes questionnaire-based methods of analysis to identify novel phenomena in the analyzed variables (Allen et al., 2008). A questionnaire interview conduct is a highly trustworthy way for gathering quantitative data, helping the collection of accurate, relevant, and unambiguous data regarding numerous subjects from chosen respondents. The present research developed, questionnaire for its instrument for data collecting (Chapman et al., 2005).

Population Framework and Sampling

The proposed research employed a stratified determination approach for selecting respondents from the top fifteen information technology companies in Pakistan. The intended audience consisted of 290 personnel representing the organizations in question. A total number of participants of 202 was chosen based on Morgan's formula to ensure a representative sample of the entire population. The overall sample was divided with four strata based on personnel functions, which are: software application design, development of mobile apps, (ERP) development, and cloud computing services. The selecting of the best fifteen information technology businesses was based on the P@sha ICT Recognition 2024, which evaluated the firms' accomplishments according to specifications such as export outcomes, consumer satisfaction, project investment strategies, customer-driven techniques and offerings to Pakistan's unique technological developments system. The selection of firms was verified by the Pakistan's Software Export Board, Twitter, LinkedIn, and business webpage to ensure authenticity. A simple approach of random technique was used to designate supervisors and managers of teams within each stratum. Respondent participation only applied to those having served over a period of six months. The final panel of participants included 202 attendees, comprised of Eighteen supervisors & 184 teammates comprising the finest Fifteen information technology companies in Pakistan. The sample contained 114 masculine respondents (eight leader along with 106 teammates) and eighty-eight famine participants (ten leader & 78 subordinates).

The sampling approach utilised in this study guaranteed that the sample precisely reflected the population and reduced bias. This study employed a stratified sample technique combined with simple random selection within each stratum to attain a thorough comprehension of the correlations among the various factors of interest in Pakistan's IT industry. This study refrained from utilising non-probability sampling methods, including convenience sampling and snowball sampling, because of their tendency to generate bias and restrict the potential for generalisation of the outcomes (Sarker & AL-Muaalemi, 2022).

Results and Discussion

Table 1.
Sample Distribution of Top IT Firms of Pakistan

Sr #	Top IT Companies	Frequency	Software Development Team	Team Working on Mobile Application	Team working on ERP System	Team working on Cloud Services
1	Systems Limited	30	10	5	10	5
2	Genetech	25	10	5	5	5
3	Netsol	20	5	5	5	5
4	Digitech	20	7	3	5	5
5	Cloud Venture	30	10	7	6	7
6	Vengeance Technologies	20	5	5	5	5
7	Liquid Intelligent Technology	25	12	3	5	5
8	ITSec	30	10	10	5	5
9	KalSoft	15	3	3	4	5
10	DPL	15	8	2	2	3

11	Q-Soft Technologies	10	2	2	3	3
12	IT EMPIRE	10	2	3	3	2
13	Maxcom Solutions	10	5	2	2	1
14	Optiwave Technologies	10	5	1	3	1
15	Ovex Technologies	10	4	3	1	2
	Total	**290**				

Table 1 illustrates the sample distribution among the most prominent Fifteen information technology firms in Pakistan, which is including Systems Limited and Cloud Venture exhibiting the highest representation (30 respondents apiece). The table illustrates a diverse allocation of team functions among organizations, so providing an overall sample of the IT sector in Pakistan.

Sample Demographics

This study involved the distribution of 300 questionnaires to the top 15 IT companies in Pakistan, including Systems Pvt. Ltd, Genetech, Netsol, Digitechtic, Cloud Venture, Vengeance Technologies, Liquid Intelligent Technology, ITSec, KalSoft, DPL, Q-Soft Technologies, IT EMPIRE, Maxcom Solutions, Optiwave Technologies, and Ovex Technologies. A total of 290 responses were received, while 10 questionnaires were not returned by respondents. Consequently, 290 responses were retained for data analysis following the elimination of specific questionnaires. The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide a comprehensive examination of the sample's composition. The gender composition of the 290 participants was 30.3% female and 69.6% male. Regarding classifications, 90.3% were subordinates and 9.7% were leaders. The predominant proportion of respondents (54.8%) belonged to the 25–34 age bracket, succeeded by individuals in the 18–24 age bracket (17.2%) and those aged over 55 (8.2%). Regarding experience, 23.7% had among six months and one year, while 36.2% had 1.5 to 2.5 years. A wide variety of enterprises took part, with the most significant contributions from OVEX Technologies and Systems Limited (10.3% each), TechAbout (10.0%), along with various other companies. This extensive sample guarantees a variety of perspectives for examination and provides comprehensive insights into the IT industry's workforce. The demographic results presented in Table 2 illustrate a varied representation of the IT sector in Pakistan. The findings reveal that a significant portion of the participants identified as male (69.6%), with the most prevalent age group being 25-34 years (54.8%).

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Traits	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Masculine Gender	202	69.6
Famine Gender	88	30.3
Designation		
Leader	28	9.7
Subordinates	262	90.3
Age		
18 – 24	50	17.2
25 – 34	159	54.8
35 – 40	35	12.0
45 – 54	22	7.5
Above 55	24	8.2

Year of Experience		
06Months – 1 year	69	23.7
1.5y – 2.5y	105	36.2
2.5y – 5y	50	17.2
More than 5y	66	22.7
Organizations		
Systems Limited	30	10.3
TRG Tech	25	8.6
Arpatech	20	6.9
Microsoft	20	6.9
TechAbout	29	10.0
RA TECHNOLOGIES	20	6.9
Techlogix	25	8.6
ITSec	20	6.9
KalSoft	15	5.2
DPL	15	5.2
Q-Soft Technologies	10	3.4
IT EMPIRE	10	3.4
Maxcom Solutions	10	3.4
OPTIWAVE TECHNOLOGIES	11	3.8
OVEX TECHNOLOGIES	30	10.3
Total	290	100.0

Variables and Measures

Paradoxical Leadership

A Likert scale ranging from one to five points will be utilised to evaluate paradoxical leadership, where 1 signifies strong disagreement and 5 indicates perfect agreement. Utilising a scale of eight criteria, as proposed by Devi (2024), the subsequent sample questions have been applied in the preliminary research for evaluating PL: Employs a fair approach by treating all employees uniformly while recognising their individuality. Each subordinate should be regarded on an equal footing, while still acknowledging their unique attributes. Continuously supervises staff members while concurrently considering their individual specifications.

Creative performance

Hilkenmeier et al. (2020) A Four-items measure of creative performance was applied to evaluate creative performance. For instance, Leader was inquired about the originality and practicality of his subordinate work.

Psychological Safety

This study evaluated psychological safety by adopting the framework of prior researchers(Zhang et al., 2022) which identified three items designed to capture each individual's sense of security, particularly in relation to engaging in collective risks within a team environment. A frequently utilised indicator for evaluating psychological safety, it has already been demonstrated in prior research (Carmeli et al., 2010), to be both valid and reliable. The subsequent examples demonstrate methods for item evaluation: It is prudent to pursue the possibility within the organisation, given that its members have the ability to address complex issues and topics. A Five-items rating measure was applied to identify the construct of psychological safety, In which signifies strongly agree and five indicates strongly disagree, in order to evaluate each items.

Data Analysis Technique

Preliminary analyses, including common method bias (CMB), correlation, and descriptive analysis, have been conducted using the statistical software SPSS. The current research adopted the method known as partial least- squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach to assess the estimation model and examine the hypothesis. Partial least- squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) have been prevalent in earlier studies towards the examination of survey-based datasets because of to its reliability (Khan et al., 2017; Zhang & Han, 2019). The PLS-SEM provides strong reliability for prediction, enabling it effective in applying methods of sampling compared to extensive investigation (Hair Jr et al., 2014). Moreover, determine the impact of mediators, have been used by numerous studies. The recent study found many obstacles related to (Baron & Kenny's, 1986) procedure, notably the measurement of indirect implications and the development of diverse hypothesis. Besides, prior studies indicate that the bootstrapping technique is a more effective technique in evaluating the impact of mediators (Hayes & Preacher, 2013), since it yields greater accuracy as opposed to the Sobel test. Therefore the current research applied the bootstrapping procedures implementing the SPSS (Statistical software) technique to analyze the impact of mediators (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). The bootstrapping method can be a robust non-parametric technique of evaluating hypotheses and magnitude of effect estimation that is not based on projections about the probable dispersion of the result. The technique considers combined direct and indirect impacts.

Data Screening

The present research revealed that the collected data is exhaustive, with no missing values, aberrant findings, and outliers, as shown in Table three. The normality tests proved that the findings matched to a normal distribution, proven by skewness and kurtosis values falling underneath the permissible range of ±1. The following signifies that the data gathering procedure was vigilant, and individuals who participated provided consistent and accurate responses, resulting in enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. Furthermore, as shown in table 4, the results of the multicollinearity analysis showed that the VIF coefficients (estimated to from 1.330 to 3.997) each item were much lower than the threshold of 10.0. It implies that the construct in the model having low correlation with each other, thus lowering the correlation indicate that there is no multicollinearity issue in the model and ultimately enhancing the reliability of the regression results.

Table 3
Missing Value Analysis

	Missing	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	290	100	100	100
Total	0	290	100	100	

Table 4
Multi-collinearity Assessment

Variables	Items	VIF
Paradoxical Leadership	PL1	2.654
	PL2	2.650
	PL3	3.997
	PL4	2.973
	PL5	2.440

	PL6	2.546
	PL7	3.114
	PL8	2.143
Creative Performance	CP1	3.350
	CP2	2.900
	CP3	2.335
	CP4	2.689
Psychological Safety	PS1	3.199
	PS2	3.585
	PS3	1.777

Review of Measurement Model and Factor Loading

The outcomes to the scale's evaluation in Table 5 provide sufficient validity and reliability for the constructs of Paradoxical Leadership, and Creative Performance with the effects of its mediation analysis of Psychological Safety. The Cronbach's alpha values (0.908-0.975) and composite reliability values (0.908-0.978) above meet the minimum threshold of 0.7, indicating adequate internal reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) values, around 0.745 and 0.851, above the requisite threshold of 0.5, indicating sufficient convergent validity. The findings substantiate the reliability and validity of the measuring approach, which is crucial for analyzing the links among Paradoxical Leadership, Psychological Safety, and Creative Performance.

Table 5
Review of Measurement Model and Factor Loading:

Variables	Items	VIF	Cross Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Paradoxical Leadership	PL1	2.654	0.917	0.950	0.953	0.959	0.745
	PL2	2.650	0.779				
	PL3	3.997	0.863				
	PL4	2.973	0.858				
	PL5	2.440	0.926				
	PL6	2.546	0.854				
	PL7	3.114	0.916				
	PL8	2.143	0.780				
Creative Performance	CP1	3.350	0.890	0.942	0.942	0.958	0.851
	CP2	2.900	0.931				
	CP3	2.335	0.933				
	CP4	2.689	0.936				
Psychological Safety	PS1	3.199	0.954	0.908	0.908	0.943	0.846
	PS2	3.585	0.951				
	PS3	1.777	0.852				

Note: Values represent factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct

Model Fit

The model fit summary in Table 6 demonstrates an adequate alignment of the estimated model with the data. The Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.153 approaches the suggested threshold of 0.08, indicating a favourable match. The Unweighted Least Squares Distance (d_ULS) value of 10.310 is similar to that of the saturated model, which is 10.364. The results indicate that the model effectively

encapsulates the links among Paradoxical Leadership, Psychological Safety, and Creative Performance within the leading 15 IT industries in Pakistan.

Table 6
Model Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.154	0.153
d_ULS	10.364	10.310
d_G	n/a	n/a
Chi-Square	infinite	infinite
NFI	n/a	n/a

Note: All model fit indices indicate a satisfactory fit of the estimated model to the data.

Reliability and Validity

Table 7 illustrates the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The Cronbach's alpha values for all constructions (CP, PL, and PS) surpass the required threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.908 to 0.975. This signifies that the elements within each construct exhibit consistency and reliability. The composite reliability (CR) ratings for all constructions surpass the suggested threshold of 0.60, ranging from 0.908 to 0.978, hence reinforcing the reliability of the constructs. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) scores for all constructs exceed the required threshold of 0.50, with values ranging from 0.745 to 0.851, demonstrating that the constructs show convergence validity. This indicates that the elements within each construct exhibit strong correlations and assess the same fundamental concept. The findings indicate that the measurement model shows adequate reliability and validity, thereby endorsing the application of the constructs in subsequent analyses. In conclusion, the elevated levels of reliability and validity suggest that the constructs are clearly defined and measured consistently, which is crucial for deriving significant conclusions from the data.

Table 7
Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CP	0.942	0.942	0.958	0.851
PL	0.950	0.953	0.959	0.745
PS	0.908	0.908	0.943	0.846

Note: Values represent reliability and validity indices, where Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70, composite reliability ≥ 0.60, and average variance extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50 indicate satisfactory reliability and validity.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

The Fornell-Larcker criterion results (Table 8) corroborate the study's findings by evidencing discriminant validity among Paradoxical Leadership, Creative Performance, and Psychological Safety. This verifies that the conceptions are different and empirically separable, enhancing the validity of this research's mediation analysis and advancing the comprehension of their intricate relationships within the IT industry.

Table. 8
Fornell-Larcker Criterion:

	CP	PL	PS
CP	**0.923**		

PL	0.909	**0.863**	
PS	0.791	0.960	**0.920**

Note: The Fornell-Larcker criterion is met when the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds the corresponding inter-construct correlations, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

The Structural Model's Assessment with Mediation Effects of Indirect Pathway

The evaluation of the structural model (refer to Table 10) indicates substantial correlations among Paradoxical Leadership (PL), Psychological Safety (PS), and Creative Performance (CP). The direct relationship from Paradoxical Leadership (PL) to Creative Performance (CP) is both positive and significant ($\beta = 0.455$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that Paradoxical Leadership exerts a direct beneficial influence on Creative Performance. Furthermore, the relationship from Paradoxical Leadership to Psychological Safety is both positive and significant ($\beta = 0.960$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that Paradoxical Leadership promotes Psychological Safety. The indirect relationship from Paradoxical Leadership to Creative Performance via Psychological Safety is both positive and significant ($\beta = 1.180$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that Psychological Safety serves as a mediator in the connection between Paradoxical Leadership and Creative Performance. The findings corroborate this research's hypothesis that Paradoxical Leadership positively influences Creative Performance, both directly and indirectly via Psychological Safety. The findings offer empirical support for the significance of Paradoxical Leadership in fostering Psychological Safety, thereby improving Creative Performance within the IT sector.

Table 10
The Structural Model's Assessment with Mediation Effects of Indirect Pathway

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
PL -> CP	0.455	0.457	0.037	12.305	**0.000**
PL -> PS	0.960	0.961	0.005	213.180	**0.000**
PL -> PS -> -> CP	1.180	1.183	0.045	26.024	**0.000**

Note: *$p < 0.001$ indicates significant paths; values represent standardized path coefficients, standard deviations, t-statistics, and p-values for the structural model.

Discussion

This study's results provide significant insights into the connections among paradoxical leadership (PL), psychological safety (PS), and creative performance (CP). The study first hypotheses, proved that there is a positively significant association among PL and CP. The found result corresponds with prior studies, suggesting that the behaviors of PL promotes CP (Hu et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2024). The seemingly contradictory but complementary actions of PL create a setting that empowers workers to participate in creative activities. The second hypotheses postulated that the positive and significant relationship among PL and PS was similar to prior studies (Javed et al., 2019). This knowledge suggests that PL create a setting when workers feels safe, they are highly take hazards, exchange thoughts, and acquire knowledge to failures. Through adopting and navigating contentions, PL create a positive psychological safe setting, essential for the well-being of co-workers. Our study third hypotheses, that proposed a positive link between PS and CP, has been confirmed. The findings aligns with earlier research, indicating that PS is an important variable which improved CP (Gong et al., 2012). When employees recognize psychological safety, they are significantly inspired to engage in creative endeavors, such as formulating inventive approaches and investigating novel ideas. The final hypotheses, asserted that PS have significantly

influenced as a mediator with the association among the main interest variables has proven. This outcomes highlights the importance of PS illustrating the impact of PL on CP. Through providing a psychologically comfortable environment, PL enable employees to undertake initiatives and engage in innovative activities, so enhancing the CP (Li et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2024). According to social learning theory, demonstrate that PL behaviors promote psychologically safe workplace which ultimately enhanced the CP. Thus SLT asserted that the significance of PL by promoting CP, both directly and indirectly via PS. The findings underscore the importance of creating a psychologically safe setting where employees feels encouraged to engage in innovative activities. Thus, business could promote a culture of innovative thinking and creativity via the use of PL style with underline mechanism of PS.

Conclusion

The findings of this research clearly indicate an encouraging relationship between PL and CP combined with psychological safety contributing to a crucial intervening influence. The conclusions determine leaders are exhibiting paradoxical behaviors can promote a psychologically safe workplace, resulting in increasing CP. The present research contributes to existing literature by illustrating the complicated association among PL and CP highlighting the importance of PS as an important mediator variable. The findings of this research are immense significance for executives and firms that are working to improve the CP of information technology companies. Leaders may create a psychologically secure settings in the organization by exhibiting paradoxical behaviors, through expressing trust in followers, vital guidance and allowing them participation in substantial decision-making process. Despite its positive aspects, this research effort faces numerous limitations. Future research should explore such limitations by analyzing the relationship between PL and CP in distinct settings and industries. First, subsequent studies should integrate directional or qualitative methods to enhance the comprehension of the underlying connections between PL and CP. Second, potential endorsements may concentrate on investigating the impact of supplementary mediators, such as cultural context, team behavior, underneath the relationship between the PL and CP. Through a deeper examination of the intricate association between PL and CP with its mediation analysis of PS future researchers may add valuable guidance for leaders and information technology industry.

Recommendations

The present study provides several pragmatic recommendations for managers. Firstly, this study results suggest that leaders should accept a paradoxical viewpoint and explore using paradoxical ideas and practices to foster the creativity in the IT sectors. Businesses that offers PL mentoring to their staff members will encourage both perspective, adopt a versatile attitude and behaviours to resolve the issues at the work place.

Secondly, this study indicates that PS serves as a crucial connecting mechanism among PL and CP. Therefore, this research indicates that supervisors need to increase conceived PS by engaging in paradoxical practices, for example having confidence in the fellow employees' capabilities, expressing essential knowledge, and permitting them to take part in significant decision-making processes.

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