

The Significance of Responsible Leadership for Innovative Work Behaviour: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract: Responsible leadership is a key foundation in today's dynamic business world, where the call for ethical behaviour and innovation is louder than ever. Unlike traditional leadership paradigms, responsible leadership represents a multifaceted relationship and views leadership as a dynamic interplay between leaders and stakeholders, rather than a one-sided leader-follower dynamic. Based on this understanding, our study developed a conceptual framework for the relationship between accountable leadership and innovative work behaviors. It also identified mediating-moderating roles to better understand the linkages and gaps in the research. The conceptual framework was developed based on a literature search of 82 studies. The individual constructs of the model were analysed with the findings of other studies and the theoretical and practical contribution was identified through synthesis. In order to create a sustainable future, it is imperative that the pursuit of continuous innovation and the principles of responsible behaviour form the cornerstones of any society. Responsible leadership stimulates innovative work behaviour not only for the benefit of the organisation but also for the well-being of all stakeholders. This is essential to building the relationships and corporate culture that mediate this relationship. The moderator of this relationship is the moral intelligence of the responsible leader, which strengthens the relationship between responsible leadership and innovative work behaviour. The study contributes by providing a comprehensive review of the existing knowledge on responsible leadership and innovative work behavior. Furthermore, it enriches scholarly knowledge and offers practical insights into the characteristics desirable in CEOs to promote responsible and innovative business behavior.

Keywords: Responsible Leadership, Innovative Work Behaviour, Conceptual Framework, Moral Intelligence, Corporate Culture, Building Relationships, Mediation Role, Moderation Role

1. Introduction

Since the second half of the 20th century, approaches, organizations and methods have gradually emerged to highlight the undesirable development of business and the importance of responsible business (Tekin *et al.*, 2015). Waldman (2011) highlights the definitional ambiguity and ideologically biased leadership research within the concept of responsible leadership. Responsible leadership should be better able to address the challenges of globalization than existing leadership concepts (Vögtlin *et al.*, 2012). RL is closely related to IWB, as some researchers have pointed out (Javed *et al.*, 2019; Leonard and Swap, 2005). Notably, Haque and Yamoah's (2021) findings highlight the key role of ethical leadership in strengthening IWB, suggesting a potential parallel with responsible leadership. As IWB becomes increasingly important in adapting to a dynamic business environment (Crossan and Apaydin, 2010), understanding it is essential to sustaining firm performance and effectively addressing emerging challenges (Al-Omari *et al.*, 2019). Despite growing interest in responsible leadership and IWB, comprehensive analyses remain limited (Amankwaa *et al.*, 2019). Existing studies largely focus on the micro and meso levels. We therefore pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the nature of the relationship of responsible leadership and innovative work behaviour?

RQ2: What constructs create mediating-moderating relationships between responsible leadership and innovative work behaviour?

Although the need for accountable leaders is widely acknowledged (Cameron, 2011), this paper provides a new perspective and proposes a conceptual framework that illuminates the multifaceted relationship between RL and IWB. The study posits that two key mediators influence the relationship between RL and IWB: relationship cultivation and organizational culture. In addition, we identify a moderator, namely moral intelligence, as a significant factor influencing this relationship. Therefore, our research not only contributes to the scholarly understanding of RL and IWB, but also offers practical insights into the characteristics sought in CEOs for responsible and innovative business practices. The paper has been divided into the following sections: section 2 provides the theoretical background, section 3 presents the methodology, and section 4 shows our results, which are discussed with the results of other papers. The last section discusses conclusions and limitations.

2. Literature Background

2.1 Responsible Leadership

Changing societal values, stakeholder expectations, and the evolving business environment have created the need to implement accountability into business strategies, thereby preventing ethical damage to companies. The need for Responsible Leadership (RL) arose from a critique of existing leadership theories (Waldman and Galvin, 2008). Initially, social responsibility was conceptualized as philanthropy (Diermeir, 2022). Social responsibility was primarily internally focused, so ethical values and beliefs were reflected in the workplace (Brown and Mitchell, 2010). Change occurred when influential companies were damaged by scandals involving sweatshops, animal cruelty, and environmental pollution (Avery and Koen, 2018; Kam and Deichert, 2020). This led to the emergence of the well-known concept of CSR, to which companies gradually began to commit (Galbreath, 2006). Companies sought to correct their mistakes in this way. This approach led to the spread of awareness about ethical leadership in practice, which focuses on making decisions based on firm moral principles and values (Giessner et al., 2015). Ethical leaders prioritize honesty, integrity, and fairness in their actions and interactions (Treviño et al., 2000), which was necessary to repair the reputation of firms. Additionally, Hartog (2015) adds that an ethical leader should consider all stakeholders, thus directing social responsibility externally, which correlates with the essence of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984).

The foundations for current research on RL were laid by Maak and Pless (2006) in their publication on the RL model in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, where they view RL as a value-based relationship between leaders and stakeholders who are united by a shared purpose. The result is increased motivation, commitment to responsible change, and the achievement of sustainable values (Tastan and Davoudi, 2019). RL views leadership as a two-sided leader <-> stakeholder relationship, in contrast to other leadership styles that view leadership as a one-sided leader -> follower relationship (Rost, 1991; Yukl, 2006). RL balances the external pressures of conflicting stakeholder interests with the internal tensions of leaders who must lead based on integrity and unity (Maak and Pless, 2006). Studies conducted by Buysse, Verbeke (2003), and Voegtlin et al. (2012) found that organizations led by responsible leaders are more likely to achieve better results.

2.2 Innovative Work Behaviour

The foundations for nowadays IWB concept were laid by Kanter (1988) who outlined that the innovation process consists of a set of behaviours of individuals within an organisation. In the following years, several studies focusing on "individual innovation" processes have been conducted, highlighting the need for an active role of employees in the innovation process (Dorenbosch *et al.*, 2005; Scott and Bruce, 1994). The most cited IWB definition in previous research is that of Janssen (2000), who characterizes it as an intentional employee behaviour involving the generation of ideas, their promotion and implementation within a job role, group or organization aimed at improving performance. Other scholars (De Spiegelaere et al. 2012; Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2017) basically build on this definition and specify that IWB comprises ideas regarding new processes, products, procedures, technologies, or work methods. In doing so, all the above authors have agreed that IWB is a three-stage process. Furthermore, AlEsa and Durugbo (2022) clarified that this three-stage process is carried out through "critical thinking, recognizing potential and existing problems, exploring opportunities and solutions, identifying performance gaps and seeking new methods and procedures with the purpose of improving organizational performance internally and externally for creating value, attaining competitive advantage and ensuring sustainability." This comprehensive definition is most appropriate for the purpose and focus of our research study. More specifically, idea generation means creating useful new ways to improve existing processes and products or solve current problems (Muchiri *et al.*, 2020).

So far, research in the field has paid enormous attention to the different antecedents and factors that potentially promote IWB. Al-Omari *et al.* (2019) based on the reviewing previous literature identified that these factors are mainly related to leadership, organizational and individual factors. Akmal and Mehmood (2020) conclude that in the past most of the antecedents of IWB are investigated at the organizational level. For instance, the influence of organizational culture or climate (participatory, open, flexible and safe) and human resource management practices (rewards, remuneration, training and development, etc.) as promoting factors of IWB are very often mentioned (Carlucci *et al.* 2020; Afsar and Badir, 2017; De Spiegelaere *et al.*, 2014). In addition, Ataoğlu (2019) and Al-Omari *et al.* (2019) summarize that among the most frequently cited individual factors belongs attitudinal variables (work engagement, intrinsic interest), personality variables (proactivity, openness

to experience, determination to succeed, etc.), as well as the employee's competency (divergent thinking style, specific knowledge and skills, emotional intelligence).

3. Methodology

The methodological approach of this research article involves a literature review of 82 studies over the past 10 years using keyword searches such as "responsible leadership", "innovative work behavior", "corporate responsibility", and "innovative employees". The examination of key terms provided insights into various aspects of RL and IWB, serving as a basis for identifying gaps, patterns, and trends in the literature on RL, IWB, and their possible interrelationships. Proceeding from literature review to the development of a conceptual framework, the synthesis of theoretical concepts guides us toward a thorough and systematic examination of mediating and moderating relationships.

Maree (2012), Tracy (2013), Ravitch and Riggan (2017) consider the conceptual framework as a key element of a research project. A conceptual framework comprises conceptions, general knowledge, and logical thinking, providing the foundation for understanding potential relationships throughout the research process (Van der Waldt, 2020; Somekh and Lewin 2011). The term "conception" refers to a mental image or abstraction of a phenomenon, encapsulating an idea or observation about its characteristics (Saunders et al., 2015). Concepts vary in levels of abstraction, with highly abstract ones challenging to visualize and define, often referred to as "constructs". Prominent constructs include leadership, ethics, performance, and motivation (Silverman, 2005; Leggett, 2011). Miles and Huberman (1994), Jacard and Jacoby (2010), and Ravitch and Riggan (2017) perceive the conceptual framework as a visual representation of the key theoretical principles or concepts of a study. Typically presented as a graphical or schematic diagram, it illustrates key concepts and their interrelations. Such visual representation aids in understanding the relationships between concepts and constructs (Jarvis 1999; Tracy 2013), often referred to as concept maps by Maxwell (2005), which must be structured and coherent. Marshall and Rossman (2006) echo this view, likening the conceptual framework to a visual map. The visual clarity provided by the framework enables a clear understanding of the complex dynamics between RL and IWB and lays the foundation for future empirical research.

4. Results and Discussion

On the basis of existing literature, new relationships in the issue can be perceived. Building relationship and Corporate Culture are mediators in the relationship between RL and IWB. MI is the moderator in the relationship between RL and IWB. These relationships are entered into following Conceptual framework. At the same time, there is a two-way relationship between RL and IWB.

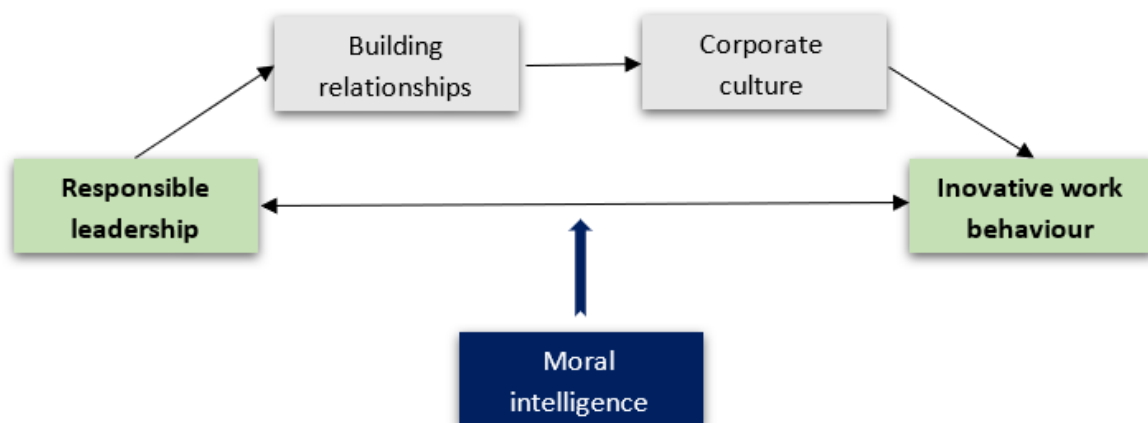


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of relationship between RL and IWB

4.1 Mediating Role

Recently, most scientific studies are devoted to effective leadership style as stimulating factor of IWB. Attention has already been given to a range of leadership styles, ethical (Muchiri *et al.*, 2023), reciprocal (Yindong and Xinxin, 2013), inclusive (Shakil *et al.*, 2021; Aslan, 2019; Javed *et al.*, 2019) and authentic (Černe *et al.*, 2013) leadership, which are suitable for fostering creativity and innovation. However, transformational leadership dominates in IWB research studies (Afsar and Umrani, 2020; Amankwaa *et al.*, 2019) with positive impact

through high psychological empowerment (Grošelj *et al.*, 2021). Amankwaa *et al.* (2019) empirically demonstrated that job autonomy and supportive management are the mediators of the relationship between transformational leadership and IWB. Furthermore, Choi *et al.* (2016) found that transformational leadership encourages employees intellectual thinking thereby helping them to think outside the box.

Building relationship (RL) aims to build and maintain ethical and social bonds between executives and stakeholders (Pless, 2007). Maak and Pless (2006) argue that leaders must balance external pressures from conflicting stakeholder interests with internal tensions when leading with responsibility. Therefore, it is necessary to build relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. RL seeks to find a balance between these interests and consider them when making decisions about innovative projects. Leaders support IWB through quality team relationships. In the context of building relationships with external stakeholders, the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) approach can be mentioned. LMX is a dyadic relationship in which employees seek a relationship with their supervisor that expresses concern, care, support, loyalty, resources, and reliability for them and their work role (Kuvaas *et al.*, 2012). In good relationships, they provide necessary resources, significantly supporting the development of IWB (De Jong and Den Hartog, 2008). Current research indicates a positive correlation between LMX and IWB (Li *et al.*, 2021; Agarwal *et al.*, 2012; Munoz-Doyague and Nieto, 2012). Social responsibility towards external stakeholders as well as towards internal stakeholders, along with participative leadership, are fundamental conditions for corporate success (Schönborn, 2010). Therefore, BR serves as a mediator in the relationship between RL and IWB. However, many scholars emphasize further investigation (Kim and Park, 2017; Schermuly *et al.*, 2013; Stander and Rothmann, 2010).

Corporate Culture (CC) can be considered as a mediator in the relationship between RL and IWB through shaping values, shared motivation and expectations. As organizations strive for sustainability, a strong corporate culture becomes a linchpin that not only shapes organizational identity, but also to achieve sustainability goals. A notable contribution comes from studies elucidating the instrumental role of CC in mitigating unethical behavior and curbing CEO turnover (Graham *et al.*, 2021; Fiordelisi and Ricci, 2014). Moreover, Gao (2019) contributes by emphasizing that CC serves as an encompassing force that actively supports innovation. This perspective broadens our understanding of CC beyond its conventional functions, positioning it as a dynamic catalyst for fostering innovative thinking and practices within an organization (Zemanova *et al.*, 2022). Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of a teamwork climate in IWB (Mathisen *et al.*, 2006). Research by Pirola-Merle (2010) further clarifies the link between teamwork climate and innovation performance and suggests that a positive and collaborative team atmosphere facilitates innovative outcomes. Klaić *et al.* (2020) recommend that leaders actively foster team identity and cultivate team cohesion. By doing so, they not only foster an environment where innovative behaviour is encouraged, but also contribute to the foundations of organisational effectiveness. Theresia *et al.* (2018) and other scholars shed light on a crucial aspect the link between organizational culture and the sustainability goals pursued by RL. The failure of organizations to achieve sustainability goals is often attributed to a lack of corporate culture.

4.2 Moderating Role

Moral intelligence (MI) is the moderator of the relationship between RL and IWB. In today's interconnected world, leaders with enhanced moral intelligence play a key role in engaging with corporate culture, which is essential for thriving in the business sphere (Prasetyawan and Barida, 2018). Al-Adamat *et al.* (2020) emphasizes that MI is a skill that can be cultivated through practice. Diermeier (2022) argues that MI cultivates over time depending on: generation, global value, nationality and social networks. Generational influence is a valid detractor of MI because while the older generation was predominantly oriented towards materialistic values associated with stability and efficiency. The pressure of the younger generation has shifted the development of global values towards post-materialistic values such as self-expression, environmental care or tolerance. The rise of social activism in the form of pressure for environmental protection, private politics or civic equality (gender equality, LBQTQ) has also played a role (Diermeier, 2022). The influence of national differences is also significant, e.g. concern for social justice would be at the forefront in Northern Europe, but less important in India or China (Inglehart, 1997), which is related, for example, to conflicts of interest in the form of sweatshops. Last but not least, it is important to mention the rise of social networks, which also influence MI. Social networks have enabled the rapid sharing of information and opinions. Businesses now exist in a 'media environment', meaning that the wording, delivery of a message or even the personality of an executive can influence the views and perspectives of the entire public (Diermeier, 2022).

5. Conclusion

This study reviewed existing research on the relationship between RL and IWB in order to gain a comprehensive overview of the existing body of knowledge. Examining key concepts provided insight into various aspects and relationships of RL and IWB. Regarding first RQ1 the study showed the ways in which RL contributes to IWB. To fulfill the second RQ2, the study identified the main mediators of this relationship and moreover revealed the mediating effect of MI. Therefore, this study is expected to be an important source of reference for researchers and practitioners. The study within the theoretical implications contributes by synthesizes fragmented knowledge from individual studies and creates a conceptual framework that provides a coherent understanding of the dynamics between RL and IWB. Furthermore, the study contributes by identifying managerial implications that can be a starting point for responsible leaders who have IWB efforts. Leaders must build good relationships with both internal and external stakeholders, invest effort in desirable CC that will support IWB and cultivate the skill of MI.

However, the results of this study may potentially be limited by the inclusion and exclusion criteria used, ie the words, databases and search fields selected. This limitation may mean that the study failed to comprehensively capture all relevant research on the topic, despite all precautions taken. The findings of this study indicate a necessity for additional empirical investigations which confirms that the relationship within RL field is still at its development stage. Future research needs to focus how individual components of MI influence the relationship between RL and IWB and which other aspects of BR and CC contribute to IWB.

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