

Does paradoxical leadership predict employee job performance in hospitality? A sequential mediation of harmonious work passion and innovative work behavior

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing insights from a self-determination perspective, this study aims to investigate the impact of paradoxical leadership (PL) on job performance among hospitality employees. It also explores harmonious work passion (HWP) and innovative work behavior (IWB) as sequential mediators in this direct association.

Design/methodology/approach – A self-report structured questionnaire was used to collect survey data from 298 employees working in Indian four-, five- and five-star luxury hotels. To test the hypothesized model, partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used.

Findings – This study found PL positively influences HWP, IWB and job performance of hospitality employees. Also, the positive association between PL and employee job performance is significantly mediated by HWP and IWB, individually as well as sequentially.

Practical implications – Adopting PL in hotels can significantly boost employees' HWP and IWB, resulting in enhanced job performance. This leadership style empowers employees to navigate conflicting demands, fostering creativity and adaptability. Consequently, hotels can benefit from a more engaged workforce, improved service delivery and a competitive edge.

Originality/value – This research adds to the limited literature on PL in the hospitality sector by highlighting its impact on employee behavior and performance outcomes. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to empirically link PL with HWP, IWB and job performance in a sequential mediation model. It uncovers the "black box" of mechanisms connecting PL to work outcomes from emotional and cognitive perspectives.

Keywords Paradoxical leadership, Job performance, Harmonious work passion, Innovative work behavior, Hospitality, Self-determination theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In this dynamic and highly competitive business landscape, employees' performance and related work behaviors play a crucial role in determining success in hospitality organizations (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2022). Like any other service firm, hospitality staff represents the brand directly to customers, and organizations, particularly hotels, are heavily reliant on their employees to sustain a competitive edge. However, working in hospitality often exposes employees to unforeseeable and conflicting situations (She *et al.*, 2020). This creates frequent paradoxical tensions, challenging both employees and leaders to balance competing demands. Leaders must satisfy organizational requirements for control while also accommodating employees' needs for flexibility and autonomy (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). In this context, a leader's

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role is vital as they should exemplify paradoxical behaviors (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019; Kundi *et al.*, 2023; She *et al.*, 2020) to help employees navigate these complexities effectively.

Zhang *et al.* (2015) defined paradoxical leadership (PL) as leaders' seemingly contradictory yet interrelated behaviors that simultaneously address structural and follower demands. Unlike contingent leadership, which adopts an "either/or" approach, paradoxical leaders embrace a "both/and" mindset to holistically unify opposing managerial needs (Zhang and Han, 2019). While PL is recognized in service literature for enhancing critical employee behaviors and outcomes (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2022), its application in the hospitality sector remains significantly underexplored. Given the limited research on this emerging leadership style, scholars have called for further investigation into its direct impact on employees' work outcomes and the intervening mechanisms which may elucidate these relationships (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2022; Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2021).

Though earlier researchers have undertaken initial examinations into the association of PL with performance-related outcomes (Kundi *et al.*, 2023; She *et al.*, 2020), but researchers have primarily adopted a single perspective by examining either an affective or a cognitive underlying mechanism in these associations, thereby failing to capture the comprehensive mechanism of action (Li and Ding, 2022). Zivkovic and Langenbacher (2023), in their recent review, suggested that there is a dearth of work on PL and employee work-related outcomes from an integrated perspective which considers both emotion and cognition as underlying mechanisms. The absence of research from integrated perspective is concerning because PL, which involves alternating between two contrasting leadership behaviors, requires analysis from various viewpoints to fully comprehend its impact (Zivkovic and Langenbacher, 2023). Scholars argue that emotionally valued employees tend to perform better, while cognitive engagement keeps them focused and capable of handling challenges. To improve performance, both emotional and cognitive factors must be considered holistically, as they address interdependent aspects of employee behavior and functioning (Geldenhuis *et al.*, 2021).

Consequently, we investigated the mediating roles of harmonious work passion (HWP) and innovative work behavior (IWB) based on self-determination perspective (SDT) to bridge this gap in the research. SDT asserts that people become self-determined and intrinsically driven when their basic needs (for autonomy, relatedness, and competence) are met in the social context which encourages higher quality motivation and results in more positive work experiences, stronger performance, more innovation and improved work-related behaviors (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Rigby and Ryan, 2018). Paradoxical leaders create an optimal organizational environment by fostering engagement, effective communication, inclusiveness, involvement and support, which addresses employees' basic needs and enhances their intrinsic motivation. This, in turn, helps employees integrate these positive experiences into their identities, cultivating a passion for their work (Lin *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, by encouraging risk-taking and creativity, paradoxical leaders establish a culture of experimentation, where learning from mistakes is valued, motivating employees to push boundaries and propose innovative solutions (Rosing *et al.*, 2011).

Both HWP and IWB require cognitive and emotional alignment (Cheng, 2024; Lin *et al.*, 2024; Janssen, 2004; Vallerand *et al.*, 2003), which are crucial for turning workplace tensions found in hospitality firms into positive outcomes. HWP, characterized by a balanced and voluntary engagement with work, integrates into an employee's identity without disrupting other life aspects (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). In the demanding hospitality industry, HWP helps employees manage stress and emotional labor by fostering positivity and reducing frustration (Li and Ding, 2022; Lin *et al.*, 2024). This passion, driven by PL, translates into enhanced performance. Furthermore, employee innovation is a key differentiator in hospitality, where creative problem-solving improves service offerings and customer experience. Engaging in IWB allows employees to identify opportunities for improvement, leading to better service quality and operational efficiency (Kim and Koo, 2017; Kundi *et al.*, 2023).

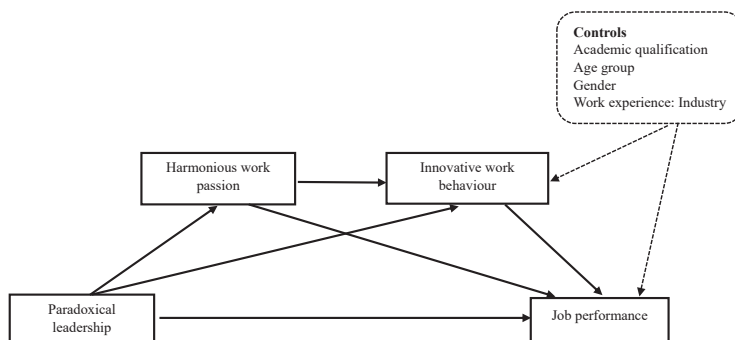
However, the link between HWP and IWB is well supported in literature, showing that employees with HWP are more likely to engage in proactive and creative activities (Jan *et al.*, 2022; Luu, 2019, 2021). According to self-determination theory (SDT), this passion drives employees to form constructive mental evaluations, gain positive feedback and self-motivate toward extra-role behaviors (Rigby and Ryan, 2018). As a result, HWP enhances innovation (Lin *et al.*, 2024), which boosts work performance (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Harmonious passion motivates employees to embrace innovation, while innovative behavior channels this passion into tangible improvements and performance gains. Building on these insights, we developed a sequential mediation model examining how PL influences job performance, with HWP and IWB as mediators. Figure 1 presents the serial mediation model.

This study seeks to elucidate the relationship between PL and job performance from a dual perspective of both emotion and cognition, hence contributing significantly to existing literature. First, it delves into the dynamic role of PL in improving employees' job performance in hotel firms, concentrating on the individual level impacts while enriching the body of literature that has primarily targeted organizational or team level outcomes. It contributes to the nascent literature on PL and underscores its potential to improve employee's work-related behaviors in hospitality context (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019; Kundi *et al.*, 2023; Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2021; She *et al.*, 2020; Shehata *et al.*, 2023). Second, the study introduces a novice dual mediating model which incorporates both cognitive and affective mechanisms (HWP and IWB), facilitating a holistic understanding of the intervening variables involved (Zivkovic and Langenbacher, 2023). Third, it contributes to the scarce research on passion and innovative behaviors within hospitality personnel by highlighting PL as a crucial antecedent. Utilising self-determination perspective, our research enriches hospitality scholarship by empirically validating the emotional and cognitive outcomes of this novel leadership approach. Furthermore, this study expands the application of SDT by examining how PL, rooted in paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011), adeptly manages workplace contradictions while satisfying the basic innate needs of followers.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Self-determination theory

SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2000) is a key framework for comprehending human behavior and motivation. It investigates how social contextual environment influence different forms of work motivation (autonomous and controlled) and improve individual's psychology, well-being, positive experiences and overall performance (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Gagné and Deci, 2005). It asserts that people have three basic innate needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Also, this theory rests on three core principles (Vallerand *et al.*, 2008). First, social



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. Conceptual model

environment meets the basic needs of an individual thereby stimulating motivation in them. Second, motivation levels have a direct impact on work outcomes and third, even suboptimal levels of work motivation can evolve into more self-determined ones with appropriate contextual support. These principles are crucial for understanding how inherent motivation can translate into self-determination to stimulate better work-related behaviors and outcomes (Vallerand *et al.*, 2008).

Rigby and Ryan (2018), based on SDT perspective, suggested that fulfilling fundamental needs in the workplace is essential for nurturing high-quality motivation. This intense motivation emerges when individuals strive for meaningful goals and participate in enjoyable activities, making work a critical part their identities (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). This intrinsic motivation is synonymous with autonomous passion, which is regarded as a higher quality of work motivation (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). SDT posits that workplaces nurturing employees' psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy are more likely to foster HWP (Deci and Ryan, 2000). PL, as a contextual factor, enhances work culture by fulfilling employees' intrinsic needs. Such environments allow employees to integrate their jobs into their self-identity, resulting in motivational internalization. Consequently, this high-quality motivation, or harmonious passion, significantly influences positive work-related behaviors, such as IWB, ultimately enhancing job performance (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Paradoxical leadership

The introduction of PL is seen as a revolution in the field of positive leadership theories as it can effectively incorporate the requirements of contemporary businesses. Drawing insights from the organizational theory of paradox, Zhang *et al.* (2015) conducted the first-ever empirical work and developed five contradictory behavioral dimensions that collectively form PL. These are as follows:

- (1) ensuring uniform treatment with subordinates while respecting their individuality;
- (2) balancing self-centeredness with people-centeredness;
- (3) retaining decision control while shared autonomy;
- (4) implementing strict work standards while permitting flexibility and
- (5) maintaining appropriate distance and closeness in relationship with subordinates

PL, inspired by the Chinese yin-yang philosophy, integrates contradictory yet interrelated behaviors to balance organizational demands with employees' needs (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Instead of choosing between opposing tensions (e.g. standardization vs customization), paradoxical leaders adopt a "both/and" approach, addressing challenges holistically. Rooted in paradox theory, this leadership style recognizes the interrelation between seemingly conflicting elements (Smith and Lewis, 2011), unlike contingency leadership, which focuses on one side. Paradoxical leaders harmonize the benefits of both poles to achieve balanced outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2021).

Paradoxical leadership and job performance. Job performance, particularly in-role performance, refers to an individual's ability to complete assigned tasks within a specific timeframe (Kim and Beehr, 2017). It reflects how employees contribute to organizational goals by fulfilling their formal job responsibilities. In hospitality firms, exceptional job performance plays a key role in elevating customer satisfaction, delivering superior service that encourages repeat business and builds loyalty (Kim and Koo, 2017). Employee performance is essential for fueling financial growth and long run competitiveness for organizations (Aftab *et al.*, 2023). As a result, it is imperative for hospitality businesses to understand how a positive work atmosphere can empower employees and strengthen their job performance (Yan *et al.*, 2023).

Paradoxical leaders boost employee job performance by developing a workplace where contradictions and competing demands are not only accepted but seen as integral to the job (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). This mindset inspires employees to turn challenges into opportunities for personal and professional growth, rather than perceiving them as barriers to success (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). By serving as role-models, paradoxical leaders help their teams accept workplace paradoxes (She *et al.*, 2020), creating an environment which reduces resistance and uncertainty (Kundi *et al.*, 2023). This empowers employees with the ability to manage varying work demands and builds their confidence in addressing diverse customer needs (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019) which improves their performance. Paradoxical leaders also clarify the expected contributions from employees by setting clear work standards for them and aligning their individualized efforts towards organizational goals which ultimately improves their on-the-job performance (Kundi *et al.*, 2023). This behavioral balance promotes adaptability and work-related competencies in employees which positively impacts their job performance (Kundi *et al.*, 2023; Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Thus, we posit

H1. PL is positively related to employees' job performance.

Harmonious work passion

HWP describes the autonomous internalization of an activity which allows a person to engage in work without external pressures. HWP reflects a positive emotional state where individuals feel intrinsically motivated, fully immersed and derive enjoyment from work because of the nature of the work itself (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). It includes both emotional and cognitive aspects, capturing a person's value perceptions and emotional connection to their work (Vallerand *et al.*, 2010). People with such passion can efficiently allocate their time and energy to their tasks while still maintaining a healthy balance with other responsibilities of life. For them, finding purpose and meaningfulness in work is a source of self-improvement and fulfillment.

Paradoxical leadership and harmonious work passion. In an organizational context, effective leader behavior is a crucial external factor for enhancing employees' harmonious passion by satisfying their basic needs (Deci and Ryan, 2008; Jan *et al.*, 2022). Based on SDT, we propose that PL fulfills employees' innate needs, leading to the development of HWP. PL creates a favorable work atmosphere by fostering strong interpersonal bonds and promoting amicable interactions with supervisors and peers (Lin *et al.*, 2024). These leaders skillfully balance formal boundaries and informal connections, fostering a culture of fairness and positive relationships (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). This blend of emotional resilience and compassionate attention meets employees' need for connection. High-quality leader-member exchanges and positive co-worker relationships cultivate a cohesive work environment, enabling employees to sustain positive emotions and greater enthusiasm for their work (Yang *et al.*, 2023).

Also, paradoxical leaders emphasize strict enforcement of job requirements, discouraging behaviors which deviate them from the collective goals of the business (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). This benefits employees as to develop valuable experience by handling their essential duties more proficiently. Such leaders are concerned about their employees' individuality and flexibility in problem-solving, to make them more adaptable and creative in handling work demands. This improves employees' acknowledgment of their own capabilities and talents through consistently managing complexities at work (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Through this acquisition of conventional knowledge and development of their flexible behaviors, people tend to enhance their competencies which empowers to have greater control and improved balance over work and life (Kundi *et al.*, 2023), stimulating HWP (Vallerand *et al.*, 2007).

Furthermore, paradoxical leaders effectively balance the decision-making authority and fairness within the organization while also recognising and promoting the individuality of subordinates, encouraging them to take initiative with autonomy (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). By addressing challenges in employees' work, leaders ensure they are seen not as imposing

coercive authority, but as providing support to improve decision-making (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, individuals who possess a high level of responsibility but a low level of insecurity with strong social support (Franken *et al.*, 2020) tend to perceive work as meaningful. They can better align their personal goals with organizational objectives. This positive work environment, encouragement and support triggers autonomous internalization of work into identities, ultimately leading to the development HWP (Li and Ding, 2022).

Harmonious work passion and job performance. Employees who are harmoniously passionate about their jobs invest a lot of time in work, which serves as the foundation for improved performance (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). Studies have shown that autonomous motivation at work considerably improves both task performance and creative performance (Kundi *et al.*, 2023). The cognitive element of passionate individuals boosts their sense of accountability and vitality at work (Jan *et al.*, 2021). Further, concerning the affective attribute of harmonious passion, research indicates that when people experience happy emotions at work, their minds are widened and focus is improved resulting in greater performance. Such attributes create a robust foundation for accurately predicting enhanced job performance (Li and Ding, 2022).

Harmonious work passion as mediator. HWP stimulated by paradoxical leaders may function as a crucial mediator between PL and job performance. Paradoxical leaders by meeting the innate needs of employees and providing positive work environment, participation in decisions and encouragement in independent choices, builds an intrinsic enthusiasm in employees (Kundi *et al.*, 2023). Through emotional support and cognitive rational development via behavioral balance, this leadership style helps employees to interact with their work in a manner that it aligns within their personal beliefs and interests, fostering a sense of happiness and fulfillment. Consequently, employees develop HWP for their job (Vallerand *et al.*, 2007). Further, passionate employees tend to perform better as they are deeply committed and genuinely enthusiastic about their roles which directly influences their level of effort, attention to detail and quality of service (Shen *et al.*, 2023) experiencing a state of deep immersion and focus, which ultimately improves their job performance. Thus, we posit

H2. HWP mediates the relationship between PL and employees' job performance.

Innovative work behavior

Scott and Bruce (1994) defined "innovative work behavior as the production, promotion, and development of novel ideas and solutions". It involves finding unique solutions to existing issues, offering a new means of goal realization, using updated work techniques, and identifying resources for introducing and implementing any new ideas (Janssen, 2000; Yuan and Woodman, 2010). Innovation is a dynamic process where incompatible yet interdependent factors coexist across the phases of idea generation, promotion and implementation (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Rosing *et al.*, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). This highlights that paradoxical tensions are inherent in innovation, and paradoxical behaviors support the development of innovative behaviors.

Paradoxical leadership and innovative work behavior. Paradoxical leaders set clear expectations while granting employees the flexibility to determine how to achieve them. This combination of autonomy and direction fosters creativity in reaching goals (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). For instance, in the hospitality industry, a manager may establish high standards for guest satisfaction but encourage staff to find personalized ways to exceed them. This freedom within a structured framework inspires innovative solutions. Further, paradoxical leaders with their uniform treatment and consideration towards people's individuality (Zhang *et al.*, 2015) foster a harmonious environment and culture of fairness which imbues positive attitudes in employees towards making changes and taking initiatives (Smith and Lewis, 2011). In such healthy work atmosphere employees easily communicate to share knowledge which helps improve their experience, resources and creative insights for innovative executions

(Yang *et al.*, 2023). By maintaining a stable operational foundation while simultaneously promoting change, paradoxical leaders create an environment where employees feel comfortable suggesting and implementing innovations (Li *et al.*, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Paradoxical leaders satisfy employees' need for autonomy, relatedness and competency which develops a state of vitality in them (Kundi *et al.*, 2023), hence stimulating hospitality employees' innovative behaviors.

Innovative work behavior and job performance. Innovative behaviors demonstrated by employees at work could also enhance their job performance. This is because innovative employees typically gather and leverage a wide array of knowledge to produce fresh imaginative ideas for improving current processes (Aryee *et al.*, 2012). Creative-thinking individuals exhibit a propensity for acquiring knowledge, exploring novel concepts and cultivating innovative solutions to address urgent challenges, ultimately augmenting their job competence (Kim and Koo, 2017). Employees who are encouraged to innovate are more engaged and satisfied with their work. Those who feel appreciated for their contributions are more likely to take responsibility for their work, which stimulates better performance outcomes. When they exhibit innovative behaviors, it helps them undertake work more effectively which improves their job performance. Researches of Aryee *et al.* (2012), Kim and Koo (2017), and Yuan and Woodman (2010) also validated this positive association.

Innovative work behavior as mediator. Encouraging employees to embrace contradictions and think creatively, paradoxical leaders navigate modern organizational complexities. They foster an environment conducive to innovation (Meng *et al.*, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2023) by balancing autonomy with guidance and integrating stability with change. Thus, followers feel supported and are more likely to take risks and exhibit innovative capacities (Jan *et al.*, 2021). Research argues that IWB is directly linked to job performance, facilitating efficient ways to complete tasks, solve complex issues and improve existing processes (Kim and Koo, 2017). Innovative individuals tend to be more proactive, adaptive and resilient (Li *et al.*, 2018; Luu, 2021), better suited for dynamic environments of hospitality. When paradoxical leaders encourage innovative initiatives, employees' performance improves because of capabilities and competencies they have acquired. Thus, we propose the next hypothesis:

H3. IWB mediates the relationship between PL and employees' job performance.

Harmonious work passion and innovative work behavior as sequential mediators

Theoretical and empirical reasoning supports that HWP and IWB sequentially mediate the relationship between PL and job performance. This argument is grounded in SDT. SDT suggests that when contextual factors like PL fulfill employees' innate needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy, it enhances their enthusiasm and dedication to work (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Gagné and Deci, 2005). This psychological satisfaction enhances intrinsic motivation and self-determination, allowing employees to find meaning in their work. It leads to the internalization of their roles, making work feel significant and embedding it into their identities, which reflects passion as a powerful motivator (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). Such individuals are emotionally connected to their jobs and put efforts willingly without any external influence. This commitment and passion for work lead to better job outcomes and engagement in extra-role behaviors (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Empirical studies also demonstrated the positive impact of HWP on employees' IWB (Jan *et al.*, 2022; Luu, 2019, 2021).

A passionate person's emotional and cognitive traits serve as a catalyst, influencing their creativity, active thinking and participation in innovative tasks (Lin *et al.*, 2024). Such employees are highly optimistic, positive-minded and enthusiastic people who love their jobs because of the nature of the work itself and consider it a vital part of their personality (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). These happy emotions and healthy mentality improve their ability to generate innovative, creative ideas, promoting the development of new approaches to resolve current workplace problems (Lin *et al.*, 2024). These individuals exhibit high cognitive

flexibility, enabling them to handle high-pressure situations, a crucial aspect of the hospitality industry (Lin *et al.*, 2024). Their cognitive strengths foster interest in innovation, making them proactive in finding solutions to workplace challenges (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2020). By broadening their thought-action competencies, passionate employees can pursue unstructured tasks, adapt to changing circumstances and take calculated risks. These traits stimulate the creation and implementation of ideas, encouraging innovative behaviors (Jan *et al.*, 2021).

Drawing on empirical evidence, theoretical reasoning and our hypotheses, we propose a compelling serial mediation model. Paradoxical leaders, by effectively balancing contradictory behaviors develop supportive atmosphere encouraging employees to internalize their work into their identity, cultivating HWP (Vallerand *et al.*, 2007). Thus, employees gain a heightened sense of autonomy, confidence and control over complex tasks (Zhang *et al.*, 2023), which fuels creative problem-solving and innovative behaviors. The broadened cognitive and emotional capabilities of these innovative individuals then translate into improved job performance. Thus, we propose that:

- H4. HWP and IWB sequentially mediate the relationship between PL and employees' job performance.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

Data were gathered during a span of five months starting from March 2023 to July 2023 from employees of four-, five- and five-star deluxe hotels in major cities across North India. These hotels were selected from the Hotel Association of India (HAI) official list. These high-end hotels were chosen in this study for the following reasons. High-end hotels operate in a highly dynamic and competitive market, requiring leaders to balance multiple priorities. These conflicting demands provide an ideal context for exploring PL, which excels in navigating workplace tensions (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2022; Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, increased levels of enthusiasm, passion and innovative talents among high-end hotel personnel are critical for improving service quality and customer experience in the organization (Luu, 2021). Such behavioral requirements make luxury hotels an ideal choice for exploring the variables under study to investigate how leaders and employees navigate contradictions, sustain passion and drive innovation in pursuit of better performance.

A quantitative approach utilizing a structured questionnaire was adopted to explore the connections between constructs in this study within Indian hospitality firms. A pretest with 47 hotel employees helped identify any ambiguous items, leading to revisions for clearer language suitable for the Indian workforce. Due to the challenging schedules of hotel employees, snowball sampling was utilized to reach respondents and given India's collectivist culture, a reference-based strategy was used to achieve the desired sample size. This way researchers contacted 48 managers through phone calls and in-person visits to explain the study's purpose and assured them that participation was voluntary, with no pecuniary rewards and data would be kept confidential and used exclusively for academic purposes.

After obtaining approvals from higher management, 32 out of 48 HR managers agreed to participate, but direct contact with respondents was not permitted. Consequently, questionnaires were distributed to HR representatives, who shared them across various departments, including front office, food and beverage services, housekeeping, sales and marketing, targeting employees whose roles required ongoing performance improvements and creative insights. A total of 480 questionnaires were distributed among these hotels, and through persistent follow-ups and visits, 324 were returned. After applying Hair *et al.* (2019) listwise deletion for incomplete responses, 26 were excluded, resulting in a usable sample of 298 participants and a response rate of 62.08%. A sample sufficiency test using G*Power software indicated a minimum requirement of 159, confirming that the 298 responses exceeded the necessary sample size. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of respondents.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of sample ($N = 298$)

Characteristic	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	74	24.8
	Male	224	75.2
Age groups (in years)	21–30	160	53.7
	31–40	97	32.6
	41–50	33	11.1
	51–60	08	2.7
	Diploma	73	24.5
Academic qualification	Graduation	138	46.3
	Post-graduation	43	14.4
	Professional degree	44	14.8
	Less than 5 years	105	35.2
Work experience (Industry)	More than 5 years	193	64.8
	4 star	181	60.7
Hotel's star ratings	5 star	94	31.5
	5 star deluxe	23	7.7

Source(s): Authors' calculations

Instruments

The variables were assessed using validated multiple-item measures on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). *Paradoxical leadership* was measured with Zhang *et al.* (2015) 22-item scale across five sub-dimensions, analyzed as a second-order reflective construct. *Harmonious work passion* was measured using Vallerand *et al.* (2003) seven-item scale, while IWB was assessed with a six-item scale by Monica Hu *et al.* (2009), commonly used in hotel contexts. *Job performance* was measured with a seven-item scale adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991). PLS-SEM results were controlled for IWB and job performance, with employee demographics (age, gender, education, work experience) as control variables.

Common method bias (CMB)

Common method bias (CMB) was addressed using both procedural and statistical methods (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The questionnaire featured simple language, assured anonymity and randomized the presentation of constructs to create psychological separation, preventing respondents from inferring cause-effect relationships (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Statistically, Harman's single-factor test showed a single factor accounted for just 27.21% of the variance, below the 50% threshold. Additionally, all VIF values were under the strict limit of 3.33 (Kock, 2015), confirming no CMB concerns (see Table 4).

Analytic strategy

Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS version 4.1 (Ringle *et al.*, 2024), a non-parametric technique well-suited for complex models and small sample sizes. Since PLS-SEM facilitates the exploration of new relationships between variables (Ringle *et al.*, 2020), it is well-suited for exploratory studies embedded in established theories. It was an optimal choice given our emphasis on theory-driven mediating mechanisms examining novel linkages between variables under study. PLS-SEM is best for second-order constructs and multiple mediations, as represented in the model (Hair *et al.*, 2019, 2022). Furthermore, it is apt for prediction-oriented studies. The application of out-of-sample prediction (Shmueli *et al.*, 2019) enabled us to assess the model's predictive relevance, which was incorporated in analysis.

Results

Measurement model assessment

We evaluated the construct validity and reliability following [Hair et al. \(2019, 2022\)](#). In first step, we assessed the five dimensions of PL, HWP, IWB and job performance, which are lower order constructs. Internal consistency was evaluated using the omega coefficient (ω) due to limitations with Cronbach's alpha ([Hayes and Coutts, 2020](#)). Most item loadings were above 0.70, with some above 0.60, retained as the constructs met the AVE threshold of 0.50, confirming convergent validity. [Table 2](#) shows composite reliability (CR) and omega (ω) values between 0.70 and 0.95, confirming internal consistency. Further, discriminant validity was verified with HTMT ratios which were well below 0.85 ([Henseler et al., 2015](#)). Next, we assessed higher order construct (i.e. PL) using the latent scores of first-order constructs ([Sarstedt et al., 2019](#)) which comprised the five sub-dimensions of PL (see [Table 2](#)). All the measures of reliability and validity were reassessed which fulfilled the same criteria as stated in stage first. [Table 2](#) summarises the reliability and validity result for both first- and second-order constructs, while [Table 3](#) presents the HTMT ratio matrix, confirming discriminant validity for both levels of latent variables.

Structural model assessment

The structural model was evaluated for multicollinearity, with all VIF values below the critical threshold of 3.33 ([Diamantopoulos, 2008](#)), indicating no collinearity concerns. SRMR values for both saturated and estimated models were below the conservative limit of 0.080 ([Henseler et al., 2015](#)), confirming a good model fit. [Table 4](#) reports R^2 , f^2 and Q^2 values, showing the model explained 31.6% variance in HWP, 46.2% in IWB and 52.5% in JP. R^2 values above 0.20 demonstrate strong explanatory power ([Hair et al., 2019](#)). Effect sizes (f^2), based on [Cohen's \(1988\)](#) guidelines, ranged from medium to large. Finally, PLSpredict procedure ([Shmueli et al., 2019](#)) was used to assess predictive relevance, with all RMSE values, except for JP6, indicating strong predictive power.

Following [Hair et al. \(2019\)](#), a bootstrapping test with 10,000 sub-samples was conducted to generate standardized beta, p -values, t -statistics and confidence intervals, confirming the statistical significance of all hypothesized relationships. [Table 4](#) provides the detailed results. **H1** was supported, showing a positive relationship between PL and job performance ($\beta = 0.240, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.067$). PL was also significantly related to HWP ($\beta = 0.562, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.462$) and IWB ($\beta = 0.393, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.188$). Additionally, positive associations were found between HWP and IWB ($\beta = 0.383, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.183$), HWP and JP ($\beta = 0.289, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.100$), and IWB and JP ($\beta = 0.315, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.112$). Control variables (age, gender, education, work experience) had no significant impact on IWB or JP.

Simple and serial mediation analyses

The study utilized [Preacher and Hayes \(2008\)](#) analytical procedure and bootstrapping at 10,000 subsamples to evaluate the hypotheses of simple and serial mediations. HWP ($\beta = 0.162, p < 0.001, CI = 0.085, 0.260$) and IWB ($\beta = 0.124, p < 0.001, CI = 0.071, 0.192$) positively mediate the relation between PL and employees job performance, supporting **H2** and **H3**. Also, results reveal significant statistics for the hypothesis of serial mediation ($\beta = 0.068, p = 0.003, CI = 0.031, 0.123$), hence supporting **H4**. Furthermore, to assess the type of mediation and further support the results of simple and serial mediations, a four-step procedure was followed to perform variance accounted for (VAF) test. Details of mediation results are presented in [Table 5](#). Since the direct effect remains significant in all four steps, it represents a case of partial and complementary type of mediation ([Zhao et al., 2010](#)).

Table 2. Convergent validity and internal consistency reliability measures

First- or second- order construct	Items	Convergent validity			Reliability	
		Loadings	VIF	AVE	CR	Omega (ω)
Treating uniformly/individualization (PLUI)				0.586	0.875	0.819
	PL1	0.630	1.321			
	PL2	0.766	1.667			
	PL3	0.825	1.971			
	PL4	0.834	2.078			
Self-centeredness/other-centeredness (PLSO)	PL5	0.755	1.639			
				0.531	0.849	0.771
	PL6	0.753	1.555			
	PL7	0.743	1.544			
	PL8	0.810	1.794			
Maintaining decision control/allowing autonomy (PLCA)	PL9	0.644	1.340			
	PL10	0.682	1.445			
				0.619	0.866	0.794
	PL11	0.785	1.637			
Enforcing work requirements/allowing flexibility (PLRF)	PL12	0.843	1.990			
	PL13	0.751	1.506			
	PL14	0.764	1.483			
				0.548	0.828	0.725
Maintaining distance/closeness (PLDC)	PL15	0.688	1.522			
	PL16	0.760	1.537			
	PL17	0.720	1.460			
	PL18	0.788	1.695			
Paradoxical leadership (PL)				0.606	0.860	0.788
	PL19	0.678	1.263			
	PL20	0.804	1.923			
	PL21	0.806	1.557			
Harmonious work passion (HWP)	PL22	0.818	2.017			
	PLUI	0.876	2.595			
	PLSO	0.840	2.162			
	PLCA	0.828	2.264			
Innovative work behavior (IWB)	PLRF	0.776	1.933			
	PLDC	0.836	2.347			
				0.692	0.918	0.888
	HWP1	0.705	1.550			
	HWP2	0.686	1.526			
	HWP3	0.757	1.835			
	HWP4	0.743	1.740			
			0.532	0.888	0.856	
Job performance (JP)	HWP5	0.748	1.730			
	HWP6	0.764	1.785			
	HWP7	0.702	1.609			
				0.588	0.895	0.831
	IWB1	0.689	1.552			
	IWB2	0.788	1.945			
Job performance (JP)	IWB3	0.782	1.870			
	IWB4	0.780	1.968			
	IWB5	0.797	1.895			
	IWB6	0.760	1.793			
			0.575	0.905	0.857	
JP1	0.744	1.950				
JP2	0.779	2.086				
JP3	0.750	1.805				
JP4	0.788	1.977				

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

First- or second- order construct	Items	Convergent validity			Reliability	
		Loadings	VIF	AVE	CR	Omega (ω)
	JP5	0.762	1.914			
	JP6	0.703	1.666			
	JP7	0.780	1.956			

Source(s): Authors' work

Discussion and conclusion

Conclusion

Drawing on self-determination perspective, this research examined a serial mediation model to suggest how PL can improve job performance of hospitality employees focusing on two relevant underlying mechanisms: harmonious passion and IWB. First, PL positively influenced employees' job performance. This is consistent with a previous study of [Kundi et al. \(2023\)](#) and resonates well with paradox theory ([Smith and Lewis, 2011](#)) which suggests how supervisors effectively manage workplace contradictions by balancing conflicting situations. These leader behaviors develop employees' confidence to encounter paradoxes at work and broaden their perspectives toward work responsibilities, hence improving job performance ([Kundi et al., 2023](#)). Second, paradoxical leaders by meeting innate needs of employees for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and hence stimulate their autonomous internalization for work which improves their passion ([Vallerand et al., 2003](#)). Such passionate individuals are more likely to exhibit positive work behaviors as they are inherently motivated to seek creative solutions and continuous improvement in work ([Jan et al., 2022](#); [Luu, 2021](#)).

Third, IWB was found to mediate the association between PL and employees' job performance. When an individual's basic innate needs are fulfilled, they tend to experience a state of vitality ([Kundi et al., 2023](#)). Such employees willingly resolve workplace contradictions with creative and innovative solutions ([Ryan and Deci, 2017](#); [Yang et al., 2021](#)). They execute their work responsibilities more effectively which helps them improve their in-role job performance. As suggested by [Aryee et al. \(2012\)](#), employees' will and motivation to learn something new and excel at work, a key enablers of employee job performance ([Vuong and Hieu, 2022](#)). Further, results validated the serial mediation model presented in our study. This is because passionate employees often engage themselves in presenting novel ways of working by thinking creatively and innovatively. They possess strong inclination towards work-related issues and exhibit the ability to flexibly handle dynamic situations. Such attributes stimulate the generation, promotion and execution of work-specific novel ideas, stimulating their innovative behaviors ([Jan et al., 2021](#)).

Theoretical implications

First, our research improves the understanding of PL and its effect on employee's behavioral and performance outcomes within hospitality domain. Findings demonstrate significant association between PL and hotel employee's job performance ([Kundi et al., 2023](#)), addressing significant gap in the literature that has primarily explored organizational and team level outcomes. This study confirms the significance of both contextual and personal antecedents in driving performance improvement by illustrating how PL, HWP and innovative behavior collectively stimulate employee's performance levels. Additionally, it enriches the paradox literature and theory ([Smith and Lewis, 2011](#)) highlighting its importance at individual level, demonstrating leaders who adeptly handle workplace contradictions can critically influence employee outcomes and work behaviors.

Table 3. Discriminant validity (HTMT)

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Academic qualification													
2. Age	0.095												
3. Gender	0.061	0.143											
4. Work experience (Industry)	0.004	0.055	0.05										
5. Treating uniformly/individualization (my (PLCA)	0.029	0.053	0.182	0.044									
6. Self-centeredness/other-centeredness (ity (PLRF)	0.033	0.045	0.165	0.129	0.822								
7. Maintaining decision control/allowing	0.013	0.041	0.207	0.035	0.823	0.808							
8. Enforcing work requirements/Allowin	0.065	0.119	0.211	0.034	0.816	0.699	0.661						
9. Maintaining distance/closeness (PLDC	0.043	0.046	0.202	0.051	0.778	0.777	0.835	0.807					
10. Harmonious work passion	0.07	0.058	0.089	0.079	0.613	0.624	0.555	0.536	0.503				
11. Innovative work behavior	0.028	0.058	0.074	0.058	0.649	0.679	0.565	0.554	0.565	0.698			
12. Job performance	0.056	0.03	0.124	0.058	0.705	0.65	0.566	0.534	0.513	0.709	0.727		
13. Paradoxical leadership	0.017	0.019	0.218	0.022						0.592	0.631	0.626	

Note(s): Values in italics represent HTMT of second order construct

Source(s): Authors' work

Table 4. Structural model evaluation

Relationship	Std. beta	p-values	t-values	BC 95% CI	Decision	VIF	f ²
<i>Controls</i>							
Academic qual. →IWB	-0.026	0.538	0.615	[-0.111, 0.058]	N. Sig.	1.022	0.001
Academic qual. →JP	0.031	0.466	0.729	[-0.050, 0.116]	N. Sig.	1.024	0.002
Age Group→IWB	-0.013	0.766	0.298	[-0.098, 0.067]	N. Sig.	1.042	0.000
Age Group→JP	-0.004	0.915	0.106	[-0.080, 0.071]	N. Sig.	1.042	0.000
Gender→IWB	-0.098	0.360	0.915	[-0.304, 0.116]	N. Sig.	1.074	0.003
Gender→JP	0.060	0.567	0.572	[-0.140, 0.226]	N. Sig.	1.078	0.001
Work experience: Industry→IWB	-0.004	0.968	0.040	[-0.177, 0.178]	N. Sig.	1.010	0.000
Work experience: Industry→JP	0.094	0.268	1.109	[-0.073, 0.261]	N. Sig.	1.010	0.004
<i>Direct effect</i>							
PL→HWP	0.562	0.000	9.120	[0.434, 0.672]	Sig.	1.000	0.462
PL→IWB	0.393	0.000	6.353	[0.270, 0.512]	Sig.	1.525	0.188
PL→JP	0.240	0.000	4.029	[0.125, 0.357]	Sig.	1.811	0.067
HWP→IWB	0.383	0.000	5.136	[0.232, 0.525]	Sig.	1.490	0.183
HWP→JP	0.289	0.000	4.496	[0.168, 0.418]	Sig.	1.762	0.100
IWB→JP	0.315	0.000	5.069	[0.192, 0.435]	Sig.	1.858	0.112
<i>Specific indirect effect</i>							
PL→HWP→JP	0.162	0.000	3.691	[0.085, 0.260]	Sig.		
PL→IWB→JP	0.124	0.000	4.037	[0.071, 0.192]	Sig.		
HWP→IWB→JP	0.120	0.001	3.337	[0.059, 0.204]	Sig.		
PL→HWP→IWB→JP	0.068	0.003	2.955	[0.031, 0.123]	Sig.		
<i>Endogenous variables</i>							
HWP			0.316	0.302			
IWB			0.462	0.331			
JP			0.525	0.319			
				Saturated model	Estimated model		
				0.036	0.040		
<i>Model fit (SRMR)</i>							
				0.036	0.040		

Note(s): PL = paradoxical leadership, HWP = harmonious work passion, IWB= Innovative work behavior, JP = job performance; BC 95% CI= Bias-corrected confidence intervals at 95% significance level VIF= Variance inflation factor; N. Sig. = non-significant effect; Sig. = significant effect

Source(s): Authors' work

Table 5. Mediation analysis results

Direct and mediation models	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	VAF %	Decision
<i>Step 1: direct only</i>					
PL-> JP	0.598 (0.000)				
<i>Step 2: simple mediation (HWP as mediator only)</i>					
PL→HWP→JP	0.364 (0.000)	0.230 (0.000)	0.594 (0.000)	38.72	CPM
<i>Step 3: simple mediation (IWB as mediator only)</i>					
PL→IWB→JP	0.334 (0.000)	0.258 (0.000)	0.592 (0.000)	43.58	CPM
<i>Step 4: serial mediation (HWP and IWB as serial Mediators)</i>					
PL→HWP→IWB→JP	0.240 (0.000)	0.351 (0.000)	0.591 (0.000)	59.39	CPM

Note(s): p-values are in parentheses; PL = Paradoxical leadership; HWP = harmonious work passion, IWB= Innovative work behavior, JP = job performance; VAF = variance accounted for, CPM= Complementary partial mediation (20% < VAF<80%)

Source(s): Authors' work

Second, through the lens of SDT, this study enhances understanding of the mechanisms linking PL and employee performance by exploring both affective and cognitive aspects (Li and Ding, 2022; Zivkovic and Langenbacher, 2023). Another key contribution is the identification of the dual mediating roles of HWP and IWB in this relationship. Unlike earlier research focused on either cognitive or motivational mechanisms like leader identification and job engagement (She *et al.*, 2020; Kundi *et al.*, 2023), our findings suggest that PL's true strength lies in engaging both dimensions to achieve positive job-related outcomes. This aligns with emerging trends in leadership research that emphasize the integration of cognition and emotion (Cheng, 2024; Lin *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, we found that the emotional stimulation from HWP energizes employees and aligns their personal goals with organizational objectives, catalyzing IWB. This connection between passion and innovation, particularly in hospitality, is notably underexplored (Luu, 2021). Our findings highlight the sequential mediating effect of HWP as a crucial component in sparking innovative behaviors, providing valuable insights for future studies in this area (Jan *et al.*, 2022; Luu, 2019, 2021).

Third, although passion has been examined in various management studies, our study is the first to empirically link PL with employees' HWP in hospitality literature. This finding broadens the understanding of PL, illustrating its role in predicting employees' internal emotional and motivational states rather than merely addressing external challenges. Although preliminary studies have examined other leadership styles such as benevolent, empowering, servant and authentic regarding their impact on HWP, research on approaches that address both cognitive and emotional needs, like PL, is limited (Lin *et al.*, 2024). Our study fills this gap by establishing a direct link between PL and HWP through SDT, identifying PL as a critical antecedent. Moreover, to deepen the understanding of innovative cognition, researchers stress the importance of investigating how paradoxical elements shape innovative outcomes (Miron-Spektor *et al.*, 2011). Innovation inherently requires embracing contradictions and challenging existing norms. While earlier research primarily focused on leadership's direct impact, our research identifies IWB as a pivotal mediator through which PL elevates employee job performance. Thus, we offer a more nuanced view of how PL indirectly boosts performance by cultivating innovation potential. It provides fresh insights into the intricate relation between leadership, innovation and performance in hospitality firms, demonstrating how paradoxical behaviors can ignite the creativity and innovation abilities at employee level (Kundi *et al.*, 2023; Zhang and Liu, 2022). Our study expands the understanding of leadership's impact on follower's motivation, behavior, cognition and performance, opening avenues for further exploration in paradox literature.

Practical implications

Findings offer valuable insights for hospitality management and practitioners, highlighting the powerful influence of leader's paradoxical behaviors on employee performance. To nurture this leadership style, management should focus on identifying and hiring candidates with these traits. HR managers could use tools like Zhang *et al.* (2015) PL scale during hiring process prioritizing candidates who get high score in paradoxical thinking. For current leaders, hospitality firms could offer targeted training sessions to encourage paradoxical mindsets through role-play sessions or case studies. Existing leaders with these qualities can mentor others sharing experiences in peer meetings to promote the adoption of PL across the organization.

Furthermore, it is essential for hospitality management to train employees in effectively managing workplace contradictions (Kundi *et al.*, 2023). One effective strategy is promoting observational learning, as employees tend to imitate their immediate leaders. Paradoxical leaders should serve as role models, fostering a paradoxical mindset among team members. Zhang *et al.* (2015) suggest organizations shift from an "either/or" to a "both/and" philosophy to build these capacities. Furthermore, to stimulate HWP, hospitality leaders should create a welcoming workplace atmosphere (Vallerand *et al.*, 2008) that prioritizes well-being,

autonomy, flexibility, transparency and mutual respect. Team-building exercises, group activities and social events can strengthen connections among staff, fostering a cohesive team environment. These initiatives will enhance positive emotions and promote autonomous internalization, thereby nurturing harmonious passion for their work.

Limitations and future considerations

Our study has certain limitations that future researchers can address. First, the cross-sectional design makes it challenging to establish causality; future studies could use a longitudinal approach to validate our findings. Second, since our results are based solely on respondents from hotel firms, their generalizability to other hospitality sectors, such as airlines or restaurants, is limited. Future researchers should test the model in these contexts. Third, we relied on self-report data, which is common in the hospitality industry, as our goal was to evaluate employees' perceptions of leadership and work-related behaviors (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019). Future research could incorporate multiple sources, including leaders' perceptions and ratings. Lastly, exploring additional affective and cognitive mechanisms such as psychological meaningfulness, paradoxical mindset and thriving at work could further link PL with employee outcomes. Additionally, introducing moderators could enhance the applicability of these results.

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