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## LEADERSHIP MECHANISMS DRIVING INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR: A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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### Abstract:

This study comprehensively examines the development of global research related to leadership and resilience in the context of Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) through a bibliometric analysis approach for the period 2016 to 2026. In an organizational landscape increasingly influenced by digital transformation, environmental instability and changing workforce dynamics, leadership and employee resilience are increasingly considered strategic elements that support the continuity of innovation. This change has driven increased academic interest in the role of both constructs in strengthening the ability of organizations to adapt to current and future challenges. Although the number of studies published in this field continues to increase, understanding of the underlying knowledge structure has not yet developed comprehensively. To address this issue, the study systematically mapped the evolution, influence, and thematic composition of the literature to reveal how knowledge in this field has expanded. Using a rigorous bibliometric methodology, 518 Scopus-indexed documents were retrieved and refined through OpenRefine to ensure validity, rigor, and consistency of the data. Descriptive performance analysis was conducted using Scopus Analyzer, while science mapping techniques,

co-authorship, citation, and keyword co-occurrence analysis were performed using VOSviewer. The results reveal a rapid growth and continued surge in publications after 2020, reflecting the increased scholarly attention driven by digitalization and post-pandemic organizational challenges. Innovative work behaviors stand out as a key thematic focus, having significant convergence with leadership styles such as transformational, servant, ethical, inclusive, and digital leadership, while being driven by psychological mechanisms related to resilience including empowerment, self-efficacy, and work engagement. China, Pakistan, and Malaysia lead the way in publication output and the strength of collaborative links, reflecting the growing influence of emerging economies in shaping this research agenda. Thematic clustering further conceptualizes an overreliance on leadership- and individual-level explanations, with relatively limited integration of digital capability and sustainability perspectives. Overall, this research effort pioneers a structured mapping of the intellectual foundation in the field, while also exploring saturation points and underexplored research gaps. This study provides a comprehensive view of the current research scope that incorporates the dimensions of leadership, resilience, and innovative work behaviour in modern organisational environments.

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Innovative Work Behaviour, Ethical Leadership, Servant Leadership, Leadership Mechanisms



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## Introduction

Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB), which encompasses the process of generating, presenting and realising new and valuable ideas among employees, is increasingly recognised as a strategic capability for organisations facing rapid technological developments, increasing digital surveillance and increasing demands for performance. In such an environment, leadership approaches that prioritise human dignity, strengthen empowerment and practice ethical governance are attracting increasing interest among researchers and organisational practitioners. Servant leadership, which emphasises individual development, employee wellbeing and decision-making freedom, is increasingly identified as a leadership approach with great potential to promote the formation of IWB. Different from leadership models that focus more on control, direction or performance achievement alone, servant leadership is found to be in line with contemporary needs for a sustainable, inclusive and psychologically safe work environment. As such, this approach continues to gain importance in a variety of organisational contexts, including the private and public sectors (Musenze et al., 2024; Qawasmeh et al., 2025). As organizations manage with algorithmic control and increasing accountability, servant leadership offers a relational and value-driven pathway to stimulate employee intrinsic motivation and innovative engagement. (Xu & Wu, 2025).

Recent empirical research supports the growing evidence that servant leadership influences IWB through a variety of psychological and contextual mechanisms. Drawing on theories from the context of self-determination, Xu & Wu (2025) show that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employee innovative behavior, with self-evaluation core enhancing this indirect influence. Accordingly, Xiao et al., (2025) using the job demands–resource theory, found that servant leadership enhances innovative actions among civil servants through psychological safety, while civil service motivation acts as a key boundary condition. Other studies extend this mechanism by highlighting social and relational development. Khan et al., (2021) show that servant leadership inspires IWB through promotional and excessive voice behavior, highlighting the importance of voice as a micro-foundation of innovation. At the contextual level, Musenze et al., (2024) identified innovation situations as important mediators linking servant leadership to IWB in the Ugandan local government sector, while Qawasmeh et al., (2025) revealed that servant leadership reduces adopted inequalities and promotes innovation in high power distance cultures. Collectively, these findings confirm that servant leadership drives through empowerment, safety, voice, climate and justice-related pathways to foster IWB across a range of cultural and institutional contexts.

Despite this level of progress, several gaps and issues remain unresolved in the servant-IWB leadership literature. First, much of the existing evidence relies on cross-sectional survey designs in single-country contexts, particularly in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, limiting inferences of causality and generalizability (Musenze & Mayende, 2022; Qawasmeh et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2025). Second, while mediating mechanisms such as empowerment, psychological safety, voice behaviors, and innovation climate are increasingly being examined, there is limited integration of these mechanisms into unified or multilevel models. Third, boundary conditions beyond employee and individual characteristics (e.g., core self-evaluations) and key motivational factors (e.g., public service motivation) remain underexplored, especially compared to alternative leadership styles such as transformational leadership that have been theorized more extensively in the IWB domain. Finally, tensions persist over whether servant leadership is more effective across cultural impact structures or whether its effects on innovation depend on contextual features such as inequality, perceptions of fairness, and institutional norms. To overcome and address this gap, it is important to advance theory and to position servant leadership as one of the primary drivers of robust and context-sensitive innovative work.

## Literature Review

The connection in between servant leadership factor and innovative work behaviour (IWB) has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years, suggesting the identification of increased innovation as a critical driver of organizational success. Servant leadership, which focus on the well-being and continues professional development of employees, is sike the reorganization of the leadership approach that can contribute to the betterment of Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) in various sectors and cultural contexts. The output from various empirical studies show that servant leaders are able to create a encouraging work environment, therefore ensuring the employees to achieve higher levels of empowerment, enjoy adequate organizational support and develop a strong sense of psychological safety. These factors are often considered important prerequisites that support the production and implementation of innovation in organizations. As an illustration, several studies conducted in public sector organizations and technology-based companies report that servant leadership makes a

significant contribution to increasing employees' innovative behavior. This effect is achieved through the provision of various valuable work resources, including strengthening trust, increasing autonomy in performing tasks and expanding opportunities for competency development and lifelong learning (Xiao et al., 2025; Khan & Ali, 2025). In addition, servant leaders also encourage employees' willingness to explore new ideas, accept challenges and engage in creative problem-solving activities. This practice not only strengthens innovative capabilities at the individual level, but also contributes to increasing team effectiveness and overall organizational achievement (Ren et al., 2024; Hikmah et al., 2024). The positive association between servant leadership and IWB is further strengthened by findings from the hospitality, service, and nonprofit sectors, where servant leadership is shown to inspire extra-role behaviors, including creativity and organizational citizenship (Jan et al., 2021; Aboramadan et al., 2022).

A major theme in the literature is the discovery of key facilitating and moderating mechanisms that explain how employee leadership translates into innovative outcomes. Various studies identify psychological empowerment, creative self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and organizational learning as critical mediators of this relationship (Khan et al., 2021; Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2023; Nazir & Iqbal, 2024). For example, psychological empowerment and job crafting were found to sequentially mediate the effects of servant leadership on IWB, suggesting that servant leaders empower employees to reshape their work roles, thereby enhancing their capacity for innovation (Ahmad et al., 2021; Handayani et al., 2025). Creative self-efficacy, or belief in one's and employees' creative abilities, also plays a key mediating role in the foundation, with knowledge sharing further supporting the relationship between self-efficacy and IWB (Jan et al., 2021; Nazir & Iqbal, 2024). Furthermore, structural factors such as innovation environment and perceived organizational support turn out to be important contextual enablers, mediating the effects of servant leadership on innovative behavior (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2023; Musenze et al., 2024). Moderating variables, including public service motivation, team innovation climate, and individual creative self-efficacy, have been revealed to strengthen or condition the strength of this relationship, suggesting that both individual and organizational characteristics shape the effectiveness of servant leadership in facilitating innovation (Lu et al., 2025; Gelaidan et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2023).

## Material And Methods

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework introduced by Page et al. (2021) is recognized as one of the main standards in the implementation of systematic literature reviews. The use of PRISMA, in this case, acts as an essential methodological tool for informing and guiding a systematic literature review by necessitating a high degree of transparency, uniformity, and rigor throughout the search process and during each stage of screening and selecting references. Such standards are thus employed to increase the reliability and validity of findings in a study, as structured procedures are used with the purpose of identifying, appraising, and determining if scientific sources fits. Furthermore, PRISMA methodology is important in reducing risk of research bias and bolstering the evidence base that underpins, guides interpretation and synthesis of study findings. Concerning the ambit of this study, the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases have been included as primary sources of bibliographic data. This platform are chosen for their capture of breadth, academic recognition, and quality and constancy of bibliographic records. Therefore, it is obvious that integration of two databases make literature review random and

extensive from view of obtaining detailed and complete papers, resulting in improving overall quality and strength of the process.

The PRISMA Protocol contains four complementary phases of integration including identification, screening, eligibility and data extraction. Stage of Identification: This stage involves the systematic retrieval and organization of literature according to a well-constructed search strategy. Then, in the screening phase, duplicate records were removed and reports that do not meet any of the three research objectives will be excluded. The remaining reference materials that clear this screening are then evaluated critically in the eligibility phase for compliance with the specific inclusion criteria.

Studies that are identified following the evaluation, undergo a data extraction process where key information is obtained from the study to be categorized and combined for assessment. The evidence successfully extracted is subsequently used to back a structured assessment and make salient interpretations that impact the empirical findings. The meticulous and reproducible application of all these steps increases the methodological precision and improves the validity of the findings derived from the research. In conclusion, the implementation of PRISMA protocol is significant in building a corpus related to knowledge that functions through systematic/evidence-based reviews mechanism. Not only does this methodological framework improve the quality of today's research but also provides a strong basis for future research and practical applications in these or similar fields.

### *Identification*

Adhering to the PRISMA protocol described by Page et al. In our study (2021), the identification step was done in a systematic way to scan and gather the scientific literature of servant leadership and innovative work behavior (IWB). In order to simplify this work, a planned-based systematic search strategy was employed using systematic keywords like 'servant leadership' and others related as the basis for searching. The strategy was enhanced by adding synonymous terms and concepts that had an intellectual link to the boundaries of the research.

The terms were chosen after a detailed examination of selected reference materials (both general and mental health focused) as well as previous empirical work. These terms were then combined to generate a broader search string in order to improve both accuracy and scope of acquisition literature. The search string was applied to two large bibliographic databases, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). All of the chosen databases contain comprehensive publication coverage, established authority within their field, and bibliographic data that has been shown to be robust.

The attempts that can be applied to literature searches so the in-depth and detailed activities will add as much effort as for obtaining studies on the topic that is relevant with respect to what research is aiming at. Both databases were selected based on the breadth of publication coverage, strong academic recognition and consistent quality of scientific sources (see Table 1). This analysis specifically focuses on publications published between 2022 and 2026 to explore the latest developments in the field of leadership and innovative work behavior. The selection of this time range was made based on the significant changes that have occurred in the post-pandemic work landscape, as organizations increasingly integrate digital technologies, implement hybrid work arrangements, and strengthen innovation-based strategies. These

developments have created a variety of new organizational demands, in addition to introducing increasingly dynamic leadership challenges and practices. By focusing on recent publications, this study is able to gather empirical evidence that describes the current state of organizations that continue to undergo transformation.

**Table 1: The Search String**

<b>Scopus</b>	TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ( "servant leader" OR ethical ) AND INNOVATIVE BEHAVIOUR ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2022 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2023 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2024 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2025 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2026 ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) ) Date of Access: December 2025
<b>Wos</b>	Servant leader AND innovative behavior Date of Access: June 2024

In addition, most previous studies have given extensive attention to earlier leadership and innovation literature, while the current study seeks to examine current development patterns, explore the evolution of leadership approaches, and identify facilitating factors and moderating variables that are increasingly gaining attention in influencing innovative work behaviour.

The search string applied in the Web of Science (WoS) database was found to be simpler than the search syntax used in Scopus. This is due to the ability of WoS to allow various search parameters, such as publication year, document type, language and database index, to be specified through filtering functions available after the initial search is performed. In contrast, Scopus requires most of these parameters to be entered directly into the search syntax structure. Therefore, although the search expressions used in WoS appear to be more compact, equivalent inclusion criteria regarding publication period, document category, language of writing and source quality standards remain applied throughout the literature collection and evaluation process. This approach is implemented to ensure procedural uniformity, increase the accuracy of the selection process, and maintain methodological consistency between the two databases used.

The literature search process yielded 1,058 relevant records, including 906 records from the Scopus database and 152 records from the Web of Science (WoS). The larger number of records in Scopus can be attributed to the breadth of interdisciplinary coverage offered by the database, particularly in the fields of management, leadership and organizational studies. The combination of these two databases has enriched the coverage of the literature review and improved the accuracy of the search process by reducing the possibility of bias caused by reliance on a single data source. In addition, the approach allows for the inclusion of high-impact articles and publications with extensive indexing levels in various academic databases. After the identification phase was completed, a total of 169 duplicate records were removed from the original data set, resulting in 889 unique records that were continued to the next stage of evaluation.

The remaining records were then screened by examining the titles and abstracts based on the specified inclusion criteria. As a result of this process, a total of 415 records were identified as meeting the requirements for further evaluation. At the same time, a total of 643 records were excluded because they did not meet the specified inclusion criteria. This step was implemented to ensure that only studies that were truly relevant to the scope and objectives of the research were retained for analysis at the next stage. The excluded records included publications that were not in English, published before 2022, or belonged to categories such as conference proceedings, books, book chapters, review articles and other forms of publication that did not match the scope of the current study.

These sources were not considered in the analysis as they may have a different level of scholarly validation than research articles that have undergone a thorough peer review process. In addition, studies that were outside the scope of the main disciplines were also eliminated to maintain conceptual coherence and ensure alignment with the research objectives. This step was implemented as the focus of the study was concentrated in the fields of social sciences, computer science and engineering.

Overall, the implementation of identification and screening procedures that were carried out in a systematic, structured and transparent manner helped to ensure that only studies with a high level of relevance, academic quality and recency were retained for analysis. This approach not only strengthen the methodological robustness of the research but also provide a solid fundamental for the implementation of the eligibility assessment stage and final selection in the overall systematic literature review process.

### Screening

A screening phase was applied as an additional stage to filter and hone the literature retrieved from the identification phase in line with the PRISMA protocol. At this stage the titles and abstracts of each article were critically appraised for initial relevance and appropriateness prior to progressing to the proceeding process. The data acquisition stage involved 263 records by Scopus and 152 records from WoS, resulting in 415 potential studies. All entries replicated in both the databases (169 duplicates, which were identified) were removed to maintain data integrity and avoid information duplications. This process guaranteed that all publication retained were unique and valuable addition to this systematic review study.

**Table 2: The Selection Criterion Is Searching**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
<b>Language</b>	English	Non-English
<b>Time line</b>	2022 – 2026	< 2022
<b>Literature type</b>	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
<b>Publication Stage</b>	Final	In Press
<b>Subject</b>	Sciences <i>Limited to</i> Business, Management and Accounting	others

As a result, 643 records were excluded in accordance with the predefined and stringent screening criteria. This exclusion process was imposed on the publications that failed to meet particular conditions such as because they were either written in non-English languages, published before 2022 or documents including conference proceedings, report studies like book chapters, review papers or newspaper articles were determined not to provide important individual-level data.

Furthermore, to ensure consistency in concept and integrity of theoretical development, the researcher also eliminated studies from other fields outside the realms of social science, computer science and engineering, given that this research was concerned with servant leadership and innovative work behavior. An exclusion decision was made to maximize the relevance, quality, and temporal relevance of the final data set that would be studied.

The screening phase is a pivotal aspect of enhancing the robustness of the research methodology by ensuring thorough literature coverage against stringent quality control. This method built a robust foundation for the upcoming eligibility evaluation stage, thus safeguarding the trustworthiness and uniqueness of every study chosen to be included in this systematic literature synthesis.

### ***Eligibility***

The qualifying assessment phase was undertaken according to the PRISMA protocol to validate studies that passed through the screening process, by a complete full-text review. At this stage, 246 articles were reviewed in detail with regards to their relevance to the research objectives, methodological appropriateness and significance of findings. Unlike the first phase, the full-text assessment provides a detailed analysis of each publication regarding its accepted definition of servant leadership, conceptual underpinning and theoretical framework, research methods employed and implications on servant leadership behaviour or innovativeness. Following the exhaustive review process, 216 articles were excluded based on various sound reasons. Several studies were placed outside of the primary area of research and others had weak alignment with key constructs or did not adequately address study objectives. Moreover, several publications could not be completely investigated because of the lack of full text access. Based on this filtering process, 30 studies satisfied all the specified eligibility criteria and were maintained for synthesis and analysis qualitative.

The last group of studies this study represents a more selective process involving both strong empirical foundations and conceptual relevance. This review incorporates zero-compromise eligibility criteria to ensure that only literature which is of high-impact and relevance gets integrated; doing so directly strengthens the credibility, consistency, validity, and overall scientific merit of this systematic literature review.

### ***Data Abstraction and Analysis***

In this study, an integrative analysis methodology was incorporated as the primary method of analysis in order to systematically triage and evaluate conflicting results across qualitative designs. This approach aimed to identify repeating themes and significant subthemes with the existing literature. The extraction of these themes began through a systematic process for data mining, which then laid a foundation for evaluation.

Out of 30 selected publications (Figure 1), statements, results and discussions were analysed for relevance to the topic presented in this study. Then, a systematic literature review was performed to assess the existing state of knowledge on the dimensions of servant leadership and innovative work behavior. Besides the empirical results and main conclusions of each study, special attention was given to methodological aspects adopted in the studies. The synthesis process involved extracting key themes, associations, and findings to develop an integrated view of the research landscape.

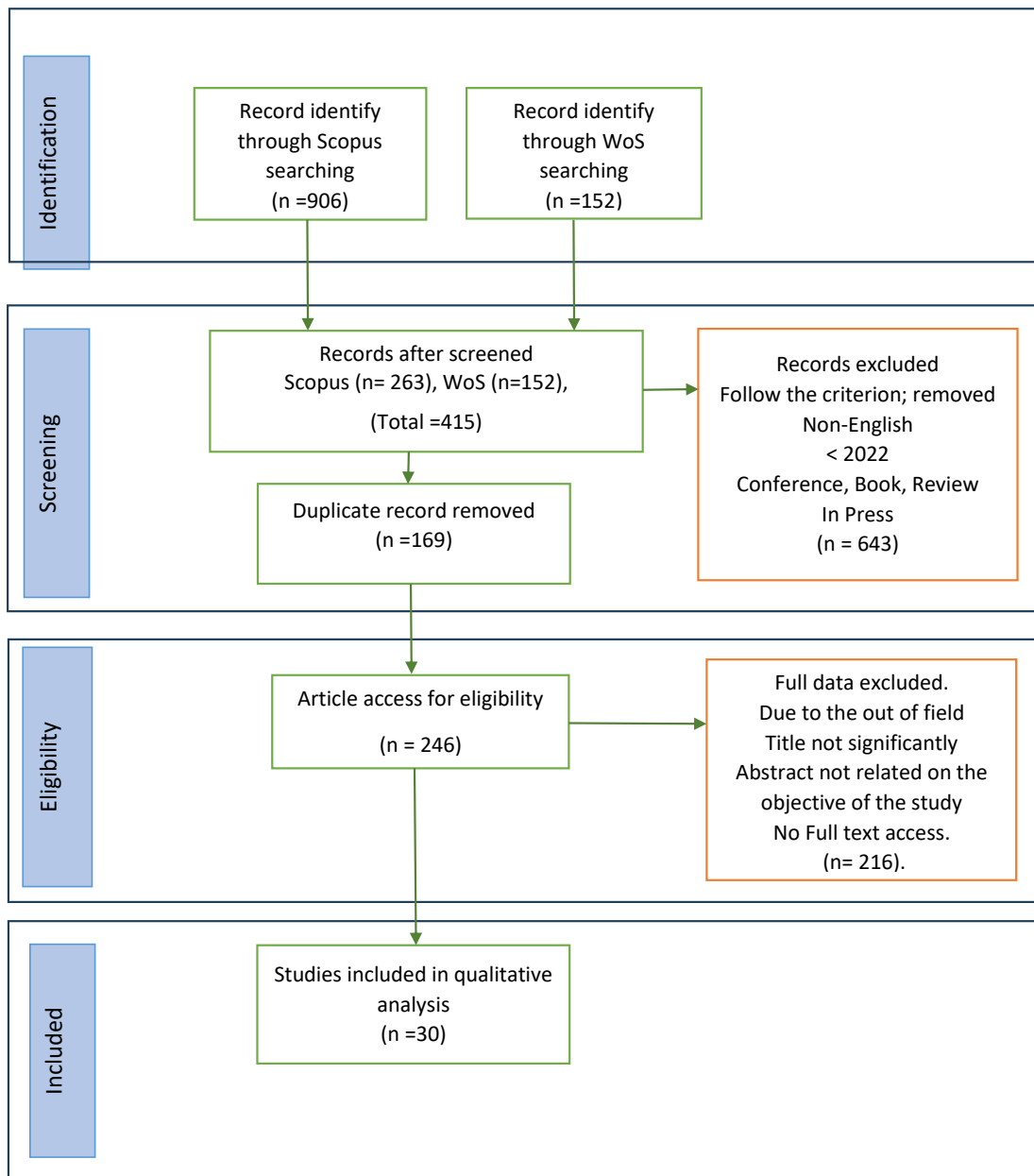


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of The Proposed Searching Study (Page et al., 2021)

Then the PI worked with co-authors iteratively to establish thematic categories, drawing on findings from reviewed literature. During the occurrence of analysis proper, detailed documentation was made to register interpretations, analytical reflections and analytic memos useful in interpreting the data. Throughout the analysis and synthesis of data, this systematic evidence base acted as our primary guide.

In order to reinforce the robustness of the analysis, the study performed an iterative cross-checking exercise with respect these themes in terms of how well they held (i.e. reliable) together compared with each other over time. Differences in interpretation of or concepts such as patient will be discussed among the group until consensus is reached. This iterative approach allowed the researcher to reconcile competing perspectives, clarify ambiguous use of terminology and improve the thematic framework as a whole. The derived themes were also re-analysed against the study aims and supporting evidence to confirm that concepts across the analysis were aligned. Refinements were made, where necessary, to enhance the thematic framework for clarity and consistency. Finally, the research questions were revised and refined for alignment with the overarching theme developed in step IV and also with the overall direction of the study.

The approach of this study incorporated, as a central strategy, integrative analysis methodology to evaluate and synthesize evidence from different designs, with a specific focus on the qualitative literature. The main aim of this approach is to identify the major themes and sub-themes pertaining to servant leadership and innovative work behavior. It started with a data identification and extraction process that was used to systematically develop thematic categories. 30 selected publications (Figure 1) are examined for statements, themes and empirical findings that aligned with the focus of this research. A formal assessment of risks of bias within studies, and an overall evaluation of the potential credibility as well as importance of evidence was also conducted at this stage.

After initial analysis, the principal investigator worked closely with co-authors to develop and codify the themes based on both empirical findings and contextual knowledge. A detailed audit trail of analytical memos and methodological notes was kept regarding both interpretations and reflections on analysis that were particularly influential in developing the data-driven analysis over time. The research team subsequently took the initial themes and verified how consistent they were with one another, the degree of coherence each had, as well as whether any of them contained similar underlying concepts. Differences in interpretation (if any) were resolved through formal and informal discussions and process of negotiation until consensus among team members was reached.

Thematic refinement was conducted, as applicable, to enhance conceptual clarity and for strong alignment within the analytical framework. The research questions were revised at this stage to ensure they remained aligned with the themes generated, methodological approach and objectives of the research. Therefore, present the research questions that arise as follows:

**RQ1:** How does ethical leadership influence employees' innovative work behaviour across organisational and sectoral contexts?

**RQ2:** Through which psychological, behavioural, and contextual mechanisms does leadership affect innovative work behaviour?

**RQ3:** How do alternative and emerging leadership approaches, including servant, participative, ambidextrous, and digital leadership, shape innovative work behaviour in contemporary organisational settings?

## Result and Discussion

The findings and discussion combine relevant findings from the analysed primary studies to promote a synthesis of leadership influencing innovative work behaviour in today organizations. The re-examination of the literature indicates that leadership does not go through a one-channel stream; rather, its variety in autonomy adopters for innovation emphasizes a niche domain shaped by various constructs running parallel albeit closely to each other. This discussion is organized around three high-level themes that emerged during the data analysis. First, ethical leadership is argued to constitute an indispensable antecedent of innovative work behaviour due to its role as a moral, relational and psychological enabler for employee innovation. Second, the literature also indicates mediating and moderating mechanisms through which leadership predicts innovation outcomes: resilience, work engagement, empowerment and psychological safety, voice behaviour and organizational support. Third, there is an increasing stream of research going beyond traditional models of leadership to study alternative and emerging forms of leadership (such as servant, participative, ambidextrous or digital leadership that may find a place in modern volatile technological development environment but also organizational culture entailing corporatist type hierarchy on old fashion bureaucracies—e.g. Collectively, these themes provide a cohesive framework for structuring the results and allow for a role-specific discussion of leadership mechanisms that impact innovative work-behaviour, which in turn sets up further detailed thematic analysis to follow.

### *Theme 1: Ethical Leadership as a Core Antecedent of Innovative Work Behaviour'*

Qualitative approach through content analysis of selected abstracts confirms that ethical leadership is one of the main drivers for inventive behaviour via building moral and psychological safe workplace. Well-established practices of ethical leaders in manufacturing, IT, education and service sectors show that modelling fairness, integrity and concern for the welfare of employees encourage discretionary behaviours required by innovation. For instance, Yue and et al., (2025), Thakur, (2024). Shows that ethical leadership promotes openness and moral safety for employees to speak out unconventional ideas without fear. Corroborating this, Albdareen et al. (2023) argue that ethical leadership directly enforces innovative behaviour through building trust and commitment, thereby confirming the role of leadership ethics as a vehicle instead of an adjunct to this effect.

It is well established in the literature that ethical leadership does not operate as an isolated phenomenon but rather works through relational and motivational pathways for stimulating innovation. Zhang and Khan, (2024) published studies converge on the concluding that ethical leaders nurture employees to be more willing to engage in innovation by amplifying affective commitment, job autonomy, and motivation. Such conditions garner greater ownership and accountability by employees towards organisational targets, which in turn leads to heightened innovativeness. The study also shows that ethical leadership activates social exchange mechanisms, employees pay back with the provision of ideas and initiatives to solve problems comports innovation is not a trait of individuals but a relational outcome.

In line with other recent findings, a key determinant in converting ethical leadership into innovative outcomes should be the employee voice and knowledge sharing. While Yue et al., (2025) and Thakur (2024) both illustrated that voice behaviour is legitimised by ethical leadership through the signals that speak up is incentivised and safeguarded. Thus, promoting voice behaviour enables knowledge transfer, ideation and co-creation. It is discovered that ethical leadership interacts with innovation climate to strengthen these effects in knowledge-intensive and intelligent manufacturing contexts, demonstrating that ethical values rooted at the leadership level create wider organisational norms which promote sustainable innovation through time. This emphasises the need for further research to investigate how ethical leadership bolsters psychological and social resources, which in turn enhance innovative work behaviour. Fundamentally, Rasheed et al., (2023) cover the relationship between ethical leadership and service innovation behaviour through the lens of psychological ownership and creative self-efficacy as positive mediators, with sleep quality as a boundary condition for endowing employees' capacity to innovate. This data is available until October 2023, and in Pham, (2024), shows that ethical leadership promotes group cohesiveness and openness to experience, which are essential for sustained innovation under project-based and public-sector conditions. These findings indicate that ethical leadership drives innovation by taking advantage of emotional and cognitive resources which support long-term engagement in creative activity.

Furthermore, ethical leadership influences the innovative behaviour depending on contextual contingencies as well. For example, Musenze & Mayende (2022) and Siswanti & Muafi (2022) find that both perceived organisational support or green organisational culture effectively moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and innovation especially in public institutions for the former and environmentally oriented SMEs for the latter. Likewise, Ullah et al., (2022) point to social capital as an important mediating mechanism, indicating that ethical leadership helps to create interpersonal networks which enable information exchange and collaborative innovation. Overall, the results suggest that ethical leadership is most effective in environments (and cultures) that support it by emphasizing ethics. Together, the abstracts provide converging evidence that ethical leadership is a strategic facilitator of innovative work behaviour, and this occurs by way of indirect influence on values, relational and psychological conditions within organisations. The principles of ethical leadership create an environment for trust, commitment, and openness that paves the way to innovation beyond simple compliance in various situations and sectors.

### ***Theme 2: Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms Explaining Leadership–Innovation Relationships***

The reviewed abstracts show that direct effects of leadership on innovative work behaviour indeed occur, but this only covers a part of the story as more mediating and moderating mechanisms are revealed. The most consistent pattern across controlled designs is the mediating role of work engagement as an underlying psychological mechanism that enables ethical leaders to drive innovation. Despite numerous insights regarding the indirect effects of ethical leadership on innovative work behaviour among university teachers in Bangladesh (Zargar et al., 2025) this study addresses that a higher-level engagement through perceived organizational support promotes ethical leadership-influenced innovative work behaviour. There are also other patterns in financial and service-sector settings, with work engagement acting as a mediator of leadership effects either directly or sequentially with other psychological resources (Uppathampracha & Liu, 2022). Together, these findings demonstrate

that when employees feel energized, engaged, and immersed in their work roles, leadership-driven innovation is sustained.

Moreover, psychological safety and psychological well-being become the essential mediating mechanisms for innovative behaviour that are closely related to engagement. Islam et al., (2024); Ahmad et al. (2021), and Liu et al. (2023) offer converging evidence that ethical leadership creates psychologically safe climates wherein employees feel safe engaging in interpersonal risks such as offering new ideas. In essence, psychological safety mitigates the negative effects of fear of retaliation and impediments to taking risk on the leadership–innovation nexus. The mechanism of indirect leadership effects has been explained further in terms of psychological well-being, particularly in high-pressure industries like the information technology industry (the setting that our research team studies), where ethical leadership relieves strain and, importantly, enables positive outcomes like sustaining innovative capacity over time (Islam et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies conceptualize emotional security as the basis for sustained creative involvement.

Another structural group connects to empowerment-processes (e.g. psychological empowerment, job crafting or job autonomy) Abuzaid et al. This paper contributes to a better understanding of the link between effective ethical leadership and innovative work behaviour by demonstrating that both psychological empowerment and job crafting fully mediate this relationship, and person–organization fit interacts with these pathways to enhance them. Furthermore, Asif et al. (2023) demonstrate job crafting as a mediating mechanism linking ethical leadership and innovation in organizations through self-leadership. Theoretical background All of those findings are conceptually supported by (Corzo-morales & Contreras-pacheco, 2024), which utilizes empowerment-related predictors based on self-determination and social exchange perspectives of the phenomenon, where employee agency being a strong predictor for innovation. Together, these studies suggest leaders encourage creativity by giving employees leeway and freedom to take ownership of the work process.

In addition to empowerment, individual psychological resources serve as an important mediator in the relationship of leadership–innovation. Brunetto, et al. The mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative work behaviour among non-profit organizations: Evidence from Pakistan (2024) Likewise, Uppathampracha (2022) finds that employee resilience is a significant mediator of the relationship between ethical leadership and both work engagement and innovation, where ethical leaders instill greater resilience among employees. Thus, these findings indicate that leadership plays a role in innovation as employees need to build adaptive and coping capacities particularly in an uncertain and continuously changing environment.

Voice behaviour and self-efficacy are identified as important underlying explanatory mechanisms in the abstracts as well. Jin. et al. f shows that ethical leadership fosters innovative behaviour through employee voice, and this indirect influence is enhanced by psychological safety. Lastly, Ahmad et al., (2025) revealed that psychological safety mediates the leadership effects while proactive personality moderated leader effectiveness which suggests that individual differences can substitute or enhance the effect of leadership. In parallel to these observations, Uppathampracha & Liu, (2022) show how self-efficacy mediates the leadership–innovation relationship and sequentially mediated by work engagement; that is an individual's confident belief of being able to address a particular task act as a guiding transformational force from ethical leadership in innovation.

Notably, the studies review emphasize context bound conditions that define when and how mediating mechanisms are effective. In the literature (Zargar et al., 2025; Abuzaid et al., 2024; (Liu et al., 2023), perceived organizational support, openness to experience, proactive personality, self-leadership and person–organization fit continually come up as moderators in relation to leadership on innovation. This moderation confirms the inherently contingent nature of leadership mechanisms, where organizational support systems and individual characteristics accentuate or assuage mediating pathways. Corzo-Morales and Contreras-Pacheco (2024) provide context for these results by showing how mediators fit in larger theoretical models, thus emphasizing the importance of integrative models for innovation.

In short, Theme 2 elucidates mechanisms underlying innovative work behaviour as a product of a sociotechnical interaction whereby leadership concurrently catalyses psychological, behavioural and contextual mechanisms. The impact of ethical and authentic leadership on innovation is not this straightforward because while it drives engagement, safety, empowerment, resilience and voice/efficacy (between leaders and followers) such relationships are more precise at the organizational or individual level. These epistemological constructs provide a proper level of abstraction for understanding the process through which leadership mechanisms enable innovative work behaviour across different organizational contexts.

### ***Theme 3 Alternative and Emerging Leadership Approaches Supporting Innovation***

The abstracts together deliver indication of a compelling change from established models, toward new directions in leadership development approaches that are more appropriate to the technology-rich and socially complex environments within which work today. Digital skills and AI-related competencies are increasingly seen as critical enablers of innovative behaviour. Lu, et al. They provide evidence of how artificial intelligence literacy boosts doctoral students' innovative behaviour in a socially responsible way via technology affordance and emotional engagement and reveal the leadership tasks of implementing ambition for a successful AI use (2025). In line with this idea area, AlBannai et al. (2025), digital leadership fosters innovation by synergising technology adoption with strategic planning and ethical risk management. These works imply that the vital to modern leaders' innovations lies in their ability to transform these digital assets into the essential cognitive and emotional engagement from organizational members.

Another major stream of findings explores servant leadership as a mechanism to foster innovation when people are included and power hierarchies mitigated. Qawasmeh et al. find that in high-power distance cultures, servant leadership promotes employee innovative behaviour as it lowers the sense of inequality in the workplace by enhancing feelings of importance to share opinions and provide input for new ideas (2025) Musenze et al. also draw similar conclusions In the public sector, Zhao et al. (2024) found that innovation climate mediated the servant leadership–innovative work behaviour relationship. Shim, et al. The role of servant leadership in enabling workgroup innovative behaviours when complemented by ethical and performance-oriented climates. Together, these studies suggest that servant leadership promotes innovation through structural changes to hierarchies and climate building which combine to legitimize employee input.

Ambidextrous and participative top management styles also turn out to be a major role in innovative industries, specifically in services and creative industries. Ajmal, et al. Parida, R. K., et al. (2025) Ambidextrous leadership: Investigating the mediating role of employee voice

behaviour and moderating effect of moral identity on innovative work behaviour in hotel industry. Hikmah et al. Findings: (2024) also find participative and servant leadership in both have a significant positive influence on innovative work behaviour, although psychological empowerment acts as a stronger mediating role for servant leader compared to participative leaders. These results suggest that leadership styles that exploit the balance between exploration and exploitation, and participative decision-making style among employees, play an important role in innovation only when employees feel morally aligned with their organization by acting transparently and inclusively.

Multiple abstracts also highlight that contextual and cultural contingencies impact how these alternative leadership approaches work. Qawasmeh et al. 2025 LaBorde & Mone, 2023; Zhao et al., (2023) point out that high-power distance cultures shape the translation of servant leadership to innovative behaviour and AlBannai et al. (2025) argue that the effectiveness of digital leadership is contingent upon organizations being ready to change. Musenze et al. (2024) support this perspective by showing how innovation climate acts as a critical contextual mechanism that allows servant leadership to promote innovation among public institutions. Taken in their totality, these studies imply that alternative leadership styles may only be successful when they are consistent with cultural norms, institutional structures, and environmental demands.

Lastly, the abstracts agree on the argument that alternative and emergent forms of leading innovations promote voice, engagement and ethical consciousness. Ajmal et al. (2025) and Shim et al. (2023) emphasize the intermediary role of voice behaviour and ethical climate in transforming leadership practices into innovative results. Lu et al. Regarding argument (3), Jewkes et al. Taken together, these findings suggest that innovation emerges most readily in organizations with leadership approaches that welcome sometimes messy openness, ethical reflection, and engagement throughout the organization. Ultimately, alternative and emerging leadership models are critical complements to ethical leadership, especially in technology-dominated, service-oriented, and internationally diverse work environments.

## Conclusion

This study conducts a systematic literature review collecting and synthesising contemporary empirical evidence about the mechanisms through which leaders influence innovative work behaviour in modern organisations. This review utilised the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021) and consisted of a database analysis, specifically Scopus and Web of Science, with inclusion criteria being studies published between the years of 2022 to 2026 that were peer-reviewed. Here are three lessons from this study has extracted from this information. Most of the antecedent of innovative work behaviour: i) ethical leadership, usually treated as an important precursor for understanding the dominant effect that fairness and trust have on building psychological safety climate in organizations. Second, leadership affects innovation indirectly, mainly through mediating mechanisms work engagement, psychological safety, and empowerment or resilience as well as voice behaviour and self-efficacy being central mediators while contextual factors are important in shaping these relationships. Thirdly, as organizations are increasingly technology-driven and complex you must adopt alternative and emerging leadership models (such as servant, participative, ambidextrous or digital leaders).

The contribution of this review to the literature is a synthesis of fragmented research into a theoretically coherent framework that furthers knowledge on leadership in its role as an enabler of innovative work behaviour through interlinked motivational, behavioural and contextual mechanisms. Thus, the integrated and contemporary understanding of leadership-enabled innovation emerges by juxtaposing moral leadership perspectives with new directions of collaborative forms of leading. At a practical level, these results push organizations in direction of organisational behaviour such as leadership styles associated with ethics, empowerment and supportive climate. Leadership development initiatives shall incorporate digital competencies and participative approaches in line with emerging business ecosystems which is one of the hard skill sets alongside Technical Skill set.

Despite these contributions, this study has some limitations. The limitations on the English-language manuscript as well as collection from two databases has become the narrow scope for this research. It also only runs to a specific period of time. What could be suggested are, to strengthen future research, it could be run to a broaden database, execute to a longitudinal and hierarchical approach. Other than that, to add the hypothesizes mediator regarding the culture and context that led to the effectiveness on leadership moderation. In the nutshell, this study has contributed to an integrated and empirical synthesis of evidence that justify some fundamental concept while justifying the practical recommendations for harnessing innovative work behaviour and establishing leadership as a dynamic source of innovation at this critical stage in this era.

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