

Fostering employees' intrapreneurial behaviors by servant leadership: the mediating role of thriving at work and moderating role of proactive personality

Qinyi Fang, Lixin Chen and Qingxiong Derek Weng

School of Management, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, China

Abstract

Purpose – Intrapreneurial behaviors, defined as entrepreneurial activities conducted by employees in existing organizations, are an emerging research topic in entrepreneurship and are regarded as fundamental for the renewal and growth of organizations. Based on the socially embedded model of thriving at work, this study examines how and when servant leadership influences employees' intrapreneurial behaviors.

Design/methodology/approach – We used a three-wave survey and collected data from full-time employees working in different industries in China.

Findings – Results revealed that servant leadership positively affected intrapreneurial behavior through employees' thriving at work. Moreover, the effect of servant leadership on thriving at work was stronger for employees high in proactive personality.

Originality/value – Based on the socially embedded model of thriving at work, we propose that the contextual factor (i.e. servant leadership) and individual factor (i.e. proactive personality) jointly influence employees' thriving experience, which stimulates intrapreneurial behavior.

Keywords Servant leadership, Thriving at work, Proactive personality, Intrapreneurial behavior

Paper type Research article

Introduction

In an increasingly turbulent and competitive business environment, organizations face intense pressure to reassess their strategies, exploit new business opportunities, and drive continuous innovation (Rabl *et al.*, 2023). Amid these challenges, intrapreneurial behaviors, defined as entrepreneurial behaviors within existing organizations initiated by employees—are recognized as critical for organizational renewal and sustainability (de Jong *et al.*, 2015). Given the strategic importance of employees' intrapreneurial behavior, a pivotal question arises: *What motivates employees to engage in intrapreneurship?* As intrapreneurship often falls outside employees' formal job requirements (Gorgievski *et al.*, 2023), the decision to opt for intrapreneurship “remains an individual and personal decision” (Rigtering and Weitzel, 2013, p. 8) because intrapreneurship may not be a standard part of employees' job descriptions (Gorgievski *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, the extant literature on the antecedents of employees' intrapreneurial behaviors has primarily focused on individual-level factors such as age (Aydin *et al.*, 2024), the Big Five personality (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2020), and cognitive style (Marques *et al.*, 2022).

However, examining organizational-level factors is equally essential to clarify the antecedents of intrapreneurial behaviors (Wan and Liu, 2021). While some studies have investigated the effects of organizational practices (e.g. high-performance work system and management support for innovation; Rabl *et al.*, 2023), Usman *et al.* (2021a) highlighted a notable gap in research on leadership-intrapreneurship linkage. Substantial studies (e.g. Lu *et al.*, 2023) underscore the role of leadership on employees' behaviors, particularly extra-role behaviors. However, only a limited number of studies have explored the role of leadership in



intrapreneurial behavior. These studies have demonstrated that positive leadership styles, such as transformational leadership (Klein, 2023) and authentic leadership (Edu Valsania *et al.*, 2016), positively relate to employees' intrapreneurial behaviors, thereby calling for further exploration of other positive leadership styles (Usman *et al.*, 2021a).

Servant leadership is characterized by its unique focus on prioritizing employees' needs, growth, and well-being (Eva *et al.*, 2019), which may demonstrate incremental variance in explaining employee outcomes beyond transformational and authentic leadership. Specifically, servant leaders emphasize employee empowerment, sharing information openly, cultivating psychological safety (Kumar *et al.*, 2024), and creating a distinct organizational climate that may facilitate proactive engagement in intrapreneurial initiatives. However, it is surprising that no study has examined the relationship between servant leadership and intrapreneurial behaviors. Thus, this study aims to fill this research gap by empirically examining whether servant leadership fosters employees' intrapreneurial behaviors. To deepen theoretical insights into this relationship, this study also explores the mechanisms (how) and boundary conditions (when) through which servant leadership drives intrapreneurship.

What theoretical mechanism explains why employees under servant leadership may exhibit intrapreneurial behaviors? Studies conducted by Xu and Wang (2020) and Jang *et al.* (2023) found that servant leadership promotes thriving at work, a self-adapted and psychological state in which individuals experience a sense of vitality and learning (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Thriving employees are in a state of continual learning and acquisition of domain-related knowledge and skills (Porath *et al.*, 2012), thus enhancing their capacity to explore, develop, and implement novel and innovative ideas (Zhang *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, building on the socially embedded model of thriving at work (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005), we theorize that servant leadership provides a work context in which employees experience thriving at work, thereby enabling them to engage in intrapreneurial behaviors.

While Spreitzer *et al.* (2005) highlighted that contextual factors can facilitate or hinder employees' thriving, they also noted the role of individual traits in predisposing employees to thrive more than others do. However, research on how contextual (e.g. leadership) and individual factors (e.g. personality) jointly influence employees' thriving at work remains limited (e.g. Cao *et al.*, 2024). Proactive personality, defined as a disposition to "scan for opportunities, show initiative, take action, and persevere until they reach closure by bringing about change" (Bateman and Crant, 1993, p. 105), represents a critical yet underexplored individual factor. Prior work has indicated that employees with a proactive personality and servant leaders are well-matched to generate optimal benefits for employees (Xu *et al.*, 2022). Responding to recent calls for integrative models, the present study examined whether proactive personality moderates the effect of servant leadership on thriving and subsequent intrapreneurial behaviors. We propose that employees' proactive personality amplifies the positive link between servant leadership and thriving such that employees with highly proactive personalities are more likely to thrive under servant leadership, thereby exhibiting more intrapreneurial behaviors. The theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Servant leadership and intrapreneurial behavior

Intrapreneurial entrepreneurship refers to employees' autonomous initiatives to drive innovation within organizational boundaries (Farrukh and Ghazzawi, 2024). It encompasses

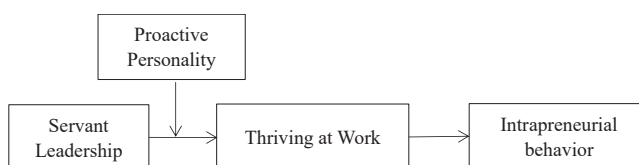


Figure 1. Hypothesized model. Source: Authors' own work

opportunity recognition, risk taking, and resource mobilization (Neessen *et al.*, 2019). Existing leadership theories explain intrapreneurial behavior as a response to external pressures (i.e. leader vision, ethical guidance, and organizational goals), such as transformational leaders who drive intrapreneurial behavior primarily through vision and inspiration. Employees are motivated to innovate because they are consistent with the leader's vision.

While transformational leadership focuses on achieving organizational goals through motivated employees, servant leadership focuses on employees' needs, growth, and professional development (Rabiul *et al.*, 2023). For transformational leadership, employees are "a means to an end," whereas, for servant leadership, the fulfillment of employees' needs is "an end in itself" (Sendjaya and Cooper, 2011). Moreover, authentic leadership does not include task focus or concern for a larger community (Liden *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, Schowalter and Volmer (2023) posited that servant leadership is more comprehensive than authentic leadership. In addition, although both ethical and servant leadership have a moral component, servant leadership is more inclusive (Newman *et al.*, 2017), given its stress on behaving ethically and demonstrating concern for a wider community.

Previous studies (Eva *et al.*, 2019; Rabiul *et al.*, 2023) have demonstrated that servant leadership could explain the significantly incremental variance of individual outcomes (e.g. general job satisfaction, commitment, job performance, and extra-role behavior) beyond transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership. By focusing on the effect of servant leadership, this study can advance the nomological networks of the antecedents of employees' intrapreneurial behaviors. Intrapreneurship flourishes in environments with high autonomy and psychological safety (Martín-Rojas *et al.*, 2017). In this study, we proposed that servant leadership positively affects employees' intrapreneurial behaviors by enhancing intrinsic motivation and fostering psychological safety in the workplace (Su *et al.*, 2020). This is because servant leaders prioritize the needs of their followers, and emphasize empowerment and community building (Liden *et al.*, 2015). We hypothesize that:

H1. Servant leadership is positively associated with employees' intrapreneurial behavior.

Socially embedded model of thriving at work

In the field of workplace psychology, Spreitzer *et al.* (2005) extended the concept of embeddedness by integrating it with self-determination theory to formulate a socially embedded model of thriving at work. This model aims to elucidate how individuals achieve psychological prosperity, termed thriving, through social interactions and resource acquisition in the workplace. Thriving at work is defined as a dual experience of vitality and learning, which arises not only from dispositional traits, but also from dynamic interactions between individuals and their organizational environment.

Vitality refers to the experience of feeling energetic, enthusiastic, and alive, typically arising when individuals perceive that they possess sufficient personal resources to engage with their work (Li *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, learning captures a sense of self-improvement and growth, reflecting an individual's confidence in acquiring and applying new knowledge and skills (Yadav *et al.*, 2017). Together, these two dimensions encompass the affective and cognitive components of thriving, and are regarded as mutually reinforcing and indispensable. Through its contextual embeddedness mechanism, the model posits that organizational conditions such as leadership support, job autonomy, and a trust-based culture, enable employees to thrive by providing both structural and relational resources. This underscores the inherently dynamic and reciprocal nature of workplace thriving.

Taken together, the socially embedded model of thriving at work offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how social contexts shape individual flourishing.

Servant leadership and thriving at work

In their socially embedded model of thriving at work, Spreitzer *et al.* (2005) proposed that contextual features (i.e. decision-making discretion, broad information sharing, and climate of trust and respect) can promote more agentic behavior (e.g. exploration) that ultimately promotes thriving at work. We build on this framework and argue that servant leadership facilitates thriving at work by encouraging these three agentic behaviors (i.e. task focus, exploration, and heedful relating).

First, task focus reflects the degree to which individuals concentrate on fulfilling their assigned responsibilities (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Servant leaders, who emphasize employee growth and prioritize followers' needs (Liden *et al.*, 2015), cultivate a sense of psychological meaningfulness at work. This sense of meaning motivates employees to stay focused and committed to their tasks, which in turn enhances vitality and fosters learning (Usman *et al.*, 2021b). Conversely, failure to complete tasks may generate negative affect and erode confidence, undermining the experience of thriving (Shahid *et al.*, 2021).

Second, exploration involves experimentation, risk-taking, discovery, and innovation behaviors, which help people stretch and grow in new directions (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Servant leaders empower their employees by giving them considerable job autonomy and delegating decision-making authority (Liden *et al.*, 2015). Such empowering leadership behaviors promote employees' psychological safety, increase their trust in leaders, and stimulate engagement in more exploratory behaviors (Kumar *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, they foster a psychologically safe and collaborative environment that enhances information sharing and reduces knowledge-hiding behaviors (Usman *et al.*, 2024), thereby stimulating curiosity, innovation, and ultimately, the experience of thriving.

Third, heedful relating refers to attentive cooperative behaviors aimed at supporting others in pursuit of shared goals (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Servant leaders strengthen relational resources by providing emotional support, modeling ethical behavior, and encouraging follower development (Eva *et al.*, 2019). These actions promote high-quality interpersonal relationships, foster connectedness, and cultivate a helping culture (Usman *et al.*, 2024), which, in turn, contributes to both vitality and learning (Shahid *et al.*, 2021). In sum, through these agentic work behaviors, servant leadership enables employees to thrive by providing meaningful work, stimulating innovation, and nurturing high-quality social interaction. Thus, we propose that:

H2. Servant leadership is positively associated with thriving at work.

Thriving at work and intrapreneurial behavior

Spreitzer *et al.* (2005) posited that employees who experience thriving at work are more likely to engage in agentic behaviors to sustain their thriving over time. In this study, we focus on a specific type of agentic behavior, intrapreneurial behavior, which refers to self-initiated, innovative, and risk-taking activities aimed at improving organizational functioning (de Jong *et al.*, 2015). Innovativeness captures various stages of the innovation process, including opportunity exploitation, idea generation, championing, and implementation. Proactiveness refers to employees' anticipation of and action on potential changes, challenges, and future needs that may lead to new opportunities. Risk taking refers to employees' willingness to venture into task activities with unknown or uncertain outcomes. In this study, we postulated that thriving at work positively relates to employees' intrapreneurial behaviors.

First, thriving at work promotes employee innovativeness. Innovativeness requires broader domain-specific expertise (Amabile, 1988), and learning can provide a foundation for developing expertise. Thriving employees continuously learn and acquire new expertise, allowing them to develop, discuss, and implement innovative ideas (Zhang *et al.*, 2023). According to broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), the vitality component of thriving is also an important contributor to employee innovativeness. Specifically, positive emotions (e.g. vitality) can broaden employees' range of attention, thoughts, and actions,

enabling them to make higher-level connections and generate novel ideas (Shahid *et al.*, 2021). Previous studies (e.g. Zhang *et al.*, 2023) have shown that thriving at work was positively related to employees' creativity and innovative behaviors.

Second, thriving employees are motivated to engage in proactive behavior. Thriving employees who feel worthy, competent, and capable of performing their work are more likely to continually improve and develop (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, the vitality component of thriving suggests that employees who feel vital at work tend to remain engaged in their work tasks (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005), are more sensitive to new opportunities, and take initiatives. In addition, scholars have found that employees' experience of vitality and learning encourages them to reciprocate with their organizations by engaging in proactive behaviors (Wu *et al.*, 2023).

Third, thriving at work enables employees to engage in risk-taking behaviors. From a componential perspective, vitality can provide employees with the necessary energy at work, thus enabling them to believe in their energetic perseverance in coping with challenging situations (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, since vitality represents an affective state in which one feels energized and has a zest for work, Jiang *et al.* (2021) found that employees who feel vital at work are willing to take task risks to cope with these undesirable situations. In addition, the knowledge and expertise acquired in learning processes boost employees' sense of competence and efficacy (Porath *et al.*, 2012), leading them to feel less anxious about taking risks and show more willingness to challenge existing routines and conventions (Zhang *et al.*, 2023). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H3. Thriving at work is positively associated with employees' intrapreneurial behaviors.

The mediating role of thriving at work

Based on the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005), contextual factors (e.g. servant leadership) promote thriving by facilitating employees' agentic behaviors. Specifically, the model proposes a positive gain spiral, suggesting employees' agentic behaviors and the resources produced in "the doing of work" (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005, p. 537). The resources (e.g. knowledge and relational resources) produced by agentic behaviors in "the doing of work" can further facilitate thriving at work. Thus, agentic behaviors are considered the engine of thriving at work. Under servant leadership, employees perceive supportive contextual features, including empowerment, personalized support, and encouragement of growth (Liden *et al.*, 2015). These perceived features motivate employees to engage in agentic behaviors, such as task focus, exploration, and heedful relating, generating informational, cognitive, and relational resources (Rabiul *et al.*, 2023), thereby facilitating both the cognitive (learning) and affective (vitality) dimensions of thriving.

Regarding the cognitive component, thriving at work incorporates continuous learning experiences, referring to the cognitive dimension of acquiring, integrating, and utilizing new knowledge and skills in the workplace (Porath *et al.*, 2012). Continuous learning enhances employees' cognitive abilities, including problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability to changing circumstances (Wallace *et al.*, 2016). Empirical evidence indicates that cognitive enhancement and learning-oriented behaviors significantly improve employees' self-perceived competence and self-efficacy (Lu *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, these elevated cognitive perceptions enable employees to embrace new challenges, proactively innovate, and explore entrepreneurial opportunities within the organization. Employees with greater cognitive resources are better equipped to perceive opportunities, evaluate their feasibility, and calculate the risks associated with intrapreneurial initiatives (Mustafa *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, intrapreneurial behavior inherently involves navigating uncertainty, creatively addressing novel problems, and making innovative contributions (Elert and Stenkula, 2022). The cognitive aspect of thriving, characterized by continual knowledge acquisition, critical analysis, and adaptive problem solving (Ma *et al.*, 2023), provides essential intellectual capital for successful intrapreneurial activities. Thus, learning fosters employees' belief in their

ability to handle complexity and uncertainty, encouraging them to actively engage in intrapreneurial behavior.

Furthermore, the vitality dimension of thriving complements the cognitive mechanism. The affective experience of vitality ignites positive emotions, expands attention, and enhances divergent thinking (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005), providing the energy and enthusiasm necessary for intrapreneurial engagement (Gorgievski *et al.*, 2023). Intrapreneurial behavior requires positive psychological resources to overcome fear of risk and uncertainty (Ewert and Stenkula, 2022). In this study, thriving at work represents a positive psychological state in which employees experience both a sense of learning and vitality (Porath *et al.*, 2012). Learning at work enables employees to acquire new knowledge and skills, which enhances their perceptions of competence and self-efficacy (Lu *et al.*, 2023) and then provides the “can-do” motivation for intrapreneurial behavior. Carmeli and Spreitzer (2009) noted that when employees thrive, their experience of energy and aliveness has a direct influence on organizational behaviors; individuals have more energy and motivation to engage in innovative behaviors. In addition, existing empirical studies have also recognized thriving at work as a critical mediating mechanism linking leadership practices to desirable employee behaviors (Shahid *et al.*, 2021). Thus,

- H4. Thriving at work mediates the positive relationship between servant leadership and intrapreneurial behavior.

The moderating role of proactive personality

In the leadership literature, proactive personality is seen as an individual trait that tends to take proactive action, shape the environment, and drive change (Bateman and Crant, 1993). This trait marks individuals who actively pursue improvements rather than passively adapting to circumstances. The socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005) posits that certain agentic behaviors are the engines of thriving at work. According to this model, employees high in proactive personality are more predisposed to thriving because they tend to engage in agentic behaviors that can shape the experience of thriving (Porath *et al.*, 2012). Specifically, employees with highly proactive personalities tend to demonstrate exceptional initiative and perseverance (Crant and Bateman, 2000). The tendency to be involved in work can cause employees to immerse themselves and focus on their job tasks. In addition, employees high in proactive personalities do not passively adapt to or endure undesirable work conditions but rather continuously seize opportunities and develop creative and novel solutions to improve their current conditions (Nielsen *et al.*, 2023). Finally, because employees with higher proactive personalities tend to pursue opportunities for self-development (Crant and Bateman, 2000), they are motivated to build networks with others who possess influence or authority to help them achieve career goals by providing support, information, or other resources. Therefore, employees with highly proactive personalities are more likely to thrive by exhibiting these agentic behaviors.

Service leadership emphasizes serving others, emotional support, and developmental orientation (Liden *et al.*, 2014). This type of leadership style can provide proactive personality with a “resource network” (such as empowerment, emotional care, and development opportunities) to enhance their intrinsic motivation and energy state (Wang *et al.*, 2019b). Studies have shown that proactive personality moderates the effectiveness of leadership styles. Najam and Mustamil (2022) found that, in higher education settings, servant leadership yields greater follower resilience when paired with a highly proactive personality. However, this matching is not unconditional. Although employees with proactive personalities may benefit more from supportive leadership, some scholars argue that excessive intervention could threaten their perceived autonomy (Parker and Collins, 2010). In high-support contexts, employees with proactive personalities may experience tension or even resource strain, especially when their efforts are impeded or unmet by organizational systems (Cangiano *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2019b). They may face role overload or frustration when organizational

responses fall short of expectations. Thus, we speculate that proactive personality serves as a key boundary condition. Employees high in proactive personality are more likely to benefit from servant leadership and experience higher levels of thriving, as they translate leader-provided resources into agentic behaviors. By contrast, employees with low proactive personalities may be less responsive to servant leadership or even overwhelmed by their intensity (Wang *et al.*, 2019a). A prior study (Newman *et al.*, 2017) proposed that proactive personality and servant leadership are well-matched to facilitate optimal benefits for employees' development, which aligns with this perspective.

- H5. Proactive personality positively moderates the relationship between servant leadership and thriving at work, such that the relationship is stronger for employees high in proactive personality.

Method

Participants and procedure

To test our hypotheses, we recruited participants from *Credamo*, which is a widely used data-collection platform in China equivalent to *Amazon Mechanical Turk*. *Credamo* is a professional online survey service company with over three million samples, covering all of China's provinces, cities, and regions (Zhou *et al.*, 2024). Using the *Credamo* smart research platform, we randomly sourced participants from every province and region in China, as well as from a variety of industries and organizations, which helps to increase the external validity of our findings (Lei, 2024). Furthermore, the *Credamo* platform has been demonstrated to effectively exclude individuals who have previously provided low-quality responses (Pan *et al.*, 2024), and has been widely adopted in research. Numerous studies have demonstrated that using *Credamo* to recruit participants yields high-quality data (Chen *et al.*, 2025; Huang *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, the survey samples in this study were diverse and representative, to some extent.

Eligible participants had to be full-time employees, work with a direct manager, and provide truthful and complete responses to the questionnaire. We used several procedural controls to minimize the common method variance (CMV). Firstly, cover letters were attached to the survey questionnaires to ensure confidentiality and academic purposes. Secondly, to reduce the likelihood of CMV infection, we adopted a time-lagged research design to collect data. Podsakoff and colleagues (2012) suggest that the optimal temporal interval for data collection should be neither too long nor too short. Prior studies (e.g. Chen and Weng, 2023) have chosen a two-week interval to examine the effects of leadership styles on employees' behaviors. Therefore, the present study used a three-wave survey design to collect data, with each wave occurring two weeks apart [1].

At Time 1, we invited 550 participants to complete a survey questionnaire covering their demographic information, proactive personality, perceptions of their supervisors' servant leadership, and transformational leadership. We obtained 497 valid responses (response rate = 90.364%). Two weeks later, at Time 2, we required these 497 participants to rate their experience of thriving at work and received 453 completed responses (response rate = 91.147%). The Time 3 survey assessing intrapreneurial behavior was distributed two weeks after Time 2 to these 453 participants who had provided usable responses at Time 2, and we obtained 384 valid responses (response rate = 84.768%). A post hoc power analysis was conducted using *G*Power* 3.1 to ascertain the adequacy of the final number of participants in providing the requisite statistical power for this study. The application of the *F*-test with an effect size of 0.33, an alpha error probability of 0.05, and a final number of 384 participants, indicated that the final number of participants would provide statistical power in excess of 0.99. This value is greater than the 0.80 threshold recommended in previous studies (Cohen, 1988).

The final sample was 33.854% female, with a mean organizational tenure of 4.773 years (SD = 4.271). The average age of the participants was 30.720 years (SD = 6.432), with a

minimum of 21 years and a maximum of 55. Regarding education level, 66.667% a bachelor's degree. In terms of the job positions, 38.281% held non-managerial positions.

Measures

The participants responded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for our key variables.

Servant leadership. We used the seven-item scale from [Liden et al. \(2015\)](#) to assess servant leadership, which was later used by [Chen et al. \(2024\)](#) in the Chinese context. A sample item was "My leader makes my career development a priority." The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.923.

Proactive personality. The ten-item scale of [Seibert et al. \(1999\)](#) was applied to measure proactive personality. This scale was used in the Chinese context by [Weng and Chen \(2025\)](#). A sample item was "No matter what the odds, if I believe in something, I will make it happen." The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.930.

Thriving at work. We measured thriving at work using the ten-item scale developed by [Porath et al. \(2012\)](#). This measure has also been used by [Chen et al. \(2024\)](#) in the Chinese context. Sample items included "I see myself continually improving" (learning) and "I feel alert and awake" (vitality). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.930.

Intrapreneurial behavior. The nine-item scale of [de Jong et al. \(2015\)](#) was used to assess intrapreneurial behavior. This scale was confirmed as suitable for the Chinese setting by [Ye et al. \(2023\)](#). Sample items were "generating new ideas" (innovativeness), "putting effort in pursuing new business opportunities" (proactiveness), and "taking risks in his/her job" (risk-taking). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.898.

Control variables. In line with prior studies ([Edú Valsania et al., 2016](#); [Klein, 2023](#)), we controlled for participants' gender (male = 0, female = 1), age (in years), educational level (high school diploma or less = 0, junior college degree = 1, bachelor's degree = 2 and graduate degree = 3), job position (non-managerial employees = 0, entry-level managers = 1, mid-level managers = 2, and senior-level managers = 3), and organizational tenure (in years) because of their potential effects on intrapreneurial behavior. Moreover, [Eve et al. \(2019\)](#) noted that "there might be a common overlap between servant leadership and transformational leadership given that both focus on followers' needs" (p. 113). Furthermore, previous studies ([Huyhn, 2021](#); [Moriano et al., 2014](#)) have shown that transformational leadership is positively related to employees' intrapreneurial behavior. Therefore, this study controlled for transformational leadership to examine whether servant leadership shows incremental validity beyond transformational leadership in predicting employees' intrapreneurial behavior. We used an eleven-item scale to measure transformational leadership based on [Murphy and Anderson \(2020\)](#). A sample item was "S/he talks enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished." The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.925.

Results

Descriptive statistical analysis

The descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables are listed in [Table 1](#).

Common method variance

To reduce concerns about the CMV, we conducted Harman's one-factor test. The total variance explained by the first factor was 25.852% (less than 50%), suggesting a low CMV risk in our study. Additionally, we adopted an unmeasured latent common method factor (ULCMF) to assess CMV. As shown in [Table 2](#), the differences in CFI ($\Delta CFI = 0.019$) and TLI ($\Delta TLI = 0.017$) between the five-factor model (CFI = 0.928, TLI = 0.924) and the ULCMF model (CFI = 0.947, TLI = 0.941) were below the suggested rule of thumb of 0.05 ([Bagozzi](#)

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	1.340	0.474	–									
2. Age	30.720	6.432	–0.020	–								
3. Education	2.790	0.652	–0.028	–0.010	–							
4. Position	1.870	0.821	–0.166 ^a	0.001	0.085	–						
5. Organizational tenure	4.773	4.271	–0.045	0.445 ^a	–0.096	0.096	–					
6. Transformational leadership	3.822	0.714	0.057	0.093	0.072	–0.046	0.080	0.755				
7. Servant leadership	3.815	0.809	0.060	0.067	0.062	–0.007	0.092	0.247 ^a	0.827			
8. Thriving at work	3.576	0.810	0.123 ^c	0.020	–0.035	–0.168 ^a	–0.027	0.290 ^a	0.301 ^a	0.784		
9. PP	3.662	0.794	–0.021	–0.001	–0.068	–0.041	–0.005	0.247 ^a	0.261 ^a	0.368 ^a	0.783	
10. Intrapreneurial behavior	3.675	0.704	–0.012	0.048	0.103 ^c	0.022	0.045	0.267 ^a	0.322 ^a	0.283 ^a	0.210 ^a	0.742

Note(s): $N = 384$; ^a $p < 0.001$, ^b $p < 0.01$ ^c $p < 0.05$. Proactive personality = PP. The figures in italics are the square roots of the AVE values

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis and model comparison

Model test	Descriptions	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Model 1	Five factors: servant leadership, PP, thriving at work, transformational leadership, and intrapreneurial behavior	1732.359	979	1.770	0.929	0.924	0.928	0.049
Model 2	Four factors: servant leadership and PP were combined into one factor	3323.403	983	3.381	0.778	0.765	0.777	0.079
Model 3	Three factors: servant leadership and PP were combined into one factor; thriving at work and transformational leadership were combined into one factor	5296.484	1,031	5.137	0.608	0.587	0.607	0.104
Model 4	Two factors: servant leadership and PP were combined into one factor; thriving at work, transformational leadership, and intrapreneurial behavior were combined into one factor	6516.983	1,033	6.309	0.496	0.471	0.494	0.118
Model 5	One factor: servant leadership, PP, thriving at work, transformational leadership, and intrapreneurial behavior were combined into one factor	7923.745	1,034	7.663	0.367	0.336	0.365	0.132
Model 6	Common method factor model: servant leadership, PP, thriving at work, transformational leadership, intrapreneurial behavior, unmeasured latent common method factor	1487.003	933	1.594	0.948	0.941	0.947	0.039

Note(s): $N = 384$. Proactive personality = PP
Source(s): Authors' own work

and Yi, 1990; Gong *et al.*, 2022), suggesting that there were no significant differences in these results. Taken together, the CMV did not cause serious issues in our results.

Evaluation of the measurement model

Convergent reliability. We first evaluated the convergent validity based on the standardized factor loadings of each item, the composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The standard factor loadings of each item of transformational leadership, servant leadership, proactive personality, thriving at work, and intrapreneurial behavior were in the range of 0.701–0.806, 0.795–0.871, 0.747–0.829, 0.734–0.824, and 0.709–0.770, respectively, which were greater than 0.50. The CR values for transformational leadership, servant leadership, proactive personality, thriving at work, and intrapreneurial behavior were

0.936, 0.938, 0.941, 0.941, and 0.917, respectively, which exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 as proposed by [Henseler et al. \(2009\)](#). The AVE values for transformational leadership, servant leadership, proactive personality, thriving at work, and intrapreneurial behavior were 0.570, 0.684, 0.613, 0.615, and 0.550, respectively, which were greater than the required cut-off of 0.5 ([Hair et al., 2021](#)). Together, these values confirmed the satisfactory convergent validity of each construct.

Discriminant validity. [Fornell and Larcker's \(1981\)](#) criterion, which suggests that the square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than its respective interconstruct correlations with other constructs, was used to assess discriminant validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed since the square roots of the AVE values ranged from 0.742 to 0.827 (as shown in [Table 1](#)) and exceeded any corresponding inter-construct correlations.

In addition, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses using AMOS 24.0 software to examine the discriminant validity of our key constructs. As shown in [Table 2](#), the fit of the five-factor model presented an acceptable fit with the data ($\chi^2 = 1732.359$, $df = 979$, $\chi^2/df = 1.770$, $IFI = 0.929$, $TLI = 0.924$, $CFI = 0.928$, $RMSEA = 0.049$), and fitted the data better than other alternative models. These results demonstrated the satisfactory discriminant validity of our key constructs.

Structural model for testing hypotheses

We used structured Equation Modeling (SEM) via Mplus 7.0 software to examine our hypotheses, because SEM can simultaneously examine mediation and moderation effects in our theoretical model ([Preacher et al., 2010](#)). Before running the structural model, we evaluated the CMV in this study again using the full collinearity test. The variance inflation factor (VIF) value in our study was less than the threshold of 3.0 ([Kock, 2015](#)), indicating that there was no collinearity problem. The results suggested that servant leadership was positively related to intrapreneurial behaviors ($\beta = 0.193$, $p < 0.01$), supporting [Hypothesis 1](#). Servant leadership was positively related to thriving at work ($\beta = 0.248$, $p < 0.001$), supporting [Hypothesis 2](#). Similarly, we found that thriving at work was positively related to intrapreneurial behavior ($\beta = 0.181$, $p < 0.001$), confirming [Hypothesis 3](#).

We tested [hypothesis 4](#) following the approaches and procedures recommended by [Preacher and Hayes \(2008\)](#). [Preacher and Hayes \(2008\)](#) pointed out three conditions for the mediation effect to hold: the independent variable (i.e. servant leadership) should be significantly related to the mediating variable (i.e. thriving at work); the mediating variable (i.e. thriving at work) should be significantly related to the dependent variable (i.e. intrapreneurial behavior); and the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable should be significant when the mediator is present in the SEM. The first and second conditions were met to support [Hypotheses 2](#) and [3](#). In this model, servant leadership was positively related to intrapreneurial behavior ($\beta = 0.193$, $p < 0.01$), providing preliminary support for the partial mediation model. We further tested the indirect effect of servant leadership on intrapreneurial behavior using the 95% confidence intervals (CI; bootstrapping samples = 5,000). The results suggested that the indirect effect of servant leadership on intrapreneurial behavior was positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.045, 95% CI = [0.012, 0.092]). Together, [hypothesis 4](#) was partially confirmed, suggesting that thriving at work only partially mediates the influence of servant leadership on employee intrapreneurial behavior.

We then modeled the interaction between servant leadership and proactive personality using the XWITH command in Mplus 7.0. The interaction term was significantly related to thriving at work (interaction effect = 0.179, $p < 0.01$). As shown in [Figure 2](#), we plotted the interaction effect and calculated the simple slopes. Specifically, the effect of servant leadership on thriving at work was more positive for employees with higher ($\beta_{simple} = 0.396$, $p < 0.001$) rather than lower levels ($\beta_{simple} = 0.084$, ns.) of proactive personality (*slope difference* = 0.312, $SE = 0.106$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, [Hypothesis 5](#) was supported.

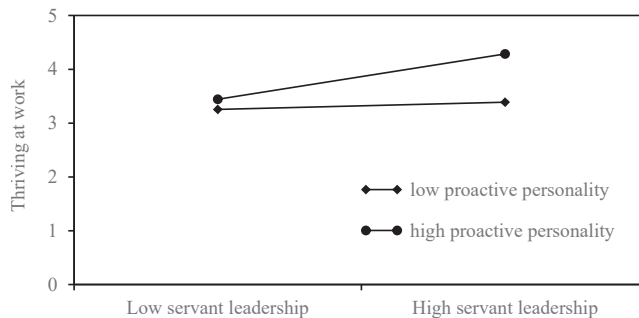


Figure 2. Moderating effect of proactive personality on the relationship between servant leadership and thriving at work. Source: Authors' own work

Discussion

Theoretical implication

Firstly, our study extends the nomological networks of intrapreneurial behavior by including servant leadership as an antecedent. Although previous studies (e.g. [Usman et al., 2021a](#)) have emphasized the pivotal role of leadership in promoting intrapreneurial behaviors, the extant literature predominantly examines transformational leadership ([Afsar et al., 2017](#)) and authentic leadership ([Edú Valsania et al., 2016](#)), overlooking other potentially influential leadership styles. Additionally, previous literature has often explained leadership effects on intrapreneurial behaviors, predominantly through psychological empowerment ([Usman et al., 2021a](#)) or social exchange mechanisms. In contrast, our study adopts an integrative approach that incorporates both cognitive and affective components of thriving at work as a novel mediating mechanism. This dual-path perspective highlights how servant leadership cultivates employees' psychological resources (i.e. vitality and learning) that serve as critical enablers of intrapreneurial behaviors, thereby offering a deeper theoretical understanding of the underlying processes.

Secondly, in response to the call to explore the antecedents and outcomes of employees thriving at work ([Shahid et al., 2021](#)), this study enriches the thriving-at-work literature by explicitly exploring both organizational and individual antecedents. Previous thriving research has emphasized the importance of contextual factors, yet has inadequately examined the role of leadership in facilitating thriving ([Rabiul et al., 2023](#)). Our findings confirm the significant positive effect of servant leadership on employee thriving, emphasizing that leadership practices that empower and nurture employees' professional growth significantly foster their experience of thriving. Moreover, this study addresses calls by [Cao et al. \(2024\)](#) to explore how contextual (servant leadership) and individual factors (proactive personality) interact to influence thriving at work. Our results highlight the synergistic role of proactive personality, confirming that thriving experiences are amplified among employees under servant leadership.

Thirdly, this study deepens the theoretical understanding of servant leadership, particularly in a non-Western (Chinese) context. While the conceptual origins of servant leadership are firmly rooted in Western cultural contexts, where individualism, egalitarian values, and low power distance predominate ([Eva et al., 2019](#)), its transferability and effectiveness in non-Western contexts, particularly Chinese, remain underexplored. The Chinese cultural environment, characterized by collectivism, high-power distance, and Confucian hierarchical values, offers unique implications for servant leadership practices. In China, the emphasis of servant leadership on humility, relational care, and empowering subordinates aligns closely with traditional Confucian values emphasizing benevolence, interpersonal harmony, and moral leadership ([Chen et al., 2015](#)). However, servant leadership's

effectiveness might also be nuanced by the relatively high-power distance prevalent in Chinese organizations, where leaders are expected to maintain authority and control. Therefore, servant leadership practices that strongly advocate empowerment and equality may sometimes face resistance or less acceptance owing to deep-rooted hierarchical norms (Ling *et al.*, 2017). Thus, our findings extend the generalizability of servant leadership research by illustrating its effectiveness in enhancing intrapreneurial behavior within the unique sociocultural environment of China.

Moreover, this study further enriches the servant leadership literature by identifying intrapreneurial behavior—a critical yet understudied extra-role behavior—as a meaningful outcome. By examining proactive personality as a moderator, this research identifies the boundary conditions under which servant leadership is most beneficial, consistent with the person-supervisor fit perspective (Newman *et al.*, 2017). Thus, our results provide actionable insights for organizational leaders aiming to leverage servant leadership effectively, particularly by recognizing that employees with highly proactive personalities may respond most positively, whereas employees with less proactive personalities might require additional support or alternative approaches.

Practical implication

This study also has several practical implications that can assist organizations in effectively promoting employees' intrapreneurial behavior. However, successful implementation is contingent not only on organizational readiness but also on the pragmatic feasibility of adopting a servant leadership model, which often demands significant cultural and structural transformation.

Firstly, organizations would benefit from hiring servant leaders, promoting potential servant leaders internally, and training existing leaders to exhibit servant leadership behaviors (Eva *et al.*, 2019). Given that servant leadership contrasts sharply with the traditional hierarchical management prevalent in many Chinese organizations, transitioning to servant leadership would likely require substantial shifts in organizational culture. Organizations frequently encounter budget constraints, lack proven training tools, and resistance to culture shifts, particularly in environments dominated by traditional hierarchical norms (Ling *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, evidence of scalable training models for servant leadership remains limited. Thus, organizations may consider more incremental strategies rather than direct large-scale leadership overhauls. For example, informal mentoring and localized pilot programs can gradually introduce servant leadership behaviors and reduce resistance and financial risks (Hunter *et al.*, 2013).

Moreover, servant leadership may not yield uniform benefits in all contexts. The effectiveness of leadership is contingent upon the specific environment (Yukl, 2012), and the assumption that servant leadership universally fosters innovation may overlook critical institutional, cultural, and industrial factors. In particular, in contexts influenced by Confucian values, employee expectations regarding authority and hierarchy may conflict with egalitarian principles inherent in servant leadership. Empirical research has shown that servant leadership is most effective when it is adaptively integrated within the organization's cultural framework and supported by transparent communication regarding its advantages (Chen *et al.*, 2025; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Bou Reslan *et al.* (2021) found that the influence of servant leadership on innovative work behavior was particularly salient in the context of the Latvian ICT sector, suggesting that such leadership styles may be more effective in dynamic, knowledge-based industries. This aligns with our argument that servant leadership is especially relevant in environments in which employee autonomy and intrapreneurial initiative are valued.

Secondly, organizations need to recognize individual differences, particularly employees' proactive personalities, to optimize the effectiveness of servant leadership. Employees with higher proactive personalities responded more positively to servant leadership styles in the form of thriving and intrapreneurial behaviors. Organizations can leverage validated

personality assessment tools to strategically align employees exhibiting proactive personalities with servant leaders, thus maximizing their psychological resourcefulness and innovation capabilities (Newman *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2019a). Furthermore, organizations should adopt targeted interventions such as coaching, feedback systems, and developmental training to enhance proactive tendencies among existing employees, fostering broader organizational readiness for servant leadership.

Nonetheless, overemphasis on proactive traits without corresponding role clarity or resource support can lead to role overload and stress (Cangiano *et al.*, 2021). Hence, organizations should approach personality assessment cautiously and supplement it with developmental interventions that support all employees, not just those who score high in proactivity.

Thirdly, our findings underline thriving at work as a critical facilitator of intrapreneurial behavior, suggesting that organizations should strategically monitor and enhance employees' thriving experiences. Therefore, managers should regularly assess thriving through surveys or feedback sessions to identify and proactively address the barriers to thriving. According to the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005), facilitating conditions such as decision-making autonomy, broad information sharing, and a trustful and respectful climate significantly boost employees' experiences of learning and vitality. Therefore, organizations should systematically foster these environmental conditions, accompanied by continuous skill development through coaching, mentoring, and targeted training programs (Porath *et al.*, 2012).

In summary, although transitioning to servant leadership and promoting proactive behaviors involves overcoming substantial cultural and structural inertia, careful phased implementation, coupled with the strategic alignment of organizational practices, employee characteristics, and thriving-oriented work environments, offers a robust pathway to enhancing employee-driven innovation in organizations.

Limitations and directions for future research

Firstly, this study utilized a time-lagged research design to test our hypotheses. Although this approach reduces common method bias concerns, it limits our ability to establish definitive causal relationships between servant leadership, thriving at work, proactive personality, and intrapreneurial behaviors. Future studies should employ longitudinal panel designs or experimental methods such as intervention-based approaches to strengthen causal claims and enhance internal validity (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). For instance, future researchers could conduct field experiments to examine how the systematic introduction of servant leadership training impacts employees' thriving and intrapreneurial behavior over time. In addition, to empirically test this effect of CMV, future research could follow Lindell and Whitney (2001) and add a marker variable to the survey. This variable is theoretically unrelated to any substantive variables. If the marker variable is correlated with the substantive variables, the degree to which they are related is representative of common method variance because the only thing the variables share is how the data were collected. Scholars should also implement the structural equation modeling marker variable approach offered by Williams *et al.* (2010) to further assess CMV.

Secondly, this study did not assess or control for other constructs that appear to overlap with the concept of thriving, such as resilience, flourishing, and well-being (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). It would be beneficial for future studies to include these constructs, which are empirically and theoretically related to thriving, to better demonstrate the unique and incremental predictive validity of thriving at work.

Thirdly, while this study emphasizes thriving as a central mediating mechanism, additional theoretical pathways might further clarify the servant leadership–intrapreneurial behavior relationship. For example, affective commitment (Eva *et al.*, 2019) and psychological safety (Newman *et al.*, 2017) may serve as critical complementary mediators. Future research could incorporate these constructs to provide a more holistic understanding of how servant leadership facilitates intrapreneurial behavior through diverse psychological processes.

Moreover, exploring additional individual-level boundary conditions could further enrich our understanding. For example, core self-evaluations or openness to experience may enhance or attenuate the effects of servant leadership on employee thriving and subsequent intrapreneurial behaviors (Usman *et al.*, 2021b). Personality traits beyond a proactive personality will yield valuable insights into the nuanced interplay between servant leadership styles and diverse employee characteristics.

Additionally, leadership effectiveness is not a universal phenomenon but rather depends on specific situational and cultural contexts (Yukl, 2012). Although servant leadership promotes universally valued traits such as humility and service, its impact may differ across organizational structures, national cultures, and industry environments (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). For instance, in cultures characterized by high power distance, the egalitarian and participatory nature of servant leadership may conflict with the prevailing expectations of hierarchical and authoritative leadership styles. Therefore, future research should adopt a contingency perspective to explore the contextual conditions under which servant leadership is the most effective.

Finally, our research was conducted in the Chinese organizational context, characterized by collectivist values, high-power distance, and specific hierarchical norms (Ling *et al.*, 2017). Cultural factors are likely to influence servant leadership effectiveness differently in other national contexts. Therefore, future studies should conduct cross-cultural comparisons or replicate our findings in various cultural settings, particularly in Western contexts, to enhance the generalizability and robustness of our theoretical model.

Note

1. Kleine *et al.* (2019) called for more research on thriving across different time intervals, including intraindividual variation over short durations and change across longer periods. While prior research has examined the mediating role of thriving at work using multi-wave survey studies with intervals of one month (Wang *et al.*, 2024) or two months (Wang *et al.*, 2023), other scholars (Leong *et al.*, 2025; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2018) have suggested that an interval of two weeks between each wave is sufficient for thriving at work to change and function. Furthermore, findings from a diary study suggest that thriving varies from day to day at the within-person level (Niessen *et al.*, 2012). Podsakoff *et al.* (2012) also suggested that the optimal temporal interval for data collection should be neither too long nor too short. Therefore, this study employed a three-wave survey design to collect data, with each wave occurring two weeks apart.

References

- Afsar, B., Badir, Y.F., Saeed, B.B. and Hafeez, S. (2017), "Transformational and transactional leadership and employee's entrepreneurial behavior in knowledge-intensive industries", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 307-332, doi: [10.1080/09585192.2016.1244893](https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1244893).
- Amabile, T.M. (1988), "A model of creativity and innovation in organizations", *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 123-167.
- Aydin, Š., Knezović, E., Bičo, A. and Smajić, H. (2024), "Age, entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial intentions: the mediating role of individual entrepreneurial orientation", *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 94-113, doi: [10.1108/jec-08-2022-0107](https://doi.org/10.1108/jec-08-2022-0107).
- Bagozzi, R.P. and Yi, Y. (1990), "Assessing method variance in multitrait-multimethod matrices: the case of self-reported affect and perceptions at work", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 75 No. 5, pp. 547-560, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.75.5.547](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.75.5.547).
- Bateman, T.S. and Crant, J.M. (1993), "The proactive component of organizational behavior: a measure and correlates", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 103-118, doi: [10.1002/job.4030140202](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030140202).

- Bou Reslan, F.Y., Garanti, Z. and Emeagwali, O.L. (2021), "The effect of servant leadership on innovative work behavior and employee knowledge sharing in the Latvian ICT sector", *Baltic Journal of Management*, Vol. 16 No. 5, pp. 729-744, doi: [10.1108/bjm-09-2020-0321](https://doi.org/10.1108/bjm-09-2020-0321).
- Cangiano, F., Parker, S.K. and Ouyang, K. (2021), "Too proactive to last? Investigating the link between proactive personality and burnout", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 42 No. 7, pp. 911-932.
- Cao, M., Zhao, S., Chen, J. and Lv, H. (2024), "Employees' HR attributions count: the effects of high-performance work systems on employees' thriving at work and emotional exhaustion", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 53 No. 4, pp. 835-856, doi: [10.1108/pr-09-2021-0632](https://doi.org/10.1108/pr-09-2021-0632).
- Carmeli, A. and Spreitzer, G.M. (2009), "Trust, connectivity, and thriving: implications for innovative behaviors at work", *Journal of Creative Behavior*, Vol. 43 No. 3, pp. 169-191, doi: [10.1002/j.2162-6057.2009.tb01313.x](https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2162-6057.2009.tb01313.x).
- Chen, L. and Weng, Q. (2023), "Authoritarian-benevolent leadership and employee behaviors: an examination of the role of LMX ambivalence", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 186 No. 2, pp. 425-443, doi: [10.1007/s10551-022-05225-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05225-8).
- Chen, Z., Zhu, J. and Zhou, M. (2015), "How does a servant leader fuel the service fire? A multilevel model of servant leadership, individual self-identity, group competition climate, and customer service performance", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 100 No. 2, pp. 511-521, doi: [10.1037/a0038036](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038036).
- Chen, L., Weng, Q. and Xi, L. (2024), "Interest incongruence and employee thriving at work: the roles of job crafting and servant leadership", *Current Psychology*, Vol. 43 No. 16, pp. 14553-14566, doi: [10.1007/s12144-023-05431-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-05431-1).
- Chen, L., Weng, Q., Popelnukha, A., Jiang, H. and Wang, Y. (2025), "Diminished relational energy: how and when LMX ambivalence leads to leader-directed counterproductive work behavior", *Applied Psychology*, Vol. 74 No. 1, e12598, doi: [10.1111/apps.12598](https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12598).
- Cohen, J. (1988), *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., Lawrence Erlbaum Associate, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 18-74.
- Crant, J.M. and Bateman, T.S. (2000), "Proactive personality and job performance: a longitudinal study", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 465-487.
- de Jong, J.P., Parker, S.K., Wennekers, S. and Wu, C.H. (2015), "Entrepreneurial behavior in organizations: does job design matter?", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 981-995, doi: [10.1111/etap.12084](https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12084).
- Edú Valsania, S., Moriano, J.A. and Molero, F. (2016), "Authentic leadership and intrapreneurial behavior: cross-level analysis of the mediator effect of organizational identification and empowerment", *The International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 131-152, doi: [10.1007/s11365-014-0333-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-014-0333-4).
- Elert, N. and Stenkula, M. (2022), "Intrapreneurship: productive and non-productive", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 46 No. 5, pp. 1423-1439, doi: [10.1177/1042258720964181](https://doi.org/10.1177/1042258720964181).
- Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., Van Dierendonck, D. and Liden, R.C. (2019), "Servant leadership: a systematic review and call for future research", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 111-132, doi: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004).
- Farrukh, M. and Ghazzawi, I. (2024), "Intrapreneurship research: what have we learned and where can we go from here?", *International Journal of Innovation Science*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print, doi: [10.1108/ijis-11-2023-0237](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijis-11-2023-0237).
- Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F. (1981), "Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 39-50, doi: [10.2307/3151312](https://doi.org/10.2307/3151312).
- Fredrickson, B.L. (2001), "The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 218-226, doi: [10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.218](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.218).

- Gong, Y., Li, J., Xie, J., Zhang, L. and Lou, Q. (2022), "Will 'green' parents have 'green' children? The relationship between parents' and early adolescents' green consumption values", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 179 No. 2, pp. 369-385, doi: [10.1007/s10551-021-04835-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04835-y).
- Gorgievski, M.J., Bakker, A.B., Petrou, P. and Gawke, J.C. (2023), "Antecedents of employee in trapreneurship in the public sector: a proactive motivation approach", *International Public Management Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 6, pp. 852-873, doi: [10.1080/10967494.2023.2255172](https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2023.2255172).
- Hair, J.F., Jr., Hult, G.T.M., Ringle, C.M., Sarstedt, M., Danks, N.P. and Ray, S. (2021), *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) Using R*, Springer, Cham, p. 197.
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C.M. and Sinkovics, R.R. (2009), "The use of partial least squares path modeling in international marketing", in *New Challenges to International Marketing*, Emerald Group Publishing, Vol. 20, pp. 277-319, doi: [10.1108/s1474-7979\(2009\)0000020014](https://doi.org/10.1108/s1474-7979(2009)0000020014).
- Huang, M., Ju, D., Yam, K.C., Liu, S., Qin, X. and Tian, G. (2023), "Employee humor can shield them from abusive supervision", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 186 No. 2, pp. 407-424, doi: [10.1007/s10551-022-05208-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05208-9).
- Hunter, E.M., Neubert, M.J., Perry, S.J., Witt, L.M., Penney, L.M. and Weinberger, E. (2013), "Servant leaders inspire servant followers: antecedents and outcomes for employees and the organization", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 316-331, doi: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2012.12.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2012.12.001).
- Huynh, T.T.G. (2021), "The influence of transformational leadership dimensions on intrapreneurial behaviour through mediators", *Management Science Letters*, Vol. 11 No. 7, pp. 2099-2114, doi: [10.5267/j.msl.2021.2.017](https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2021.2.017).
- Jang, S., Yoo, S., Lee, J. and Lee, Y. (2023), "Serving for thriving: a moderated mediation analysis of the relationship between servant leadership and thriving at work", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 52 No. 5, pp. 1345-1361, doi: [10.1108/pr-08-2021-0602](https://doi.org/10.1108/pr-08-2021-0602).
- Jiang, Z., Jiang, Y. and Nielsen, I. (2021), "Thriving and career outcomes: the roles of achievement orientation and resilience", *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 143-164, doi: [10.1111/1748-8583.12287](https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12287).
- Klein, G. (2023), "Transformational and transactional leadership, organizational support and environmental competition intensity as antecedents of intrapreneurial behaviors", *European Research on Management and Business Economics*, Vol. 29 No. 2, 100215, doi: [10.1016/j.edeen.2023.100215](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edeen.2023.100215).
- Kleine, A.K., Rudolph, C.W. and Zacher, H. (2019), "Thriving at work: a meta-analysis", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 53 Nos 9-10, pp. 973-999, doi: [10.1002/job.2375](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2375).
- Kock, N. (2015), "Common method bias in PLS-SEM: a full collinearity assessment approach", *International Journal of e-Collaboration*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 1-10, doi: [10.4018/ijec.2015100101](https://doi.org/10.4018/ijec.2015100101).
- Kumar, N., Jin, Y. and Liu, Z. (2024), "The nexus between servant leadership and employee's creative deviance for creativity inside learning and performance goal-oriented organizations", *Management Decision*, Vol. 62 No. 4, pp. 1117-1137, doi: [10.1108/md-09-2022-1294](https://doi.org/10.1108/md-09-2022-1294).
- Lei, S. (2024), "Shedding light on the adverse spillover effects of work-family conflict on unethical sales behaviors at work: a daily diary study", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 190 No. 2, pp. 399-411, doi: [10.1007/s10551-023-05423-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05423-y).
- Leong, A.M.W., Bai, J.Y., Rasheed, M.I., Hameed, Z. and Okumus, F. (2025), "AI disruption threat and employee outcomes: role of technology insecurity, thriving at work, and trait self-esteem", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 126, 104064, doi: [10.1016/j.ijhm.2024.104064](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2024.104064).
- Li, M., Liu, W., Han, Y. and Zhang, P. (2016), "Linking empowering leadership and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior: the role of thriving at work and autonomy orientation", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 29 No. 5, pp. 732-750, doi: [10.1108/jocm-02-2015-0032](https://doi.org/10.1108/jocm-02-2015-0032).
- Liden, R.C., Wayne, S.J., Liao, C. and Meuser, J.D. (2014), "Servant leadership and serving culture: influence on individual and unit performance", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 57 No. 5, pp. 1434-1452, doi: [10.5465/amj.2013.0034](https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0034).

- Liden, R.C., Wayne, S.J., Meuser, J.D., Hu, J., Wu, J. and Liao, C. (2015), "Servant leadership: validation of a short form of the SL-28", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 254-269, doi: [10.1016/j.leafqua.2014.12.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leafqua.2014.12.002).
- Lindell, M.K. and Whitney, D.J. (2001), "Accounting for common method variance in cross-sectional research designs", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 1, pp. 114-121, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.86.1.114](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.1.114).
- Ling, Q., Liu, F. and Wu, X. (2017), "Servant versus authentic leadership", *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, Vol. 58 No. 1, pp. 53-68, doi: [10.1177/1938965516641515](https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965516641515).
- Lu, S., Wang, L., Ni, D., Shapiro, D.L. and Zheng, X. (2023), "Mitigating the harms of abusive supervision on employee thriving: the buffering effects of employees' social-network centrality", *Human Relations*, Vol. 76 No. 9, pp. 1441-1473, doi: [10.1177/00187267221091469](https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267221091469).
- Ma, L., Ma, H., Zhan, X. and Wang, Y. (2023), "How do problem-solving demands influence employees' thriving at work: an explanation based on cognitive appraisal", *Sustainability*, Vol. 15 No. 20, 14879, doi: [10.3390/su152014879](https://doi.org/10.3390/su152014879).
- Mahmoud, M.A., Ahmad, S. and Poespowidjojo, D.A.L. (2020), "Intrapreneurial behavior, big five personality and individual performance", *Management Research Review*, Vol. 43 No. 12, pp. 1499-1516, doi: [10.1108/mrr-09-2019-0419](https://doi.org/10.1108/mrr-09-2019-0419).
- Marques, C.S., Lopes, C., Braga, V., Ratten, V. and Santos, G. (2022), "Intuition and rationality in intrapreneurship and innovation outputs: the case of health professionals in primary health care", *The International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 579-602, doi: [10.1007/s11365-021-00761-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-021-00761-7).
- Martín-Rojas, R., Fernández-Pérez, V. and García-Sánchez, E. (2017), "Fostering corporate entrepreneurship: the role of leadership styles", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 73, pp. 87-94.
- Moriano, J.A., Molero, F., Topa, G. and Lévy Mangin, J.P. (2014), "The influence of transformational leadership and organizational identification on intrapreneurship", *The International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 103-119, doi: [10.1007/s11365-011-0196-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-011-0196-x).
- Murphy, W.H. and Anderson, R.E. (2020), "Transformational leadership effects on salespeople's attitudes, striving, and performance", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 110, pp. 237-245, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.01.023](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.01.023).
- Mustafa, M., Martin, L. and Hughes, M. (2016), "Psychological ownership, job satisfaction, and middle manager entrepreneurial behavior", *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 272-287, doi: [10.1177/1548051815627360](https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051815627360).
- Najam, U. and Mustamil, N.B.M. (2022), "Does proactive personality moderate the relationship between servant leadership and psychological ownership and resilience", *Sage Open*, Vol. 12 No. 2, 21582440221087273, doi: [10.1177/21582440221087273](https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221087273).
- Neessen, P.C., Caniëls, M.C., Vos, B. and de Jong, J.P. (2019), "The intrapreneurial employee: toward an integrated model of intrapreneurship and research agenda", *The International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 545-571, doi: [10.1007/s11365-018-0552-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-018-0552-1).
- Newman, A., Schwarz, G., Cooper, B. and Sendjaya, S. (2017), "How servant leadership influences organizational citizenship behavior: the roles of LMX, empowerment, and proactive personality", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 145 No. 1, pp. 49-62, doi: [10.1007/s10551-015-2827-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2827-6).
- Nielsen, J., Firth, B. and Crawford, E. (2023), "For better and worse: how proactive personality alters the strain responses to challenge and hindrance stressors", *Organization Science*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 589-612, doi: [10.1287/orsc.2022.1587](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2022.1587).
- Niessen, C., Sonnentag, S. and Sach, F. (2012), "Thriving at work—a diary study", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 468-487, doi: [10.1002/job.763](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.763).
- Pan, S.Y., Lin, K.J., McAllister, D.J. and Xia, Y. (2024), "Holding abusive managers in contempt: why and when experienced abusive supervision motivates enacted interpersonal justice toward

- subordinates”, *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 192 No. 2, pp. 341-361, doi: [10.1007/s10551-023-05528-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05528-4).
- Parker, S.K. and Collins, C.G. (2010), “Taking stock: integrating and differentiating multiple proactive behaviors”, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 36 No. 3, pp. 633-662, doi: [10.1177/0149206308321554](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206308321554).
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2012), “Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it”, *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 63 No. 1, pp. 539-569, doi: [10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100452](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100452).
- Porath, C., Spreitzer, G., Gibson, C. and Garnett, F.G. (2012), “Thriving at work: toward its measurement, construct validation, and theoretical refinement”, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 250-275, doi: [10.1002/job.756](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.756).
- Preacher, K.J. and Hayes, A.F. (2008), “Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models”, *Behavior Research Methods*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 879-891, doi: [10.3758/brm.40.3.879](https://doi.org/10.3758/brm.40.3.879).
- Preacher, K.J., Zyphur, M.J. and Zhang, Z. (2010), “A general multilevel SEM framework for assessing multilevel mediation”, *Psychological Methods*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 209-233, doi: [10.1037/a0020141](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020141).
- Rabiul, M.K., Karatepe, O.M., Al Karim, R. and Panha, I.M. (2023), “An investigation of the interrelationships of leadership styles, psychological safety, thriving at work, and work engagement in the hotel industry: a sequential mediation model”, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 113, 103508, doi: [10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103508](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103508).
- Rabl, T., Petzsche, V., Baum, M. and Franzke, S. (2023), “Can support by digital technologies stimulate intrapreneurial behaviour? The moderating role of management support for innovation and intrapreneurial self-efficacy”, *Information Systems Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 567-597, doi: [10.1111/isj.12413](https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12413).
- Rigtering, J.C. and Weitzel, U. (2013), “Work context and employee behaviour as antecedents for intrapreneurship”, *The International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 337-360, doi: [10.1007/s11365-013-0258-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-013-0258-3).
- Schowalter, A.F. and Volmer, J. (2023), “Are the effects of servant leadership only spurious? The state of research on the causal effects of servant leadership, recommendations, and an illustrative experiment”, *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 34 No. 6, 101722, doi: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2023.101722](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2023.101722).
- Seibert, S.E., Crant, J.M. and Kraimer, M.L. (1999), “Proactive personality and career success”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 84 No. 3, pp. 416-427, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.84.3.416](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.3.416).
- Sendjaya, S. and Cooper, B. (2011), “Servant leadership behaviour scale: a hierarchical model and test of construct validity”, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 416-436, doi: [10.1080/13594321003590549](https://doi.org/10.1080/13594321003590549).
- Shahid, S., Muchiri, M.K. and Walumbwa, F.O. (2021), “Mapping the antecedents and consequences of thriving at work: a review and proposed research agenda”, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 78-103, doi: [10.1108/ijoa-09-2019-1881](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-09-2019-1881).
- Spreitzer, G., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S. and Grant, A.M. (2005), “A socially embedded model of thriving at work”, *Organization Science*, Vol. 16 No. 5, pp. 537-549, doi: [10.1287/orsc.1050.0153](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0153).
- Su, W., Lyu, B., Chen, H. and Zhang, Y. (2020), “How does servant leadership influence employees’ service innovative behavior? The roles of intrinsic motivation and identification with the leader”, *Baltic Journal of Management*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 571-586, doi: [10.1108/bjm-09-2019-0335](https://doi.org/10.1108/bjm-09-2019-0335).
- Usman, M., Ali, M., Ogbonnaya, C. and Babalola, M.T. (2021a), “Fueling the intrapreneurial spirit: a closer look at how spiritual leadership motivates employee intrapreneurial behaviors”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 83, 104227, doi: [10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104227](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104227).
- Usman, M., Liu, Y., Li, H., Zhang, J., Ghani, U. and Gul, H. (2021b), “Enabling the engine of workplace thriving through servant leadership: the moderating role of core self-evaluations”,

- Usman, M., Ali, M., Soetan, G.T., Ayoko, O.B. and Berber, A. (2024), "Seeing others' side to serve: understanding how and when servant leadership impacts employee knowledge-hiding behaviors", *Human Relations*, Vol. 77 No. 1, pp. 3-28, doi: [10.1177/00187267221125353](https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267221125353).
- Wallace, J.C., Butts, M.M., Johnson, P.D., Stevens, F.G. and Smith, M.B. (2016), "A multilevel model of employee innovation: understanding the effects of regulatory focus, thriving, and employee involvement climate", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 42 No. 4, pp. 982-1004, doi: [10.1177/0149206313506462](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313506462).
- Walumbwa, F.O., Muchiri, M.K., Misati, E., Wu, C. and Meiliani, M. (2018), "Inspired to perform: a multilevel investigation of antecedents and consequences of thriving at work", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 249-261, doi: [10.1002/job.2216](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2216).
- Wan, W. and Liu, L. (2021), "Intrapreneurship in the digital era: driven by big data and human resource management?", *Chinese Management Studies*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 843-875, doi: [10.1108/cms-07-2020-0282](https://doi.org/10.1108/cms-07-2020-0282).
- Wang, Z., Meng, L. and Cai, S. (2019a), "Servant leadership and innovative behavior: a moderated mediation", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 34 No. 8, pp. 506-518, doi: [10.1108/jmp-11-2018-0499](https://doi.org/10.1108/jmp-11-2018-0499).
- Wang, Z., Yu, K., Xi, R. and Zhang, X. (2019b), "Servant leadership and career success: the effects of career skills and proactive personality", *Career Development International*, Vol. 24 No. 7, pp. 717-730, doi: [10.1108/cdi-03-2019-0088](https://doi.org/10.1108/cdi-03-2019-0088).
- Wang, Z., Song, D., Ren, S., Rosenberg, B.D. and Cai, S. (2023), "Team reflexivity, thriving at work and employees' work-to-family enrichment: a multilevel perspective", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 38 No. 7, pp. 465-479, doi: [10.1108/jmp-04-2022-0199](https://doi.org/10.1108/jmp-04-2022-0199).
- Wang, Z., Jiang, Z. and Blackman, A. (2024), "Why and when do emotionally intelligent employees perform safely? The roles of thriving at work and career adaptability", *Applied Psychology*, Vol. 73 No. 2, pp. 723-747, doi: [10.1111/apps.12497](https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12497).
- Weng, Q. and Chen, L. (2025), "Coping with interest incongruence: the joint roles of proactive personality and job crafting", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 178-196, doi: [10.1108/jmp-06-2023-0320](https://doi.org/10.1108/jmp-06-2023-0320).
- Williams, L.J., Hartman, N. and Cavazotte, F. (2010), "Method variance and marker variables: a review and comprehensive CFA marker technique", *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 477-514, doi: [10.1177/1094428110366036](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428110366036).
- Wu, C.M., Chen, T.J. and Wang, Y.C. (2023), "Formation of hotel employees' service innovation performance: mechanism of thriving at work and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 54, pp. 178-187, doi: [10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.12.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.12.015).
- Xu, X. and Wang, L. (2020), "How and when servant leaders enable collective thriving: the role of team-member exchange and political climate", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 478-494, doi: [10.1111/1467-8551.12358](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12358).
- Xu, A.J., Loi, R. and Chow, C.W.C. (2022), "Why and when proactive employees take charge at work: the role of servant leadership and prosocial motivation", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 117-127, doi: [10.1080/1359432x.2021.1934449](https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432x.2021.1934449).
- Yadav, A.K., Kohli, N. and Yadav, S. (2017), "Exploring the meaning of thriving at work through the hermeneutic analysis of Wings of Fire", *Indian Journal of Positive*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 663-666.
- Ye, D., Xie, W. and Zheng, L. (2023), "Unleashing intrapreneurial behavior: exploring configurations of influencing factors among grassroots employees", *Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 13 No. 9, p. 724, doi: [10.3390/bs13090724](https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13090724).
- Yukl, G. (2012), "Effective leadership behavior: what we know and what questions need more attention", *Academy of Management Perspectives*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 66-85, doi: [10.5465/amp.2012.0088](https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0088).

Zhang, Y., Zheng, Y., Zhang, L., Xu, S., Liu, X. and Chen, W. (2021), "A meta-analytic review of the consequences of servant leadership: the moderating roles of cultural factors", *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 371-400, doi: [10.1007/s10490-018-9639-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-018-9639-z).

Zhang, R., Kang, H., Jiang, Z. and Niu, X. (2023), "How does workplace ostracism hurt employee creativity? Thriving at work as a mediator and organization-based self-esteem as a moderator", *Applied Psychology*, Vol. 72 No. 1, pp. 211-230, doi: [10.1111/apps.12374](https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12374).

Zhou, X., Tang, J. and Wang, T. (2024), "Effect of the fit between situational regulatory focus and feedback focus on customers' co-design behavior", *Internet Research*, Vol. 34 No. 5, pp. 1818-1844, doi: [10.1108/intr-11-2022-0861](https://doi.org/10.1108/intr-11-2022-0861).

Corresponding author

Lixin Chen can be contacted at: 1753659559@qq.com