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LEADING WITH HEART, INSPIRING INNOVATION: THE MINDFULNESS BRIDGE IN SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN BPO INDUSTRY, PAKISTAN

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Servant Leadership, Employee Innovative Behavior, Mindfulness, Employee Performance, Creative Behavior, Leadership Style	Employees love to work and take the labour of work, if they find cooperative & congineal work environment especially with their managers. This creates a kind of expectation and exchange of values in between employees and their managers. This study uses social exchange theory (SET) to examine the link between servant leadership and employee innovation, focusing on the mindfulness as a potential mediator. This study employed the deductive quantitative approach, using both correlational and explanatory designs to examine Pakistan rapidly growing BPO industry. This methodological style eased efficient data collection while maintaining reliability in examining key industry dynamics. The study findings emphasize servant leadership's (SL) role in driving innovative employee behavior (EIB) in Pakistan's BPO sector. SL empowers employees to explore ideas creatively while aligning personal and organizational goals. It fosters mindfulness (MF), enhancing empathy, and collaboration, while building organizational resilience. By reducing micromanagement, SL encourages risk-taking and innovation, a key to viable advantage. Integrating mindfulness into leadership supports employee growth and organizational success, creating a culture conducive to sustained innovation.
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INTRODUCTION

Even before the turn of the millennium, there were indications that 21st century would bring about intensely competitive business environment. Studies show that in order for firms to be competitive in the global marketplace of 21st century, they must prioritize innovation as critical tactic (Gangele & Kumar, 2025). Now, As we enter the twenty-first century, companies find themselves in fiercely competitive climate, where they are continuously challenged to reinvent their goods, services, and

processes. This drive for innovation is largely fueled by creative contributions from firm employees, who are increasingly known as knowledge workers (Sharif, Tongkachok, Akbar, Iqbal & Lodhi, 2024). These workers are taking on more significant roles and are actively being encouraged and supported by organizations to engage in innovative work behaviors (Sugiono & Nurhasan, 2025). Among the various factors that can influence such behaviors and thereby provide the competitive advantage is effective leadership (Odugbesan, Aghazadeh, Qaralleh & Sogeke, 2023). Thus, as a country with a unique socio-cultural landscape and organizational dynamics, understanding that how servant leadership is practiced and perceived in Pakistan is crucial for fostering leadership effectiveness, organizational success, and societal development (Alasmari, Ali, Khalid, Chuanmin & Rasheed, 2025).

Despite a growing body of research linking leadership to innovative work behaviors over different mediators (Afsar & Umrani, 2019; Asurakkody & Kim, 2020), there remains gap in understanding. This gap stems from two significant changes: the evolving nature of work and nature of the workers themselves. With increased expectations for innovation, employees see their roles as ever-evolving (Jiang, Huo, Jones, Cheng, Manoharan & Spoehr, 2025). This continuous change challenges the traditional authority of managers over job design, advocating instead for job crafting. This allows employees to adapt their roles, enhancing satisfaction and effectiveness (Parker, Ballard, Collins, Dollard, Griffin, Jorritsma & Kyndt, 2025). Moreover, today's knowledge workers, equipped with vision, education, training, and intrinsic motivation, require different leadership approaches than those used in the industrial economy (Alshahrani, Yaqub, Ali, Hakimi & Salam, 2025). The study explores servant leadership as powerful driver of innovative work behaviors (EIB), characterized by sincerity, humility and empowerment (Miralles, Pozo, Rodríguez & Pessi, 2024a; Khan, Mubarik, Ahmed & Islam, 2025). It shows that SL service-focused approach boosts mindfulness, generating the positive emotional responses (Zhang, Liu, Aramburo & Jiang, 2025) and resource development that fuels innovation.

The research examines both SL's direct effect on EIB and mindfulness mediating role (Elsaied, 2025), with growing literature confirming SL-EIB connections to creativity (Ali, 2024; Tanno & Banner, 2018). The proposed model suggests SL boosts employee attention, thereby fostering innovation (Sajjad, Eweje & Raziq, 2024). In the today's dynamic business environment, servant leadership is increasingly vital for enhancing employee innovative behavior and maintaining competitiveness (Orieno, Udeh, Oriekhoe, Odonkor & Ndubuisi, 2024). However, the SL-EIB relationship remains unclear (Ghlichlee & Motaghed Larijani, 2024), particularly regarding mindfulness's mediating role (Amin, Shahnaz & Mukminin, 2024; Goyal, Sheoran & Sharma, 2024). This study focuses on Pakistan's BPO sector which is a key economic driver which can address this gap, examining how SL fosters EIB through mindfulness (Chaprana & Palo, 2025). By clarifying these mechanisms, the research aims to help organizations build resilience amid disruptions (Yang, Dong, Guo & Peng, 2025), offering actionable insights for the sustainable growth in competitive markets. This study enhances theoretical understanding of how SL drives EIB through the mindfulness. By cultivating advanced cultures, organizations can better adapt to dynamic business environments, helping both employees and firms.

Research Questions

1. How does servant leadership affect employee innovative behaviour, and what is the nature of this relationship?
2. How does servant leadership affect employees' mindfulness, and what effect does this have on their creative behaviour?
3. How much does mindfulness act as a mediator in connection between innovative employee behaviour and servant leadership?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Servant Leadership

Traditional leadership focused on serving the leader, but servant leadership changed that concept instead of leaders seeking their own advantage, they prioritize serving their followers (Wesevich, 2022a). This approach underlines the growth and development of employees as servant leadership engage with their employee or follower in meaningful ways, aiming to empower them emotionally, ethically, and spiritually (Ortiz, Molina, Ariza & Rios, 2022). By caring for their followers' interests, servant leaders inspire greater engagement and commitment to organizational goals. Thus, despite concerns that servant leadership might neglect organizational interests, it promotes both employee development and organizational success (Giolito, Liden, Dierendonck & Cheung, 2021). Servant leadership practices, like humility and authenticity, help employees grow and contribute to the community. Globally, firms are exploring strategies that motivate employees towards innovative work behaviors.

The servant leaders share information, support their followers, and nurture them to become leaders themselves this leadership style benefits both employees and organizations, improving employee well-being, job satisfaction, performance, and productivity, and fostering creativity and innovation (Kumari, Abbas, Hwang & Cioca, 2022). The servant leadership stands out as a morally driven leadership approach, different from other conventional leadership styles and it prioritizes welfare of others over self-interest, embodying characteristics like empowerment, humility, empathy, and boosts employee attention, thereby fostering innovation and commitment to community (Kaushal, 2023). While research on the impact of servant leadership on the employee innovation is limited, studies guide us that its profound influence on job attitudes, engagement, and turnover intention (Wilson, 2023).

Mindfulness

The mindfulness refers to focused, non-judgmental awareness of the present moment, encompassing both external surroundings and internal experiences (İNCE & DEMİR, 2023; Lau, Michel, LeDoux & Fleming, 2022). This state of attentiveness enables individuals to observe thoughts and emotions objectively, process termed decentering, reducing impulsive reactions and cognitive biases (Carter, Crath, Tronnier, Bhargava, Galeota, Garcia, Lasheen & Steindler, 2024; Lingras, 2022). While rooted in Buddhist traditions (Galla, 2024), mindfulness has gained relevance in the organizational contexts, over its intangible nature makes it challenging to measure directly (Thomas, 2023). The researchers assess it indirectly through behavioral observations, interviews, or task-based analyses

(Good, 2024). The study examines both transient and enduring mindfulness, emphasizing its value for leaders. By cultivating mindfulness, individuals boost regulation and decision-making, that is critical in work dynamics. Still, gaps remain in operationalizing mindfulness within organizational frameworks, warranting the exploration of its observable manifestations and long-term impacts on leadership efficacy.

Employee Innovative Behavior

Innovation theory distinguishes creativity from employee innovative behavior, emphasizing that EIB involves generating and implementing ideas to drive tangible improvements (Héraud, 2021; Malibari & Bajaba, 2022). While creativity focuses on novel idea generation, EIB explicitly targets practical application and organizational benefits (Hammad, 2023). This dual process measured from ideation to execution (Leendertse, Schrijvers & Stam, 2022) addresses the performance gaps through actionable solutions. Though EIB and creativity overlap in the implementation (Nguyen & McGuirk, 2022), their key difference lies in emphasis: creativity initiates innovation, while EIB ensures its realization (Engen, Fuglsang, Tuominen, Sundbo, Møller, Scupola & Sørensen, 2021). The recent research highlights the implementation as the critical phase, bridging creative thought to measurable outcomes. By integrating both stages, organizations foster comprehensive innovation, where ideas are not only conceived but effectively operationalized. This approach underscores the symbiotic relationship between the creativity and EIB, with each phase contributing uniquely to organizational advancement.

Servant Leadership & Employee Innovative Behavior

The innovative behavior can also be known as the generation of new and important ideas within an organization and significant differences in leadership styles impact employee creativity at work (Hanafy, Hajla & Elsharnouby, 2025; Hameed et al.,2021). Different leadership styles have been found to influence subordinate innovative behavior. Servant leaders shape followers' thoughts and actions by empowering them, developing their skills, honoring commitments, understanding their perspectives, and focusing on their interests and future goals. Previous research also indicates that servant leaders encourage creative behavior over building strong relationship with their followers. Social exchange theory, which suggests that workplace behavior is influenced by interactions that create obligations. Thus, this study intends to analyze the link between SL and EIB (Iqbal, Latif & Ahmad, 2020).

However, as businesses increasingly rely on their human capital to navigate the rapidly changing landscape of the knowledge economy, contemporary leadership models like servant leadership are gaining more importance as predictors of various performance outcomes (Wesevich, 2022b). Many studies have proven association amid SL concept and EIB within firm. Servant leadership focuses trust-building through leaders' acceptance, empathy, and development of their subordinates, the effective leadership practices under servant leadership style enhance employee motivation and inspire the adoption of creative work practices (Zorlu et al., 2021). Employees engage in innovative behavior as form of gratitude for the support given by their leaders. Besides, SL requires leaders to include employees in decision-making processes actively and knowing their creative contributions (Usmanova et al., 2023).

Overall, SEL fosters a supportive environment for innovation and contributes to the development of IWBs among organizational members. Servant leaders empower their followers, foster trust and relational identification, and encourage a culture of reciprocity, where employees feel obligated to reciprocate with innovative behaviors (Khattak et al., 2023). By accenting humility, mindfulness and personal growth servant leadership inspires employees to take ownership, leading to improved performance and problem-solving through continuous learning and novel solutions (Tennakoonge, 2023). It plays an important role in encouraging employees to engage in creative work conduct. Servant leadership give positive emotions, enhances cognitive abilities, and enables idea creation. As a result, it is possible to hypothesize that servant leadership has a favorable impact on employee innovation (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2023). Hence based upon the discussion, following hypothesis was developed:

H1: Servant leadership affect employee innovative behavior

Servant Leadership & Mindfulness

Over the last few years, there has been a surge of interest in servant leadership, characterized by its moral dimension (Lemoine et al., 2023). This interest stems from both the increasing demand for the moral and ethical leadership styles and the potential organizational success associated with them (Azhar, 2025). Servant leaders prioritize serving their employees' particular needs and interests through selfless and ethical actions (Zhu, 2025), this manifests itself in the leadership style that is more concerned with others. Servant leaders promote psychological safety by providing support, trust, and open communication. The literature displaying sensitivity, attention, and concern for the employees. This attention can significantly impact employees' awareness and sense of value within teams. In recent decades, mindfulness has garnered increasing interest in various research fields due to its positive associations with job performance of the employees and employees' behavior (Coo & Salanova, 2018).

The employees who get organizational support for their development and well-being tend to show higher levels of mindfulness (Walsh & Arnold, 2020). The servant leadership focuses on employee well-being and support may create helpful conditions for fostering mindfulness among employees (Miralles et al., 2024b). Leaders, especially servant leaders, are perceived as significant resources by employees fostering a culture (Lin et al., 2025) where employees feel valued and listened to and try their best to contribute to a safe psychological environment (Miralles et al., 2024b). Moreover, positive relationships between leaders and employees predict positive outcomes, including better performance at workplace or organization (Wang et al., 2023). Thus, servant leaders who prioritize the well-being and growth of others are more likely to cultivate higher levels of mindfulness among employees (Abdelwahed et al., 2023). Henceforth, based upon the discussion, following hypothesis was developed:

H2: Servant leadership affect employees' mindfulness

### Mindfulness & Employee Innovative Behavior

Demonstrations have shown that possessing trait of mindfulness increases employees' involvement in creative tasks. Individuals in the mindful state tend to cultivate heightened levels of creativity

(Mulligan et al., 2021) Several research have explored the advantages of mindfulness in fostering new ideas and creativity. Employees who exhibit consciousness and mindfulness tend to approach their work and tasks with earnestness, often seeking innovative approaches to completing them (Montani et al., 2020). The mindfulness plays a significant role in the innovative work behavior of employees (Mulligan et al., 2021; Awan et al., 2024). It was established that the mindfulness trait is substantially correlated with creative self-efficacy, and that persons with a high mindfulness trait are motivated to participate in learning experiences related to innovation work. Ilyas and Khattak (2021) suggested that workers' innovative activity is considerably and directly related to perceived workplace performance. Many experts believe that creative work behavior is critical for both the employee and organizational success (Zyl et al., 2021). It is suggested that creative work behavior is a strong predictor of performance in micro and medium-sized enterprises (Ilyas & Khattak, 2021). A recent study conducted by (Assen & Caniëls, 2022) employees with innovation likely perform better at workplace.

Mindfulness as a Mediator

There have been many studies on servant leadership style, which used to affect and enhance the employee's innovative behavior in the workplace (Demeke et al., 2024). Many research has been made in this context, leadership style used to be supported by collaboration, humility, mindfulness, and teamwork (Piwowar & Iqbal, 2024). SL is supported by social exchange theory which let us know how leader behavior has a positive impact on employees or followers (Adra et al., 2024). SL prioritizes demands of subordinates over managers and supports them with resources. In the interim, servant leadership prioritizes the interests of subordinates over the interests of rivals (Ibrahim et al., 2023). It means assisting employees in their success and growth and giving them access to enough resources so they be creative, innovative and fearless when it comes to taking on new challenges (Hidayat, 2023).

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework:
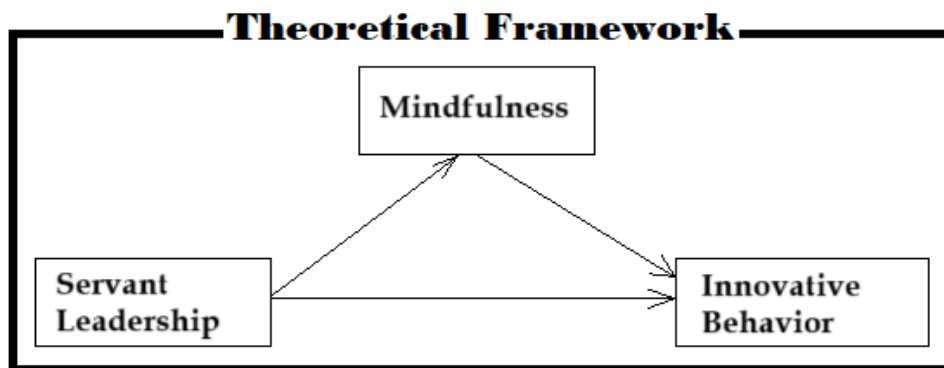
The servant leadership and mindfulness foster psychological safety, with research exploring how compassionate leadership cultivates mindfulness. Organizations can promote mindfulness—both as a trait and trainable practice to enhance work environments and career growth (Khalid & Syed, 2023). The social exchange theory (Ahmad et al., 2023) explains this dynamic: the supportive

leadership boosts engagement and performance, while exploitative behaviors harm it (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020). Trust is critical, strengthening leader-employee bonds and reducing turnover (Mehraein, Visintin & Pittino, 2023; Schaufeli, 2021). Sustainable relationships require leaders to understand follower motivation (Climek, Henry & Jeong, 2024), aligning with results that mindful leadership improves work-life balance and reduces burnout (Kulandaiammal, Hebert, Alafia & Neelakantan, 2024).

H3: Mindfulness as a mediator relates to Servant Leadership and Employee Innovative Behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is explanatory and based upon quantitative data. The research design chosen for this study is causal research, often known as explanatory research. The target population of research is the BPO industry employees at middle and higher levels of jobs in Karachi, Pakistan. In the target population. Both men and women were involved, working in supervisory and higher management areas who have keen knowledge about the leader's style. The exact population size is unknown. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 384 is the standard sample size (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Therefore, for accuracy, the sample size for the research is 500. Soft copies of questionnaires were distributed among the employees by using Google Forms. Adopted questionnaires were used to collect data.

Adopted questionnaires were used to collect data. A survey was created using the framework as a guide and administered through Google Forms. The name, age, gender, and experience are the four demographic questions in the form; the remaining questions dealt with the variable. The Servant Leadership measured through 7-item adopted from (Liden et al., 2015), Employee Innovative work Behavior measured through 10-items adopted from (H200820 - EIB Question.Pdf, n.d.) as well as mindfulness measured through 16-item adopted from (Lau et al., 2006). The research questionnaire utilizes the Likert scale, The questionnaire was based on 5-point rating from highly opposed to totally in support. in this connection, SMART PLS software was used analyze the model structure with the help of the PLS algorithm software, and the hypotheses were be tested by running the bootstrap mechanism.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 1 Summary of Reliability Analyses

	CA	CR (RHO_A)	CR (RHO_C)	AVE
EIB	0.768	0.769	0.843	0.518
MF	0.802	0.802	0.858	0.502
SL	0.603	0.603	0.79	0.557

Table 2 Summary of HTMT

	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)
MF <-> EIB	0.812
SL <-> EIB	0.581
SL <-> MF	0.622

Table 3 Summary of Fornell-Lacker Criterion

	EIB	MF	SL
EIB	0.72		
MF	0.639	0.709	
SL	0.397	0.435	0.746

Table 4 Summary of R-Square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
EIB	0.426	0.423
MF	0.19	0.188

Table 5 Summary of Hypothesis through Path Coefficient

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	(STDEV)	T statistics	P values
MF -> EIB	0.575	0.578	0.041	13.924	0.0000
SL -> EIB	0.147	0.146	0.046	3.201	0.0010
SL -> MF	0.435	0.438	0.042	10.441	0.0000

Figure 1 Bootstrap Model
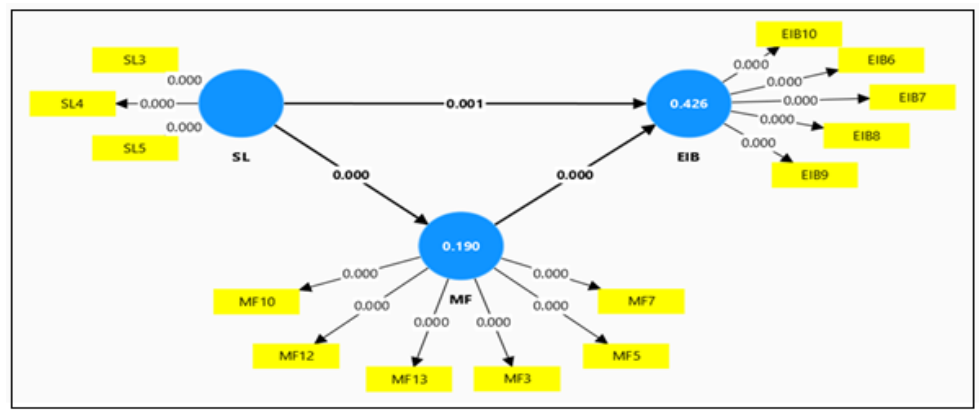
DISCUSSION

H1 (SL → EIB relationship) is supported (p = 0.001), rejecting the null hypothesis. Asamoah (n.d.) confirms leadership styles impact innovative behavior, with servant leaders empowering followers through skill development, empathy, and future-focused support. Iqbal et al. (2020) align with this, highlighting SL's role in fostering creativity through strong leader-follower bonds rooted in social exchange theory. SL enhances idea generation, cognitive abilities & intrinsic motivation (Usmanova et al., 2023), as employees respond supportive leadership with innovative behaviors. Participation in decision-making and recognition of creative efforts strengthen this link. H2 (SL → Mindfulness relationship) is strongly supported (p = 0.000), rejecting the null hypothesis. Research shows servant leadership fosters mindfulness by creating emotional safety over attentiveness and care. Miralles et al. (2024b) further confirm that employees perceive servant leaders as valuable resources who cultivate appreciation, active listening, and safe environments. This leadership approach enhances

employees' awareness and worth within teams, demonstrating SL significant impact on developing mindful work cultures.

H3 (MF → EIB relationship) is confirmed (p = 0.000), showing a positive link between mindfulness and innovative behavior. Awan et al. (2024) found mindfulness strongly correlates with creative self-efficacy, enhancing engagement in innovation-related learning. Ilyas and Khattak (2021) demonstrated that employees' perceived work success directly relates to the innovative activities, underscoring EIB's importance for both individual and organizational performance. **H4**, proposing mindfulness as a mediator amid SL and EIB, is supported by significant results of H1-H3 (Piwowar & Iqbal, 2024). While mindfulness partially explains the SL-EIB relationship, other factors likely contribute. It offers practical insights for fostering innovation by promoting SL and mindfulness in workplaces. The results guide managers in developing strategies to boost EIB, creating competitive advantages. Research shows SL and mindfulness create emotional safety, enabling positive work environments that foster both mindfulness development and career growth (Kulandaiammal et al., 2024). This mediation effect aligns with leadership approaches emphasizing cooperation, humility, and mindfulness.

CONCLUSION

A strong work environment thrives on meaningful employee connections, where individuals feel valued and supported. Regular team-building activities, clear communication, and recognition of successes boost morale and foster trust, leading to enhanced collaboration, innovative thinking, and shared commitment to organizational goals. The inclusive decision-making further strengthens this dynamic by promoting transparency and empowering employees to contribute ideas, reinforcing their sense of ownership and value. Leadership plays pivotal role in cultivating this culture. When leaders openly share their thought processes and actively seek employee input, they build trust and encourage creative participation. This collaborative approach not only boosts accountability but also ensures diverse perspectives are heard, enriching problem-solving and aligning solutions with organizational objectives. Embracing diversity in the brainstorming sessions leads to more innovative outcomes, reinforcing inclusivity as a driver of success. Such practices create a vibrant workplace culture centered on the excellence, mutual respect, and teamwork. Employees in this environment feel inspired to perform at their best, knowing their contributions directly impact the organizational success.

Beyond immediate productivity gains, these strategies establish a foundation for sustained growth, creativity, and long-term achievement. By prioritizing collaboration and support, leaders foster a legacy of innovation and engagement that benefits the entire organization, ensuring resilience and adaptability in an evolving business landscape. This study explores the link between the servant Leadership (SL), Employee Innovative Behavior (EIB), and Mindfulness (MF) but has limitations, including self-reported data biases and a narrow focus on Pakistan's BPO sector. The restricted sample size and demographics also limit generalizability. Future research should expand to diverse industries and regions for broader applicability. Longitudinal studies could track SL's long-term impact on EIB and MF, while mixed-method approaches (e.g., case studies) would deepen insights into SL practices. In this connection, cross-industry comparisons may reveal contextual variations,

strengthening understanding of how SL fosters innovation as well as mindfulness across different organizational settings.

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