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Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Leadership as Predictors of Employee Innovative Behavior: The Mediating Roles of Psychological Safety and Learning Orientation

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ABSTRACT

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The integration of psychological capabilities and effective leadership practices plays an important role in shaping employee behavior in contemporary organizations. This study examined the impact of emotional intelligence and ethical leadership on employee innovative behavior. Emotional intelligence reflects an individual's psychological ability to understand and regulate emotions, whereas ethical leadership represents managerial practices characterized by fairness, integrity, and transparency. The study also investigated the mediating roles of psychological safety and learning orientation in explaining the relationships among these variables. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from employees working in service-sector organizations. Established measurement scales were used to assess the study variables, and the data were analyzed using structural equation modeling to test the hypothesized relationships. The results indicated that emotional intelligence and ethical leadership had significant positive effects on employee innovative behavior. Furthermore, psychological safety and learning orientation significantly mediated the relationships between the independent variables and innovative behavior. The findings suggest that psychological competencies and ethical leadership practices together create a supportive organizational environment that encourages employees to share ideas, learn continuously, and engage in innovative activities within the workplace.

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1.0 Introduction

Companies that are in a more dynamic and competitive setting depend on the capability of employees to create, market, and put into practice new concepts that enhance products, services, and internal operations. In this regard, innovative behavior by employees has become a key to organizational flexibility and sustainability in competitiveness. Innovative behavior is the deliberate invention, introduction and implementation of new ideas in a working position, team, or organization with the purpose of improving performance and efficiency (Namono, Obanda, Ayebale, Isiagi, & Wofuma, 2022). The contemporary organizations hence aim at creating work environments that would stimulate employees to think innovatively and provide innovative solutions to challenging organizational problems. Psychological competencies and leadership practices are among the factors that support such behavior, which are the subject of significant focus in the recent organizational research, as they determine the way employees interpret their workplace, relationships with their coworkers, and participate in creative problem solving (Hunsaker & Ding, 2022).

Specifically, emotional intelligence and ethical leadership have been identified significant antecedents that influence attitudes and behaviors of employees in organizations. Emotional intelligence is the ability of an individual to recognize, comprehend, control, and apply emotions positively in self and others to allow employees to contain emotional reactions and to have good interpersonal relations. Ethical leadership on the other hand is an expression of how leaders portray normatively right behaviours in the form of fairness, honesty, integrity and accountability and also encourage followers to adopt such behaviours through communication and decision making process (Zheng, Epitropaki, Graham, & Caveney, 2022). When leaders act ethically in organizations and employees have good emotional regulation skills, people have a higher chance of feeling respected, valued and will be willing to go beyond the normal working conditions. As a result, these psychological and leadership drivers can become significant stimuli towards the improvement of the innovative behavior of employees (Ye, Liu, & Tan, 2022).

Supportive psychological processes in the work place can also explain the relationship between emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, and innovative behavior. A psychological safety is one of the mechanisms as it is the shared belief of employees that the work environment is safe to risk inter-personally and thus employees are able to share ideas, ask questions and experiment without the fear of criticizing or punishing others. Feeling psychologically safe will encourage employees to contribute less conventional ideas and question current practices, which are critical aspects of innovation (Liu, Huang, Kim, & Na, 2023). In the same manner, learning orientation is the dedication of an individual or an organization to learn new knowledge, enhance competencies, and acquire new and new skills. High learning orientation employees seek feedback actively, learn new things, and use the lessons of experience which contributes to their increased capacity in the generation and implementation of innovative solutions. Such psychological conditions can be promoted with the help of emotional intelligence and ethical leadership which promotes open communication, trust and mutual respect in the workplace (Singh & Singh, 2025).

These relations may be described by using the Social Exchange Theory and Social

Learning Theory as their theoretical background. According to the Social Exchange Theory, employees are expected to reward positive treatment by leaders and organizations with positive behaviors that are beneficial to the organization. With ethical leadership and fairness, employees will tend to respond positively with good attitudes and behavior like creativity and innovations. Equally, the Social Learning Theory is based on the idea that employees learn and replicate the leadership behavior and values of the leaders they observe (Lian et al., 2022). Ethical leaders are thus role models who influence the standards of behavior among employees and motivate them to make responsible and proactive decisions such as generation of ideas and experimentation. Emotional intelligence also intensifies these processes because it assist workers in controlling their interpersonal relationship with each other and also react positively to leadership signals and company demands (Tomblison, 2025).

Although there is a growing appreciation of the relevance of emotional intelligence and ethical leadership in determining employee performance, the literature has been found to largely study the constructs separately or in relation to overall job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. There is a lack of studies that examine the combined effect on employee innovative behavior and especially using psychological mechanisms like psychological safety and learning orientation. Besides, much of the previous research has been mainly concerned with the particular styles of leadership or individual competencies individually without considering the possibility of interactive and mediating processes through which these factors contribute to innovative performance (Tomblison, 2025). The existence of this gap implies that more integrated structure should be involved, which will take into account both psychological capabilities, leadership practices, and supportive organizational climates in explaining the innovative behavior of employees (Ye et al., 2022).

Moreover, the empirical research concerning the mediating role of psychological safety and learning orientation is rather scarce, particularly in the service-sector organization in which the knowledge sharing, teamwork, and continuous learning are crucial to the innovation. The employees of the service sector often work in the conditions where high interpersonal communication and problem solving are involved, and emotional intelligence and ethical leadership are specifically applicable to influence the workplace dynamics. Nevertheless, this has not been given enough consideration in the realization of how these elements generate psychological conditions which can motivate employees to explore new ideas and engage in innovation-related activities (Ghani, Hyder, Yoo, & Han, 2023). This gap needs to be bridged in order to come up with a more all-inclusive knowledge on how organizations can be effective in fostering the innovative behavior among the employees (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021).

The research problem is thus based on how emotional intelligence and ethical leadership can influence the employee innovative behavior, and how the relationships can take place. In particular, it is not clear that the psychological perceptions of the employees about the safety and their orientation towards the continuous learning are the main avenues in the context of which the emotional intelligence and the ethical leadership can be transformed into innovative results. In the absence of such mediating mechanisms, organizations might not be able to make effective

managerial practices and developmental programs that can promote creativity and innovation among employees.

This study has relevance because it will add value to both the theoretical and practical fields. Theoretically, the study combines psychological skills and leadership actions in a single framework to describe the innovative behavior of employees and emphasize the mediating functions of psychological safety and learning orientation. The proposed integrated approach builds on the existing literature and elucidates the psychological mechanisms of how leadership and emotional capabilities can affect innovation-related behaviors. Practically, the results can be used by organizational leaders and managers who want to have a conducive work environment, which promotes creativity, open communication, and lifelong learning. With the focus on the development of emotional intelligence and ethical leadership practices, organizations are able to establish an environment where employees feel free to exchange ideas and can participate in innovative projects that drive organizational performance and competitiveness.

2.0 Literature Review

Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Social Learning Theory (SLT) can be considered the key to explaining the theoretical basis of the relationship between emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, psychological safety, learning orientation, and innovative behavior of the employees. According to the Social Exchange Theory, the relationships between leaders and employees are established on the principles of mutual exchange of trust, fairness, and support. Employees will feel compelled to also treat others in the same positive manner, which they are treated, by showing positive behaviors that will help the organization, such as creativity and innovation, when they have the perception that their leaders are ethical and fair towards them. Ethical leaders are moral models and underline transparency, fairness, and integrity, which contributes to the development of trust and promotes the input of new ideas and solutions among the employees in the workplace (Onsori, Gyurian Nagy, & Szabó-Szentgróti, 2025). On the same note, the Social Learning Theory explains that employees learn and copy the behavior of leaders who portray ethical and responsible behavior, and consequently internalize these behaviors and utilize them in their work practices. In this way, employees are more ready to test new practices and become involved in new work behavior. Moreover, emotional intelligence improves both personal relations and employees and their capacity to control emotions, communicate effectively, and relationships in the workplace, which also promotes collaborative learning and creative thinking in the organizations (Singh & Singh, 2025).

Employee innovative behavior means the deliberate creation, marketing and application of new ideas that will enhance organizational processes, services or products. According to the existing literature, leadership behaviors are the key factors that promote such behaviors among employees. It has been established that ethical leadership is a major predictor of innovative work behavior due to the fact that ethical leaders provide a favorable environment where the organization is full of trust, openness and fairness. Employees will show more positive attitudes and exchange their innovative ideas to enhance organizational performance when they view their leaders as ethical and supportive (Wen, Wu, & Long, 2021). Empirical research has repeatedly

reported that ethical leadership has a positive impact on the innovative work behavior through the establishment of a culture of respect, empowerment, and knowledge sharing in organizations. These types of leadership practices motivate workers to engage in idea generation and experimentation which eventually improves organizational innovation and performance. In addition, the leadership styles that focus on moral values and transparency have been identified to encourage employees to participate in innovative activities as a form of returning the positive support given to them by their leaders (Wen et al., 2021).

In addition to the leadership practices, individual psychological skills including emotional intelligence are also significant in determining the innovative work behavior. Emotional intelligence is the capacity of a person to be aware of, comprehend, and control feelings within and outside the person to be able to communicate and cooperate with others. Employees who have a high emotional intelligence are in a better position to cope with stress at the workplace, have positive relationship and can easily adapt to new organizational changes (Supramaniam & Singaravelloo, 2021). Such competencies enable them to be innovative in thinking, cooperate well with other employees, and find new ways of solving problems. According to previous studies, EI employees are better placed to develop conducive socialization and positive working environments, which are essential in knowledge exchange and cooperative learning processes. As a result, emotional intelligence can help employees to be able to perform innovative actions and to adequately react to complex organizational issues (Strugar Jelača et al., 2022).

Psychological safety is the other important mechanism that describes the role of leadership and personal competences in influencing innovative behavior. Psychological safety means the belief of employees that they will be able to share ideas, ask questions, and make interpersonal risks without being afraid of a negative response to such actions, i.e. criticism or punishment. At high-psychological safety levels in organizations, employees are more cooperative to express unorthodox ideas and risk current practices, which are the necessary preconditions of innovation (Hennel & Rosenkranz, 2021). Ethical leaders usually develop psychological safety through promoting open communication, fairness and mutual respect among teams. Employees will be encouraged to take chances in being creative and engaging in innovative tasks when they feel secure to express their opinions and experiment with new ideas. Empirical data indicates that the leadership behavior style that focuses on trust, empowerment, and support is a key to the enhancement of psychological safety of the employees and, consequently, to innovative work behavior (Hanafy, Al-Hajla, & Elsharnouby, 2025).

Besides psychological safety, learning orientation has also been determined as other significant factors in the innovative behavior of employees. Learning orientation is a personal or organizational pursuit of constant learning, acquisition of knowledge and developing skills. The highly learning oriented employees are those who are eager to acquire new knowledge, new ideas, and utilize the acquired knowledge to enhance their work performance. These people see challenges as growth opportunities and not as challenges, which promotes experimentation and creativity. Learning orientation environmental organizational settings tend to encourage sharing of knowledge, collaboration and continuous improvement thus making employees be able to create

innovative solutions (Gomes, Seman, Berndt, & Bogoni, 2022). It has been emphasized in past research that leadership practices and favourable work climates play a vital role in determining the learning behaviours of employees and promote the innovation of innovative capabilities. Employees will be more motivated to learn and develop new competencies when they realize that their organization appreciates learning and development, and they will bring new innovative ideas that will enhance organizational efficiency (Potnuru, Sahoo, & Parle, 2021).

Judging by the theoretical viewpoints and empirical evidence presented above, one can argue that emotional intelligence and ethical leadership are useful predictors of innovative behavior amongst employees. Moreover, psychological safety and learning orientation can serve as important psychological processes, which can be used to understand how these predictors work to impact innovative outcomes. The higher the emotional intelligence of the employees and the ethical leaders under whom the employees operate, the more chances that the workplace climate will be supportive in terms of trust, openness, and continuous learning. These conditions facilitate the free exchange of ideas, collaborative learning, and experimentation of new ways of solving organizational problems in employees (Nguyen, Shen, & Le, 2022). Thus, the hypotheses are as follows: emotional intelligence has a positive impact on employee innovative behavior; ethical leadership has a positive impact on employee innovative behavior; emotional intelligence has a positive impact on psychological safety; ethical leadership has a positive impact on psychological safety; learning orientation has a positive impact on employee innovative behavior; and psychological safety has a mediating effect between emotional intelligence and employee innovative behavior(Bui, Vu, & Tran, 2024).

3.0 Methodology

The research design that was used in this study was a quantitative research design, which was used to test the relationship between emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, psychological safety, and learning orientation, and employee innovative behavior. The quantitative methodology was deemed suitable since the research will test the hypotheses that are theoretically developed and test causal relationships between various constructs on the basis of statistical methods. The study was based on positivist research philosophy, which presupposes that social phenomena are measurable objectively and that the relationships between variables can be empirically tested due to the possibility of the statistical analysis. Positivism focuses on observable and measurable data and is therefore applied in research studies that aim to test behavioral relationships using structured tools and quantitative methods of data analysis. The research design adopted was a cross-sectional study where the data were obtained at one time of the employees in service-sector organizations. The design helped the researcher to develop the perceptions of the employees about leadership practices, psychological conditions, and innovative behavior in their respective organizational settings.

The study target population was employees working in service sector organizations in Pakistan, i.e. the banking, telecommunication, education, healthcare, and other knowledge intensive service organizations where innovation and generation of ideas is a significant factor in organizational success. This means that employees working in these industries are often involved in problem

solving, teamwork and sharing of knowledge thus they are the right people to study innovative behaviors in the organization. A sample consisting of about 300 employees was chosen with an adequate statistical power to conduct structural equation modeling analysis. The sampling was purposive through non-probability purposive sampling strategy since the respondents were chosen to respond to the study based on their working experience in organizations in the service sector and their capacity to give pertinent information as far as the study constructs are concerned. This method is usually applied in organizational studies in which access to certain groups of employees is necessary and when the respondents are the ones with the requisite knowledge and experience on the variables of the research.

Structured survey questionnaire entailing the use of previously tested measurement scales based on already existing literature was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was categorized into a few parts that measured emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, psychological safety, learning orientation and employee innovative behavior. The measurement items were evaluated using a five point Likert scale based on strongly disagree to strongly agree to elicit the perception and attitudes of respondents towards the study variables. Employees were given the questionnaire in both the online and physical form to enhance the number of people who respond and ensure accessibility. The instrument was checked on its clarity and relevance before the actual data collection process and slight changes on the wording were done to make sure that the questions were easily comprehensible to the respondents in the Pakistani organizational setting. A survey questionnaire allowed the researcher to gather standardized data of a relatively big number of respondents in an effective and methodical way.

The study used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) on SmartPLS software to analyze the data. PLS-SEM was deemed to be the right choice since the need to test a variety of relationships simultaneously between latent constructs is intrinsic to it, and it is also the right choice when predictive and exploratory research models are required to be used to examine the effects of mediation. This analysis was done in two stages. To evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs under consideration with the help of the indicators factor loading, composite reliability, Cronbachs alpha, average variance extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity, the measurement model was evaluated. Second, the structural model was assessed to test the hypothesized relationships of the variables with path coefficients, t-statistics and p-values derived as a result of bootstrapping processes. Also, the mediation functions of psychological safety and learning orientation were tested to establish whether the two constructs can provide explanations of the relationships among emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, and employee innovative behavior.

Ethical issues were keenly monitored during the research process in order to uphold the validity and privacy of data. The involvement in the study was purely voluntary and the respondents were notified of the objective of the research prior to filling the questionnaire. Respondents were assured that their answers would not be disclosed as they would only be utilized in the study of the research. None of the personal details were gathered, and the respondents were not forced to continue with the research until the end without any repercussions. In addition, the data obtained was kept in safe

places and only utilized in doing statistical analysis and research reporting. These were some of the ethical practices that aided in ensuring transparency, privacy of respondents and credibility and reliability of the research findings.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Table 4.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Emotional Intelligence	0.889	0.914	0.640
Ethical Leadership	0.901	0.925	0.673
Psychological Safety	0.873	0.907	0.622
Learning Orientation	0.886	0.915	0.644
Employee Innovative Behavior	0.912	0.932	0.705

The results of reliability and convergent validity show that the measurement model is found to have good internal consistency and construct validity. All the constructs have Cronbach alpha values of between 0.873 and 0.912, as seen in the table, which is above the recommended value of 0.70, and this indicates that the measurement items measure what they are supposed to measure. On the same note, the composite reliability (CR) ranges between 0.907 and 0.932 that are greater than the acceptable threshold of 0.70, also shows that the constructs have high internal reliability. Also, the average variance extracted (AVE) values are between 0.622 and 0.705, all of which is beyond the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that each construct accounts for not less than half of the variance of the indicators. On the whole, these results prove the fact that the measurement model has sufficient reliability and convergent validity, meaning that the emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, psychological safety, learning orientation, and employee innovative behavior constructs are measured with a great degree of accuracy and consistency.

4.2 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Table 4.2 Discriminant Validity

Constructs	EI	EL	PS	LO	EIB
Emotional Intelligence	—				
Ethical Leadership	0.63	—			
Psychological Safety	0.59	0.61	—		
Learning Orientation	0.57	0.60	0.64	—	
Employee Innovative Behavior	0.66	0.69	0.62	0.67	—

Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used to determine the discriminant validity of the constructs, and it was tested by determining whether the constructs in the model are empirically different or not. The HTMT values within the constructs vary between 0.57 and 0.69 as depicted in the table and none exceeds the recommended value of 0.85. Particularly, the value of HTMT of emotional intelligence and ethical leadership is 0.63, with emotional intelligence having 0.59, 0.57, and 0.66 with psychological safety, learning orientation, and employee innovative behavior respectively. Correspondingly, ethical leadership shows a 0.61 score with psychological safety, 0.60 with learning orientation, and 0.69 with employee innovative behavior which is within the range of 0.5 to 1.0 in the values of HTMT. Moreover, the values of the HTMT between psychological safety and learning orientation (0.64), psychological safety and employee innovative behavior (0.62), and learning orientation and employee innovative behavior (0.67) are already under the acceptable range. The results prove that all constructs are distinct enough and therefore there is enough discriminant validity of the measurement model.

4.3 Multicollinearity Test (VIF)

Table 4.3 Multicollinearity Test

Construct	VIF
Emotional Intelligence	2.11
Ethical Leadership	2.24
Psychological Safety	1.98
Learning Orientation	2.06

Value of variance inflation factor (VIF) to determine the existence of multicollinearity between the predictor constructs in the structural model was also looked at. According to the table, the VIF of emotional intelligence (2.11), ethical leadership (2.24), psychological safety (1.98), and learning orientation (2.06) is lower than the recommended value of 5.0. This signifies that the independent variables incorporated in the model do not have problematic levels of multicollinearity and that each construct will only have independent explanatory power on the model. Also, the similarity of VIF nearly equal to 1 also indicates weak redundancy among predictors, which proves that the relationships between the constructs can be estimated without distortion by high intercorrelations. Thus, the findings show that multicollinearity does not pose a problem in the research, and the structural model can be interpreted without any doubts.

4..4 Model Fitness (PLS Model Fit)

Table 4.4 Model Fitness

Model Fit Indicator	Value	Recommended Threshold
SRMR	0.061	< 0.08
NFI	0.912	> 0.90
RMS Theta	0.107	< 0.12

Some of the widely suggested indices used to measure the model fit of the structural model in PLS-SEM were also used to assess the model fit, such as Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Normed Fit Index (NFI), and RMS Theta. According to the table, the value of SRMR equals 0.061, which is less than the suggested value of 0.08, and this means that the proposed model fits the observed data well. In the same manner, NFI value stands at 0.912, and is higher than the acceptable value of 0.90 implying that the model fits well in general, as compared to a null model. Further, RMS Theta = 0.107 and this is smaller than recommended value of 0.12 thus confirming that there is sufficient specification of the measurement model. Taken together, these model fit measures suggest that the proposed structural model can give a satisfactory description of the data and that the associations between emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, psychological safety, learning orientation, and employee innovative behavior can be reliably estimated.

4.5 Structural Equation Model Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β (Path Coefficient)	T Value	P Value	Decision
H1	Emotional Intelligence → Employee Innovative Behavior	0.214	3.48	0.001	Supported
H2	Ethical Leadership → Employee Innovative Behavior	0.276	4.11	0.000	Supported
H3	Emotional Intelligence → Psychological Safety	0.331	5.29	0.000	Supported
H4	Ethical Leadership → Psychological Safety	0.358	5.84	0.000	Supported
H5	Emotional Intelligence → Learning Orientation	0.295	4.67	0.000	Supported
H6	Ethical Leadership → Learning Orientation	0.321	5.01	0.000	Supported
H7	Psychological Safety → Employee Innovative Behavior	0.239	3.72	0.000	Supported
H8	Learning Orientation → Employee Innovative Behavior	0.261	3.95	0.000	Supported

The results of the structural model show that all the direct relationships are statistically significant and positive. In particular, emotional intelligence positively affects innovative behavior of employees ($b = 0.214$, $t = 3.48$, $p = 0.001$), and ethical leadership is also positively associated with innovative behavior ($b = 0.276$, $t = 4.11$, $p < 0.001$), which proves that both psychological skills and ethical leadership styles directly contribute to innovative performance of employees. In addition, ethical leadership and emotional intelligence are also strong predictors of psychological safety ($b = 0.331$, $t = 5.29$, $p < 0.001$; $b = 0.358$, $t = 5.01$, $p < 0.001$, respectively) and learning orientation ($b = 0.295$, $t = 4.67$, $p < 0.001$; $b = 0.321$, $t = 5.01$, $p < 0.001$, respectively Lastly, the positive impact of psychological safety ($b = 0.239$, $t = 3.72$, $p < 0.001$) and learning orientation ($b = 0.261$, $t = 3.95$, $p < 0.001$) are significant on the innovative behavior of employees, which proves

that the two mediating mechanisms play a significant role in the power of emotional intelligence and ethical leadership to boost innovation. On the whole, these findings are a solid empirical evidence of the direct links between the variables suggested in the research and the fact that both leadership and psychological variables play a vital role in the development of innovative work behavior.

4.6 Mediation Results

Table 4.6 Mediation Results

Hypothesis	Indirect Relationship	β	T Value	P Value	Result
H9	Emotional Intelligence → Psychological Safety → Innovative Behavior	0.079	2.91	0.004	Supported
H10	Ethical Leadership → Psychological Safety → Innovative Behavior	0.086	3.04	0.002	Supported
H11	Emotional Intelligence → Learning Orientation → Innovative Behavior	0.077	2.68	0.007	Supported
H12	Ethical Leadership → Learning Orientation → Innovative Behavior	0.084	2.95	0.003	Supported

The results of the mediation analysis suggest that psychological safety and learning orientation play important intermediary roles in the relations between the antecedents (emotional intelligence and ethical leadership) and innovative behavior of employees. In particular, the indirect impact of the emotional intelligence on the innovative behavior via psychological safety ($b = 0.079$, $t = 2.91$, $p = 0.004$) and ethical leadership through psychological safety ($b = 0.086$, $t = 3.04$, $p = 0.002$) are important, indicating that the influencing factors in question partially explain the way, in which they contribute to innovation. In the same way, the indirect impact of emotional intelligence on innovative behavior is significant through learning orientation ($b = 0.077$, $t = 2.68$, $p = 0.007$), and the same can be said about ethical leadership ($b = 0.084$, $t = 2.95$, $p = 0.003$). These results indicate that psychological safety and learning orientation are important mechanisms by which emotional intelligence and ethical leadership converts into greater degree of innovative behaviour among the employees, which underscores the need to encourage favourable psychological environments and a life long learning orientation in the organisations in order to

optimise the results of innovation.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide robust evidence for the significant roles of emotional intelligence and ethical leadership in promoting employee innovative behavior within service-sector organizations. The results confirm that both emotional intelligence and ethical leadership have positive direct effects on innovative behavior, indicating that employees who can understand and regulate their own emotions and those of others, and who work under leaders demonstrating fairness, integrity, and transparency, are more likely to engage in creative problem-solving and idea generation. These results are consistent with previous studies highlighting that psychological competencies and morally responsible leadership foster proactive and innovative behaviors among employees. The findings also support the theoretical underpinnings of Social Exchange Theory and Social Learning Theory, suggesting that employees reciprocate positive treatment and emulate ethical behaviors observed in leaders, which enhances their willingness to contribute novel ideas to organizational processes.

The study further reveals that psychological safety and learning orientation serve as significant mediators in the relationships between emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, and employee innovative behavior. Psychological safety, defined as the belief that one can take interpersonal risks without negative consequences, enables employees to share unconventional ideas and challenge existing practices confidently. Employees who perceive high psychological safety are more likely to experiment and implement innovative solutions, highlighting the importance of supportive workplace climates in fostering creativity. Likewise, learning orientation, reflecting employees' commitment to acquiring knowledge and improving competencies, provides a critical mechanism through which emotional intelligence and ethical leadership translate into innovation. Employees with strong learning orientation actively seek feedback, explore new approaches, and continuously improve their skills, thereby enhancing their innovative capacity. These results align with prior research emphasizing that supportive psychological and learning environments are essential for translating leadership practices and individual capabilities into tangible innovation outcomes.

In conclusion, the study confirms that emotional intelligence and ethical leadership are significant predictors of employee innovative behavior and that the effects of these antecedents are strengthened through the mediating roles of psychological safety and learning orientation. Organizations that invest in developing employees' emotional competencies and promote ethical leadership behaviors are likely to experience higher levels of innovation and creativity among their workforce. Furthermore, cultivating a psychologically safe work environment and encouraging a learning-oriented culture can enhance employees' willingness to share ideas and experiment with new approaches, ultimately contributing to organizational competitiveness and adaptability in dynamic market contexts.

Based on these findings, several practical recommendations can be proposed. Organizations should implement training programs focused on improving employees' emotional intelligence skills, such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication, as these competencies directly enhance innovative behavior. Additionally, leadership development

programs should emphasize ethical decision-making, fairness, integrity, and transparency, encouraging leaders to model behaviors that promote trust, respect, and openness within teams. Human resource practices should also focus on creating psychologically safe environments where employees feel comfortable expressing ideas and taking calculated risks, alongside policies that encourage continuous learning and skill development to reinforce a learning-oriented culture.

The implications of this study extend to both theory and practice. Theoretically, the research contributes to the literature by integrating emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, psychological safety, and learning orientation into a unified framework that explains employee innovative behavior. It highlights the critical mediating mechanisms that help translate leadership and psychological capabilities into innovative outcomes, addressing existing gaps in empirical research regarding the combined effects of these variables. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for managers and organizational leaders seeking to foster innovation in service-sector settings. By emphasizing the development of psychological competencies, ethical leadership practices, and supportive learning environments, organizations can enhance their innovative capacity, improve employee engagement, and maintain a competitive edge in rapidly evolving business contexts.

Contribution

Hamid Bilal: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework
Ayesha Kashif: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest in this article's research, authorship,and publication.

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