

## The Role of Mediation Readiness to Change in the Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Culture on Innovative Work Behavior of Employees: A Conceptual Analysis

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Des 22<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Revised Januari 23<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Accepted Maret<sup>th</sup>, 2026

#### Keyword:

Transformational Leadership,  
Organizational Culture,  
Readiness To Change,  
Innovative Work Behavior,  
Conceptual Analysis.

### ABSTRACT

The acceleration of technology and the need for continuous transformation make innovative employee behavior a key determinant of organizational sustainability. The success of this innovation is influenced not only by transformational leadership and organizational culture, but also by individual psychological readiness (readiness to change) in the face of change. This article develops an integrative conceptual framework to examine the mediating role of readiness to change in the relationship among transformational leadership, organizational culture, and innovative work behavior. Based on a systematic literature review (2019–2025), and based on a series of hierarchical regressions, the study hypothesizes that transformational leadership and adaptive culture foster cognitive, affective and behavioral staff commitment to change, so triggering innovation. Theoretically, this study positions readiness to change as a psychological mechanism that bridges the influence of organizational context on individual innovation. In practice, this framework serves as a guide for organizations to design leadership, cultural, and change-management interventions to support sustainable innovation.



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## INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological change, competitive market pressures, and demands for digital transformation are forcing organizations to maintain a high level of innovation capacity as a strategic resource. Innovative employee behavior, including the creation, promotion, and implementation of new solutions, is at the core of the organizational innovation process. Still, the sustainability of such behavior depends heavily on individuals' psychological conditions and the organizational context in which innovation is required. In practice, change initiatives often generate uncertainty and resistance; therefore, internal factors, such as employee readiness to change, become determinants of whether organizational interventions lead to the adoption and implementation of innovation.

Transformational leadership has been consistently reported to increase innovative behavior through the creation of a shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and the empowerment of subordinates, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment. In recent empirical research, transformational leadership is positively related to innovative work behavior through the mediating mechanisms of psychological empowerment, organizational identification and employee voice (Jun & Lee, 2023; Karimi et al., 2023; Li & Lin, 2024). But this leader effect is not direct; what determines a leader's influence is always modulated by the psychological state of the receivers of change, in their change readiness, that is, their attitude on change and their intentions to implement it.

Like leadership, an organisational culture that encourages learning, psychological safety, and the tolerance for taking risks and failing is a contextual factor that can support the exploration of ideas and their testing for innovativeness (Saif et al., 2024). Such a culture lessens the punitive nature of failure and promotes face-to-face collaboration that facilitates experimentation. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the presence of an innovative culture

alone is not always sufficient to lead individuals to actually exhibit innovative behavior when they are not yet cognitively, affectively, or behaviorally ready to change; without readiness, radical cultural norms may be met with tacit resistance or underemployment (Köhler et al., 2024).

The construct of readiness to change, which incorporates cognitive (knowledge of the need for change), affective (emotional commitment to change), and behavioral (intention and desire to act) components, is identified as a proximal psychological mechanism that explains how leadership and organizational culture influence innovation activity. Organizational readiness is also confirmed as a mediator of organizational factors and change success, rather than being more tangible and measurable compared to other constructs (leadership style, culture type). Discoveries showing that interventions toward leadership or culture have stronger effects when accompanied by strategies to bring individuals' readiness up to speed (Köhler et al., 2024; Oreg et al., 2023). Besides, recent research has indicated that readiness development programs (e.g., clear communication, participation in decision-making, and adaptive training) could enhance the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative behavior in digital transformation (studies 2023–2024).

Although the three elements of transformational leadership, organizational culture, and readiness to change have been studied extensively, the literature shows an integrative gap: few studies conceptually and systematically place readiness to change as a central mediating mechanism that simultaneously links both transformational leadership and organizational culture with innovative work behavior. Readiness for change is often treated as a moderator variable, a mediator, or even an individual independent variable in studies that do not account for the psychological processes linking context and an individual's innovative response. This is particularly important in periods of rapid evolution and digitalization, when companies need tangible building blocks for design leadership and cultural interventions while slowly but surely cultivating individual readiness.

Based on this gap, this conceptual article aims to formulate an integrative theoretical framework that positions readiness to change as the primary mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational culture and employees' innovative work behavior. Theoretical contributions The theoretical relevance of the findings in this study lies in three aspects: (1) extending our understanding of organizational change theory through consideration of readiness to change as a psychological mediation process; (2) consolidating leadership and organizational culture literature under a single model that explicate how influences are transmitted to Innovative Work Behaviour; and (3) suggesting that readiness to change can be measured multidimensionally (building awareness, knowledge, support for changes). Practical contributions include guidance for HR practitioners and management on designing programs to strengthen readiness to change (strategic communication, employee engagement, implementation-oriented training) that enable the influence of transformational leadership and organizational culture to manifest in tangible sustainable innovation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Transformational Leadership

According to Bennett (2002), transformational leadership is a process in which people engage with others and create relationships that increase motivation and morale in leaders and followers. Four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, in which leaders, despite having charisma, demonstrate integrity, emphasize trust, uphold the most important values, emphasize the importance of goals, and demonstrate commitment. Intellectual stimulation, a dimension that shows leaders who encourage their followers to be more creative, come up with ideas, and solve existing problems using new approaches that require critical thinking and rational reasoning rather than mere assumptions. Individual

consideration: This dimension describes leaders who treat others as individuals, consider their needs and aspirations, listen to them, and educate and train their subordinates. Inspirational motivation: This dimension describes leaders who inspire others in their work and encourage their followers to realize shared goals, making the process more meaningful.

## Organizational Culture

Organisational culture is the set of shared values, norms, beliefs, and practices that shape how people think, act, and respond to change in most organisations. Organizational culture as a contextual factor. The role of organizational culture in predicting innovation is the degree to which employees feel safe enough to take risks and try something new. Recent studies indicate that a learning, open-to-change and psychologically safe organization is prospectively related to employees' innovative work behavior as it fosters an environment for exploration and failure learning (Saif et al., 2024).

Recent studies also suggest that organizational culture is not only a distal factor but also affects innovation through individual psychological states. "Adaptive and change-oriented culture, as a whole, significantly contributes to the perceptions of organization support, trust and involvement with employees in innovative initiatives." (Qomari & Yuliantini, 2024). Conversely, a rigid, control-oriented culture tends to hinder innovative behavior by increasing fear of mistakes and reducing employees' courage to try new approaches.

In recent years, the literature has increasingly emphasized that the effectiveness of organizational culture in fostering innovation is conditional. A culture of innovation will affect only as much as people are psychologically ready to adopt new modes. A lack of such preparedness can even cause culture to seem as an additional burden especially in a world that is increasingly becoming more fluid and where digitilisation carries us away (Köhler et al., 2024). These results strengthen the justification that OC was to be considered a context which interacts with individual readiness to affect innovative behaviour.

## Readiness To Change

Readiness to change is defined as the extent to which individuals cognitively understand the need for change, affectively support change, and behaviorally are willing to engage in its implementation. This notion is treated as a proximal psychological state that mediates the effects of organizational factors on individual responses to change. Recent literature defines readiness to change as a multidimensional construct, including i) belief that the organization will benefit from change; ii) trust in management, and iii) self-confidence in adapting (Köhler et al., 2024).

Empirical research over the past three years shows that readiness to change plays an important role in determining the success of change and innovation initiatives. Employees with high expected readiness for change have a proactive attitude, cognitive flexibility and are actively involved in shaping and introducing new ideas." (Oreg et al., 2023). Within the leadership and organisational culture landscape, change readiness is an internal mechanism through which external influences, such as a leader's vision or new cultural expectations are transmuted into innovative activity.

Furthermore, recent studies place readiness to change as a mediating variable that explains why managerial practices and organizational contexts do not always produce uniform innovative responses among employees. When readiness to change is low, employees tend to exhibit passive resistance or feigned compliance, ultimately weakening the implementation of innovation (Vakola & Petrou, 2024). Therefore, readiness to change is seen as a psychological prerequisite for the emergence of sustainable innovative work behavior, especially in organizations facing intensive change.

## **Innovative Work Behavior**

Innovative work behavior refers to a series of individual activities that include generating new ideas, promoting them to relevant parties, and realizing and implementing them in the context of work. For example, in recent literature, it is claimed that the construction of innovative work behaviour itself is a dynamic and processual phenomenon rather than just innovation as such (Montani et al., 2014). Thus, Innovative Work Behavior is the primary level of analysis in HRIB case study research.

A Result score is down 9 above the Recent study shows that Innovative work behavior's to be influenced by both individual and contextual level. This includes personal factors, such as intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and readiness to change, in addition to contextual factors - such as leadership/workplace culture and psychological safety (Karimi et al., 2023). Empirical findings show that employees are more likely to engage in innovative behavior when they feel supported, trusted, and confident that the changes initiated by the organization are positive for themselves and the organization.

The literature has in the past three years also noted innovative work behaviour as becoming ever more pertinent in an environment that is constantly changing and being digitalised. Innovation is no longer the exception to the rule, it has become a constant demand for companies and employees who are required to continue to evolve and innovate. Consequently, research recommends that innovative work behavior is understood as a function of the relationships among leadership, organizational culture, and individual psychosocial readiness for change (Lin, 2023; Saif et al., 2024). This perspective emphasizes the importance of an integrative model that places readiness to change as a key mechanism in explaining the emergence of innovative work behavior.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative, conceptual analysis design to develop and integrate a theoretical framework on the role of readiness to change as a mediating variable in the relationship between transformational leadership, organizational culture, and employees' innovative work behavior. This approach is not directed at testing hypotheses statistically, but rather at explaining the conceptual mechanisms (how and why) that explain the relationship between variables based on a synthesis of theory and empirical findings. Conceptual analysis is relevant to this article because the research focuses on constructing an integrative model that can serve as a basis for further empirical research.

The research data sources were secondary literature, specifically reputable national and international scientific journal articles. The systematic review was conducted across prominent academic databases using the keywords: transformational leadership, organizational culture, readiness for change, and innovative work behaviour. A priority was placed on literature from 2019 through to 2025 to provide the salient organisational change and innovation context. The selection process involved screening titles, abstracts, and full-text articles against the criterion that articles must discuss at least one main variable and make theoretical or empirical contributions relevant to the development of conceptual models.

We used conceptual synthesis and thematic analysis to analyze the data, which entailed identifying how a concept was defined, delineating relationship patterns among variables, and synthesizing pervasive psychological mechanisms from the existing literature. The synthesis results were used to formulate a conceptual framework and research propositions that explain the direct and indirect relationships among variables. To maintain conceptual validity, this study used triangulation of literature sources and established construct definitions. Although it did not involve empirical testing, this approach made a theoretical contribution by offering a coherent and relevant conceptual model as a basis for future quantitative or mixed-method research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model posits that transformational leadership and organizational culture are the central antecedent constructs of employee readiness for change, which, in turn, predicts innovative work behavior. Based on theory, transforming leadership has an impact on employees' perceptions that change will be beneficial and must occur (i.e., a team mindset) through inspirational vision communication, empowerment, and support for the individual employee, leading to stimulated cognitive, affective, and behavioral readiness to change. And a learning- and change-enabling cultural environment creates a psychological climate where experimenting and taking calculated risks are safe and reinforce readiness for change. This readiness to change serves as a psychological mechanism that bridges the influence of leadership and organizational culture on innovative work behavior, as employees who are ready to change tend to view change as an opportunity and are motivated and ready to generate, promote, and implement new ideas. This proposed conceptual model argues that new transformational leadership.

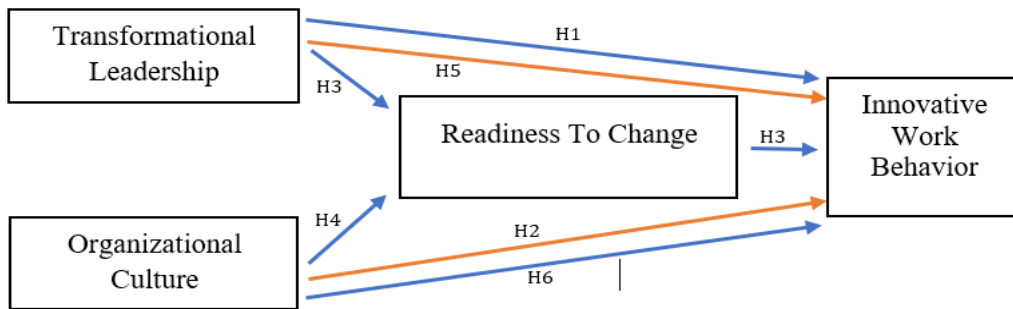


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The most recent empirical research demonstrates a robust positive association between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior, as well as the mediating effects of psychological mechanisms (e.g., empowerment, self-efficacy, readiness) underlying this relationship (Jun & Lee, 2023; Lin, 2023; Saif et al., 2024). Organizations aspiring to further support employee innovation may integrate transformational leadership development with cultural interventions focused on psychological safety and continual learning. Increase readiness to change by using interventions that enable effective communication about change, readiness training, and your own involvement in designing the change.

Transformational leadership is often identified as a significant driver of innovation. Theoretical rationale: The theoretical rationale is based on leaders' impact on followers' cognition and motivation. Transformational leaders enhance readiness to change by articulating visions of the future, giving subordinates more power, and providing support for personal problems. This enables employees to build collective confidence in their ability to cope with change and increases their perception of its benefits. In addition, transformational leadership is directly related to innovative work behavior; effective leaders encourage followers to engage in creative, extra-role solution-seeking behaviors (Jun & Lee, 2023; Lin, 2023; Saif et al., 2024). For instance, transformational leaders stimulate innovative work behavior via practices like enhanced knowledge sharing (Saif et al., 2024).

On the other, it positions a fertile ground in which change and innovation can germinate (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024). An adaptive, innovation-oriented culture is essential because it fosters a safe psychological climate. This climate allows employees to experiment without

fear of punishment (Köhler et al., 2024), an important prerequisite for reducing the psychological risks associated with adopting new ideas. An organizational culture that supports innovation positively influences innovation performance and facilitates mechanisms such as ambidextrous learning (Zhang et al., 2023), which ultimately contributes to increased readiness to change.

At the second level, readiness to change plays a central mediating role. The moment employees are ready (from a cognitive and emotional perspective) to embrace change, they have more incentive to redirect their efforts towards productive work. This preparedness supports IWB because employees perceive change as an opportunity to implement new ideas rather than a hindrance. With readiness, employees will have the willingness and ability to generate, promote, and implement new ideas that align with organizational goals, thereby bridging strategic initiatives (such as leadership and culture) with actual behavioral outcomes/Innovative Work Behavior.

Based on the above discussion, the results of the conceptual analysis research are as follows:

### **Transformational Leadership Impact on Innovative Work Behavior**

Conceptually, transformational leadership is seen as the primary driver of innovative work behavior because it influences employees' cognition, motivation, and behavioral orientation. Transformational leaders also promote innovation through their expression of an exciting vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support, empowering employees to take risks in generating or implementing creative new ideas. Recent research has shown that transformational leadership is likely to elicit innovative behavior when employees feel empowered, trusted, and encouraged to be creative. Consequently, there exists a strong theoretical foundation (the positive association between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior (Jun & Lee, 2023).

### **Organizational culture's impact on employees' innovative work behavior**

Organizational culture provides a social structural framework that determines employee behavior norms and expectations. An adaptive, learning-focused culture that encourages psychological safety promotes experimentation and judicious risk-taking. According to this framework, organizational culture decreases fear of failure and enhances perceptions of organizational support, which, in turn, influences Innovative work behavior. Hence, the more supportive the organizational culture toward innovation, the greater the likelihood that employees will be involved in generating, promoting, and implementing new ideas (Saif et al., 2024).

### **Transformational leadership impact on employee readiness to change**

Transformational leadership has a significant bearing on employees' readiness to change, as leaders are seen as agents of change who influence how employees interpret organizational changes (Vakola & Petrou, 2024). Transformational leaders enhance employees' perceptions of the desirability of change and their trust in management by communicating a clear vision and providing empowerment and individual consideration. In a metaphorical sense, the process helps build the muscle of cognitive, affective, and behavioral readiness to change, so that employees are more likely to hold on to and support (Oreg et al., 2023).

### **Organizational culture's impact on employee readiness to change**

An adaptive and change-supportive organizational culture creates a psychological climate that fosters individual readiness to change. With values that promote lifelong learning, broad cooperation, and a willingness to experiment, employees will experience change as an opportunity rather than a threat. In this conceptual model, organizational culture is positioned

as a contextual factor that shapes employees' psychological readiness by reducing resistance and increasing trust in the change process (Vakola & Petrou, 2024).

### **Transformational leadership impact on innovative work behavior through Readiness to change as a Mediating Variable**

Presumably, the effect of transformational leadership on innovative work behavior is indirect rather than a direct relationship; it transpires through the psychological readiness to change of employees. Readiness to change serves as a mediating process by which leaders' vision, support and empowerment get internalized by employees in terms of readiness to act. Employees with a high level of readiness to change tend to be more proactive and willing to allocate their energy to generate and implement innovative ideas, thereby bridging the influence of leadership on behavioral outcomes (Karimi et al., 2023)

### **Organizational culture impact on innovative work behavior through Readiness to change as a Mediating Variable**

Readiness to change is presented as a psychological mechanism translating organizational norms and values into behaviour at the individual level in an organizational culture-innovative work behaviour relationship. An innovation-supportive climate will make the stimulation of innovative work behaviour stronger when employees are cognitively and emotionally prepared to meet the need for change. As such, readiness to change explains why a given organizational culture can lead to different levels of innovative behavior, depending on the degree to which employees are ready to adopt and enforce changes (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024)

## **THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Theoretically, this model fills a gap in the literature on the interaction between contextual factors and individual behavior. The literature has validated the direct relationship between transformational leadership and Innovative Work Behavior (Jun & Lee, 2023; Li & Lin, 2024) as well as the role of culture in supporting innovation (Zhang et al., 2023). The main contribution of this model is the placement of readiness to change as a central mediating mechanism, which enriches the understanding of causality by explaining how the energy of leadership and support from culture are internalized by employees into psychological conditions (readiness) before being manifested in actual behavior (Innovative Work Behavior).

This model does not hide the challenge of more detailed empirical testing. Future studies should employ multilevel and cross-sector designs to validate the external validity of these mediation results, as readiness to change may vary across typologies depending on organizational context (Köhler et al., 2024). This model does not hide the challenge of more detailed empirical testing. Future studies should apply multi-level and cross-sector designs to validate the external validity of these mediation results, because readiness to change may be found in different typologies depending on organizational context, IWB (Innovative Work Behavior) (Saif et al., 2024).

The theoretical and practical implications for HR practitioners and managers remain that this framework offers an articulated roadmap through which innovation can be stimulated by the management of antecedents and mediating constructs. First, organizations need to acknowledge the pressing need for leaders with transformational traits. Leadership training should help these leaders to develop a set of key skills - for example, communicating an inspiring vision, nurturing individuals, and empowering employees - with which they can increase the motivation of their staff to innovate (Jun & Lee, 2023). Additionally, leaders must be taught to facilitate knowledge sharing, which has been proven key to translating leadership into innovative behavior (Saif et al., 2024). Second, leaders must build an organizational culture that supports experimentation. This is crucial because an adaptive, pro-innovation culture

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# Global Explorations in Economics and Management

Volume 1, Number 1, 2026

P-ISSN: xxxx-xxxx E-ISSN : xxxx-xxxx

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creates a safe psychological climate in which the risk of failure is accepted as part of the learning process (Zhang et al., 2023). A strong and supportive culture, as supported by a systematic literature review Tadesse Bogale & Debela (2024), is an important prerequisite for triggering readiness to adopt new ideas (Köhler et al., 2024).

Furthermore, because readiness to change is a proximal predictor of Innovative Work Behavior, organizations must design interventions that directly aim to increase readiness. These interventions must be based on three identified pillars: consistently communicating the benefits of change to increase employee confidence, providing adequate training and resources, and increasing employee participation in decision-making processes related to change. By focusing on these three main areas of intervention leadership, culture, and organizational readiness, organizations can effectively convert their strategic capital into tangible and innovative behavioral outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

This conceptual analysis highlights the integration of three important domains in organizational management: transformational leadership, organizational culture, and readiness to change, with the main objective of explaining the triggers of employees' innovative work behavior. The main conclusion of this conceptual framework is that readiness to change plays a crucial mediating role, bridging the influence of leadership and culture on innovative work behavior.

Theoretically, this proposed model fills a gap in the literature by proposing that the influence of transformational leadership Jun & Lee, (2023); Lin (2023); Saif et al (2024) and adaptive and safe cultural support Tadesse Bogale & Debela (2024) must be internalized by employees as collective and individual readiness before innovative work behavior can be optimally realized. We define as a psychological predisposition of the individual contributing to employees positively responding their attitude toward instead of threat from the new initiatives (Köhler et al., 2024). This model offers a testable framework for quantitative studies and a suggestion for increasing its strength by developing it through multi-level testing and adding control variables to enhance external validity.

On a practical level, this model provides HR practitioners and leaders with a game plan to follow. In order to support innovative work behavior, organizations should: (1) Educate leaders through transformational factors that have proven to be effective stimulants for sharing knowledge and innovation (Saif et al., 2024). (2) Cultural innovation-supportive development based on psychological security (Zhang et al., 2023), and (3) Communicational participating interventions to directly trigger readiness for change adaptation (Köhler et al., 2024). Through the synergistic handling of these situational antecedents and intervening conditions, organisations can successfully transform their strategic assets into durable innovation capacity-building.

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## Global Explorations in Economics and Management

Volume 1, Number 1, 2026

P-ISSN: xxxx-xxxx E-ISSN : xxxx-xxxx

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