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Servant Leadership and Innovative Work Behaviour: Resolving the Dimensionality Debate through a Multilevel Resource-based Framework

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ABSTRACT

Innovative work behaviour (IWB) is crucial for organisational adaptation; nevertheless, current research is conceptually disjointed, especially concerning the dimensionality of IWB and the methods by which leadership fosters innovation. The principal objective of this study is to establish a cohesive, theory-based framework that elucidates how servant leadership promotes enduring innovative work behaviour through processes of resource production, incentive, and resource transfer. Utilising Servant Leadership Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, the study defines servant leaders as essential facilitators of innovation by creating pathways for resources that safeguard, activate, and restore psychological, social, and structural assets. To improve explanatory capacity, the framework is supplemented by Social Exchange Theory, the Job Demands–Resources model, and Self-Determination Theory, which together clarify the mechanisms by which leadership-generated resources are reciprocated, internalised, and transformed into sustained innovative behaviour. The paper employs a narrative critical review methodology to synthesise current literature, elucidate definitional difficulties related to IWB, reconcile conflicts between resource conservation and investment, and define processes of empathy-driven resource crossing. The analysis additionally reveals contextual factors, such as organisational culture and environmental volatility that influence the efficacy of leadership-driven innovation. This study enhances theoretical clarity by refining classifications of innovation-related resources and elucidating resource flows facilitated by leaders, providing practical guidance for institutionalising servant leadership practices that foster resilient, resource-abundant environments conducive to sustaining innovation and long-term competitive advantage.

1. INTRODUCTION

Innovative work behaviour (IWB) has become a vital concept in organisational research, reflecting employees' ability to conceive, advocate for, and execute original ideas that improve organisational adaptability and competitiveness in unstable environments (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017; Srirahayu et al., 2023). Organisations acknowledge the strategic necessity of promoting continuous innovation at the human level

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while contending with swift technology progress, evolving market requirements, and heightened uncertainty. Notwithstanding increasing scholarly interest, the conceptualisation of IWB remains disjointed, marked by conflicting perspectives on its dimensions and theoretical underpinnings. This fragmentation hinders the establishment of cohesive empirical data and restricts the creation of unified theoretical models necessary for directing both research and administrative practice.

A significant debate in the IWB literature pertains to its dimensional framework. The prevailing conceptualisation characterises IWB as a multistage process, generally encompassing idea generation, promotion, and implementation (Janssen, 2000; Scott & Bruce, 1994), with additional stages such as idea exploration, reflection, and networking proposed in further elaborations (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Messmann & Mulder, 2012). Although these process-orientated models offer analytical detail, their presumption of linear growth contradicts empirical evidence in dynamic organisational contexts, where innovation frequently occurs through improvisational, repetitive cycles (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013). Conversely, advocates of a unidimensional perspective contend that IWB is more accurately understood as a cohesive behavioural disposition, embodying a multifaceted interaction of cognitive, affective, and behavioural components without imposing arbitrary stage delineations (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017; Janssen, 2000).

This issue goes beyond simple definitional distinctions, having substantial implications for theory development, measurement, and application. Multidimensional frameworks, despite their detailed nature, often experience construct proliferation, measurement inconsistencies, and restricted comparability across contexts (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). In contrast, unidimensional measures typically exhibit greater construct reliability and enhanced predictive validity for overarching organisational outcomes (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). This study employs a unidimensional perspective to improve theoretical simplicity and empirical strength, while acknowledging that process insights are essential for guiding leadership strategies that foster creativity. The influence of leadership on promoting innovative work behaviour represents a significant and evolving area of research outside dimensionality. Servant Leadership (SL), which prioritises follower growth, empowerment, and welfare (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2014), provides a persuasive framework for comprehending the environment favourable to IWB. Current studies have established a positive correlation between SL and immediate innovation facilitators, including work engagement, voice behaviour, and knowledge sharing (Chen et al., 2015; Halbesleben et al., 2014). Nonetheless, these investigations frequently lack a thorough theoretical framework regarding the resource dynamics that support such mediations, thereby constraining their explanatory efficacy and practical applicability.

This conceptual study addresses this gap by integrating Servant Leadership Theory (SLT) (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2014) with Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) to provide a theoretically grounded, unidimensional model of IWB. Servant leaders are defined as "resource passageways" (Hobfoll et al., 2018), employing principles of resource investment, gain, and crossover to stimulate innovation-related capabilities among followers. This research integrates COR observations with additional frameworks, including Social Exchange Theory (SET), the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), to provide a multilayered account of how leadership actions foster sustained innovative performance. This integration elucidates persistent conceptual difficulties and redefines COR as a proactive, growth-orientated paradigm appropriate for innovation situations. Furthermore, it offers pragmatic techniques for integrating innovation-fostering leadership approaches into organisational frameworks, thus effectively connecting theory and practice.

In this context, the main aim of this study is to establish a cohesive, theory-based framework that elucidates how SL promotes enduring IWB through mechanisms of resource production, incentive, and resource transfer. This conceptual paper aims to achieve four interconnected objectives. Initially, it aims to elucidate the conceptualisation of IWB by proposing a unidimensional, resource-orientated perspective that reconciles current dimensionality discussions. Secondly, it seeks to amalgamate SLT and COR theories to elucidate how leaders operate as conduits for resources, facilitating resource allocation, accumulation spirals, and resource interchange that foster innovation. Third, it enhances this integration by integrating complementary viewpoints from SET, the JD-R model, and SDT to elucidate how resources provided by

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leadership are reciprocated, internalised, and transformed into enduring innovative behaviour. The study seeks to discover essential contextual modifiers and boundary conditions that influence the effectiveness of SL in promoting IWB across various organisational contexts.

The study contributes significantly by pursuing these objectives. Theoretically, it proposes a cohesive and integrative framework that transcends disjointed leadership-innovation models and redefines COR as a proactive, growth-orientated theory applicable to innovation contexts. It conceptualises SL as a fundamental mechanism for organising resource flows that facilitate creativity, rather than simply as a relational or ethical leadership approach. It provides practical ideas for institutionalising leadership methods that integrate innovative, supportive resources into organisational systems. The study aims to reconcile persistent discrepancies between theory and reality, establishing a more definitive basis for forthcoming empirical research on leadership-driven innovation.

2. CONCEPTUALISING INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR: DEBATES AND DEVELOPMENTS

IWB has been conceptualised through multiple perspectives, illustrating different epistemological positions about its essence and methodology. Initial predominant models by Scott and Bruce (1994) and Janssen (2000) depicted IWB as a linear, sequential process involving idea generation, promotion, and implementation. Subsequent enhancements incorporated new phases, including concept discovery, reflection, and networking (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Messmann & Mulder, 2012), hence augmenting process specificity and emphasising the unique competencies and resources needed at each level (Anderson et al., 2014). Empirical studies, especially in agile or cross-functional teams, demonstrate that these stages frequently occur concurrently or recursively, undermining the linearity suggested by stage-based frameworks (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013).

Critics of the multidimensional approach assert that the expansion of phases has resulted in significant construct redundancy and measurement inconsistencies (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). Divergences in the quantity, nomenclature, and practical definitions of dimensions impede meta-analytic synthesis and obstruct cumulative theoretical advancement. For example, several instruments distinguish "idea exploration" as an independent dimension, whilst others incorporate it inside idea creation, resulting in disparate empirical findings (Messmann & Mulder, 2012). Furthermore, the multidimensional perspective may neglect the nonlinear, improvisational nature of innovation, wherein problem-solving and advocacy frequently coexist inside interconnected cycles rather than in a straight progression. The unidimensional perspective regards IWB as a comprehensive behavioural disposition that includes the full spectrum of creative actions without unnecessarily dividing them into several phases (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017; Janssen, 2000). This methodology corresponds with complexity theory, which perceives adaptive systems as emergent and self-organising rather than mechanistically sequential (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Empirical evidence indicates that unidimensional operationalisations produce greater concept reliability, enhanced predictive validity, and wider applicability across cultural and sectoral contexts (Scott & Bruce, 1994). This study employs a unidimensional framework to improve theoretical simplicity, measurement consistency, and practical significance.

SLT characterises leaders as enablers of follower development, empowerment, and welfare, marked by humility, empathy, stewardship, and a community-centric approach (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2014). In contrast to transactional or solely transformational methods, SL promotes psychological safety, an essential precursor for risk-taking and innovative experimentation in uncertain contexts (Carmeli et al., 2010). Empirical data establishes a favourable correlation between SL and intermediary innovation facilitators, including work engagement (Eva et al., 2019), voice behaviour (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), and knowledge sharing (Chen et al., 2015). Nonetheless, existing research often examines these mediators in isolation, without a cohesive theoretical framework that clarifies how SL fosters the resource conditions essential for sustaining IWB, so constraining both explanatory depth and practical applicability.

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The paper contends that the innovation-promoting impacts of SL are most effectively elucidated through resource-based theories, specifically COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Servant leaders inspire while actively creating, transferring, and safeguarding precious resources, so encouraging followers to participate in high-risk, high-reward innovative behaviours. COR theory defines resources comprehensively as items, personal attributes, circumstances, and energy that individuals seek to obtain, preserve, and enhance (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). The revised formulation transitions from solely safeguarding resources in threatening situations to proactively investing in resources for future benefits, a vital distinction for comprehending innovation, which necessitates resource allocation without assured returns. In this context, servant leaders serve as "resource conduits" (Hobfoll et al., 2018), fostering environments abundant in psychological resources (e.g., confidence, optimism), social resources (e.g., trust, networks), and structural resources (e.g., autonomy, training). The gain paradox concept in COR indicates that resource accumulation has disproportionately significant consequences in resource-scarce environments, highlighting the increased importance of SL in crisis-prone or limited industries. Furthermore, COR's resource caravan concept emphasises resource aggregation and reciprocal enhancement, suggesting that the diverse support inherent in SL might yield cumulative innovation advantages.

Notwithstanding these synergies, the literature rarely elucidates the methods by which servant leaders enable resource crossover—the transference of resources from leaders to followers (Westman, 2001). Empathy-driven resource crossover may constitute a vital, if underexamined, mechanism by which SL fosters follower resilience and optimism, particularly in high-stress contexts. Elucidating these strategies could enhance leadership development techniques by deliberately fostering resource-sharing attitudes. Enhancing COR's resource framework with further theories broadens explanatory scope. SET theory (Blau, 1964) asserts that trust-based, reciprocal leader-follower relationships foster discretionary, innovation-orientated behaviours. The JD-R model paradigm (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008) positions SL as a resource that mitigates job pressures and boosts motivation, consequently improving engagement and innovation. The SDT theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) presents a motivational framework, suggesting that servant leaders fulfil followers' psychological requirements for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, hence enhancing intrinsic motivation, a crucial catalyst for creativity.

The proposed paradigm synthesises these approaches by integrating structural resource flows, relational quality, and motivational motivations, providing a multilayered explanation of how SL catalyses IWB. This synthesis underscores enduring deficiencies in the literature: (1) the ongoing disagreement on the dimensionality of IWB, (2) inadequate theoretical exploration of resource crossover processes in leadership–innovation research, and (3) a lack of comprehensive integration of resource-based and relational theories. This study addresses these deficiencies by offering a cohesive, one-dimensional IWB model that situates SL inside COR and additional frameworks. The conceptual synthesis enhances clarity of constructs, unites leadership and innovation scholarship within a cohesive resource investment framework, and integrates empathic resource transfer as an innovative method. It provides a framework for leadership development initiatives that prioritise resource generation, psychological safety, and proactive skill enhancement. This section outlines the narrative critical review process utilised to construct and validate the integrative framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a conceptual theory-building approach, adhering to the framework established by Gilson and Goldberg (2015), to formulate an integrated model that connects IWB, SL, SLT and COR. This thorough integration is particularly warranted due to the ongoing discourse regarding the dimensionality of IWB and the inadequately developed theoretical framework of resource crossover mechanisms—critical phenomena for comprehending the transfer of resources between leaders and followers to facilitate innovation. A conceptual framework is necessary to unify disparate findings from various sources, facilitating the creation of a theoretically sound and empirically verifiable model that enhances both academic comprehension and practical significance.

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Braun and Clarke (2013) characterised thematic analysis as the method of recognising patterns and formulating themes from an extensive examination of a subject. This article employed ATLAS.ti 25 software to do a theme review, utilising a thematic analysis methodology for the literature evaluation. The subsequent phase was recognising the pattern and establishing a category to understand the publication trends in higher education that pertain to the tasks of middle managers. This research aims to systematically examine literature on middle management within higher education and to emphasise the interconnectedness of the findings from both domains. Despite varying review guidelines from different researchers, the guidelines employed here are based on empirical studies conducted by Zairul (2022) and Mahdzir and Ghani (2022). The study's instructions encompass four principal phases: planning, research scope and search strategy, selection criteria, data extraction, and thematic review approach.

We performed a comprehensive literature review to find pertinent research concerning leadership style, innovative behaviours, and resource conservation as the key factors or subject areas. The choice of Web of Science and Scopus was predicated on their capacity to offer the most extensive repository of peer-reviewed papers with accurate filtering capabilities (AlEssa & Durugbo, 2021; Oladinrin et al., 2021). Scopus comprises about 75 million entries, 24,600 titles, and 5,000 publishers, serving as a principal repository for most academic outputs. Simultaneously, WoS demonstrates superior accuracy compared to other journal databases and delivers more exact outcomes regarding data centralisation (Oladinrin et al., 2021). This procedure discovered 22 articles in the Scopus database and 32 papers in the WoS database, as illustrated in Table 1.

The articles were uploaded as primary documents to the ATLAS.ti 25 program, and subsequently, each paper was classified by author, periodical, publisher, and publication year. The capabilities of ATLAS.ti 25 facilitated a more systematic and precise categorisation of the 42 articles. Certain methodologies in the theme review mirrored qualitative research coding techniques. The procedure is often viewed as disaggregating and diminishing facts to a degree that obscures the dialectical relationship between reading and writing. ATLAS.ti 25 enhanced the thematic evaluation process by creating hypertext links between the preliminary coding and themes. Thematic evaluation necessitates the capacity to distance oneself from raw facts and preliminary codes to arrive at the final theme for interpretative purposes. The essence of a theme review paper comprises iterative processes that involve cyclical transitions between analytical tasks and technological tools. The analytical process involves reflection. The centrality of this method is significant in comparison to other review paper methodologies.

The analytical process occurred in three iterative steps. Initially, conceptual mapping delineated the definitional progression of IWB by rigorously contrasting unidimensional and multidimensional viewpoints while documenting operational discrepancies. This phase exposed the conceptual dispersion resulting from diverse stage-based models and inconsistent measuring methodologies, necessitating the logical implementation of a unidimensional operationalisation. This frugality improves theoretical clarity and measurement reliability, which are crucial for the accumulation of knowledge (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017; Scott & Bruce, 1994). The second phase was theoretical integration, wherein the fundamental ideas of COR theory regarding resource acquisition, investment, and crossover (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) were aligned with SL behaviours (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2014). This identified SL as a "resource conduit", a process that enables the transfer of psychological, social, and structural resources essential for innovation. The third phase concentrated on identifying gaps and developing models, highlighting underexplored mechanisms like empathy-driven resource crossover, refining operational definitions of innovation-relevant resources, and specifying contextual moderators—such as organisational culture and industry turbulence—that may influence the SL–IWB relationship. The model was subjected to recurrent improvement to guarantee internal coherence and cross-theoretical compatibility.

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Table l. Search strings phase from WoS and Scopus databases

Web of Science (WoS)	Search strings	(ALL=("conservation of resources" AND "leadership" AND "innovative behaviour")) AND ((LA==("ENGLISH")) NOT (SJ==("PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH" OR "ENGINEERING" OR "SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY OTHER TOPICS" OR "INFORMATION SCIENCE LIBRARY SCIENCE" OR "ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES ECOLOGY")))	
	Publication extraction	Retrieved	32
		Duplication	12
		∑ Accepted	**20**
Scopus	Search strings	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Conservation of Resources" AND "leadership" AND "Innovative behaviour") AND (EXCLUDE (SUBJAREA, "ENGI") OR EXCLUDE (SUBJAREA, "COMP") OR EXCLUDE (SUBJAREA, "MEDI") OR EXCLUDE (SUBJAREA, "ECON")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar"))	
	Publication extraction	Retrieved	22
		Duplication	12
		∑ Accepted	**10**
Duplication (WoS – Scopus)	Publication extraction	WoS	32
		Scopus	22
		Year of publication	2016 - 2026
		∑ Accepted	**12**

4. DISCUSSION

Notwithstanding significant advancements in connecting SL to IWB via COR theory, notable conceptual and practical restrictions persist, hindering both theoretical accuracy and practical applicability. It is essential to address these constraints to develop a more comprehensive and practical understanding of how leadership stimulates creativity. This part enhances theoretical integration, addresses inherent contradictions across theories, elucidates the suggested conceptual framework, incorporates contextual factors, and delineates consequences for measurement and practice.

4.1 Theoretical Gaps: From Resource Definition to Motivational Vectors

While SET, SDT theories, and the JD–R model are commonly used in leadership and innovation studies, their explanatory efficacy is frequently diminished when utilised concurrently rather than as a cohesive framework. Within the current framework, these ideas are regarded as complementary and sequential, each targeting a specific phase of the leadership–innovation continuum. COR theory elucidates the rationale for employees' willingness or reluctance to participate in IWB, asserting that innovation involves uncertainty and potential loss, thereby necessitating resource availability as a prerequisite for action (Hobfoll et al., 2018). SLT enhances COR by delineating the processes via which resources are generated inside organisations. Servant leaders, through empowerment, interpersonal care, and developmental support, function as resource generators, cultivating psychological (e.g., self-efficacy, safety), social (e.g., trust, relational support), and structural (e.g., autonomy, access to information) resources that facilitate innovation (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2014). In this context, SLT operationalises COR by converting abstract resource principles into tangible leadership practices.

SET enhances COR and SLT by elucidating the rationale behind employees reciprocating leadership-provided resources with discretionary behaviours, such as IWB. When followers recognise that servant leaders allocate resources for their development and welfare, they feel compelled to reciprocate with behaviours that exceed official role expectations (Blau, 1964). SET elucidates the relational process connecting leadership-generated resources to innovative endeavours. Nonetheless, neither the COR theory nor the SET theory adequately elucidates the mechanism by which resources convert into enduring creative motivation. This limitation is mitigated by incorporating SDT theory, which elucidates the process by which resources provided by leadership are internalised through the fulfilment of employees' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thus transforming external support into intrinsic motivation—a vital catalyst

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for sustained innovation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The JD–R model enhances this integration by defining work engagement as a direct motivating state that facilitates the conversion of accumulated resources into proactive activities, including voice, knowledge sharing, and IWB (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

A fundamental theoretical conflict in this integration is COR's conventional focus on resource conservation versus the intrinsic necessity for resource allocation in innovation. Innovation requires experimentation, risk-taking, and the potential for failure, seemingly at odds with COR's loss-avoidance rationale. This concept alleviates the tension by embracing COR's modern focus on resource gain spirals instead of static conservation (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Resource expenditure is feasible when individuals have excess or prospective resources that mitigate possible loss. SL is essential in creating situations that promote psychological safety, validate learning from failure, and offer developmental assistance. In this context, investment in innovation-related resources is redefined as strategic and safeguarded rather than as imprudent consumption, thus connecting inventive conduct with the broadened theoretical framework of COR. Thus, innovation is perceived not as a breach of resource conservation but as a progressive investment facilitated by leadership-driven resource abundance.

4.2 *Conceptual Framework and Resource Passageways*

A visual conceptual model is developed to elucidate the relationships between SL, resource dynamics, motivational mechanisms, and IWB, hence enhancing conceptual clarity and facilitating comprehension of the proposed framework. The model identifies SL as the principal precursor that initiates and maintains resource pathways, facilitating the flow, transfer, and crossover of resources to promote IWB. In this context, COR delineates the fundamental principles of resource accumulation and safeguarding (Hobfoll et al., 2018), whereas SLT articulates the leadership behaviours that originate and sustain these resource dynamics (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2014). The model also incorporates SET to elucidate reciprocal behavioural reactions (Blau, 1964), the JD-R model to elucidate motivational activation through work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), and SDT to describe the internalisation of resources into intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Diagram 1 demonstrates that SL initiates resource flow by generating psychological, social, and structural resources vital for innovation. These resources function not as separate inputs but are integrated within resource caravan gateways, characterised as persistent organisational and relational conduits that facilitate continuous resource flow rather than intermittent exchanges (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Resource flow pertains to the comprehensive circulation of resources within the system, resource transfer signifies the provision of resources from leader to follower, and resource crossover encapsulates the dissemination of resources across followers or units (Westman, 2001). Clarifying these mechanisms resolves previous conceptual uncertainty and improves analytical accuracy. Servant leaders enable the flow of psychological resources by fostering environments of psychological safety and learning. Leaders that actively endorse experimenting and characterise failure as a learning opportunity instil self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience in their followers. This psychological resource transfer mitigates fear of loss and empowers employees to allocate cognitive and emotional resources towards idea generation and testing. Such techniques are especially vital in innovation environments marked by uncertainty and ambiguity, where psychological capital influences employees' propensity for creative risk-taking (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

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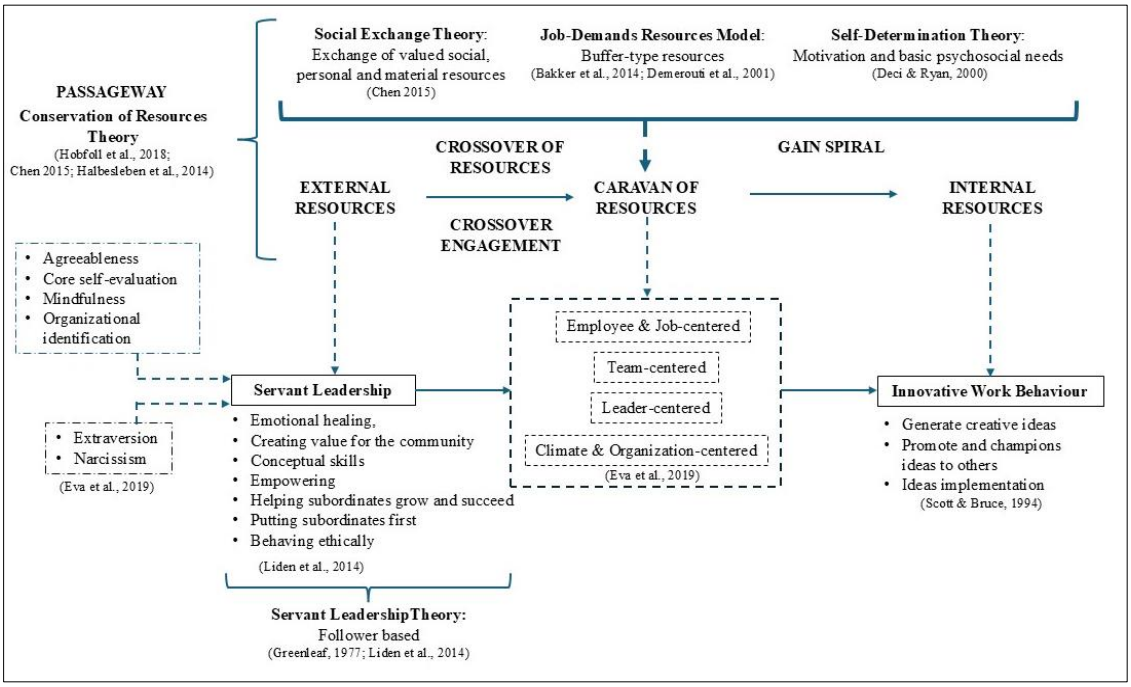

Fig. 1. The Conceptual Framework

Servant leaders facilitate social resource pathways through relational behaviours that cultivate trust, empathy, and mutual support. Concrete examples encompass mentorship connections, peer coaching, and collaborative problem-solving forums, facilitating the circulation of relational resources beyond dyadic leader-follower interactions. These mechanisms facilitate the transfer of positive states, including engagement, enthusiasm, and innovative norms, among team members, hence enhancing collective innovative potential (Chen et al., 2015; Westman, 2001). Thus, SL converts individual resource acquisitions into collective team assets.

Moreover, structural resource pathways are formalised by organisational design decisions implemented or advocated by servant leaders. Examples encompass designating protected time for innovative endeavours, decentralising decision-making authority, forming cross-functional innovation teams, and deploying digital knowledge-sharing platforms. These institutional configurations transform leadership intentions into concrete chances for innovation by facilitating access to knowledge, autonomy, and educational resources. Significantly, these gateways avert resource fragmentation and diminish dependence on individual leader discretion, integrating innovation support within organisational frameworks (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The graphic framework illustrates how resources traversing these pathways stimulate motivational systems. Accumulated resources augment work engagement, as suggested by the JD–R model, and fulfil the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as delineated by SDT (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2000). These motivating states, consequently, promote behavioural manifestations of innovation, such as voice behaviour, information sharing, and eventually IWB. By explicitly delineating these paths, the framework elucidates how SL reconciles the conflict between resource conservation and resource expenditure: innovation arises not from unrestrained consumption but from the safeguarding of resources through steady pathways and leadership endorsement.

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4.3 Contextual Considerations

The efficacy of the proposed SL-IWB framework is fundamentally dependent on organisational and cultural context. Although social learning is posited as a potent catalyst for resource generation and innovation, its impact on resource dynamics, motivational drivers, and behavioural results varies across different contexts. Contextual moderators, including organisational structure, environmental dynamism, and cultural values, influence the functioning of resource pathways and dictate whether leadership-facilitated resources are converted into innovative behaviour.

In entrepreneurial and start-up environments, characterised by flexible structures and a culture of experimentation, the framework is expected to function with high efficacy. Start-ups generally exhibit minimal formalisation, swift decision-making, and an acceptance of failure, factors that enhance the efficacy of SL in harnessing psychological and social resources. In these cultures, the empowerment and developmental behaviours of servant leaders quickly result in autonomy, learning opportunities, and psychological safety, thereby enabling rapid resource flow and encouraging employees to participate in inventive experimentation. In these circumstances, resource gateways are typically informal yet highly dynamic, facilitating swift resource transfer and collaboration among team members, hence enhancing innovation outcomes (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Conversely, in established businesses or public-sector organisations marked by bureaucratic structures, hierarchical decision-making, and formalised procedures, identical leadership actions may produce diminished or delayed outcomes. Inflexible regulations and centralised power can hinder autonomy and impede the distribution of structural resources, hence diminishing the efficacy of SL unless paired with supportive organisational reforms. In these contexts, social learning (SL) can effectively cultivate psychological and social resources (e.g., trust and support); yet these resources may fail to foster innovation if structural pathways—such as decision-making authority, time for testing, or access to information—are constrained. This underscores the necessity of synchronising leadership conduct with organisational frameworks to guarantee that resource channels stay accessible and operational.

The cultural background also influences the functioning of the framework. In low power-distance cultures, SL strongly corresponds with established values of involvement, expression, and egalitarianism, hence promoting resource allocation and fostering innovative behaviour. In high power-distance cultures, the emphasis on empowerment and shared influence in SL may initially contradict the expectations of directed leadership. In these settings, employees may perceive SL practices as confusing or ineffective, thereby hindering resource transfer and diminishing psychological safety. Nonetheless, SL can continue to promote creativity if empowerment is validated through role definition and alignment with culturally sanctioned authority structures (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011).

In addition to contextual modifiers, several boundary conditions specify when SL may be less effective in fostering IWB. A condition emerges in contexts marked by intense time constraints or crises that emphasise swift action above contemplation and learning. Under these circumstances, the relational and developmental investments necessary for SL may be regarded as inefficient, constraining leaders' capacity to create durable resource pathways. In businesses with highly individualised reward structures that prioritise competition over collaboration, resources generated by social learning may not translate into innovation due to insufficient social interchange and restricted resource sharing.

A crucial boundary condition pertains to task features and interdependence. Social learning is more efficacious for fostering IWB in positions that permit autonomy, learning, and collaboration. In highly routinised or strictly standardised positions, prospects for creativity are limited irrespective of leadership style, resulting in a diminished connection between leadership, resources, and innovation. Moreover, SL may be less effective when followers lack fundamental competences or skills pertinent to innovation, as mere resource provision cannot offset inadequate task capability. In such instances, resource pathways may be there yet failed to stimulate innovation due to restricted absorptive ability.

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The suggested techniques may fail in organisational environments characterised by poor trust or a history of inconsistent leadership. When employees view leadership behaviour as inauthentic or inconsistent with organisational practices, psychological resources like trust and safety may not develop, hindering resource transfer and crossing. In the absence of these fundamental resources, the motivational mechanisms outlined by SET and the JD–R model cannot be entirely engaged, thereby diminishing the manifestation of IWB. The proposed paradigm is most effective when leadership behaviours are bolstered by supportive structures, cultural alignment, and task features that facilitate the intended functioning of resource pathways. Explicit acknowledgement of these moderators and boundary constraints improves the external validity of the framework and offers better direction for academics and practitioners aiming to implement SL to promote innovation in various organisational contexts.

4.4 Measurement and Empirical Testing

From a measurement and empirical testing standpoint, the proposed framework necessitates enhanced precision to guarantee that its theoretical contributions are practically viable. While the research employs a unidimensional conceptualisation of IWB, this does not suggest conceptual simplicity; instead, it indicates that idea production, idea promotion, and idea implementation are interconnected behavioural manifestations of a singular higher-order construct. Empirical research can implement this unidimensional conceptualisation by utilising validated behavioural scales that encapsulate these aspects as reflecting indicators of IWB, such as the commonly employed measure devised by Scott and Bruce (1994). This method aligns with previous studies indicating that, although analytically separable, innovation-related behaviours frequently coalesce and operate as a cohesive behavioural pattern within organisational settings. Confirmatory factor analysis can assess if a single-component model adequately fits compared to multidimensional alternatives, thus empirically resolving the dimensionality argument in certain settings.

The framework produces multiple distinct and testable hypotheses to direct future empirical research, rather than broad assumptions. Fundamentally, SL is anticipated to have a beneficial indirect impact on IWB via resource-based and motivational mechanisms. SL is posited to positively forecast innovation-related resources, encompassing psychological resources (e.g., self-efficacy and psychological safety), social resources (e.g., trust and relational support), and structural resources (e.g., autonomy and access to information). These resources are anticipated to improve work engagement, which in turn forecasts IWB. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation is proposed to mediate the connection between leadership-generated resources and enduring innovative behaviour, in accordance with SDT. Sequential mediation models can thus be evaluated in which SL affects IWB through resource accumulation, job engagement, and intrinsic drive.

The framework is also suitable for multilevel hypothesis testing. Resource crossover mechanisms, characterised as the transfer of resources between team members or units, can be implemented by consolidating individual perceptions of shared resources (such as team psychological safety or collective efficacy) and analysing their impact on team-level innovation outcomes. Utilising Westman's (2001) crossover viewpoint, future research may examine whether SL indirectly forecasts collective IWB through team-level resource crossover while accounting for individual-level resource transfer. Such designs would enable researchers to differentiate between leader-to-follower resource transfer and follower-to-follower resource exchange, hence improving conceptual clarity.

Implementing the various resource kinds within COR theory necessitates clear delineation. Psychological resources can be assessed through recognised notions like psychological capital, creative self-efficacy, and perceived psychological safety. Social resources can be assessed through metrics of leader-member exchange quality, interpersonal trust, and team support climate, whereas structural resources may be operationalised through indicators of job autonomy, decision latitude, access to learning opportunities, and the presence of innovation-supportive infrastructure. These resource metrics should be seen as conceptually independent but empirically interconnected variables, allowing researchers to evaluate their relative and cumulative impacts on innovative results.

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The approach facilitates the analysis of contextual moderators in empirical models. Organisational structure, environmental dynamism, and cultural values can be conceptualised as moderators that influence the strength of the linkages between SL, resource pathways, and IWB. The indirect impact of SL on IWB through resource accumulation may be more pronounced in low-bureaucracy or high-autonomy settings compared to highly standardised situations. By delineating these measurement methodologies and hypotheses, the framework transcends abstract theorising to offer a definitive roadmap for rigorous empirical validation.

4.5 Practical Implementation

The amalgamation of SL and COR theory provides a definitive and pragmatic approach for businesses aiming to establish IWB as a lasting competence rather than an intermittent result. Successful implementation commences with the identification and cultivation of leadership. Organisations should initially integrate social leadership competencies—such as empowerment, ethical stewardship, empathy, and developmental orientation—into leadership selection criteria and evaluation processes. Structured leadership development programmes should concentrate on enhancing leaders' ability to intentionally create and safeguard resources pertinent to innovation, such as psychological safety, autonomy, and opportunities for learning. This preliminary action guarantees that leadership behaviour consistently indicates endorsement for innovation and mitigates employees' perceived risk related to resource allocation.

The second phase entails the creation and institutionalisation of resource pathways that convert leadership intent into daily practice. Organisations should implement formal processes, such as mentoring programmes, cross-functional innovation teams, and structured knowledge-sharing platforms, instead of depending on informal encouragement. These systems facilitate an uninterrupted flow of resources through leader-to-follower resource transfer (e.g., developmental feedback and coaching) and follower-to-follower resource exchange (e.g., peer learning and collaborative problem-solving). Cross-functional project teams facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and confidence from one unit across organisational boundaries, hence enhancing innovation capability beyond individual positions. Institutionalised routes are essential for maintaining IWB over time, as they mitigate resource fragmentation and decrease reliance on individual leaders (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The third step emphasises the alignment of performance management and incentive systems with the objectives of collaborative innovation. Organisations should amend appraisal criteria to acknowledge behaviours such as idea dissemination, constructive feedback, and collaborative experimentation, rather than focusing exclusively on individual performance. Reward schemes that recognise team-orientated innovation results strengthen SET mechanisms by indicating that resource allocation for innovation will be reciprocated at the organisational level. In the absence of such alignment, SL behaviours may be compromised by systems that tacitly dissuade risk-taking or collaboration.

Notwithstanding these directives, numerous operational issues frequently emerge when institutionalising SL for innovation. A significant problem is opposition from hierarchical or control-orientated corporate cultures, where empowerment and collaborative decision-making may be viewed as a threat to authority. In these situations, SL attempts may be perceived as symbolic rather than substantive, thus constraining resource allocation. This problem can be alleviated through staggered implementation, commencing with pilot units and bolstered by top leadership exemplifying SL habits to validate them. Clear communication connecting strategic leadership to organisational performance and innovation strategy further aids in alleviating scepticism.

A secondary difficulty pertains to unbalanced incentive systems that favour short-term efficiency or individual rivalry at the expense of experimentation and collaboration. When employees anticipate adverse repercussions for failure, resource pathways may deteriorate despite supportive leadership actions. Organisations can tackle this issue by implementing learning-orientated criteria, such as acknowledgement for experimenting and information dissemination, and by distinctly differentiating between prudent risk-

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taking and irresponsibility. These actions strengthen COR's gain spiral logic by diminishing the perceived resource depletion linked to innovation.

A third difficulty pertains to capacity limitations, especially in resource-deficient or high-stress settings. In such environments, executives may find it challenging to dedicate time and focus to developmental initiatives. Nevertheless, COR theory posits that SL may be particularly advantageous in such circumstances, as even minor resource acquisitions might provide disproportionately beneficial outcomes (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Organisations can alleviate capacity restrictions by integrating service-learning activities into established routines, such as regular team meetings or performance evaluations, instead of considering them as supplementary chores.

Practical examples illustrate the feasibility of this system. In knowledge-intensive businesses, SL correlates with enhanced knowledge-sharing environments and elevated collaborative creativity, since leaders emphasise staff development and psychological safety (Liden et al., 2014). Organisations that have established organised mentoring and cross-functional innovation platforms report more consistent idea development and implementation, since resources traverse hierarchical and functional boundaries instead of being isolated (Eva et al., 2019). In public and professional service organisations, SL has demonstrated the ability to bolster resilience and adaptive creativity during times of change and resource limitation by cultivating trust and collaborative problem-solving.

Implementing the SL-COR framework necessitates intentional and synchronised efforts in leadership development, organisational processes, and performance management. By institutionalising SL principles via formal resource channels, aligning incentives with collaborative innovation, and proactively mitigating cultural and structural obstacles, businesses can convert leadership behaviour into a sustainable innovation capability. These practical findings illustrate that SL is not simply a normative ideal but a strategically viable method for promoting IWB across various organisational situations.

5. CONCLUSION

This study represents a notable advancement in the literature on IWB by introducing a theoretically integrated and conceptually developed model that connects SLT and COR theories inside a unidimensional framework of IWB. The study critically contributes in three interconnected ways by synthesising various frameworks: clarifying definitional boundaries, broadening theoretical breadth, and improving practical application.

The study initially tackles the persistent discourse surrounding multidimensional versus unidimensional conceptualisations of IWB by anchoring its methodology in complexity theory. It redefines IWB as a comprehensive, nonlinear behavioural inclination instead of a fixed, sequential procedure. This viewpoint resolves discrepancies in previous studies (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Scott & Bruce, 1994) by emphasising the dynamic and cohesive characteristics of inventive behaviours, hence enhancing construct dependability and reinforcing the basis for cumulative theory advancement. Furthermore, employing a unidimensional operationalisation enhances comparability across various cultural and industrial contexts, a critical benefit for promoting global innovation research and maintaining measurement consistency.

Secondly, the study reinterprets COR theory by transitioning from its conventional reactive emphasis on resource protection to a proactive framework for resource investment. This theoretical evolution is implemented through the incorporation of SL, which functions as a "resource caravan passageway", enabling the continuous accumulation and strategic utilisation of psychological, social, and structural resources essential for creativity. The model additionally integrates underexamined mechanisms, including empathic resource crossover and motivational drivers from SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), thereby enhancing the explanatory capacity of Conservation of Resources theory in high-risk, creativity-orientated environments. This enhanced comprehension clarifies how SL actions stimulate creativity by influencing resource allocation and intrinsic motivation simultaneously.

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Thirdly, the study connects theory and practice by converting the integrated COR–SL framework into implementable leadership techniques. These techniques prioritise the creation of organisational frameworks that maintain resource flow, incorporate empathy and resilience training into leadership development, and strategically implement SL in resource-limited settings where its beneficial impacts are heightened. These recommendations align with COR's gain paradox principle, which asserts that modest resource gains yield disproportionately significant advantages in resource-scarce environments. Consequently, the model provides context-specific strategies for the effective enhancement of IWBs in various organisational environments.

The framework enhances its resilience by positioning IWB within the wider context of proactive and extra-role activities, promoting theoretical integration with related models such as the JD-R model and SET. This multi-theoretical integration not only fortifies the intellectual underpinning of the model but also amplifies its practical significance for intricate organisational structures, where innovation is ingrained in daily work behaviours.

The suggested paradigm has significant opportunities for empirical validation and enhancement. Mixed-method study designs—integrating structural equation modelling to statistically assess resource-mediated linkages with qualitative exploration of lived experiences with resource crossover—would provide thorough validation and nuanced insights. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparative research could elucidate how cultural variables influence the interactions within the COR–SL–IWB framework, thereby enhancing theoretical complexity and providing practical insights for multinational firms operating in varied innovation environments. This work presents a theoretically cohesive and practically relevant approach that significantly enhances innovation research. It clarifies definitional difficulties, expands theoretical perspectives, and suggests practical leadership interventions within a complete resource-based framework, thus providing a robust platform for future research and organisational practices.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author(s) report no potential conflicts, commercial, financial, or personal relationships, and no funding influencing the study design, data collection and analysis, manuscript preparation, or publication decisions.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study, including the development of research protocols, literature analysis, methodological formulation, and comprehensive discussions. They collaboratively participated in drafting, revising, and critically reviewing the manuscript to ensure its intellectual rigour and coherence, and all approved the final version for submission. Specifically, Mohamad Nasaruddin Mahdzir conceptualised and wrote the introduction, led the discussion, and concluded the review. Rohayu Abdul Ghani and Nor Faridah Ahmad Roslan conducted the literature review, synthesised relevant theoretical frameworks, and assisted in interpreting the findings. Meanwhile, Zaleha Yazid developed the research methodology section, evaluated the robustness of the qualitative process, and analysed the research outcomes.

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