



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Leadership and Innovation: A Qualitative Review of Psychological Factors Influencing Organizational Creativity

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Abstract: In increasingly innovation-dependent organizations, leadership plays a central role in shaping the psychological conditions that facilitate employee creativity. This qualitative study investigates how leadership behaviors influence key psychological enablers of creativity—namely, psychological safety, trust and empowerment, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy—within medium to large organizations in Bangladesh. Drawing on Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity and Transformational Leadership Theory, the research employed a phenomenological approach, conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 leaders from sectors including technology, manufacturing, education, and public health. Thematic analysis revealed that leaders who promote open dialogue, delegate meaningful responsibility, reinforce purpose, and recognize contributions foster environments where creative risk-taking can thrive. These findings not only affirm existing theoretical models but also offer context-sensitive insights into how leadership functions within hierarchical and culturally embedded organizational settings. The study highlights the importance of psychological leadership—where influence extends beyond structural management to nurturing the emotional and motivational states that enable innovation. Practical implications include the need for leadership development programs that emphasize trust-building, autonomy support, and motivational communication. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how leadership can activate the internal drivers of creativity, with recommendations for future longitudinal and cross-cultural research to extend these insights.

Keywords: leadership behavior, organizational creativity, psychological safety, intrinsic motivation, qualitative research

1. Introduction

In today's competitive and rapidly evolving organizational environments, innovation is widely recognized as essential for sustaining performance and achieving strategic advantage. As organizations increasingly prioritize innovation, the role of leadership in shaping a culture that fosters creativity has gained prominence. While extensive research affirms that leadership is a critical enabler of innovation, the **psychological mechanisms** through which leadership influences organizational creativity remain underexplored (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Hughes et al., 2018; Mahmood et al., 2019). Specifically, little is known about how leadership behaviors affect key psychological factors such as **intrinsic motivation, psychological safety, trust, self-efficacy, and cognitive flexibility**, which are fundamental to creative performance.

The literature has predominantly focused on the correlational relationship between leadership and creativity, often employing quantitative designs. However, **qualitative insights** into how leadership concretely shapes psychological enablers of creativity are scarce (Harbi et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2018; Amoah-Oppong, 2025). Although several scholars emphasize the importance of investigating the individual-level psychological processes that mediate innovation (Hughes et al., 2018; Mahmood et al., 2019), there is limited empirical work that explores these processes in depth within organizational settings. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to provide a context-rich, interpretive understanding of how leadership behaviors foster or hinder the psychological conditions necessary for creativity.

This research is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: **Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity** and **Transformational Leadership Theory**. Amabile's model posits that creativity arises from the interplay between domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic task motivation—all of which can be shaped by contextual factors such as leadership (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Hughes et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2012). Transformational Leadership Theory further deepens this understanding by highlighting the capacity of leaders to inspire, intellectually stimulate, and individually support followers—thus cultivating psychological safety and cognitive adaptability that underpin creative engagement (Shi & Zhang, 2022; Mahmood et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how organizational leaders influence the psychological environment that supports or constrains employee creativity. This inquiry seeks to uncover both direct and nuanced pathways through which leadership behaviors affect psychological conditions essential for innovation, with a particular emphasis on **intrinsic motivation**, **trust**, **psychological safety**, and **cognitive flexibility**.

To guide this investigation, the following research questions are posed:

- How do organizational leaders influence employees' psychological readiness for creativity?
- What leadership practices are associated with enhanced creative motivation, trust, or cognitive flexibility?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to enrich theoretical and practical understanding of how leadership contributes to a psychologically supportive climate for innovation, thereby informing leadership development and organizational design across diverse sectors.

2. Literature Review

Leadership and Organizational Creativity

Leadership plays a central role in fostering organizational creativity, with a growing body of evidence highlighting its significant influence on team innovation outcomes. Among various leadership models, **transformational leadership** has received particular attention for its ability to inspire and empower employees toward creative performance. Chaubey et al. (2019) found that transformational leaders enhance employee creativity by articulating a compelling vision, promoting autonomy, and reinforcing self-efficacy—conditions conducive to creative engagement. Similarly, servant leadership has been shown to enhance creativity through the development of trust and self-efficacy. Yang et al. (2017) demonstrated that servant leaders positively impact employees' confidence in their creative abilities, thereby contributing to an innovative organizational climate.

Beyond immediate outcomes, leadership influences long-term cultural and structural elements that support sustained innovation. Hughes et al. (2018) emphasized that leadership is not only a predictor of creative output but also a critical architect of organizational systems that encourage innovation. Likewise, Jensen and Bro (2017) underscored the strategic importance of leadership in aligning team dynamics with creativity-enhancing processes. Collectively, these studies illustrate that leadership is a multi-dimensional driver of creativity, requiring deeper inquiry into its psychological pathways and organizational impacts.

Psychological Factors in Creative Workplaces

A range of psychological factors—particularly **intrinsic motivation**, **psychological safety**, **self-efficacy**, and **cognitive flexibility**—are fundamental to fostering creativity in organizational settings. Intrinsic motivation, defined as the internal drive to perform a task for its inherent satisfaction, has consistently been linked to higher levels of creative expression. Wadei et al. (2020) found that intrinsically motivated employees are more likely to engage in ideation and experimentation, especially in environments where autonomy is encouraged.

Equally vital is psychological safety, which refers to the perception that the workplace is a secure space for taking interpersonal risks. When employees feel safe to voice unconventional ideas without fear of negative repercussions, creativity flourishes (Sobaih et al., 2022; Helmy et al., 2023). Self-efficacy—belief in one's own capacity to perform creatively—is another crucial enabler. Xu et al. (2024) reported that high self-efficacy enhances persistence in problem-solving and promotes engagement with challenging creative tasks. Conversely, low levels of psychological safety or cognitive rigidity can create climates of risk aversion, suppressing innovation (Younas et al., 2018). Understanding these psychological levers offers a foundation for leadership interventions aimed at cultivating organizational creativity.

Leadership Styles and Psychological Mechanisms

Various leadership styles influence creativity through distinct psychological mechanisms. **Transformational leaders**, for instance, foster emotional engagement and build trust, creating environments that stimulate innovative thinking (Afsar & Masood, 2017; Cheng et al., 2023). Jensen and Bro (2017) further demonstrated that transformational leadership supports intrinsic motivation by satisfying fundamental psychological needs, thereby enhancing creative performance.

Servant leadership, characterized by humility, support, and a focus on employee growth, has also been shown to elevate self-efficacy and psychological safety. Iqbal et al. (2020) observed that servant leaders promote collaboration and empowerment, strengthening the psychological foundation necessary for creativity. In parallel, **empowering leadership** facilitates employee autonomy and responsibility—key precursors to innovative work behaviors. Studies by Wang et al. (2021) and Javed et al. (2017) confirmed that when leaders trust employees with decision-making and provide opportunities for ownership, creative outcomes improve significantly. These findings collectively suggest that leadership styles embedded with **supportive psychological mechanisms** are more effective in catalyzing creative engagement at both individual and collective levels.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite extensive empirical work linking leadership and creativity, the literature remains dominated by **quantitative approaches** that often miss the nuanced, context-dependent nature of leadership's psychological impact. As Ng and Lucianetti (2016) and Shalley et al. (2004) argue, the lived experiences and subtle interpersonal dynamics within organizations are best understood through **qualitative inquiry**. The absence of such approaches leaves a critical gap in comprehending how leadership influences psychological readiness for creativity in everyday work environments.

Moreover, although constructs such as **psychological safety** and **self-efficacy** have been established as mediators of creative performance, their interactive effects under different leadership styles are insufficiently explored (Carmeli et al., 2013; Jyoti & Dev, 2015). Few studies delve into how these psychological factors evolve in response to leadership behavior over time

or across cultural and organizational contexts. Addressing these gaps through interpretive and phenomenological methods could yield richer insights into how leadership practically enables or inhibits creativity, offering grounded recommendations for leadership development and organizational innovation strategies.

3. Methodology

Qualitative Approach and Paradigm

This study employed a **qualitative research design** grounded in the **interpretivist paradigm**, which seeks to understand human experiences and meanings as socially constructed within specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the study's aim to explore how leadership behaviors shape the psychological conditions that foster creativity, a **phenomenological approach** was adopted. Phenomenology enables researchers to capture the **lived experiences** of individuals and interpret how they make sense of their realities within organizational life (Vagle, 2018). This design was particularly suitable for examining the nuanced relationship between leadership and creativity in Bangladeshi organizations, where social and cultural factors often influence leadership practices and workplace dynamics.

Researcher Reflexivity

Throughout the research process, reflexivity was maintained to ensure transparency and self-awareness. The primary researcher, trained in organizational psychology, acknowledged potential preconceptions related to leadership behaviors and creativity. Continuous **reflective journaling** and **peer debriefing** helped minimize bias and enhance interpretive rigor (Finlay, 2002). The researcher maintained a non-hierarchical stance during interactions, mindful of the cultural tendency toward deference to authority in Bangladeshi organizations, to encourage open and honest dialogue from participants.

Sampling Strategy

A **purposive sampling** approach was employed to recruit participants who held relevant leadership responsibilities in innovation-oriented organizations. Participants included **team leaders, department heads, and project managers** from sectors such as **information technology, education, and manufacturing**, where creativity and adaptability are critical for success. A total of **15 participants** were targeted to ensure **data saturation**, the point at which no new themes emerge (Guest et al., 2006). This sample size aligns with qualitative best practices for phenomenological studies seeking depth over breadth.

Context and Setting

The study was conducted in **Dhaka and Chattogram, Bangladesh**, within medium to large organizations employing between **100 and 500 employees**. These settings represent diverse leadership contexts, ranging from hierarchical corporate structures to more collaborative environments. Bangladesh provides a compelling context for examining leadership and creativity, as organizations increasingly navigate rapid technological transformation and global competition while maintaining culturally rooted leadership practices.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using **semi-structured interviews**, allowing for flexible yet focused exploration of participants' experiences. The **interview guide** was developed based on the theoretical underpinnings of Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity and Transformational Leadership Theory. Questions addressed participants' perceptions of motivation, trust, psychological safety, and leadership behaviors that facilitate or hinder creativity. Interviews were conducted in English and Bengali, depending on participant preference, to ensure comfort and clarity. Each session lasted approximately **45-60 minutes**, was **audio-recorded with consent**, and **transcribed verbatim**. Field notes were maintained to capture contextual and non-verbal cues.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the **Institutional Review Board of Bangladesh Medical University, Bangladesh**. Participants provided **written informed consent** prior to data collection. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms replaced identifiable information, and all recordings and transcripts were securely stored. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Ethical rigor was maintained through adherence to the **Bangladesh Social Science Research Ethics Framework**, ensuring respect for autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the **thematic analysis** framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which facilitates systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns in qualitative data. The process involved six iterative phases: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and reporting. Coding was conducted using **NVivo 12** to enhance analytical transparency and consistency. An **inductive approach** guided theme generation, ensuring that findings emerged from participants' lived experiences rather than pre-imposed categories. Regular peer debriefing ensured analytic validity and theoretical alignment.

Trustworthiness Techniques

Multiple strategies enhanced the study's **trustworthiness** (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- **Credibility** was ensured through **member checking**, where participants reviewed summaries of interpretations.
- **Dependability** was maintained via an **audit trail** documenting decisions and reflections.
- **Confirmability** was strengthened through reflexive journaling and external peer review.

- **Transferability** was facilitated by providing thick descriptions of the Bangladeshi organizational context, enabling readers to assess applicability to similar settings.

4. Findings

The findings of this qualitative study are drawn from in-depth interviews with 15 participants occupying leadership roles across various sectors in **Dhaka and Chattogram**, Bangladesh. These leaders offered rich, experience-based perspectives on how their behaviors influence the psychological conditions that support or hinder organizational creativity. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in **Table 1**, illustrating diversity in age, gender, sector, and organizational role.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Occupation	Age	Gender	Location
Respondent 1	Product Development Manager	30	Male	Dhaka
Respondent 2	Telecom Project Manager	50	Female	Chattogram
Respondent 3	Senior Supervisor	38	Male	Dhaka
Respondent 4	Team Lead (Startup)	55	Male	Chattogram
Respondent 5	R&D Unit Manager	35	Male	Dhaka
Respondent 6	NGO Program Coordinator	41	Female	Dhaka
Respondent 7	Software Industry Manager	48	Male	Dhaka
Respondent 8	Factory Floor Supervisor	44	Male	Chattogram
Respondent 9	Public Health Team Leader	44	Female	Chattogram
Respondent 10	HR Manager	39	Female	Dhaka
Respondent 11	University Department Head	52	Male	Chattogram
Respondent 12	Logistics Manager	46	Male	Chattogram
Respondent 13	Tech Team Manager	36	Male	Dhaka
Respondent 14	Hospitality Team Lead	40	Female	Chattogram
Respondent 15	Garments Production Supervisor	38	Male	Dhaka

Four overarching themes emerged through thematic analysis, each reflecting a specific dimension of the relationship between leadership and psychological enablers of creativity.

Thematic Findings

Four interrelated themes emerged through thematic analysis, each corresponding to a core psychological factor identified in the literature and grounded in the research objectives.

Leadership-Facilitated Psychological Safety

Participants emphasized the critical role of psychological safety in fostering creativity. Leaders who established environments where team members felt safe to voice unconventional ideas and take intellectual risks without fear of punishment saw higher levels of creative engagement. This was often achieved through modeling vulnerability, inviting diverse perspectives, and removing fear of failure from team discourse.

"We had a junior team member propose a radical solution—something we'd never have considered if we stuck to senior voices only. That only happened because we foster a psychologically safe climate." (Respondent 5, 35-year-old R&D Unit Manager, Dhaka)

"I always say, 'There's no penalty for a wrong idea.' That opens people up." (Respondent 9, 44-year-old Public Health Leader, Chattogram)

These reflections suggest that creativity cannot thrive in an environment of judgment or rigidity. Psychological safety functions as a precondition for open communication and experimentation.

Trust and Empowerment as Creative Enablers

Trust emerged as a powerful facilitator of creativity, particularly when paired with empowerment. Leaders who trusted their teams to make decisions and contribute ideas—rather than micromanaging—reported stronger engagement, collaboration, and creative risk-taking among their staff. Empowerment was expressed not only through autonomy but also through the validation of employee contributions.

"When people feel safe, even the quietest team members share creative solutions." (Respondent 6, 41-year-old NGO Program Coordinator, Dhaka)

"I began simply by asking for input in meetings, even from junior staff... they felt safe. That's the psychological shift I was aiming for." (Respondent 12, 46-year-old Logistics Manager, Chattogram)

This theme underscores that leadership effectiveness is amplified when teams are not only led but also trusted and encouraged to take ownership of their work.

Motivating Through Autonomy and Purpose

Intrinsic motivation was found to be significantly influenced by leadership behaviors that provided autonomy and connected day-to-day work with meaningful organizational goals. Leaders who gave employees the freedom to choose their methods—and who consistently reinforced the value of their contributions—reported higher levels of innovative behavior.

"I try to avoid giving step-by-step instructions. Instead, I outline the goal and let them figure out the path." (Respondent 5, 35-year-old R&D Unit Manager, Dhaka)

"Motivation spikes when people understand the purpose of their work. My job is to connect daily tasks to broader goals." (Respondent 9, 44-year-old Public Health Leader, Chattogram)

These insights reveal that autonomy alone is not enough; creativity is most likely when leaders also provide purpose and direction without imposing strict controls.

Self-Efficacy as a Catalyst for Creative Risk-Taking

A final theme highlights the role of self-efficacy in sustaining creative performance. Participants noted that when employees believed in their ability to generate valuable ideas, they were more likely to take initiative and engage in innovative problem-solving. This belief was often reinforced by leadership practices such as recognizing creative contributions and providing structured opportunities to succeed.

"When someone sees their idea getting implemented, their belief in their ability to contribute grows." (Respondent 7, 48-year-old Software Manager, Dhaka)

"I delegate challenging tasks and support them through feedback. That builds confidence." (Respondent 15, 38-year-old Garments Supervisor, Dhaka)

Leaders who deliberately nurtured self-efficacy helped lower creative inhibition and built a foundation for continuous innovation.

Synthesis of Findings

Collectively, these themes reflect a dynamic interplay between leadership behaviors and psychological conditions necessary for organizational creativity. The synthesis presented in **Table 2** illustrates how specific leadership actions align with psychological enablers of creativity.

Table 2: Synthesis of Themes and Psychological Factors

Theme	Psychological Factor	Enabling Leadership Behavior
Leadership-Facilitated Psychological Safety	Risk-taking comfort	Open feedback, modeling openness, accepting failure
Trust and Empowerment	Confidence and initiative	Inclusive input, delegation, validation
Motivating Through Autonomy and Purpose	Intrinsic motivation	Task ownership, connecting work to purpose
Self-Efficacy and Creative Risk-Taking	Creative confidence	Implementing ideas, progressive responsibility

These findings provide empirical support for both **Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity** and **Transformational Leadership Theory**, demonstrating that leaders who actively manage the **psychological climate** of their teams are more likely to foster sustained innovation.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to explore how leadership behaviors influence psychological conditions that enable or inhibit organizational creativity, focusing on leaders operating in innovation-dependent organizations in Bangladesh. The findings demonstrate that leadership practices directly shape four core psychological enablers: psychological safety, trust and empowerment, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy. These insights extend previous scholarship by offering a contextualized, qualitative understanding of how these dynamics play out in practice.

The theme of **psychological safety** emerged as central to creative engagement. Participants described leadership behaviors that created non-threatening environments where expressing unconventional ideas and taking risks were not penalized. These findings are in line with previous research emphasizing that psychological safety fosters innovation by reducing interpersonal fear (Hughes et al., 2018; Sobaih et al., 2022; Helmy et al., 2023). While these earlier studies provided quantitative validation of the safety-creativity link, the present study adds detail on how leaders in culturally rooted, hierarchical settings actively cultivate this condition through open communication and modeling vulnerability.

The second theme, **trust and empowerment**, reinforces the idea that leadership is not only directive but also enabling. Consistent with previous research (Yang et al., 2017; Chaubey et al., 2019), participants in this study confirmed that when leaders entrust teams with autonomy and actively solicit their input, employees are more likely to engage in creative behavior. These findings complement the transformational and servant leadership literature, which links empowerment with enhanced creative self-efficacy and initiative (Iqbal et al., 2020; Afsar & Masood, 2017). Importantly, this study expands those insights by showing that such behaviors are especially impactful in contexts where hierarchical norms may otherwise inhibit employee voice.

The third theme, **autonomy and purpose as sources of motivation**, underscores the influence of intrinsic motivation on creativity. Participants described that when employees are given the freedom to determine how to approach tasks and are reminded of the broader purpose of their work, they become more engaged and creative. This finding aligns with Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity, which posits that intrinsic motivation is a core driver of innovation and can be shaped by leadership behavior (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Sun et al., 2012). Other studies have similarly highlighted the motivational role of leadership (Wadei et al., 2020; Jensen & Bro, 2017), but this study contributes by illustrating how leaders operationalize purpose and autonomy through everyday interactions.

The final theme centers on **self-efficacy as a catalyst for creative risk-taking**. Employees who were entrusted with meaningful responsibilities and whose ideas were visibly implemented reported increased confidence in their creative abilities. This supports the work of Xu et al. (2024) and Younas et al. (2018), who found that self-efficacy positively predicts creative performance. Likewise, servant and empowering leadership styles have been shown to elevate self-belief and encourage risk-taking (Iqbal et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Javed et al., 2017). The present findings add further granularity to this discussion by showing that self-efficacy grows incrementally through leader feedback, validation, and opportunity design.

Theoretically, this study contributes to a deeper application of **Transformational Leadership Theory** (Mahmood et al., 2019; Shi & Zhang, 2022) and **Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity** (Amabile, 1996; Hughes et al., 2018). Both theories posit that leadership influences not just tasks or structures but also individual psychological readiness for innovation. This study affirms those claims and extends them by revealing how such influence operates within real-world, culturally specific contexts. This aligns with calls from prior scholars to move beyond decontextualized models and adopt more interpretive, qualitative approaches (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016; Shalley et al., 2004).

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of **leadership development programs** that focus not only on strategic execution but also on **interpersonal trust-building, psychological empowerment, and motivational communication**. Organizations aiming to foster innovation should equip leaders with the skills to build psychologically safe environments and encourage intrinsic engagement through purpose-driven dialogue and participatory structures.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations. The sample, though diverse, was limited to 15 participants in Dhaka and Chattogram, which may limit the transferability of findings to other sectors or regions. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the data constrains our ability to explore changes over time. Future research could benefit from **longitudinal and comparative designs**, particularly across different cultural and industry settings, to better understand the temporal and contextual dynamics of leadership-psychology interactions.

In sum, this study affirms that effective leadership extends beyond task management; it involves crafting a psychological environment where creativity becomes both possible and sustainable. By aligning leadership practices with the internal drivers of innovation—trust, safety, motivation, and confidence—leaders can position their organizations for adaptive success in increasingly complex environments.

6. Conclusion

This study explored how leadership behaviors shape the psychological conditions necessary for fostering creativity within organizational contexts in Bangladesh. Drawing on qualitative data from 15 leaders across diverse sectors, the findings revealed four critical psychological enablers of creativity—psychological safety, trust and empowerment, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy—each of which was strongly influenced by specific leadership practices. These insights affirm and extend existing theoretical frameworks, particularly **Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity** and **Transformational Leadership Theory**, by showing how leadership operates not only at a structural level but also within the psychological realities of team members.

The study contributes to the leadership and innovation literature by offering a nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of how creativity emerges in real work environments, particularly in hierarchical and culturally complex settings. It underscores the vital role of leadership in constructing climates that nurture risk-taking, autonomy, and confidence—conditions under which creativity can thrive.

Practically, the findings highlight the importance of training leaders to foster environments characterized by openness, meaningful engagement, and psychological support. Organizations that aim to enhance innovation must prioritize leadership development strategies that cultivate these conditions as part of their cultural fabric.

Future research should continue to explore these dynamics in other regional and sectoral contexts, ideally through longitudinal and mixed-method designs. Such efforts would deepen understanding of how leadership behaviors and psychological conditions interact over time to sustain creativity and innovation in organizations worldwide.

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