

Linking paradoxical leadership and individual in-role and extra-role performance: a multilevel examination

Paradoxical leadership & individual performance

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Abstract

Purpose – Leaders in the hospitality industry encounter daily conflicting demands and paradoxes which call for adjusting their leadership philosophy from “either/or” to “both/and” leadership style. Therefore, drawing upon paradox, self-determination, social learning and job demands-resources perspectives, the purpose of this article is to examine the relationships between paradoxical leadership and employee in-role and extra-role performance outcomes. It also aims to explore the mediating effect of work engagement on the aforesaid linkages.

Design/methodology/approach – Multilevel analyses in Mplus 8.0 software were conducted on three-wave data from 238 employees working in 19 Pakistani hotels.

Findings – The authors found that paradoxical leadership influences employee in-role (job performance) and extra-role (innovative work behavior and voice behavior) performance directly and indirectly through employee work engagement.

Originality/value – This study addresses recent calls by highlighting the role of paradoxical leadership, an important yet underexplored leadership style in the hospitality literature. In addition, this is the first study examining the multilevel effect of paradoxical leadership on employees’ in-role and extra-role performance via work engagement.

Keywords Paradoxical leadership, Job performance, Work engagement, Voice behaviour, Innovative work behaviour

Paper type Original Article

Introduction

The performance of the hospitality sector relies on employees’ critical behaviors and attitudes (Ubeda-Garcia *et al.*, 2016). Due to the complexity of the business environment and constant market changes, hospitality leadership has been viewed as a cornerstone for boosting employees’ positive work-related outcomes (Elkhwesky *et al.*, 2022; Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019). Leaders in the hospitality industry face a challenging environment with conflicting demands, paradoxical conditions, and obstacles (She *et al.*, 2020). They are required to balance the organization’s needs for control and order with the employees’ needs for flexibility and autonomy (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Given this complexity, hotel leaders experience difficulty striving to meet these conflicting demands (Ma *et al.*, 2019).

Accordingly, to respond to these conflicting challenges, leaders must perform paradoxical roles and exhibit contradictory actions (Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2021). An example of conflicting demands in hospitality is that hotels require workers to adopt standard corporate



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behavior while constantly demanding them to provide customized services to each customer (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019). Paradoxical thinking, building on the paradox theory (Cameron and Quinn, 1988), has been reported to be effective in handling these conflicting demands in organizations (Smith and Lewis, 2011) and consequently can have a positive effect on employees' behavioral outcomes such as innovative performance and proactive behaviors (Li *et al.*, 2018). According to the paradox theory, it seems that even contradictory elements may coexist in a harmonious manner (Cameron and Quinn, 1988). On the other hand, this theory provides insights into identifying possible mechanisms for managing contradictory demands within hospitality organizations (Guo *et al.*, 2020).

In hospitality research, a number of leadership theories were explored to see the influence of different leadership styles on employees' work-related outcomes. For instance, transformational leadership (Gui *et al.*, 2020), empowering leadership (Chiang and Chen, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2019), servant leadership (Karatepe *et al.*, 2020), ethical leadership (Sarwar *et al.*, 2020), authentic leadership (Kaya and Karatepe, 2020), inclusive leadership (Thabet *et al.*, 2022) and spiritual leadership (Abualigah *et al.*, 2022) were reported to depict a positive association with employees' work-related outcomes in hospitality settings. Barring a few notable exceptions (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019; Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2021; She *et al.*, 2020), very limited research has been directed toward examining the effect of paradoxical leadership in hospitality research (Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2022). For example, She *et al.* (2020) examined the linkage between paradoxical leadership and employee service performance through the mediating role of leadership identification. Rescalvo-Martin *et al.* (2021) investigated the relationship between paradoxical leadership and extra-role service using self-improvement as a mediator. In light of this and given the scarcity of studies on this emerging leadership style (Chen *et al.*, 2021), particularly in the hospitality industry (Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2022), more research is needed to examine not only the direct effect of paradoxical leadership on hospitality employees' performance outcomes (both in-role and extra-role) but also the potential of other psychological/contextual underlining mechanisms that help to explain such a relationship. This was also evidenced by Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*'s (2022) recent literature review that underscored the need for more research in this underexplored area.

To address these limitations and respond to the calls for more studies on the influence of paradoxical leadership on employee performance (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2022; Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2022), the present study draws on theories of paradox, self-determination, social learning and job demands-resources (JD-R) to investigate how paradoxical leadership leads to employee performance in terms of in-role (job performance) and extra-role (innovative work behavior and voice behavior). Moreover, since work engagement (defined as the positive, affective-motivational state of high energy combined with high levels of dedication and a strong focus on work; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010) can be shaped by the organizational factors (i.e. leadership) (Ahmad and Gao, 2018; Hakanen *et al.*, 2008), it is proposed that work engagement can serve as a transmission pathway between paradoxical leadership (assessed at the organizational level) and employee performance behavior.

Together, prior research raises a set of interrelated questions: Is paradoxical leadership effective in enhancing employees' performance in the hospitality sector? Can work engagement mediate the relationship between paradoxical leadership and important employee performance outcomes? The present study addresses these two questions and makes three essential contributions to existing literature, while also responding to the call for more research on the role of paradoxical leadership on performance outcomes, especially in the hospitality sector.

First, this study extends current paradoxical leadership literature by developing a multilevel model to examine the influence of paradoxical leadership on employees' in-role and extra-role performance behavior. Applying the paradox, self-determination, social learning

and JD-R perspectives, this study emphasizes how paradoxical leadership enhances individuals' work engagement and fosters their in-role (i.e. job performance) and extra-role (i.e. voice behavior and innovative work behavior) performance behavior. The relationship between paradoxical leadership and employee performance has been overlooked (Zhang *et al.*, 2021); this is surprising given that service organizations (e.g. hotels) are continually dealing with dynamics that shape their operations (Tanova and Bayighomog, 2022). Similarly, given the potential of paradoxical leadership to reconcile the conflicting job requirements that are frequently seen in the hospitality industry, it is surprising that there is a dearth of studies on paradoxical leadership in this sector (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2022). Thus, this study advances current scholarship into paradoxical leadership, which is a complex and multilevel phenomenon.

Second, this study explores an important organizational antecedent for employee work engagement. There is now an emerging body of research on employee work engagement and performance outcomes in various contexts (e.g. Chen *et al.*, 2020; Ma *et al.*, 2020; Tisu *et al.*, 2020). However, most research focuses on the individual antecedents of work engagement (e.g. Abualigah *et al.*, 2021; Tan and Yeap, 2022). Moreover, work engagement and performance (both in-role and extra-role performance) have not been examined together with organizational-level paradoxical leadership. Thus, this study helps us better understand how paradoxical leadership at the organizational level may benefit employees' work engagement, which is crucial to employee performance (Ma *et al.*, 2020).

Third, by proposing a multilevel model to explain the indirect effect between paradoxical leadership and individual performance, which is mediated by work engagement, this study enriches current literature that attempts to explain the underlying mechanisms between paradoxical leadership and individual performance, which is still an unsolved issue in the paradoxical leadership literature (Sparr *et al.*, 2022). In addition, the multilevel nature of organizations requires a multilevel approach to examine the transmission pathways between organizational leadership and individual-level outcomes in order to develop a better understanding of how paradoxical leadership leads to individual performance outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). By adopting a multilevel research design, our research reduces the risk of common method bias and drawbacks of cross-sectional methodologies, thereby reinforcing the credibility and validity of the findings.

Fourth, given the crucial role of leadership in the hospitality sector (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2021; Badar *et al.*, 2022), few studies have examined the role of paradoxical leadership on the behavioral outcomes of employees working in the hospitality sector. As per the recent meta-analytic study by Huertas-Valdivia *et al.* (2022), only three studies have investigated paradoxical leadership in the hospitality industry but ignored the multilevel perspective. Hence, this study responds to Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*'s (2022) call for more research on the role of paradoxical leadership in the hospitality sector.

Literature review and hypotheses

Paradoxical leadership

Paradoxical leadership is originated and defined by Zhang *et al.* (2015) as a leading philosophy aimed at balancing the contradictory and conflicting demands within an organization. This leadership style is characterized as “both/and” leading style and cognitive basis rather than “either/or” in which a leader has to choose either between a directive or a participative approach (Fürstenberg *et al.*, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). According to Zhang *et al.* (2015), paradoxical leadership is characterized by the combination of (1) self-centeredness with other-centeredness, (2) maintaining distance while displaying closeness in dealing with followers, (3) consistency in dealing with employees while taking individualization into consideration, (4) respecting work demands while permitting flexibility and (5) enforcing

decisions control while permitting autonomy. The combination of these five components can be used to create a global indicator that summarizes paradoxical leadership at work (She *et al.*, 2020; Park *et al.*, 2021a; Zhang *et al.*, 2015).

Work engagement

Work engagement is a motivational construct that emphasizes individuals' strengths, optimal performance and positive experiences in the workplace (Bakker and van Wingerden, 2021). Work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, p. 74). This motivational construct comprises three main dimensions. Vigor refers to high degree of energy and psychological resilience while working, and the willingness to put effort at work. Dedication is defined as "a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, p. 74). In relation to absorption, it refers to being immersed and fully concentrated in one's work.

Job performance

Job performance refers to the total value to an organization of the set of specific behaviors that an individual contributes over a period of time (Motowidlo *et al.*, 1997). Job performance is one of the important constructs in the field of management and organizational behavior (Jalalkamali *et al.*, 2016; López-Cabarcos *et al.*, 2022), and a variable that businesses aim to improve in order to achieve better results and maintain sustainable competitiveness (Gencer *et al.*, 2023). Following previous literature (e.g. Jalalkamali *et al.*, 2016; Gencer *et al.*, 2023), this study focuses on the individual-level behaviors to conceptualize job performance, because these behaviors are key to the economic performance of organizations (López-Cabarcos *et al.*, 2022; Rich *et al.*, 2010).

Innovative work behavior

Innovative work behavior is defined as the production, promotion and development of novel ideas and solutions (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Due to rising competing demands, globalization and changing business environment, innovative work behavior has become an increasingly significant topic over the last decade (Jan *et al.*, 2021; Susomrith and Amankwaa, 2019). In addition, innovative work behavior is seen to be the foundation of innovation in a firm (Karatepe *et al.*, 2020). Previous studies (e.g. Yuan and Woodman, 2010) have distinguished between creativity and innovative behavior. While the former mainly focuses on the generation of ideas, the latter, on the other hand, incorporates both idea generation and implementation (Hu *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, innovative behavior is a wider construct that incorporates creativity but is not limited to it (Park *et al.*, 2021b).

Voice behavior

According to van Dyne and LePine (1998, p. 326), voice behavior is viewed as a behavior characterized by "constructive, change-oriented communication intended to improve the situation". It generally includes constructive and challenging expressions about ideas, suggestions and job-related concerns (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Employee voice behavior helps organizations to learn more about their weaknesses and mistakes (Bai *et al.*, 2019). According to Tedone and Bruk-Lee (2022), employee voice behavior has three main characteristics. First, voice is a verbal act that staff members engage in. Second, employee voice is constructive, which means speaking up with the intent to find solutions and promote change. Third, employee voice is a choice, which means that individuals must make a conscious decision to communicate their ideas or concerns. In short, employee voice behavior can be seen as

improvement-oriented, proactive and upward communication that staff members display in an organization (Tedone and Bruk-Lee, 2022; van Dyne and LePine, 1998).

Paradoxical leadership and employee performance outcomes

Paradoxical leadership and job performance. In management literature, paradoxical leadership shows to positively affect employees' work-related outcomes such as proactive behaviors, creativity and resilience (Franken *et al.*, 2019; Park *et al.*, 2021a; Yang *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). The paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011) can help us understand the effect of paradoxical leadership on employee behavioral outcomes. This theory explains how leaders can manage conflicting demands within their organizations (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019). More specifically, leaders who adopt such a leadership philosophy react to paradoxical and conflicting demands through establishing a balance between these demands which are interrelated (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019). Under such a leadership style, these conflicting demands may coexist in a harmonious and interdependent manner to create a totality that constantly evolves and transforms (Cameron and Quinn, 1988).

In this study, we extend previous research through investigating the relationship between paradoxical leadership and job performance in hospitality setting. Although the antecedents of job performance have been widely examined in the hospitality literature (see Akgunduz, 2015; Grobelna, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2017), the relationship between paradoxical leadership and job performance in the hotel industry has yet to be addressed. Therefore, examining such a relationship is of great importance, because job performance contributes to the achievement of organizational goals (Akgunduz, 2015; López-Cabarcos *et al.*, 2022).

Accordingly, we expect paradoxical leadership to positively influence employees' job performance for the following reasons. First, due to the paradoxes and conflicting demands employees encounter in hospitality setting, paradoxical leadership can be a very effective approach to manage employees in hospitality industry (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019). Under this style, employees tend to learn to be open to challenges and paradoxes through broadening their view of job requirements and recognizing new opportunities to adapt to the ever-changing environment (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). This is because leaders act as role models to show employees how to accept paradoxes and conflicting demands in the workplace (Fang, 2005). She *et al.* (2020) argued that paradoxical leaders in hospitality can serve as role models for learning in situations characterized by high workloads.

Second, through paradoxical leadership, leaders build a work environment characterized by flexibility and individuality for employees while there is an orientation to keep decision control and high work requirements (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). While the latter enables employees to understand work objectives and requirements in order to achieve the desired work outcomes (Shao *et al.*, 2019), the former, however, implies that paradoxical leaders empower their employees and take into consideration their personal and social needs (Srivastava *et al.*, 2006). Consequently, employees tend to behave in a proficient and adaptive manner (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Based on the previous discussion, we advance the following hypothesis:

H1. Paradoxical leadership is positively associated with job performance.

Paradoxical leadership and innovative work behavior. Innovative work behavior is seen as a critical component of ensuring organizational competitive advantage and effectiveness (Luu, 2021). Although innovative work behavior is known to be beneficial to the organizations, employees are not always motivated to display such a behavior (Liu *et al.*, 2020). In addition, despite the importance of innovative work behavior to enhance innovation in an organization (Karatepe *et al.*, 2020), evidence regarding the predictors of innovative work behavior is scarce (Susomrith and Amankwaa, 2019), particularly in the hospitality literature (Jan *et al.*, 2021; Luu, 2021).

In general, leadership in hospitality has been viewed as a crucial factor in boosting employees' innovative work behavior. For instance, transformational leadership (Wang *et al.*, 2014) and servant leadership (Karatepe *et al.*, 2020) have been reported as important drivers of creative and innovative work behavior in a hospitality setting. In this study, we believe that paradoxical leadership and innovative work behavior are associated for the following reasons. Paradoxical leaders accept the conflicting demands and paradoxes and search to differentiate and integrate them (Zhang *et al.*, 2015), which, in turn, may help organizations to engage in innovation (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, the self-determination theory (SDT) indicates that people have three needs: "autonomy, competence and relatedness" (Ryan and Deci, 2000). At the workplace, employees will develop a state of vitality (Ryan and Deci, 2000), when these needs are met.

In general, paradoxical leaders maintain control while allowing for empowerment (Fürstenberg *et al.*, 2021). Through empowerment, employees' interests and needs are realized by promoting flexibility and autonomy (Parker *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, paradoxical leaders allow for individuality while treating employees uniformly (Fürstenberg *et al.*, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). With this in mind, employees are permitted to develop skills and knowledge (Dong *et al.*, 2017). Finally, leaders maintain distance while emphasizing for harmonious relationships. Under such a condition, employees can have close interpersonal relationships with their leaders. Therefore, we argue that employees can satisfy their needs indicated in SDT through the dimensions of paradoxical leadership (Yang *et al.*, 2019). This implies that, consistent with SDT, creative and innovative behaviors would be a likely outcome (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Yang *et al.*, 2019). Based on the abovementioned arguments, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2. Paradoxical leadership is positively associated with innovative work behavior.

Paradoxical leadership and voice behavior. Employee voice behavior has been reported to be beneficial because it promotes problem-solving skills (Chen and Hou, 2016), favors collective learning (Detert and Burris, 2007) and helps the organization gain constructive knowledge about its performance (Avey *et al.*, 2012). Given that employee voice is voluntary, prosocial and sometimes risky behavior, scholars have investigated a range of predictors that engender employee voice such as leadership (Bai *et al.*, 2019).

Previous research in the hospitality industry suggests that leadership is of great significance in fostering employees' voice. For instance, in Taiwanese hospitality industry, Liang *et al.* (2017) found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee voice behavior. Furthermore, empowering leadership was found to influence employee voice behavior through knowledge sharing in Taiwanese' five-star hotels (Chiang and Chen, 2021). In their recent study, Elbaz *et al.* (2022) underscore the need for more research to investigate the effect of organizational factors (e.g. leadership styles) on employee voice behavior. In this study, we extend this line of inquiry by examining the relationship between paradoxical leadership and employee voice behavior.

In line with the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), we assume that paradoxical leadership may reinforce employee voice behavior. According to this theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), employees develop behaviors as they observe and imitate their role models. Through observing the behaviors of the role model, employees are more likely to improve their holistic view about these behaviors, which may ultimately lead to these behaviors being imitated (Liu *et al.*, 2014; Resick *et al.*, 2013). When leaders adopt a paradox mindset and act as a role model in dealing with contradictions constructively (Li *et al.*, 2020), workers are provided with opportunities to observe and learn how to handle such contradictions and paradoxes (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, employees may develop a paradox mindset as well (Miron-Spektor *et al.*, 2018) which may lead to employees coming up with novel solutions to handle these

paradoxes (Liu *et al.*, 2020) and increase their ability to speak up. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

H3. Paradoxical leadership is positively associated with voice behavior.

Paradoxical leadership and work engagement

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) outlined that work engagement is a positive psychological state represented by “vigor, dedication, and absorption”. It has been argued that highly engaged employees show energy (vigor) and enthusiasm (dedication), and they are entirely concentrated (absorption) in their jobs (Bakker and van Wingerden, 2021). Research has demonstrated that work engagement can be a driver to a number of favorable behavioral and attitudinal outcomes such as career satisfaction, employee affective commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and adaptive performance (Aboramadan and Kundi, 2020; Kaya and Karatepe, 2020).

Extant research suggests that leadership is a crucial factor in enhancing employees’ work engagement (Amor *et al.*, 2020; De Clercq *et al.*, 2014). In the hospitality context, Kaya and Karatepe (2020) found that servant leadership and authentic leadership positively influenced work engagement among hotels employees working in Turkey, while Liang *et al.* (2017) found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement among employees working in the Taiwanese hospitality industry.

Considering the link between paradoxical leadership and work engagement, we argue the following. First, under the umbrella of JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008), there is a motivational connection between job resources (e.g. job autonomy, empowerment and supervisory support) and work engagement. We believe that the paradoxical leadership dimensions represent important job resources such as autonomy and empowerment, and allow for interpersonal relationships. Therefore, paradoxical leaders through self-centeredness while permitting for other-centeredness, maintaining distance while allowing for closeness and maintaining power while permitting autonomy, can boost employees’ work engagement. In hospitality research, several job resources were identified as factors which affect work engagement such as job autonomy (Chen *et al.*, 2014), supervisor support and empowerment (Babakus *et al.*, 2017). Given the previous discussion, we advance the following hypothesis:

H4. Paradoxical leadership is positively associated with work engagement.

Work engagement and performance outcomes

Employees with high levels of engagement tend to be satisfied with their work and are effective in delivering services (Karatepe, 2012). Furthermore, work engagement has become a crucial factor in increasing productivity and motivating employees (Karatepe, 2013; Saks and Gruman, 2014). Furthermore, work engagement has been found to have a positive influence on in-role performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008), extra-role performance (Haynie *et al.*, 2016) and reduced intentions to leave (Babakus *et al.*, 2017).

In hospitality research, work engagement has also been reported as a significant predictor of voice behavior (Liang *et al.*, 2017), job satisfaction (Lee and Ok, 2016) and adaptive performance (Kaya and Karatepe, 2020). In line with the norm of reciprocity, engaged employees tend to enjoy a high-quality relationship with their organizations due to the availability of resources, which motivates employees to exhibit positive work-related outcomes (Saks, 2006) such as job performance, innovative work behavior and voice behavior. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be posited:

H5. Work engagement is positively associated with (a) job performance, (b) innovative work behavior and (c) voice behavior.

The mediating role of work engagement

Paradoxical leaders usually make the final decision but at the same time also allow employees to deal with specific work issues (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). With this practice, employees can obtain autonomy to handle these specific work issues. This implies that there is a sort of shared leadership in some aspects of the work (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, paradoxical leaders provide employees with some sort of flexibility and freedom which are likely to enhance employees' perceptions of empowerment (Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2021) and open the doors for harmonious and close interpersonal relationship while keeping distance (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, when paradoxical leaders provide these resources of autonomy, empowerment and support, employees perceive these resources positively, and consequently, this will be translated into higher levels of work engagement. In such a high-quality relationship, engaged employees tend to dedicate their efforts to face challenges and display positive work-related outcomes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Karatepe, 2013), such as job performance, innovation and voice behavior. However, limited research has investigated the underlying mechanisms between paradoxical leadership and performance outcomes. For example, Zhang *et al.*'s (2022) is one of the few studies that examined the indirect effect between paradoxical leadership and innovation. They found that ambidexterity mediated the nexus between these variables in the telecommunication and information technology industries. In hospitality research, work engagement was found to exert an indirect effect on the relationship between transformational leadership and voice behavior (Liang *et al.*, 2017) and between leader-member exchange and innovative work behavior (Kim *et al.*, 2017). According to Rescalvo-Martin *et al.* (2022), little is known about the effect of paradoxical leadership in the hospitality research. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to investigate the mediating effect of work engagement on the linkage between paradoxical leadership and performance outcomes (i.e. job performance, innovative work behavior and voice behavior). Based on the arguments presented above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H6. Work engagement mediates the positive relationship between paradoxical leadership and (a) job performance, (b) innovative work behavior and (c) voice behavior.

Figure 1 shows the research model of our study.

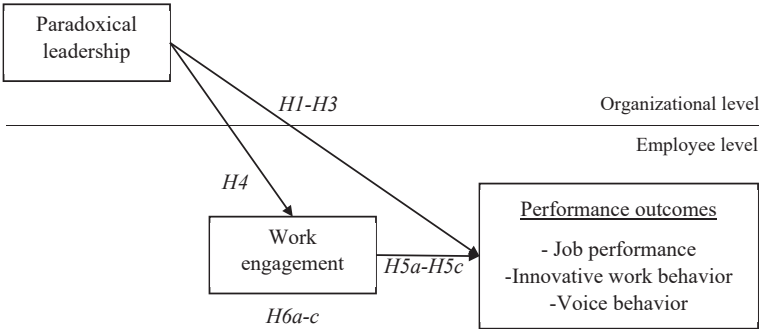


Figure 1.
Research model

Note(s): H = hypothesis. H6a-c represents the mediation hypotheses
Source(s): Authors own creation

Method

Sample and procedure

Data were collected from employees working in 19 hotels located in Pakistan. The organizations were selected using the snowball sampling technique, asking each participating organization to identify other appropriate organizations. The sampling was selective in the sense that participants' consent to participate in the research was obtained. Data were collected using an online survey designed using Google Forms. An online survey was disseminated among the researchers' network and via a professional site (i.e. LinkedIn). These initial participants referred the researcher to other participants and forwarded the survey link to their colleagues. The survey's cover page mentioned the study's purpose, confidentiality and anonymity of responses, and one of the researchers' email ID in case participants wished to know more about the study. Participants were also told that they can withdraw from the survey any time without any consequences. Also, they were asked to provide their email IDs if they were willing to be part of a three-wave study.

According to Podsakoff *et al.* (2012), temporal separation across multiple time points minimizes the risk of common method bias. Therefore, data were collected in three measurement points with a time lag of two weeks. At Time 1, we measured demographic variables and paradoxical leadership. At Time 2 (i.e. two weeks later), we measured employee work engagement. At Time 3 (two weeks after Time 2), we measured dependent variables, namely job performance, innovative work behavior and voice behavior. A total of 455 responses were received at Time 1, 324 employees participated at Time 2 (response rate = 71.2%) and 290 employees participated at Time 3 (response rate = 89.5%). The final matched sample size consisted of 238 employees, representing a response rate of 52.3%.

Dropout analysis was performed using multiple logistic regression as suggested by Goodman and Blum (1996), in which we examined the systematic differences in participants between the three phases of our data collection. Our results showed no significant difference between respondents and nonrespondents at Time 2 and Time 3, indicating that attrition did not seriously affect our findings. Among 238 employees, 105 were female (44.1%), the average age was 33.71 years ($SD = 6.55$) and the average job tenure was 8.03 years ($SD = 4.79$). The majority of the participants a bachelor's degree or above (17.1% held a bachelor's degree and 75.3% held a master's degree). Within the organization, 171 were nonmanagerial employees and remaining 67 were managerial employees.

Measures

All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The survey was administered in English as this is the official language at the Pakistani workplace (Soomro *et al.*, 2022).

Paradoxical leadership was measured with the 22-item scale developed by Zhang *et al.* (2015). Example items are "my supervisor manages subordinates uniformly, but considers their individualized needs" and "my supervisor maintains overall control, but gives subordinates appropriate autonomy". The internal reliability was 0.82.

Work engagement was measured using a nine-item shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006), comprising three subdimensions, namely vigor, dedication and absorption. Sample items are "At my job, I feel strong and vigorous" and "I am proud of the work that I do". The internal reliability of the overall construct was 0.72.

Job performance was measured using four items borrowed from Rodwell *et al.* (1998). Example items are "I am proud of my work performance" and "I am currently working at my best performance level". The internal reliability was 0.87.

Innovative work behavior was measured using six items taken from Hu *et al.* (2009). Example items are "At work, I come up with innovative and creative notions" and "At work, I

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try to secure the funding and resources needed to implement innovations”. The internal reliability was 0.86.
Voice behavior was gauged with the six-item scale developed by [Van Dyne and LePine \(1998\)](#). An example item is “I keep well informed about issues at work where my opinion can be useful”. The internal reliability was 0.87.

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Results
[Table 1](#) presents the means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables.

Aggregation of paradoxical leadership

As the employees were nested in organizations, paradoxical leadership was aggregated to the organizational level. To justify the aggregation, within-group homogeneity and between-group heterogeneity were tested. The results of one-way analysis of variance showed that paradoxical leadership differed ($p < 0.000$) between organizations. The intraclass correlation coefficients were $ICC_1 = 0.48$ and $ICC_2 = 0.82$. Furthermore, mean rwg score was above the cutoff score of 0.70, indicating adequate within-organization agreement ([James et al., 1984](#)).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

CFA with robust maximum likelihood estimation was conducted to test the fitness of measurement model and construct distinctiveness. The results demonstrated that the five-factor model of paradoxical leadership, work engagement, job performance, innovative work behavior and voice behavior fit the data better when compared with alternative models including a three-factor model, a two-factor model and a one-factor model (see [Table 2](#)), providing support for the discriminant validity of the study variables.

Table 1.
Means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	33.71	6.55	–							
2. Gender	0.56	0.49	–0.06	–						
3. Tenure	8.03	4.79	0.81**	–0.24**	–					
4. Paradoxical leadership	4.50	1.30	–0.03	0.02	–0.02	–				
5. Work engagement	5.10	1.46	–0.02	–0.01	–0.07	0.51**	–			
6. Job performance	5.26	1.60	0.09	–0.04	0.05	0.33**	0.39**	–		
7. Innovative work behavior	5.37	1.08	–0.02	0.10	–0.06	0.28**	0.34**	0.49**	–	
8. Voice behavior	5.81	0.90	0.06	0.22**	0.02	0.26**	0.27**	0.30**	0.44**	–

Note(s): Gender coded 1 = male, 0 = female. Age and tenure were assessed in years. Organizational-level variable (paradoxical leadership) is assigned down to correlate with employee-level variables. $N = 238$ employees within 19 organizations
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$
Source(s): Authors’ own creation

Table 2.
Comparison of alternative measurement models

Models	Factors	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δ df)	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
Model 1	5 factors: PL, WE, JP, IWB, VB	296.97	242	–	0.97	0.04	0.03
Model 2	3 factors: PL, WE, JP + IWB + VB	1056.43	249	759.46** (7)	0.67	0.10	0.11
Model 3	2 factors: PL, WE + JP + IWB + VB	1167.12	251	870.15** (9)	0.62	0.11	0.11
Model 4	1 factor: PL + WE + JP + IWB + VB	1415.32	252	1118.35** (10)	0.52	0.13	0.14

Note(s): + indicates merger of two factors into one. PL = paradoxical leadership; WE = work engagement; JP = job performance; IWB = innovative work behavior; VB = voice behavior. ** $p < 0.01$
Source(s): Authors’ own creation

Next, we checked the convergent validity by assessing the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) scores as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2019). We found that the CR and AVE scores of each construct were greater than the cutoff value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) and 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), respectively (see Appendix I). These results revealed that each construct has a satisfactory level of convergent validity.

Furthermore, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity can be assessed by comparing the average shared variance (ASV) score of constructs with its AVE score. As can be seen in Appendix I, the AVE for each construct was higher than its ASV score, suggesting discriminant validity. In addition, we also tested the discriminant validity using heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler *et al.*, 2014). We found that the HTMT ratio for study constructs (see Table 3) was below than the conservative 0.85 cutoff, further supporting our claims of discriminant validity.

Hypothesis testing

To test our hypotheses, multilevel analysis was conducted in Mplus 8.0. The results (see Table 4) revealed that paradoxical leadership was positively related to employee job performance ($\gamma = 0.41, p < 0.01$; Hypothesis 1 was supported), innovative work behavior ($\gamma = 0.24, p < 0.01$; Hypothesis 2 was supported), voice behavior ($\gamma = 0.18, p < 0.01$; Hypothesis 3 was supported) and work engagement ($\gamma = 0.59, p < 0.01$; Hypothesis 4 was supported). Similarly, work engagement was positively related to employee job performance

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Paradoxical leadership	–				
2. Work engagement	0.633	–			
3. Job performance	0.478	0.494	–		
4. Innovative work behavior	0.302	0.444	0.570	–	
5. Voice behavior	0.235	0.352	0.352	0.517	–

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 3.
HTMT ratio

Path	Estimate	S.E.	Lower and upper 95% CI limits
<i>Test of direct relationships</i>			
Paradoxical leadership → job performance	0.41**	0.07	0.264, 0.524
Paradoxical leadership → innovative work behavior	0.24**	0.06	0.115, 0.332
Paradoxical leadership → voice behavior	0.18**	0.05	0.089, 0.265
Paradoxical leadership → work engagement	0.59**	0.07	0.460, 0.706
Work engagement → job performance	0.33**	0.07	0.203, 0.455
Work engagement → innovative work behavior	0.17**	0.05	0.085, 0.260
Work engagement → voice behavior	0.10*	0.04	0.022, 0.170
<i>Test of indirect relationships</i>			
Paradoxical leadership → Work engagement → job performance	0.19**	0.05	0.105, 0.278
Paradoxical leadership → Work engagement → innovative work behavior	0.10**	0.03	0.014, 0.155
Paradoxical leadership → Work engagement → voice behavior	0.06*	0.02	0.011, 0.101

Note(s): Standardized regression coefficients are reported. $N = 238$ employees within 19 organizations.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 4.
Results of multilevel
analysis

($\gamma = 0.33, p < 0.01$), innovative work behavior ($\gamma = 0.17, p < 0.01$) and voice behavior ($\gamma = 0.10, p < 0.05$), supporting Hypotheses 5a, b and c. Furthermore, employee work engagement mediated the relationship between organization paradoxical leadership and employee job performance ($\gamma = 0.19, p < 0.01$; Hypothesis 6a was supported), innovative work behavior ($\gamma = 0.10, p < 0.01$; Hypothesis 6b was supported), and voice behavior ($\gamma = 0.06, p < 0.05$; Hypothesis 6c was supported).

Discussion of the results

This study aimed to investigate the multilevel impact of paradoxical leadership on employees' behavioral outcomes in the hospitality industry through work engagement as a mediating mechanism. These outcomes were job performance, innovative work behavior and voice behavior. On the relationship between paradoxical leadership and job performance, our result indicated that this leadership style depicts a positive relationship with job performance. The findings provide support to the theoretical foundations embedded in paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011) which explains how leaders respond to conflicting demands through balancing them. When leaders do so, employees get more open to these paradoxes by broadening their perspective on the job duties and also identify new opportunities to be consistent with the changing business environment. In specific, maintaining control by paradoxical leaders can pave the way for employees to learn about the work purposes and limitations, whereas creating a work environment which is flexible helps empower employees and consider their personal needs. The results also suggest that paradoxical leadership positively influenced innovative work behavior. These results, consistent with SDT, indicate that when employees satisfy their needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, they experience a state of vitality. For instance, when paradoxical leaders empower employees (Parker *et al.*, 2006), treat them individually (Dong *et al.*, 2017) and call for harmonious relationships, this will lead to employees' fulfilling their previously mentioned needs. Consequently, innovative work behavior will be the outcome (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Yang *et al.*, 2019).

Moreover, the results indicated that paradoxical leadership positively impacted employees' voice behavior. Through the lens of the social learning theory, employees learn from their leaders and recognize them as role models. This will help employees to widen their perspectives about job paradoxes and conflicting demands. As employees tend to develop a paradox mindset, they are more likely to raise their voice and provide novel ideas to cope with these paradoxes. Similarly, the results suggest that paradoxical leadership is positively related with work engagement. Through the dimensions of paradoxical leadership such as job autonomy (Chen *et al.*, 2014), supervisor support (Chen *et al.*, 2014) and empowerment (Babakus *et al.*, 2017), employees' work engagement is more likely to increase with the presence of these job demands as suggested in the JD-R model. On another note, our results demonstrated that work engagement has a positive effect on job performance, innovative work behavior and voice behavior. These results are in line with previous studies which found that work engagement is a significant predictor of behavioral outcomes such as discretionary behavior (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2022) and voice behavior (Liang *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, the results showed that work engagement mediated the relationships between paradoxical leadership and our examined behavioral outcomes. These results imply that when employees positively perceive the resources (i.e. flexibility, freedom, empowerment, etc.) provided by their paradoxical leaders, employees tend to display greater degrees of vigor, dedication and absorption. Under the umbrella of such high-quality relationships between the leader and employees, employees will ultimately show positive work behaviors (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Furthermore, the results lend support for previous research in hospitality in which work engagement was found to mediate the relationship between

transformational leadership and voice behavior (Liang *et al.*, 2017) and leader–member exchange and innovative work behavior (Kim *et al.*, 2017).

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the relevant literature as follows. First, research on the effect of paradoxical leadership on employee performance outcomes has mainly focused on individuals' perceptions of paradoxical leadership (e.g. She *et al.*, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2022), even though leadership is a complex and multilevel phenomenon (Turner and Baker, 2018). This is an important gap in knowledge, because leadership is crucial for both individual and organizational performance. Our study revealed the positive effects of paradoxical leadership in fostering work engagement ultimately leading to individual performance outcomes in terms of job performance, innovative work behavior and voice behavior. Our multilevel research design also benefits the performance literature by providing a more fine-grained, supervisor–subordinate interface perspective which is limited in the current literature (Morinaga *et al.*, 2022). Hence, our study reveals how a multilevel analysis enables us to develop a more comprehensive view of how leaders foster individual performance outcomes.

Second, we revealed the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between paradoxical leadership and employee performance outcomes. In particular, by examining how paradoxical leadership would increase employees' work engagement, and in turn foster employees' in-role (job performance) and extra-role (innovative work behavior and voice behavior) performance outcomes, we contribute to the work engagement literature, since the majority of existing studies have focused on individual-level antecedents of work engagement, and work engagement and performance (both in-role and extra-role performance) have not been examined together with organizational-level paradoxical leadership. In particular, Morinaga *et al.* (2022) encouraged more research on the multilevel, antecedent-focused research on work engagement.

Third, by examining work engagement as a critical mechanism linking paradoxical leadership and employee performance, our study contributes to the paradoxical leadership literature by extending our understanding of how paradoxical leadership could foster employees' performance behaviors in the workplace. Our findings show that when employees positively perceive the resources (e.g. flexibility, freedom and empowerment) provided by their paradoxical leaders, they tend to display greater levels of work engagement. In turn, they are more engaged in both in-role (job performance) and extra-role (innovative work behavior and voice behavior) performance outcomes. By revealing the mediating role of work engagement, our research sheds light on the unexplored but highly important influencing mechanisms connecting paradoxical leadership to employee in-role and extra-role performance outcomes.

Finally, our study is one of the few that examines the influence of paradoxical leadership on employee performance outcomes in the hotel sector. This was also evidenced by Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*'s (2022) recent literature review which found that only three studies (i.e. Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2019; Rescalvo-Martin *et al.*, 2021) have investigated paradoxical leadership in the hospitality industry. Therefore, our study responds to Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*'s (2022) call for more research about the role of paradoxical leadership in the hospitality environment.

Practical implications

The present study provides useful implications for hotel managers. It underlines the significance of paradoxical leadership, how it fits the challenging work environment of the hotel industry and how it boosts employee performance outcomes. As the hotel industry faces

several conflicting demands and paradoxes, hotel management needs to tackle these contradictions in an effective manner. In this regard and given the positive role paradoxical leaders play in influencing employees' positive work-related outcomes, hotel administrators are invited to encourage and support paradoxical leadership behaviors. This can be conducted through proper training and coaching. Furthermore, hotel management may need to reconsider their recruitment strategy through which they need to prioritize hiring leaders with paradoxical behaviors. Besides, leaders need to promote their paradoxical thinking as this would help them to deal with conflicting demands and contradictions in a balanced way for the benefit of both the organization and the employees. Similarly, paradoxical leaders need to serve as role models and train their employees to embrace paradoxical objectives and act in a paradoxical manner. These leaders can build a work climate characterized by "both/and" ideology to encourage employees to display higher levels of engagement, demonstrate better job performance, engage in innovative behavior and express their concerns and opinions. Moreover, hotel organizations need to foster a paradox mindset among employees, as this would contribute to their positive behaviors. Therefore, hotels are invited to shift from "either/or" to "both/and" philosophy. Finally, hotel management should not ignore the significance of the availability of job resources such as autonomy, empowerment and support, because the lack of these resources will negatively affect employees' level of engagement, in-role performance, innovation behavior and their ability to express their opinions.

Final considerations

This study has a number of limitations that need to be addressed. First, this research examined the effects of paradoxical leadership on only three outcomes, namely, job performance, innovative work behavior and voice behavior. Future research may consider uncovering the relationship between paradoxical leadership and other outcomes such as knowledge-sharing behavior, affective commitment, intrinsic motivation and organizational attractiveness. Second, although there was no issue with the common method bias, performance variables were assessed by the individuals themselves. Therefore, future research may consider assessing these variables using supervisor ratings. Third, since work engagement was considered a single construct, future research may look into its subdimensions, vigor, dedication and absorption for better insights. Future research may also examine other mediators, such as psychological meaningfulness and voice climate. Finally, it would be interesting for future research to consider the role of the employee paradox mindset, which has been reported to influence innovative behaviors and thriving at work (Liu *et al.*, 2020).

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Further reading

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Appendix

Paradoxical leadership & individual performance

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Constructs/items	Loading	AVE	ASV	CR
<i>Paradoxical leadership</i>				
Treating subordinates uniformly while allowing individualization	0.63	0.51	0.11	0.84
Combining self-centeredness with other-centeredness	0.82			
Maintaining decision control while allowing autonomy	0.60			
Enforcing work requirements while allowing flexibility	0.79			
Maintaining both distance and closeness	0.69			
<i>Work engagement</i>				
Vigor	0.60	0.51	0.12	0.77
Dedication	0.72			
Absorption	0.81			
<i>Job performance</i>				
I am currently working at my best performance level	0.86	0.65	0.12	0.88
I am proud of my work performance	0.89			
My work is always of high quality	0.85			
I set very high standards for my work	0.60			
<i>Innovative work behavior</i>				
At work, I come up with innovative and creative notions	0.75	0.53	0.13	0.87
At work, I try to propose my own creative ideas and convince others	0.85			
At work, I seek new service techniques, methods or techniques	0.72			
At work, I provide a suitable plan for developing new ideas	0.57			
At work, I try to secure the funding and resources needed to implement innovations	0.74			
Overall, I consider myself a creative member of my team	0.70			
<i>Voice behavior</i>				
I develop and make recommendations to my supervisor concerning issues that affect my work	0.77	0.52	0.08	0.87
I speak up and encourage others in my work unit to get involved in issues that affect our work	0.78			
I communicate my opinions about work issues to others in my work unit, even if their opinions are different and they disagree with me	0.73			
I keep well informed about issues at work where my opinion can be useful	0.77			
I get involved in issues that affect the quality of life in my work unit	0.72			
I speak up to my supervisor with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures at work	0.52			

Note(s): AVE = average variance extracted; ASV = average shared variance; CR = composite reliability. The dimensions of paradoxical leadership and work engagement are considered as means. Standardized coefficients are reported. All items are significant at a *p*-value of 0.001

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table A1.
Confirmatory factor analysis of hypothesized five-factor model

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