

MUHAMMAD YOUNAS KHAN
SHAZIA FAIZ
SAMYIA SAFDAR

Gritty leadership and creative performance: The mediating roles of proactive attitude and improvisation: Quantitative evidence from hospitality industry of Pakistan

Abstract

Research background and purpose: The aim of this study is to draw upon social learning theory to examine the effect of leader's grit on creative performance and explore the sequential mediating roles of proactive attitude and employee improvisation between gritty leadership and creative performance of employees in hospitality industry of Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach: A study sample of 268 employees from hotels of Rawalpindi, and Islamabad, Pakistan was conducted consists of established questionnaires relating to measuring variables gritty leadership, proactive attitude, employee improvisation, and employee creative performance. SPSS-26 was used for descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The theoretical model was investigated using structural equation modeling (SEM) and hypotheses testing by utilizing SmartPLS4 program.

Findings: The study result indicates that gritty leadership has significant direct effect on employee creative performance. In addition, the study findings highlight that proactive attitude mediates the relationship between gritty leadership and employee improvisation. Furthermore, the study results depict that employee improvisation significantly mediates the relationship between proactive attitude and creative performance. Finally, proactive attitude and employee improvisation sequentially mediates the relationship between gritty leadership and creative performance.

Value added and limitations: The research data was collected from single industry, and the culture and background of the industry builds the perceptions of the employees about creativity. By gathering information from a larger and more diverse range of cultural and industry contexts, future study can validate and improve the findings. In theoretical context, the study broadens the leadership importance with the underlying mechanism by assessing the sequential mediating effects of proactive attitude and employee improvisation in the relationship between gritty leadership and employee creative performance. Additionally, the study findings guide the managers in the organization need to adopt various styles of leadership to foster employee proactive attitude and employee improvisation which will help the employees to perform more creatively.

Keywords: *gritty leadership, proactive attitude, employee improvisation, creative performance, hospitality industry, Pakistan*

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1. Introduction

In complex, advanced and competitive world of today, it is impossible to overstate how important talented employees are in difficult customer interactions. Talented employees demonstrate creativity and innovative behavior, gauge customer happiness and loyalty, and assist the hospitality industry in achieving higher profit margins and competitive advantage (Tajeddini et al., 2020; Lombardi et al., 2019; Madera et al., 2017). An organization's or a work unit's innovative behavior is the outcome of an employee's desire to develop fresh ideas, methods, and techniques (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). Employee knowledge and cognitive skills are among the personal qualities that influence creative behavior (Zhu & Zhang, 2019). According to the study of Tajeddini et al. (2020) states that human factors like creativity and leadership encourage the employees of the hospitality industry to act innovatively. Prior studies also indicate that investment and spending on human resources stimulates creativity and innovation (Ottenbacher, 2007).

According to Nasifoglu-Elidemir, Ozturen, and Bayighomog (2020) creativity of an employee is an essential competency in the digital age for employees to stay relevant in their jobs. Creativity is a special resource that embodies the skills, knowledge, and intellectual competencies that employees possess that are hard to duplicate (Melnik et al., 2023). It is vital to personal growth and the advancement of an organization's capacity for innovation because it makes it easier to find new and better ways to do things and boosts employees' creative job performance (Adekanmbi & Ukpere, 2021). Creative employees are crucial for the innovations and sustainability of the organizations (Bakker et al., 2020).

Creative performance term defines by the researchers Zhang, Gong, Zhong, and Zhao (2017): "it refers to a person's capacity for coming up with innovative and useful ideas at work". Individuals' creative contributions result in the creation of innovative ideas, services, or goods for the company's progress (Bishop, 2021). To encourage innovation in business groups, creative performance is the fundamental and primary source. Creative performance is to be a useful tool for encouraging managerial and non-managerial employees to be creative at work (Karatape et al., 2020).

A study by Bavik and Kuo (2022) stated that employee creative performance is now a vital and mainstream need in the hospitality industry. Particularly in Pakistan, the service sector is the primary and crucial source of economic growth. Over the past few years, the services sector has continuously contributed the most to Pakistan's GDP. However, Pakistan's hospitality sector was significantly impacted by the pandemic in 2020 and the floods in 2022 (Moosvi & Ali, 2022). Pakistan is now the fastest developing country in the hospitality sector, accommodating both domestic and foreign guests as tourism interest in the country grows (Altaf & Hussain, 2021). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2022), despite Pakistan's hospitality industry's

ability to improve the economy, there is still a manpower shortage for skilled and creative employees. Even with this significance, academics and practitioners are still wondering about new features and procedures that can encourage people to frame their creative performance in the workplace. Several theoretical and empirical studies have examined several predictors of creative performance, but there are still some gaps in the literature.

Şeşen and Maşlakcı (2019) found that leadership is the most studied contextual component in the hospitality industry for employee creativity. Leadership is the action a leader takes to encourage their team members and influences how resources are distributed, shapes the nature of the tasks, and the working environment (Ivcevic et al., 2021). This makes leadership a more relevant and significant contextual component in relation to the creative performance of employees. Numerous research studies support the notion that different leadership styles have positive and significant impact on employee creativity e.g. ethical leadership (Arokiasamy et al., 2023), empowering leadership (Mai et al., 2021), benevolent leadership (Xia et al., 2022), transformational leadership (Mansoor et al., 2021), and servant leadership (Ouyang et al., 2021).

Today, millennials making up the majority of the workforce and expecting different work demands from organizations than previous generations, it's critical to look beyond traditional styles of leadership (Galdames & Guihen, 2022). Therefore, the present study is interested to study the creative performance with the recently emerged leadership style i.e. gritty leadership. Gritty leaders defined by Duckworth (2016) as “leader’s grit have perseverance and passion towards long term goals, they work tenuously towards challenges, maintaining effort and interest despite failure”. Leader’s grit follows two principles: i.e. avoiding negative experiences and improving skills and expertise continuously (Buszka, 2020). As a result, gritty leaders create an atmosphere where both managerial and non-managerial employees can positively impact the organization by exhibiting highly developed creative performance at every level.

Furthermore, positive emotions, attitudes, and behaviors, such as productivity and work engagement (Hodge et al., 2018), well-being and career success, are produced by a leader’s grit (Seguin, 2019). The attitudinal effects of leadership should be evaluated, according to many earlier studies. According to Jia et al., effective leadership may be able to enhance workers’ proactive attitudes (2020). According to Potgieter and Coetzee (2013, p. 3), proactive attitudes entail “accepting responsibility for one’s decisions, setting challenging goals for oneself, and spotting opportunities before others do”. In addition, according to Prado (2017), not just adjusting to circumstances or waiting for them to happen but actually taking action and making things happen.

Similarly, employee improvisation is one such important action that blends creativity and spontaneity (Clercq et al., 2021). Improvisation is described as “an instinctive action

in reaction to unplanned situations that is characterized by the confluence of preparation and execution,” by Mannucci, Orazi, and de Valk (2020, p. 614). Increased pressure on people to respond quickly to crises highlights the importance of understanding what drives people to engage in improvisation behavior (Ren et al., 2022). Considering the previously mentioned arguments, we speculate that gritty leadership may influence proactive attitude as a mediating mechanism with regard to the direct impact of gritty leadership on the employee’s improvisational behavior. The current research fills a knowledge gap regarding the mediating effect of proactive attitude between gritty leadership and employee improvisation. Therefore, it is presumed that a gritty leader will impact an employee’s proactive attitude, which may further encourage employee improvisation. Employee improvisation has been used as a predictor in some studies as well as an outcome variable in different studies. However, this study demonstrates interest in examining how it might mediate the underlying mechanism. Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated, according to Kim, Hon, and Lee (2019), that proactive employees are creative problem solvers who are internally motivated to find new solutions.

In the existing body of knowledge, we wanted to fill a few gaps with this research. However, there are several research gaps regarding this relationship between leadership styles and creative performance. Firstly, previous research has paid much attention to conventional leadership styles, whereas the impact of gritty leadership on employees’ creative performance, which stresses perseverance and passion in pursuing long-term goals, still needs more investigation (Duckworth, 2016; Lee et al., 2020). Secondly, although many studies have focused on employee creativity, few investigations have explored the causal process or intermediary factors, such as the influence of proactive attitude and employee improvisation on creative behavior. Thirdly, most current research tends to investigate the role of mediators separately without considering their sequence in the causal pathway. Lastly, research based on empirical data obtained from developing countries, including Pakistan, is scarce in literature (Bavik & Kuo, 2022). This study aims to fill these research gaps by constructing a sequential mediation model.

In addition, there are studies (Vaccaro et al., 2012; Hassi, 2019) that have investigated the relationship between different leadership styles (such as transformational and empowering) and creativity and innovation. This study contributes to a mediating effect of proactive attitude between leader’s grit and employee improvisation which has not been examined so far empirically. Furthermore, this research highlights the mediating role of employee improvisation between proactive attitude and creative performance relationship. Finally, this is the first research study examining the sequential mediating effects of proactive attitude and employee improvisation in the relationship between gritty leadership and creative performance which has not been empirically tested in hospitality industry. A review of the literature shows that fewer

empirical studies have looked at the underlying mechanism linking gritty leadership to creative performance of employees. To advance the body of knowledge, our research tests these linkages. On a final note, the present study has formulated the following questions:

- RQ1: Does gritty leadership affect employee creative performance?*
- RQ2: Does proactive attitude mediate between gritty leadership and employee improvisation?*
- RG3: Does employee improvisation mediate between proactive attitude and employee creative performance?*
- RG4: Do proactive attitude and employee improvisation sequentially mediate between gritty leadership and employee creative performance?*

and objectives:

- O1. To find the impact of gritty leadership on employee creative performance.*
- O2. To assess the mediating role of proactive attitude between gritty leadership and employee improvisation.*
- O3. To examine the mediating role of employee improvisation between proactive attitude and employee creative performance.*
- O4. To investigate the sequential mediating roles of proactive attitude and employee improvisation between gritty leadership and employee creative performance.*

Bandura presented social learning theory (SLT) in 1977, which depicts three key factors (observational learning, imitation, and modelling). According to the research work of Muro and Jeffrey (2008), social learning theory (SLT) is becoming more frequently recognized as an important component of sustainable resource management and the support of desired behavioral change. Furthermore, this theory's focus is to learn from people interactions with one another and is considered as a linking bridge between social cognitive and behaviorist theories (Muro & Jeffery, 2008). According to the concept of social learning (SLT), individuals learn through imitating, modeling, and observing how others behave, particularly those who they consider as role models (Bandura, 1977). According to social learning theory, followers of gritty leaders may observe the persistence and determination of leaders and internalize these attributes, which would enhance employee proactive attitude and employee improvisation that will further leads to improve creative performance. A proactive attitude, employee improvisation can be fostered by gritty leaders, who serve as role models and boost employee creative performance. Based on these assumptions the following hypotheses have been formulated. In the present study model the H1 examines the direct relationship. Hypotheses H2 and H3 are theoretically grounded in literature

extending from leadership theory; although empirical evidence may be lacking, there is enough supporting literature on transformational and authentic leadership to give credibility to the hypotheses. For hypothesis H4, contemporary studies dealing with sequential mediations in organizational behavior research (e.g., Gonlepa et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024) lend empirical credence to this hypothesis, thus giving it legitimacy for inclusion in the model.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gritty leadership and creative performance

In recent years, there has been a lot of focus on the relationship between creative performance and leadership. To investigate how different leadership philosophies affect creative performance in organizational contexts, this literature review summarizes the most recent studies. A study conducted by Ma, Jiang, Wang, and Xiong (2020) found that transformational leadership has positive and significant impact on employee creative performance. Employee creativity has been demonstrated to be greatly increased by transformational leadership, which is typified by inspiring and encouraging staff members. By creating an atmosphere where staff members feel appreciated and free to take chances, leaders with these traits promote creativity. A meta-analysis revealed a significant connection between creative and innovative performance and transformational leadership (Lee et al., 2020). In addition, there has been a relationship stated between higher levels of employee creativity and ethical leadership, which prioritizes justice, integrity, and ethical behavior. The research employing structural equation modelling demonstrated that ethical leadership favourably promotes employee creativity. This implies that when employees believe their managers are right, they will be more devoted and involved, which will promote creativity (Asif et al., 2021).

To gain and keep a competitive edge in today's market, organizations are constantly seeking for ways to foster and enhance innovative and creative work behaviors among their staff. There is a wealth of theoretical and empirical research on what fosters and inhibits employee creativity in disciplines like psychology, sociology, human resource management, and organizational science (e.g. George, 2003; Hunter et al., 2007; Shipton et al., 2006). Like, Collins and Smith (2006) state that organizational leaders pay close attention to the necessity of facilitating the process of knowledge generation to foster creativity and innovation. According to research, fostering employee creativity depends greatly on the role of leadership (Mumford & Hunter, 2005; Woodman et al., 1993). According to Al-Mazrouei's (2023) study, authentic leadership significantly influences employee performance, creativity, and innovation. Since it stimulates individual

creativity, the atmosphere that leaders cultivate among their staff members promotes idea exchange. Previous research has shown that employees' creativity as well as innovation inside organizations are greatly influenced by the leadership (Xu et al., 2017; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017).

Based on the above cited literature, the present study examines the relationship between creative performance and gritted leadership in Pakistan's hospitality industry. Gritty leadership, which is characterized by perseverance and enthusiasm for long-term objectives, can greatly impact creative performance by encouraging a creative and resilient work environment. This study will add to the body of knowledge by examining how employees' creativity is stimulated by grittier leaders, which improves problem-solving and fosters creative service delivery. As a result, it is postulated that:

Hypothesis 1: Gritty leadership positively relates to employee creative performance.

2.2. Mediating Role of Proactive Attitude between Gritty leadership and Employee Improvisation

Many past research studies have employed proactive attitude, gritty leadership, and employee improvisation in a various circumstance, with some serving as predictors, dependent variables, or mediating variables. Like, a study conducted by Sun, Huang, Wu, and Li (2023) explored the relationship between humble leadership and employee improvisation with the mediating role of positive emotions. The study researchers founds that humble leadership leads to employee positive emotions, and it further foster employee improvisation. In addition, a study by Ren, Zhang, Chen, Liu (2022) examined a relationship between empowering leadership and employee improvisation with the mediating roles of hindrance stress and challenge stress. The study findings showed that empowering leadership minimizes the hindrance stress and enhance the challenge stress thereby promoting employee improvisation.

Proactive attitude has a mediating role between leadership and employee improvisation, as demonstrated by the studies conducted by Sun et al. (2023) and Ren et al. (2022). Effective improvisation requires people to be proactive, and both humble and empowering leadership philosophies support these assumptions. Leaders may improve their staff members' capacity for innovation and adaptation in the face of adversity by creating a culture that is encouraging and empowering. Being proactive means being in charge, foreseeing problems, and taking proactive measures. This kind of attitude is essential for improvisation because it helps employees adjust and react imaginatively to unforeseen circumstances. By converting the beneficial outcomes of leadership into useful improvisational skills, proactive attitude serves as a mediator. Effective improvisation is facilitated by leaders that empower and

assist their staff members, as this cultivates an attitude of innovation (Wu & Ma, 2019).

An organization to take advantage of an opportunity, its leaders must be proactive learners (Kim, 1998). Individual focus has primarily been on managers' pro-active attitude (Almeida et al., 2015). Leaders have the ability to directly or indirectly influence the attitudes and behavior of their subordinates by fostering their employees' motivation for their work or by altering the workplace environment (Parkar et al., 2019). By including subordinates in decision-making, recognizing their contributions, accepting their uniqueness, and tolerating their mistakes, inclusive leadership approaches conflict differently and has a positive impact on workers' mental health and behavior at work (Parkar et al., 2019).

In the study by Rego et al. (2022), the moderating effects of humility and the mediating effects of psychological capital were used to assess employee improvisational behavior and leader grit. The study was carried out in Portugal, and information was gathered from the staff of 89 private businesses. The study's conclusions demonstrated that a grit of a leader's has a sizable indirect impact on the improvisational behavior of their workforce. Proactive attitude, gritty leadership, and employee improvisation have all been employed in a variety of past research studies, some as dependent variables, predictors, or mediating variables. However, the current study is interesting to assess the mediating role of a proactive attitude in between gritty leadership and employee improvisation relationship based on the literature. Additionally, the current study contends that the mediating role of a proactive attitude between grit of a leader and employee improvisation relationship received little attention in earlier research studies, particularly in the Pakistani context. Consequently, the current study's hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: Proactive attitude mediates the impact of gritty leadership on employee improvisation.

2.3. Mediating role of employee improvisation between proactive attitude and creative performance

In the past 30 years, research on creativity has gained more and more attention in the top academic journals (Liu et al., 2016). Psychological research on creativity is where the study of creative performance in organizations began. To more accurately reflect the outcomes of creativity in work environment, and to emphasize the importance of creativity in the workplace, many academics adopt the idea of creative performance (Zhang et al., 2017; Chan, 2016).

The development of employee creativity may be influenced by situational or organizational circumstances, according to several past studies (Zhou & George 2003).

Using work embedding as a mediating factor, Faraj, Faeq, Abdulla, Ali & Sadq (2021) investigated the impacts of overall quality management on creative performance. Scholars are eager to examine creative performance from a variety of perspectives to get more fruitful results. The degree to which people's positive attitudes at work predict positive results is also relevant, as is the impact of extra work attitudes and other organizational characteristics, such as size or industry.

An investigation of the mediating relationship between improvisational behavior, social networking, and the success of women-owned SME businesses was carried out in Malaysia by Bari and Arshad in 2020. The study's findings indicate that improvisational behavior has served as a mediator in the above relationship. Additionally, the Hmieleski and Corbett (2008) study discovered a connection between new venture performance and improvisational behavior as well as the level of entrepreneur job satisfaction. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy was a moderating factor in this study. A study by Al Harbi, Arifi, and Mosbah (2019) investigated a relationship between transformational leadership and creativity of employee with the mediating role of employee improvisation. According to the study findings, transformational leadership fosters an atmosphere that encourages improvisation and creative thinking, which in turn increases employee creativity. In addition, a study by Liden, Wayne, Liao, and Meuser (2014) examined a relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance with the mediating role of employee improvisation. This study used employee improvisation as a mediator to look at how servant leadership affects organizational performance. According to the study, servant leadership improves employee improvisation and overall performance by fostering a culture of trust and empowerment within the organization.

Employee improvisation has been studied from many different perspectives in the past, but the current study is particularly interesting in how it mediates the relationship between proactive attitude and the creative performance of employees. The current study assumes that a proactive approach can foster employee improvisation, which can then result in creative performance, in line with the relevant literature. Therefore, we suggest that:

Hypothesis 3: Employee improvisation mediates the impact of proactive attitude on employee creative performance.

2.4. Sequential mediating effects of proactive attitude and employee improvisation between gritty leadership and creative performance

Leaders have the ability to influence their subordinates' attitudes and behavior either directly or indirectly by fostering their employees' passion for their work or by making

changes to the workplace environment (Parkar et al., 2019). According to Khoreva's (2016) research, leadership development approaches have a positive impact on employee attitudes. Numerous studies have examined the influencing aspects of improvisation, including individual components (Ding & Chen, 2017). It is not unexpected that empowering leadership and transformational leadership have a significant impact on improving employee proactive behavior as the motivational state of such leadership is to provide a challenging goal to motivate subordinates to take initiative (Hartog & Belschak, 2012).

To get work done and get the desired results, leaders, according to Andersen (2016), inspire, motivate, and value their team members. Different leadership philosophies are used by leaders to energize and inspire their workforce. They elevate them through influencing the principles, dispositions, beliefs, and deeds of their followers. Inspirational leaders have a positive mindset and set high standards for their followers. Due to their enthusiasm, they encourage their followers to set higher goals. Employees that are intellectually stimulated are more likely to be aware of their issues and be able to solve them in more creative ways (Asrar-ul-Haq & Kuchinke, 2016).

According to Ding and Chen (2017) several investigations have examined the improvisation's affecting components, including individual considerations. Furthermore, the study by Charyton (2015) examined how improvisation directly affects people's creative abilities. Essentially, the purpose of the study was to assess the improvisational effect and understand the musicians' creative approach to music during a performance.

Numerous studies have looked at several platforms for gritty leadership, a proactive attitude, employee improvisation, and creative performance. Most of them have been studied as moderators with the many targeted populations in different cultures, but some have been used as antecedents, predictors, and outcome variables. Some have also been employed in mediated mechanisms. To achieve the most beneficial and diverse outcomes, the current study is much more in favor of observing the sequential mediating effect of proactive attitude and employee improvisation in the relationship between gritty leadership and creative performance in Pakistan's hospitality sector. This is based on literature. Consequently, we propose that:

Hypothesis 4: Proactive attitude and employee improvisation sequentially mediate the impact of gritty leadership on employee creative performance.

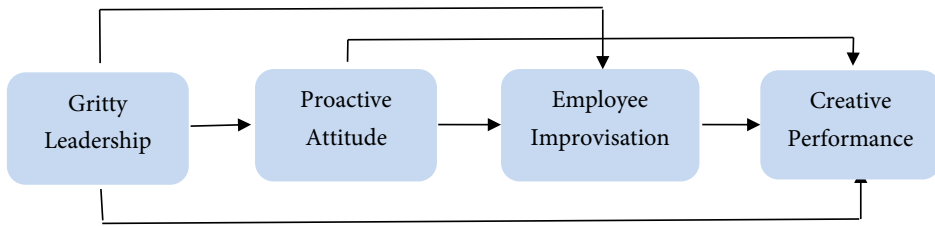


Figure 1. **Theoretical research model**

Source: own study

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework of the study and showing the hypothesized relationship of the study variables. The structural model was intended to confirm the expected causal links between latent variables, in accordance with recommended SEM procedures (Hair et al., 2021; Kline, 2016).

3. Research method

3.1. Data collection methods: study sampling, research instrument design and distribution

For sampling from Rawalpindi and Islamabad hotels were selected on the basis of their size and ranking from 3 to 5 stars and also considering the accessibility to the hotels. In advance HR departments were contacted for the objectives to be explained to them, taking their permission and then approached to the employees with their consent. Furthermore, convenient sampling was employed because it is the common choice in management studies whenever accessibility dictates sample selection (Etikan et al., 2016). In three different time points and stages data were collected from hotels employees of Pakistan. As creative performance of employees is seen as a key success factor for hotels, the hospitality industry was deemed to be a suitable setting for gathering primary data for this study (Hewagama et al., 2019). This study adopted a non-random sampling strategy for the empirical analysis to take into account the unique employee perceptions of the important study variables, such as gritty leadership, proactive attitude, employee improvisation and creative performance. With this non-probability approach, we could more successfully choose sample groups based on our judgment and preference for our research aims. This allowed us to follow recommendations from earlier studies (Yildiz & Elibol, 2021). More specifically, we adopted convenient sampling which could give more

plentiful and relevant data. Our study key variables include leader's grit positive influence and employee productive behavior such as proactive attitude, employee improvisation, and creative performance.

The study's sample has a sufficiently diverse population of employees of hotel, as the fourteen (14) hotels that were chosen ranging from three to five stars. Like previous research in the Pakistani hotel business, this study employed a hotel sample technique (Sarwar & Muhammad, 2020). Pakistan's official language is English, and for this reason, the questionnaire was written in mentioned language. According to Sarwar and Muhammad (2020), surveys done in English in recent research conducted in Pakistani hotels did not present any bias or obstacle into the study. Prior to requesting responses from hotel employees, the researcher tried to build rapport and trust with them, given the sensitivity of the data needed for the study. To do this, the researcher personally went to the hotel staff and gave them the questionnaire after meeting with them and going over the study's objectives, confidentiality policy, and research ethics. Prior to conducting staff visits, the researcher secured approval from the hotel management to incorporate the establishments into the sample and gather information from hotel staff members. The survey's goals, methods, potential advantages and drawbacks, as well as how to participate, were all described to the participants. Employees were also informed of the survey's procedures, their voluntary nature, and their ability to discontinue participation at any time to further guarantee the research instrument's ethical, accurate, and thorough completion.

Data collection took place three times in 2024. There was a gap of two weeks between each wave. This provides greater clarity of findings and increases replicability as suggested by Ployhart and Vandenberg (2010). To reduce the common method biasness, the data was gathered in three phases, separated by a gap of two weeks (Podsakoff et al., 2012). In time lag 1 data were obtained on gritty leadership (IV), and in time lag 2 data were collected on two mediators: employee improvisation and a proactive attitude. Data on (DV) creative performance from employees were collected in time lag 3. In time lag 1, a total of 342 questionnaires were distributed; 308 of them were completed and usable, yielding a 90% response rate. In first point of time, proper codes were given to the questionnaires and these codes were shared with the respondents to ensure the quality and fairness in responses.

After two weeks, employees who had finished the time lag 1 survey were contacted and requested to complete the follow-up survey. 294 completed and usable surveys with response rate of 85% were collected in time lag 2, while 268 completed and usable questionnaires with response rate of 78% response rate were obtained in time lag 3. After removing those with invalid or no responses, for the final analysis 268 questionnaires were utilized.

3.2. Constructs operationalization

We analyzed all the variables at the individual level. Unless indicated, the study variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. Scales were adapted to fit into the business context and recommended by expert reviewers and colleagues in the field. This is considered good methodological practice (DeVellis, 2017).

In this study we measured *gritty leadership* with eight items scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn's (2009). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) very much (5) not at all. Sample items consist of "My supervisor finishes whatever he begins", "My supervisor has been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest", and "New ideas and projects sometimes distract my supervisor from previous ideas".

We measured *proactive attitude* with a nine items scale developed by Schwarzar (1999). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree (5) strongly agree. Sample items of the scale is "I usually wait for something to happen rather than taking the initiative myself", "I am able to choose my own actions", and "I feel responsible for my own life".

In our study we measured *employee improvisation* with twelve items scale developed by Hmieleski et al. (2013). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree (5) strongly agree. Sample items consist of "I am creative when required to work with limited resources", "If I hear an unfamiliar word in a conversation, I look up the meaning", and "I'm optimistic that I can learn new information".

Adopting the scale by Hmieleski et al. (2013) was deemed appropriate since it has already been empirically tested in organizational and entrepreneurship literature and successfully captures the essence of improvisation through the characteristics of adaptability and spontaneity.

In this study we measured *creative performance* with thirteen scale developed by Zhou and George (2001). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree (5) strongly agree. Sample items of the scale is "I develop adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas", "I often have a fresh approach to problems", and "I come up with new and practical ideas to improve performance".

3.3. Data analysis method

Partial least structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze primary data, given that it is an appropriate technique for testing and predicting hypothesized relations (Shmueli et al., 2019), and to test new relations it is very appropriate for exploratory research as well (Hair et al., 2019b). The orientation of the PLS-SEM prediction has led to the development of new estimating methods

(Dash & Paul, 2021). PLS-SEM can therefore be utilized for a variety of study analyses, depending on the available sample size. When there are multicollinearity problems or missing values in empirical data, the PLS model produces predictable findings (Shoukat et al., 2023). Furthermore, given the theoretical framework's complexity, particularly when considering mediating effects, the PLS technique is used (Hair et al., 2019). Finally, PLS may compute sequential mediation between the underlying relationship between the predictor and outcome constructs; hence, in the gritty leadership and creative performance linkage, we look at proactive attitude as mediator 1 (M1) and employee improvisation as mediator 2 (M2).

4. Study results

4.1. Profile of respondents

In the study the gender distribution of participants was 66.8% male and 33.2% female. Participant's age criterion was ranging from 20 year to 60 years & above. 35.4 % of participants were between the ages of 20 and 29, and 31.7% of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 39. 19% of participants were in the 40- to 49-year-old age group. The percentage of participants who were 60 years of age or above made up just 4.5% of the total sample. Similarly, 45.9% of respondents with a bachelor's degree and 32.5% with a master's degree met the qualification criteria. The proportion of respondents with an MS/M.Phil degree was 19.8% and 1.9% of Phd respectively. Furthermore, 11.2% had less than one year of experience, while 20.5% had 1-3 years of experience. Participants with 4-7 years of experience made up 29.9% of the sample, while those with 7-10 years of experience made up 17.5%. Participants with more than ten years of experience made up 20.9 % of the total sample size.

4.2. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 represents mean, standard deviation (SD), correlations and reliabilities. The results indicate that gritty leadership has significant correlation with proactive attitude ($r=.42$, $p<0.001$), employee improvisation ($r=.49$, $p<0.001$) and employee creative performance ($r=.46$, $p<0.001$). In addition, proactive attitude has significant correlation effect on employee improvisation ($r=.35$, $p<0.001$) and creative performance ($r=.28$, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, employee improvisation has significant correlation with creative performance ($r=.48$, $p<0.001$).

Table 1. **Descriptive statistics**

Variables and items	OL	CR	AVE
<i>Gritty Leadership</i>	-	0.89	0.56
GL1	0.78		
GL2	0.77		
GL3	0.76		
GL4	0.72		
GL5	0.75		
GL6	0.76		
GL7	0.72		
GL8	0.74		
<i>Proactive Attitude</i>	-	0.90	0.54
PA1	0.76		
PA2	0.77		
PA3	0.75		
PA4	0.72		
PA5	0.75		
PA6	0.69		
PA7	0.70		
PA8	0.72		
PA9	0.73		
<i>Employee Improvisation</i>	-	0.91	0.50
EI1	0.75		
EI2	0.71		
EI3	0.69		
EI4	0.67		
EI5	0.71		
EI6	0.72		

EI7	0.70		
EI8	0.69		
EI9	0.70		
EI10	0.72		
EI11	0.70		
EI12	0.73		

Note. N:268, **p<0.01, CP: Creative Performance, EI: Employee Improvisation, GL: Gritty Leadership, Proactive Attitude. Reliability is *shown diagonal*.

Source: own study

4.3. Measurement model

The model of the study was measured for assessing the reliability and validity of the constructs (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019b). According to Hair et al. (2019b), the minimum composite reliability value of 0.893 is greater than the minimal threshold value of 0.7. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) value demonstrated the convergent validity. All constructs had an AVE value higher than 0.5 the required value (Hair et al., 2019b). Although a few items had somewhat lower outer loadings than 0.7, their values were approaching to 0.7, therefore it was still preferable to keep such items because the AVE was greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019). These items were thus taken into consideration. Table 2 presents the outer loading's, composite reliability (CR) and AVE of all constructs.

Table 2. Outer loadings, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

Variables and items	OL	CR	AVE
<i>Creative Performance</i>	-	0.92	0.51
CP1	0.69		
CP2	0.73		
CP3	0.76		
CP4	0.70		
CP5	0.67		

CP6	0.70		
CP7	0.71		
CP8	0.73		
CP9	0.72		
CP10	0.71		
CP11	0.69		
CP12	0.69		
CP13	0.79		

Note: OL - Outer Loadings, CR- Composite Reliability, AVE - Average Variance Extracted

Source: own study

Table 3. Measurement model (Discriminant validity-HTMT)

Constructs	CP	GL	EI	PA
CP	-	-	-	-
GL	0.512	-	-	-
EI	0.53	0.552	-	-
PA	0.319	0.392	0.474	-

Source: own study

Table 3 shows the values of HTMT in the measurement model are all below the threshold of 0.85 thus indicating the existence of discriminant validity between the constructs under investigation. This means that gritty leadership, proactive attitude, employee improvisation, and creative performance constructs have been validated and are therefore distinct from one another. In accordance with Henseler et al. (2015), such results indicate that the measurement model has high reliability.

4.4. Structural model

The results of the structural model analysis are shown in Table 4 & 5. According to Hair et al. (2019b) the study structural model was assessed with R² (coefficient of determination), t-values, and f² effect size. By employing the procedure of bootstrapping 5000, the t-values were assessed (Hair et al., 2019b).

The findings of the model supported all the hypotheses of the study. In hypothesis 1, the results of direct relationship between gritty leadership and employee creative performance indicates that gritty leadership has significant direct impact on creative performance ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$). When leader's grit increases it brings creativity in the performance of employees. So, hypothesis 1 is supported.

The results of mediation effects of proactive attitude show that proactive attitude mediates the relationship between gritty leadership and employee improvisation ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.001$). Furthermore, according to Hayes (2013) the confidence interval is greater than zero (0.10, 0.24). Hence, hypothesis 2 is supported. This clarifies that when a leader's grit increases it influences employee proactive attitude which further increases the creative performance of employees. In addition, the findings in table indicate that employee improvisation significantly and positively mediates the relationship between proactive attitude and employee creative performance ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.001$). Further, the value of confidence interval is above zero (0.07, & 0.19) (Hayes, 2008). Hence, the results highlight that as proactive attitude increases it further increases employee improvisation which further enhances employee creative performance. Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported.

Table 4. **Structural model direct effects results (hypothesis testing)**

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	S.E	t-values	f2	R2	Q2	Decision
H1	GL CP	0.29	0.06	4.86	0.09	0.30	0.195	Accepted

Source: own study

Table 5. **Structural model (mediation and sequential mediation effects results)**

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	S.E	t-values	2.5% (CI.95)	97.5%	Decision
H2	GL PA EI	0.16	0.037	4.38	0.10	0.24	Accepted
H3	PA EI CP	0.12	0.031	4.04	0.07	0.19	Accepted
H4	GL PA EI CP	0.05	0.017	3.25	0.03	0.09	Accepted

Notes: GL: Gritty Leadership, PA: Proactive Attitude, EI: Employee Improvisation, CP: Creative Performance

Source: own study

Finally, the Table 5 shows the sequential mediating effects of proactive attitude and employee improvisation. According to Hayes (2013), it is discovered that employee improvisation and a proactive attitude successively mediate the association between gritty leadership and creative performance ($\beta = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$), and the confidence interval is not zero (0.03 & 0.09). The findings confirmed that leader's grit leads to proactive attitude, proactive attitude leads to employee improvisation and further employee improvisation improves employee creative performance. Hence, hypothesis 4 is supported. Furthermore, the f-square values of relationship between employee improvisation and creative performance is (0.12), and the relationship between gritty leadership and proactive attitude is (0.23), and finally the f-square value of relationship between proactive attitude and employee improvisation is (0.15). Additionally, evaluations of prediction fits were conducted, encompassing R2, f2, and out-of-sample prediction.

Since the values were found to be within an acceptable range, predictive significance was determined. PLS-Predict is used to assess the sample prediction, as described by Shmueli et al. (2019) in a recent technique for performing prediction analysis.

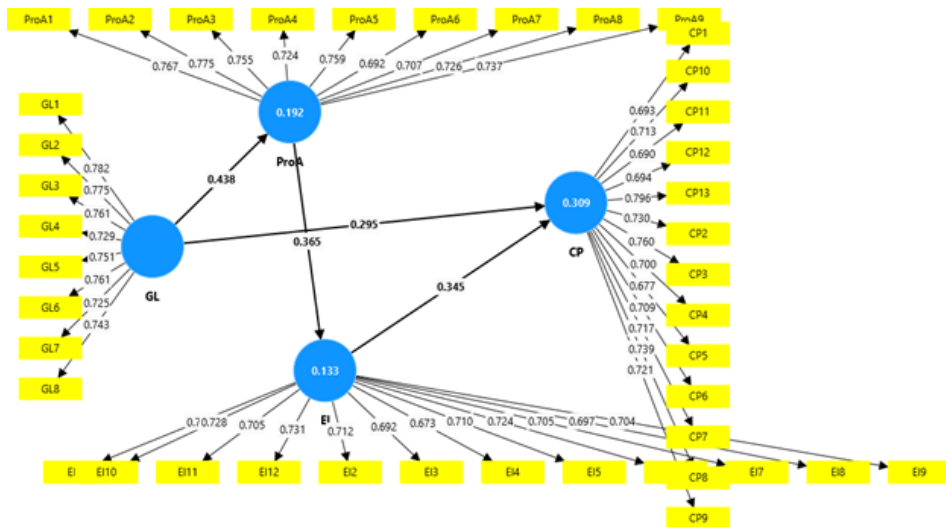


Figure 2. Measurement model assessment

Source: own study

Figure 2 presents the measurement model of the study which includes validity, reliability of the study variables.

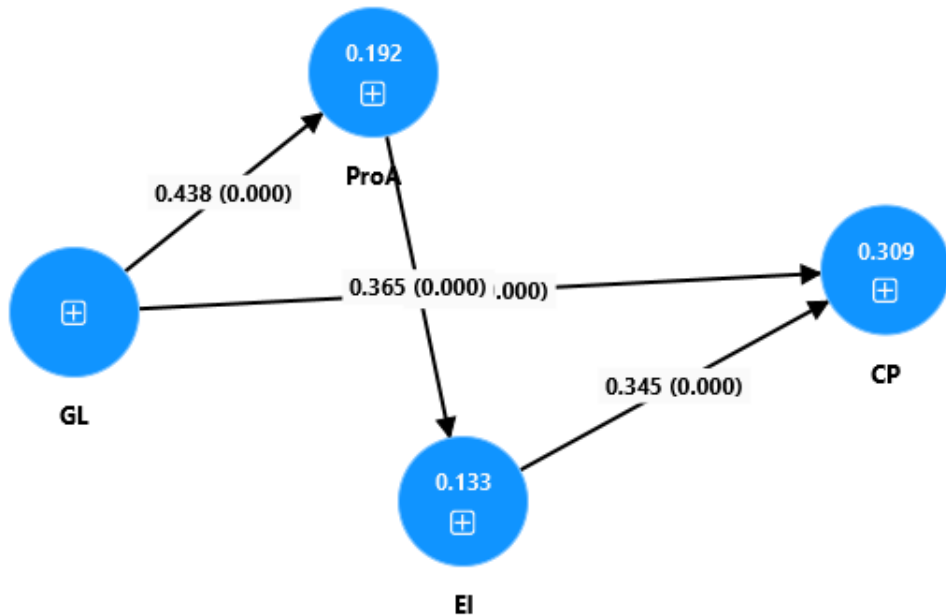


Figure 3. **Structural model and hypothesis testing results**

Source: own study

Figure 3 shows the structural model of the current study showing the hypothesized tested paths of the study constructs.

5. Discussion

This study incorporates direct, mediation, and sequential mediation relationships to provide new insights into how a leader's grit affects employee creative performance. In order to obtain a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms, we will examine the research findings in more detail in the sections that follow. All the relationships that had been hypothesized were supported by our study's findings. These outcomes increase our understanding of the importance of gritty leadership, proactive attitude, employee improvisation, and their role in improving creative performance of employees.

Consequently, the findings contribute to existing literature on the relationship between leaders and creativity by demonstrating how gritty leadership sustains

creativity in hospitality work environment. While transformational and servant leadership foster inspiration and service orientation respectively, gritty leadership acts through perseverance and passion for the long haul. Workers see this perseverance in their leaders, and adopt a proactive attitude towards tasks at hand, thus engaging in more creative performance. According to Duckworth and Quinn (2009) gritty people are persistent in their efforts to achieve goals and therefore sustain creative performance. In addition, Credé, Tynan, and Harms (2017) indicate that grit is associated with adaptation and performance in various dynamic sectors. Therefore, grit helps to sustain creativity and makes workers resilient in face of setbacks common in hospitality industry.

Despite the consistency of the current results with earlier studies underscoring the positive influence of grit and proactiveness on engagement and performance, there are still some contradictions within the literature that need to be mentioned. For example, even though several researchers including Chen et al. (2025) and Suzuki et al. (2015) have found the existence of positive associations between the indicators under analysis and performance, other studies indicate that the intensity and nature of such associations may differ depending on the context and individual traits of participants. This difference might be caused by various cultural, organizational, and industry-based features. The collectivist and high power distance culture of the Pakistani hospitality industry can increase the influence of leader behavior on employees' attitudes and improvisation. Thus, the higher level of mediation in the current research may be attributed to the contextual nature of the analysis rather than generalization of the obtained results.

In first relationship, we found that gritty leadership effects creative performance of employee. The finding shows that gritty leadership has positive and significant impact on creative performance. Gritty leadership is characterized as a style of leadership marked by tenacity, passion, and a sustained dedication to attaining objectives. Gritty leaders are tenacious, resilient, and committed to continuous growth which lead to employee creative performance. Creative performance in the hospitality sector can result in enhanced visitor experiences, more efficient operations, and a competitive edge. Effective leaders provide their staff members the chance to develop and make use of their skills and abilities, and they encourage them along the journey. Additionally, leaders encourage vastness for the growth and improvement of the workforce they oversee rather than for personal benefit (Legood et al., 2021). Research has indicated that the development of employee creativity is contingent upon the leadership function (Shafi et al., 2020; Li et al., 2019). Similarly, a study conducted by Peng et al. (2023) in hospitality industry of Pakistan by examining the impact of empowering leadership on employee creativity. The results showed that empowering leadership positively influences employee creativity. Our study finding is aligned with previous studies, that

leader's grit improves and enhances the creative performance of employees. So our hypothesis 1 is supported.

Second, our study found that proactive attitude mediates in the relationship between gritty leadership and employee improvisation. As leaders' grit increases it leads to a proactive attitude which further leads to employee improvisation. As it discussed that leader's with grit are passionate, persistent and create a culture and conducive environment where employees feel empowered to expand new experiments and ideas and respond proactively. Proactive individuals take initiatives, seek opportunities and build the capacity of an individual where he or she can act spontaneously in any situation. Based on this discussion our hypothesis 2 is supported. In addition, according to Hodge, Wright and Bennett (2018) study, found that a leader's grit frequently causes people to have good feelings, positive attitudes, and behaviors, supports the findings of our study. Furthermore, according to the study of Magni, Provera and Proserpio (2010), individual attitude affects improvisation. This study supports our study findings.

Third, we found that employee improvisation significantly mediates the relationship between positive attitude and employee creative performance. As employee positive attitude increases, it increase the improvisation behavior of an individual which further brings creativity in employee performance. As a result of their intrinsic flexibility and adaptability, proactive employees are more likely to improvise successfully. When unexpected situations emerge, their creativity is triggered by their desire to attempt new things and take risks. Thus, our hypothesis 3 is supported. According to research by Magni, Palmi, and Salvemini (2018), a person's attitude influences an individual improvisation. Furthermore, according to research by Kleinmintz, Goldstein, Mayseless, Abecasis, and Tsoory (2014) improvisation strategies have a significant influence on creativity. So, our study findings are aligned with these studies.

Finally, the study results anticipate that proactive attitude and employee improvisation sequentially mediates the relationship between gritty leadership and employee creative performance. As gritty leadership increases, it increases employee proactive attitude which further leads to employee improvisation, and it results in bring creativity in employee performance. Organizations often have to react to unforeseen obstacles in today's uncertain and changing business environment. A proactive mentality among employees is greatly aided by gritted leadership, which is highlighted by passion and endurance. A leader that demonstrates grit motivates their team members to take charge, look for creative solutions, and welcome change. The ability of employees to improvise creatively in response to unforeseen circumstances is influenced by this proactive mindset. The improvisational skills of employees enhance the resilience and agility of the organization. Iterative improvisation also has a favorable effect on workers' creative performance, which produces new results, fresh concepts, and increased output. So, our hypothesis

4 is supported. A study by Parkar et al. (2019) found that leaders' ability affects the attitudes and behaviors of their employees and motivates them for their work. Furthermore, according to the study of Magni, Provera, Proserpio (2010) individual attitude affects improvisation. According to the study of Kleinmintz et al. (2014) improvisation practices bring creativity in individual performance. These studies support and endorse our study findings.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated gritty leadership and its outcomes with the sequential mediating effects of proactive attitude and employee improvisation. First, the study empirical results revealed that proactive attitude mediates in the relationship between gritty leadership and employee improvisation. In addition, the study further clarifies that employee improvisation mediates between proactive attitude and employee creative performance. Lastly, the empirical results reveal that proactive attitude and employee improvisation sequentially mediate the relationship between gritty leadership and creative performance. The hospitality industry in Pakistan was chosen as the subject of the study because it has a diverse population and a complex, creative work environment. This study offers some theoretical and practical implications for hotel management that are useful for individual and organizational growth. Furthermore, the interaction and relationship between leaders and followers is examined in this study to emphasize the spillover effect of the social learning theory. Setbacks and future directions of the study may pave the way for future endeavors of research.

This research makes a significant contribution to academia and business domain by providing various theoretical as well practical implications. There are various ways in which the current study adds to the body of literature. First of all, the study of gritty leadership, a relatively novel leadership style as a predictor of creative performance among employees provides fresh empirical evidence for the connections between gritty leadership and the other studied variables. The hospitality business places a high value on employee creativity, but scholars and practitioners are working to understand how to frame creativity in relation to employee performance in this specific field is a valuable contribution in hospitality literature (Nasifoglu-Elidemir et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2020). Furthermore, this study contributes effectively to the existing body of knowledge by examining the mediating role of proactive attitude between gritty leadership and employee improvisation as well as the assessing the mediating role of employee improvisation between proactive attitude and creative performance. In addition, the current study examined the sequential mediating effects of proactive attitude and employee improvisation between gritty leadership and employee creative performance. The management and employees of the business organizations can utilize these contributions.

The study's findings have some substantial practical applications that will benefit managers as well as employees in the organization. First, the management of the hotel should implement a variety of human resource tactics (such as training and development) to encourage staff to be proactive. Management should educate supervisors on how to implement fair human resource policies. Any policy or procedure can be ineffective without the support of a supervisor.

Furthermore, the findings of the study may assist human resource management professional's design customized leadership programs in which leaders persevere and are passionate about establishing a team with positive attitude and improvisation to display creativity. This study recommends managers should adopt a gritty leadership style that can encourage individuals to engage in activities consistently and passionately, which will ultimately boost employee creative performance in the presence of a proactive attitude and employee improvisation. Furthermore, management should equip its employees with specialized training on how to succeed in the competitive business environment that requires creativity. The literature review is based on international studies; however, the results would have a broad application when dealing with issues relating to leadership, creativity, and improvisation for hospitality firms in other developing countries. The reason why this particular industry was selected as an example is that it will allow generalizing findings to a larger extent.

In this study many limitations were noted, and various research directions should be considered for future study. Firstly, gritty leadership was examined uni-dimensional, and it may be utilize in future study dimension wise for more productive outcomes. Second, as the study's data were obtained from the hospitality industry, more useful findings might be attained in the future if data are gathered from the banking, telecommunications, and education sectors. Third, for future study cross sectional method may be utilized for different outcomes. Even though this research uses a three-wave time-lagged design in order to reduce common method variance, other researchers might also use cross-sectional designs when studying other issues or bigger samples in the future. This is because using both longitudinal and cross-sectional designs for studying certain things can be beneficial. Fourth, as data collection was limited to Islamabad and Rawalpindi, and in future study data may be collected from other region or all over Pakistan for different results.

Authors' contribution

M.Y.K.: article conception, theoretical content of the article, conducting the research, data collection. **S.F.:** article conception, research methods applied, analysis and interpretation of results. **S.S:** draft manuscript preparation.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the authors did not use Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

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